



PARLIAMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS

December Plenary Session

KEY ISSUES

Preparing the Commission hearings

Group Vice-President Hannes Swoboda asked the Commission President during the question time, if he would be prepared to change the Commissioner's portfolios should Parliament's hearings of the Commissioners-designate suggest this is necessary.

Furthermore, he stressed from Strasbourg that 'the parliamentary hearings need to focus on the competence of the candidates to do the crucially important jobs for which they have been nominated'. Therefore, our Group is preparing these hearings seriously and 'we will have tough questions and we will demand straight answers'. However, 'we will not engage in witch-hunts of the kind that the Right wing are preparing, by absurd insinuations about the communist past of some nominees'.

Aminatou Haidar

On a proposal by S&D Group Leader, Parliament decided not to debate or vote a resolution on Sahrawi human rights activist Aminatou Haidar, scheduled for Thursday afternoon. This proposal based on information gathered by our Group and on the delicacy of the situation could receive the trust of the majority of the Chamber and was approved with 249 votes in favour, 163 against and 135 abstentions. Group leader, Martin Schulz, said: 'There will be a solution to this case shortly. EU representatives are working to achieve a positive solution. The debate would in fact prevent the progress of the diplomatic efforts', he added. Thanks to this action, our Group contributed to a solution of the crisis, as recent developments clearly show. We are glad that Ms. Haidar is on her way home.

Micro-credits to start up businesses

The 'European Progress Microfinance Facility' is to make available micro-credits to people who have lost or risk losing their jobs to start or grow very small firms. Beneficiaries will also receive training and assistance in developing viable and sustainable businesses.

Pervenche Berès, S&D Chair of the Employment committee made it clear that the Parliament did not accept a financing entirely from the Progress programme. Kinga Göncz, S&D Rapporteur, said: 'Reallocating all the money from Progress would give the wrong signal since it targets the most vulnerable groups' (the Progress programme supports coordination of member states policies in the field of employment, non-discrimination and social inclusion). She added: '100 million for four years is the minimum for this facility to be effective'.

The [Parliament's amendments](#) to the draft legislation were adopted with 516 votes in favour, 82 against and 4 abstentions. The facility is scheduled to come into force in early 2010.

EU budget 2010 – Financing EU policies for citizens

MEPs adopted the final EU budget for 2010, with payments amounting to 122.9 billion and representing 1.04% of EU gross national income. Parliament achieved namely fresh money for the already agreed but not yet financed economic recovery plan and a figure of 300 million in support for the dairy sector. Francesca Balzani, S&D shadow, stressed that the budget needs to be useful for each European citizen and that it is on the basis of this usefulness that the needed general discussion on the resources for EU policies must take place.

The budget 2010 is the last one under the Nice Treaty rules. [Read the resolution.](#)

IN SHORT

End of the Swedish Presidency

Group leader Martin Schulz welcomed the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the new powers of the European Parliament. This new institutional framework will allow for a real influence of the EU as a whole in such important issues as the financial markets, climate change and economic recovery. He regretted that the Swedish Presidency had still to experience, in its coordination role, 'once again that Mr. Sarkozy and Ms. Merkel kept the cards very close to their chests and people were saying – the prime minister of Sweden does not know what is going on'.

EP delegation to Copenhagen Climate Conference - Jo Leinen, Head of the EP delegation and S&D Chair of the Environment committee, stressed that Parliament will push for 'ambitious goals for CO2 reduction by 2020 as well as for sufficient funding for a worldwide climate protection policy after 2013'. He added: 'the post-Copenhagen process will be as important as Copenhagen. By summer 2010 there must be a deal for a new legally binding agreement'.

The S&D Group also sent a delegation of MEPs to Copenhagen. Check their activities by visiting the blog ['The melting iceberg'](#).

Subsidiarity and Human Rights - After heated discussions, the S&D request to postpone the vote on a resolution concerning the recent judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg regarding the display of crucifixes in Italian schools and to check the admissibility of such a vote was adopted with 283 votes in favour and 259 against. The EFD Group (extreme-right) had managed to add this point to the agenda on Monday with the support from the right-wing. The only resolutions to be voted on were the ones from the EPP and the EFD, as other Groups had decided to withdraw their texts.

Effective and reformed multilateral trade framework - A successful Doha Round by end 2010 is needed to build a more balanced and fair economic system as part of a new global governance at the service of development and the eradication of poverty, said Rapporteur Harlem Désir and S&D trade committee coordinator Kader Arif. They presented amendments to the joint EPP-ALDE-ECR text stressing the special role of public services, the need to consider sensitive products and preserve policy space of developing countries. The right-wing text was approved with 370 votes in favour, 125 against and 125 abstentions, with the S&D Group abstaining after losing key amendments. Read the [adopted resolution](#) and the [S&D text](#) (not voted).

Recognition of professional qualifications in the EU - A directive intended to rationalise the current system was adopted in 2005. Although the deadline for its implementation in the Member States was 20 October 2007, seventeen out of twenty-six states have not yet managed to implement it in full and Greece has not done so at all. Evelyne Gebhardt, S&D Coordinator for the Internal Market Committee, called on the Commission 'to monitor more closely the implementation of this directive and to propose initiatives to address the problems raised in many Member States'. She added: 'This legislation is crucial to enhance the EU's competitiveness as well as the personal and professional experience of individuals'.

EU farm crisis - S&D MEPs asked the Commission to come forward with new ideas and initiatives on how to tackle the crisis that is affecting the whole European agricultural sector. Paolo de Castro, S&D Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, reminded that 'we cannot favour some producers over others'. S&D Spokesperson on Agriculture, Luis Capoulas Santos said that our Group is deeply concerned 'by the dramatic drop in farm income over the last year although food prices for consumers have remained stable'.

Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Thought - Russian Human Rights Group Memorial collected Parliament's annual Prize. [Read the acceptance speech from Sergei Kovalev, on behalf of Memorial.](#)

Urgencies - MEPs called on [Ugandan](#) MPs to reject a [bill that will criminalise homosexuality](#). Michael Cashman, S&D rapporteur, said: 'EU ministers and the European Commission must now join us in putting pressure on the Ugandan authorities to prevent this outrageous measure from becoming law and to respect universal human rights'. [Read the text.](#)

MEPs also debated on... the situation in the Middle East, in the presence of High Representative Cathy Ashton; Afghanistan and Pakistan; [Azerbaijan](#); [Belarus](#) and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#).

APPROACHING

- 11-19 January: Hearings of the Commissioners-designate.

- 26 January 2010 - Extraordinary plenary in Brussels to vote on the Commission.

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