

KEY ISSUES

New Bulgarian Commissioner-designate

The resignation of Bulgarian candidate for the European Commission Rumiana Jeleva was 'the best outcome for everyone, including herself', said S&D leader Martin Schulz. This outcome was 'both inevitable and predictable after such a poor performance in Parliament', he said. Our Group prepared the parliamentary hearings of the Commissioners-designate seriously and focused on the competence of the candidates to do the crucially important jobs for which they have been nominated. This is not only a prerogative of the Parliament, but also our duty towards European citizens. S&D Group has once again showed that it is the leading force in respecting Parliament's role. Schulz regretted the way in which the EPP Group tried to save Jeleva despite her performance. 'It was a serious mistake to put political allegiance before basic competence to do the job'. The Bulgarian Socialist delegation in the European Parliament also regretted the wrong approach of their country's prime minister to criticisms of his nominee as European Commissioner, 'instead of helping to find a fast and efficient solution to this delicate case'.

The hearing of the new Bulgarian Commissioner-designate, Kristalina Georgieva, will take place on 3 February 2010 and the election of the new Commission on 9 February.

Haiti

EU immediate focus is 'to ease the suffering of the Haitian people. Our commitment to rebuild Haiti is long term', said EU High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission Cathy Ashton in plenary. After post-emergency needs have been fully assessed, we call for an international conference on Haiti.

The EU will commit €122 million in humanitarian aid, €100 million in early non-humanitarian assistance and €200 million for the long term response. 'For the first time since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, we are pulling together the efforts, in a comprehensive approach, under my overall coordination', in cooperation with the United Nations and the United States. 'This is ground-breaking', she added.

Group Vice-President Linda McAvan stressed that 'it is about getting the aid out there' and that 'we need to look at the whole issue of Haiti, about its outstanding debt'. She asked if the IMF USD 100 million loan could not be converted into a grant, since 'there is no point in impoverishing this country for another 100 years'; 'a country where 75% of people already lived below the poverty line before the tragedy', she reminded.

Señor Zapatero, 'give Europe that extra boost of modernisation'

Group leader Martin Schulz congratulated Mr. Zapatero on the Spanish Presidency 'promising' agenda and welcomed its ambitions in key areas including investment in jobs, social inclusion, education and training and European economic governance. He described the Spanish government as 'avant-garde'. 'If you can show the same determination at European level, you can give Europe that extra boost of modernisation', he said. However, Europe's challenges 'cannot be solved by one summit after another. We need Member States to actually implement the proposals made', he stressed, making governments accountable for their lack of commitment in implementing the Lisbon strategy on jobs and growth. Schulz also called for more control and supervision of the financial industry, accusing banks of 'speculating with citizens' money to drive up their profits'.

IN SHORT

SWIFT – Ensure a good agreement: In plenary, Group leader Martin Schulz stressed that 'we have to ensure that data protection is guaranteed, that data deletion takes place, that citizens have a right to redress and the possibility

of going to court', as the agreement provides for quite serious infringements of private rights. The fact that Parliament has not been involved is 'unacceptable', he said.

Parliament will receive on Monday the text of the interim agreement on banking data transfers to the United States, signed last November and planned to come into force on 1 February for nine months. The Parliament will, however, ask for the suspension of the interim SWIFT agreement until the vote in plenary on 10 February. The Lisbon Treaty will allow for full participation of the Parliament in the drafting of the long term agreement that should follow.

From Copenhagen to Mexico: MEPs discussed on the outcome of the Copenhagen Climate Conference. Jo Leinen, Head of the EP delegation and S&D Chair of the Environment committee, is concerned that Member States are not in agreement regarding the follow-up post-Copenhagen. He stressed that 'Europe must lead the way in fighting climate change, keeping to its commitments, also vis-à-vis third countries'. Europe must engage in 'climate change diplomacy' previous to Mexico, winning new partners for addressing this global challenge.

Ombudsman Diamandouros re-elected: The candidate backed by the Group, Greek Nikiforos Diamandouros, was re-elected European Ombudsman on Wednesday with 340 votes (secret ballot). The other candidates, Pierre-Yves Monette and Vittorio Bottoli received 289 and 19 votes respectively. His priorities for the new mandate, which runs until 2014, are to ensure that EU delivers the benefits for citizens established by the Lisbon Treaty, to improve service to and communication with citizens and engage in dialogue with EU institutions and cooperation with national and regional ombudsmen.

Yemen: 'Our own security is at risk if we do not help countries like Yemen, who are struggling to meet multiple challenges at the same time', said High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission Cathy Ashton in a debate in plenary. David Sassoli, on behalf of our Group, stressed the need to intensify efforts to promote political and economic reforms and democracy and to improve people's lives. Richard Howitt, Group Coordinator in Human Rights committee, added 'so that, as an international community, we do not wait for the terrorists to move in before we begin to address issues of capacity, governance and development in fragile states in our world'.

ACP-EU Partnership of equals: The second revision of the Cotonou agreement governing relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries should be finalised in March 2010. Progress in negotiations is assessed by Parliament in a report adopted by a show of hands with amendments. For Harlem Désir, 'it is not about imposing a model, but constructing, with these countries, their sustainable development', taking into account new challenges such as climate change, technology transfer, renewable energy, food crises, tax havens and tax governance. EU trade relations with ACP countries can not be less favourable than before, he added, while Vice-President Véronique De Keyser stressed the need of focusing on legal and circular migration.

Group delegation to Rosarno: The Group sent Thursday a high-level delegation to Rosarno, Italy, to investigate violent clashes between local people and migrant workers many of whom are employed illegally by organised criminals. Leading the Delegation, Stavros Lambrinidis, EP Vice-President, said that 'exploitation of migrant labour, fight against racism and xenophobia and the fight against organised crime concern Europe as a whole and require an EU-wide response'. 'We want Europe-wide, equal labour rights for migrant workers in the EU and a uniform status for seasonal workers'. Parliament later decided to send an ad hoc fact-finding mission to Rosarno as well, before end February.

APPROACHING...

- 1-2 February – S&D Group Bureau in Rome.
- 3 February 2010 (12.30 – 15.30): Hearing of the new Bulgarian Commissioner-designate.
- 9 February 2010 (13.30) – Vote on the Commission.

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