

With travel from some parts of Europe almost impossible, MEPs decided to hold all votes planned for this session during the next plenary session.

KEY ISSUES

Air travel crisis – top priority: help stranded passengers

In the plenary debate on Tuesday, S&D leader Martin Schulz focused on the human dimension of the major disruption in European airspace caused by volcanic ash from Iceland. 'This is no longer an inconvenience for the million passengers stuck, but a real difficulty, especially for people with small children, handicapped people and other vulnerable individuals', he said. 'The role of the EU is to coordinate, to help these people get home and ensure they are waiting in decent conditions'.

'This is a moment for the EU to show that it is a Union for the people and it is there to help its citizens', added Saïd El Khadraoui, S&D Transport Spokesperson. Therefore, 'the Commission should reconsider its rejection of using the solidarity fund or other EU resources and it should be flexible regarding state aid'. At the same time, we also 'expect airlines to show consideration for their passengers'.

This crisis showed that we need more Europe. We need not only 'a roadmap for such future exceptional cases, but also better alternative European transport systems and an effective Trans-European Transport Network, a long standing demand of the European Parliament'.

'The interoperability of national rail systems in Europe is crucial', stressed Martin Schulz and 'modernizing European rail cannot obey economic considerations alone, but service ones as well', added Vice-President Hannes Swoboda.

'In a couple of years, the single European sky, with decisions being taken at European level, will also ensure better coordination regarding the airspace itself', concluded Saïd El Khadraoui.

Message to the Commission: come forward with legislative proposals

The S&D Group put forward [12 key demands](#) to improve the Commission Work Programme, including better economic coordination; reform of the financial sector and a Financial Transfer Tax; ambitious proposals to make more social Europe a reality; a greener, healthier and more competitive Europe with a radical alternative legislative agenda on Citizens' Europe and a stronger Europe on the world stage.

In plenary, Vice-President Hannes Swoboda underlined that 'we need a strong Commission's voice echoing and fighting for the European goals'. 'Budget consolidation cannot jeopardize the objectives of fighting unemployment and poverty and the monitoring of the economic and budgetary development must go beyond crisis situations'. 'Europe needs a common European policy for services of general interest, more investment and a consequent budget', he added.

S&D demand to the Commission is to 'go beyond policies and general recommendations and to come forward quickly with the legislative proposals. We want to discuss them concretely'.

SWIFT - Guarantees for citizens

Following Parliament's rejection of the last SWIFT agreement on EU-US financial data transfers in February, the Council will now decide on a new negotiating mandate. 'We expect the European Council to have learned

the lesson; so that the EU negotiates a fair, effective and proportionate agreement with the US, in line with Parliament's requests', said S&D Spokesperson on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, Claude Moraes. S&D consider fight against terrorism to be a high priority, but we also want greatly strengthened citizens' privacy and legal protection at all stages.

In plenary, S&D Shadow Birgit Sippel stressed that to reach a good outcome, we need an 'ambitious and engaged negotiating mandate'. 'Solutions to ensure that bulk data, deletion periods, transfer of info to third states and the rights of our citizens are better addressed than in the previous agreement are still needed', she added. Furthermore, 'the Council should postpone its decision until Parliament's vote on this resolution in May'.

In SHORT

Agriculture and climate change – Climate change has a direct impact on EU agriculture, but our 'agriculture also has a role to play in fighting climate change – by increasing its energy savings and by contributing to fix carbon', said S&D Vice-President Stéphane Le Foll, when presenting his report in plenary. Therefore, 'we need an ambitious CAP 2013 that will be economically, ecologically and socially performing. This would be a U-turn for more sustainability, viable development and food security', he added.

Aviation Security Charges – S&D Rapporteur Jörg Leichtfried insisted on the need for transparency, both for airlines and for passengers. Without prejudice to national systems, Parliament's goal is that those paying know what they are paying for. 'Regarding more stringent measures, these must be financed by the Member States, according to the principle that security is a public responsibility'. 'EU national governments should now agree to our proposals, making sure that passengers are not paying out of their pocket again', he said.

EU strategy towards Latin America – MEPs debated on Parliament's message to the EU-Latin America summit of 18 May in Madrid. Emilio Menéndez del Valle highlighted S&D priorities: promotion of regional integration; respect of human rights; keeping dialogue channels open and strengthening our strategic relationship, as well as its inclusive and development focus.

Structural Funds – 'Reducing unnecessary red tape and clarifying rules will lead to improved implementation and correct spending on EU money', said S&D Rapporteur Evgeni Kirilov. Efficient and fast measures will allow for more projects, which is crucial for the creation of jobs, investment and infrastructure and for the adaptation of workers and enterprises to the economic change'. Regional policy is fundamental not only for solidarity reasons, but also for a quick recovery in all regions of the EU.

Discharge – Debating on discharge 2008, MEPs proposed postponing the Council's discharge, as some answers obtained are not yet satisfactory, and granting discharge to all other EU institutions, putting forward, nevertheless, recommendations to improve accountability and efficiency of EU spending.

MEPs also debated rules on Passenger Name Records - information provided to the US Government on passengers travelling to the USA. They postponed the vote to await the Commission response to Parliament's demands on data protection; the coordination of humanitarian and reconstruction in Haiti; the situation in Kirgizstan; the upcoming EU-Canada summit; the EU airline blacklist; animal welfare and the EU's maritime transport policy.

APPROACHING...

- 5 - 6 May - Plenary Session in Brussels;

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