



PARLIAMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS

May Plenary Session

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CREATING A COMPETITIVE SOCIAL MARKET, DEBT SURVEILLANCE AND EU 2020

In a resolution on the long-term sustainability of public finances, adopted by a narrow 302 votes to 275 with 34 abstentions, the Parliament calls for the prioritisation of debt surveillance, asks the Commission to evaluate the quality of Member States' debts and emphasises that stronger supervision of the financial markets is essential for guaranteeing the long-term health of national budgets. At the end of the vote, the author of the draft resolution, S&D Member Liem Hoang Ngoc declared that he would withdraw his name from the resolution as adopted since it dealt a serious blow to the EU's citizens. "The EPP and liberals want to make citizens pay for the crisis", he said.

MEP Liem Hoang Ngoc firmly denounced right-wing Members for undermining the report. Mr Hoang Ngoc had tabled amendments calling for flexible application of deficit rules, to avoid needless austerity measures, and the creation of a public ratings agency to avoid Member States being at the mercy of the markets.

During the Parliament debate, Mr Hoang Ngoc said that: "Common sense is of no importance to Liberals and Conservatives – nor the social impact of the crisis, nor the fact that massive debts are the result of saving the banks. They have an unswerving, dogmatic believe in an outdated stability pact. They see no need for economic governance. A bread-and-water diet is all Europe needs, in their view. They want to put us on a forced march towards the pact's criteria, without any guarantee of success and with every risk of ruining recovery."

On the other hand, the S&D Group successfully pushed for the adoption of progressive policy priorities for creating a competitive social market. The EU should pass a "Single Market Act" by May 2011, setting out policy priorities for creating a highly competitive social market and green economy and covering both legislative and non-legislative initiatives, says a resolution drafted by S&D Group Member Louis Grech and adopted by 578 votes to 28, with 16 abstentions. In the end, a right-wing coalition managed to postpone the important vote on Parliament's EU 2020 resolution to the June Plenary.

MEPs BACK HEDGE FUNDS CLAMPDOWN

The Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee adopted a key draft report in Strasbourg on the need for greater transparency in how hedge funds and "alternative investment" funds - speculative and private equity funds - operate. The report was carried by a comfortable majority of 31 in favour to 11 against with 3 abstentions. "This is a big step forward," said Udo Bullmann, a S&D Group lawmaker involved in brokering support for the progressive report. "Now it is up to the countries to make a move. It is important for them to act against manipulative speculators."

Hedge funds have been accused of exacerbating Greece's borrowing difficulties by betting against its debt. The planned legislation would change that, making it easier for supervisors to see what is happening as well as intervene by curbing short-selling. S&D MEPs also want to place private equity and hedge funds under closer scrutiny by supervisors and give watchdogs the power to cap their borrowing. Informal negotiations are under way between the two institutions to reach formal agreement on the new hedge fund directive. The EP is scheduled to vote in plenary in July on the new EU rules with a view to them coming into force in 2012.

S&D FOR A NON-PROFIT ORGAN DONATION NETWORK IN EUROPE

People needing organ transplants should face shorter waiting times after Parliament approved a draft directive on quality and safety standards for human organs used for transplants. The directive covers all stages of the chain from donation to transplantation and provides for cooperation between Member States. MEPs also adopted a resolution on an Action Plan for organ donation. The proposal is based on the Spanish organ transplant system.

European S&D lawmaker Andrés Perelló told the media that the Spanish donor rate is 34 for every million citizens, well above the EU average rate of 18. He added that the success of the Spanish model proves that public and universal health systems are able to provide the best medical attention to citizens. Mr Perelló, author of the parliamentary report on the action plan pointed out that: "A successful transplant system is not only based on the solidarity of the donors, but mostly on the right use of the information and a good network to share this information. We don't want a person to die in Portugal, let's say, because we never knew that there was a heart or a kidney suitable for him in France."

NO TO MEAT GLUE!

The Parliament has blocked the authorisation of "meat glue" thrombin as a food additive. The enzyme, derived from pigs or cattle, is used to stick scraps of meat together to form single pieces. In Strasbourg, European lawmakers declared that such reconstituted meat products carry an unacceptably high risk of misleading consumers. The Commission had proposed to add porcine/bovine thrombin to a list of approved additives. However, MEPs narrowly decided to block the proposal when they backed a resolution tabled by the Environment Committee by 370 votes in favour, 262 against and 32 abstentions. A minimum of 369 votes in favour was needed to exercise Parliament's right of veto under the "regulatory procedure with scrutiny". Addressing the plenary, S&D Group Environment Committee Chair Jo Leinen said that: "Consumers in Europe should be able to trust that they are buying a real steak or ham, not pieces of meat that have been glued together." A very different view was expressed by Conservative Member Pilar Ayuso, who argued that the binding procedure had been declared safe and was already practised in some countries.

IN SHORT

Thailand Should call Early Elections - The S&D Group condemned in Strasbourg the use of bullets against protesters in Thailand and called for a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the politically motivated violence. It also called on the government and the opposition to go back to the negotiating table. A plenary resolution was passed calling on both sides to show restraint, to respect fundamental and individual rights and to engage in a peaceful dialogue that would ease the way to the general elections scheduled for 14 November.

Group Leaders Host Key Talks on Political stalemate in Albania - The leaders of the two largest Groups in the European Parliament, Joseph Daul EPP and Martin Schulz S&D, invited Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha and opposition leader Edi Rama, who is mayor of Tirana, to a meeting in Strasbourg. The aim is to work jointly on a resolution of current political problems in Albania. EU enlargement commissioner Stefan Füle is also invited to attend the talks.

Improving Energy Efficiency - Labels on household appliances such as fridges, washing machines and ovens will have to include more information on energy consumption, following a vote in Strasbourg. The House approved a new layout of the EU energy efficiency label introducing additional "plus" classes to the familiar colour scheme. "The agreement reached with the Council, embracing the main points supported by the Parliament in its first agreement, paves the way towards a win-win situation, both for the market and the consumers, by guaranteeing every consumer's access to proper information and full awareness about the impact of his or her choices." said the S&D Group rapporteur Anni Podimata.

Resettlement Programmes for Refugees - The S&D Group meeting in Strasbourg strongly supported a new proposal to make funds available to EU countries willing to host and resettle refugee from outside the EU. MEP Antonio Masip Hidalgo, S&D Group rapporteur on the proposal told the press that: "The EU must take up its responsibility as world player. A resettlement programme for refugees is an essential element of EU foreign policy". Currently, the whole EU offers asylum to less than 7% of all international refugees and only 10 European countries have adopted a national resettlement programme for people who are persecuted or have been banned from their country of origin. With the vote, the Parliament has modified a Commission recommendation by increasing from 4,000 to 6,000 euro per refugee the funds being available to any EU country joining the EU resettlement scheme for the first time.

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