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SCHULZ URGES HUNGARIAN PREMIER TO WITHDRAW MEDIA LAW

Some MEPs waved blank newspaper pages emblazoned with the word "censored," while others protested by sticking tape over their mouths, as Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, clashed with critics over his controversial media law in a stormy debate in the European Parliament.

S&D leader Martin Schulz led calls in the Chamber for the withdrawal of Hungary's media law, condemning it for "falling outside the rule of law as we understand it in Europe." He also criticised Premier Viktor Orban's installation of a carpet depicting Hungary's imperial history at the EU Council headquarters in Brussels. The carpet shows a map of Europe in 1848 when Hungary included large parts of what are now other EU countries. In a debate on priorities for Hungary's six-month Presidency of the Council, Mr Schulz called for withdrawal of the media law to avoid the issue dominating debate in the months ahead. Important issues to be dealt with included the financial crisis, rising food prices and jobs, he said, adding that the S&D Group would judge the presidency on its actions. Attacking the media law, Mr Schulz singled out the supervisory media council, composed of Orban government allies for criticism. He said: "In a democracy, it is the media that scrutinises power. What you are doing is scrutinising the media and that is not right." Mr Schulz added: "We see a basic democratic value of European society being threatened. We don't want this debate to dominate the Hungarian Presidency. Please do something about it: Withdraw your act and come back with a better one, a balanced media act in Hungary."

The Commission this week said that a preliminary review found parts of the measure were not in accordance with EU law. A particular concern is a media council with the authority to sanction media outlets for coverage that it deems unbalanced or offensive to human dignity. The five-person council is comprised entirely of members of the ruling Fidesz party.

CLEAR RULES ON CROSS-BORDER HEALTHCARE

European travellers short of prescription drugs, or on waiting-lists for surgery at home, will be reimbursed for care anywhere in the EU by late 2013, under a law approved by the Parliament. The ground-breaking law sets out patients' rights to medical care in any of the 27 Member States, while spelling out rules for reimbursement and requirements for prior authorisation.

Over the complex negotiation of this report, the S&D Group pushed for some key objectives that were included in the final text. The S&D demand for a double legal basis, establishing health promotion and not just market-opening as a central purpose of the legislation was met. S&D Group Vice President Roth-Behrendt said in Strasbourg: "We have made sure that there will be legal certainty on reimbursement rules and on prior authorisation which have finally been introduced for hospital and specialised care. The directive guarantees reimbursement of healthcare costs for treatment in another member state at the same level as in the state of affiliation.

National contact points will be established to inform patients about their rights. Reference Networks between healthcare providers and centres of expertise will be developed in order to spread knowledge and best practise as well as to foster the diagnosis and treatment of rare diseases. Member States will enhance cooperation especially on e-Health, health technology assessment and the recognition of prescriptions from other Member States. On the outcome, Dagmar Roth-Behrendt said: "Our group achieved a good balance between the right of EU patients to seek the best treatment and the protection of the financial sustainability of national social security systems."

IN SHORT

Tunisia - In Strasbourg, European Parliament President Buzek opened the session with a remark to the recent events in Tunisia. He said: "We have followed the recent events, which have been unfolding in Tunisia, with great concern, but equally with hope. Peaceful demonstrations in defence of legitimate grievances were turned into violent clashes: we deplore the fact that Tunisian authorities failed to understand that their first and foremost duty is to serve the good of their citizens." Leaders of the political groups and representatives of the Commission supported his statement. One minutes of silence was held in the Chamber for the victims in Tunisia.

Lithuania Warned on Homophobic Law - The S&D Group, lined up to warn the Lithuanian Parliament to reject a draft law which "would seriously limit freedom of speech and expression, such as publicly supporting or campaigning for equality or LGBT rights or against discrimination based on sex or sexual orientation". In a resolution adopted by a large majority, the Parliament calls on the Commission to "immediately start infringement proceedings should the outcome of the vote not be compatible with EU legislation and treaties, and issue an EU Roadmap with concrete measures against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation". Lithuanian S&D Group Member Vilija Blinkevičiūtė said in Strasbourg: "It is a pity that there are cases when individual Members of the Lithuanian Parliament initiate laws that are discriminatory and violate the human rights of the citizens. I hope the Lithuanian Parliament will have the political will to reject the proposed law that would undermine human rights and freedoms. I hope that all types of discrimination will be prevented, including discrimination based on sexual orientation."

A step forward for Serbia - The House approved the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which needed the EP's consent as well as ratification by all Member States to enter into force. While welcoming Serbia's reforms, MEPs stress that full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia remains "a fundamental condition for Serbia to progress on the path to EU membership". The resolution on Serbia's integration process was adopted by 612 votes to 38 with 28 abstentions.

Adoption Procedures within the Union - European countries were urged in Strasbourg to ease international adoption procedures within the EU while reinforcing their cooperation against child trafficking. The House adopted a resolution calling for facilitating the mutual recognition of necessary documents and suggesting coordination at EU level of national strategies on adoption. Luigi Berlinguer, S&D member of the Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs and one of the initiators of the resolution, said: "The right of every child to have a family is a key principle and Europe must act concretely, in accordance with

relevant national legislation and international conventions, to improve the instrument of adoption.

Stepping up the fight against Alzheimer disease - The EU should step up co-operation and support to improve prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for patients with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, said the Parliament. The report which was approved with 646 votes in favour, 6 against and 6 abstentions, calls for dementia to be made an EU health priority and urges Member States to develop dedicated national plans and strategies. These strategies should address the social and health consequences, as well as services and support for sufferers and their families.

Go-Ahead for Economic Agreement with Fiji & Papua New Guinea - MEPs gave their green light for the Council to conclude an Interim Economic Partnership Agreement with Papua New Guinea and Fiji, two countries of the Pacific Region with significant exports to the EU. Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament voted on the Interim Partnership Agreement with Papua New Guinea and Fiji under the consent procedure, which allows MEPs to approve or reject the act but without any amendments. The vote was carried by 540 in favour, 120 against and 20 abstentions.

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