

MARCH PLENARY 2012

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DEBATING THE EU SUMMIT: GROWTH, SCHENGEN & TAX EVASION

European lawmakers debated the last EU-Summit, in the presence of European Council and Commission Presidents Herman Van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso. The plenary deliberations focussed on the situation in Greece, growth, tax evasion and recent French comments on a possible renegotiation of the Schengen agreement on passport free travel. S&D Group Leader, Hannes Swoboda criticised the recent decision not to enlarge the Schengen area to Romania and Bulgaria despite the two countries meeting all the criteria.

"The decision not to enlarge Schengen to those countries is politically motivated. It follows the same regrettable approach shown by French President Nicolas Sarkozy calling for Schengen to be reviewed. These are anti-European and nationalist statements which are not acceptable in the Europe that we live in. Is it really Sarkozy's intention that we need to reintroduce passport checks to travel in Europe? This is not what we stand for. Our vision for Europe is moving forward and not backwards."

Hannes Swoboda also made a strong plea for a more just and socially-responsible Europe, highlighting the call for action by the European Socialists and Democrats to tackle the increasing youth unemployment rate. He criticised the lack of action at the EU Summit last week on providing practical solutions to the crisis and the high unemployment levels, and he stressed the need to support the most vulnerable groups in society.

"We are following the wrong path. The focus on austerity leads to exactly the opposite of what we need: instead of more growth and employment we have less, which also means less taxes and public income. We need to overcome this and focus on a policy which supports demand. We need an education and employment guarantee for young people in Europe. I urge the EU institutions to consider the failure to act on youth unemployment as seriously as any failure to comply with budgetary discipline."

"It is good news that the Commission has taken up our proposal to tackle tax evasion and avoidance, which could result in savings of up to €1 trillion – as a recent study commissioned by our Group clearly showed."

STEPPING UP WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS & BUSINESS: PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR QUOTAS

Parliament reiterates its call for new laws introducing quotas to boost female representation in corporate boards, should national measures fail to achieve this. S&D Euro MPs backed a resolution calling for a 10% reduction in the pay gap between men and women and for quotas to increase the number of women in business and administration boards. S&D Group negotiator Katarína Nevedalová said to the press in Strasbourg that "Despite many campaigns, women still earn on average 17.5% less than men for the same job. This is simply no longer acceptable in our modern societies. As socialists and democrats, we are calling for equal pay for equal work".

"Women should have the same position, rights and opportunities in today society as men. It is a long process but we can help it together by supporting women to get involved in fields where they are a minority e.g. in green economy, research and science, IT technologies", said Mrs Nevedalová. This Parliament has adopted a strong position calling for EU legislation to increase the number of women in senior management and decision-making – including in politics – by 30% by 2015 and 40% by 2020.

The resolution also underlines the importance of sexual and reproductive rights, and health including access to contraceptives and safe abortions. It urges the need for a legislative criminal-law instrument and for progress on the maternity leave directive. The resolution on the annual report on gender equality was passed with 361 votes in favour, 268 against and 70 abstentions. The resolution on women's representation in political decision making was passed with 508 votes in favour, 124 against and 49 abstentions. [Adopted Text - Click on 13.03.2012](#)

SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ORGANISED CRIME

The European Parliament meeting in Strasbourg voted to set up a new parliamentary committee specifically to investigate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering, to look at its impact on the EU and its member states, and to propose appropriate measures to fight these threats. The new committee is expected to start work in April 2012 and it will have 12 months to carry out field visits and hold hearings before delivering its final assessment and recommendations. Claude Moraes, S&D spokesperson on civil liberties, justice and home affairs said:

"The special committee – a strategic priority for our Group for a long time – will allow us to directly focus our efforts on finding effective tools to tackle the widespread problem of organised crime."

The new committee will also assess the EU and national legislation to fight mafia and organised crime, including the new rules proposed by the Commission to make it easier to confiscate criminal assets in Europe. According to the Commission's proposal, member states will have 'to manage frozen assets so that they do not lose economic value before they are eventually confiscated'.

"Assets and profits confiscated from mafia and criminal organizations should not be frozen but put to good use and exploited for social purposes", said S&D Euro MPs Rita Borsellino and Rosario Crocetta, two Sicilian MEPs on the frontline in the fight against the mafia. Selling criminal assets through auctions is not enough to prevent their return into the mafia's hands. This will be one of the first proposals the S&D Group will raise within the new European Parliament committee on the mafia", they concluded.

IN SHORT

MEPs strongly condemn Dutch discriminatory website -The EP adopted a strong resolution calling on the Dutch government to officially condemn the anti-migrant website *Meldpunt Midden en oost Europeanen* created by Geert Wilders' far-right PVV party. The Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), a formal partner and ally of the centre-right coalition government, started this website to collect complaints about migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe living in the Netherlands. Urging an immediate shutdown of the website, S&D Group leader Hannes Swoboda said:

"Such a website is not acceptable in today's EU. The questions there are discriminatory and stigmatise people from Central and Eastern Europe. The website is opposed to our European values and needs to be shut down. There is only one Europe, there is no reason to distinguish between people coming from the East or from the West. The end of this story is in Mr Rutte's hands now. His non-reaction is unacceptable". [Adopted Text - Click on 15.03.2012](#)

S&D Group calls for action against financing of extreme - right political parties - The Parliament's highest internal decision-making body, the Conference of Presidents decided, on the initiative of S&D Group leader Hannes Swoboda, to launch the procedure to check whether a political party at European level is committed to observing the EU principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. It will now be up to a Parliamentary Committee to verify the compliance of European political parties with the above-mentioned fundamental principles.

EP Urges Poland to Unblock Plan for a Low-Carbon Economy - The EP sent a strong message to the European Council, with a clear majority voting in favour of a roadmap for moving to a competitive low-carbon economy by 2050. The EU must harness its energy, transport and agriculture policies to cut CO2 emissions - and improve its Emissions Trading System - to make the economy more competitive and dramatically less dependent on fossil fuels, says the adopted resolution. S&D negotiator for the parliamentary report on the issue, Euro MP Jo Leinen, said:

"We regret the short-sighted position expressed by Poland at the Council meeting last week, vetoing this long-term plan presented by the Commission. The future of Europe depends on an efficient, sustainable and competitive use of energy. To achieve the society we want to see we need to start working now and to set specific milestones for a gradual reduction in domestic emissions to achieve the 80% reduction target by 2050." [Adopted Text - Click on 15.03.2012](#)

Annual Report on Equality between Women and Men - The European Parliament adopted in Strasbourg its annual report on equality between women and men in the EU. The text looks at recent advances in gender equality, and includes several recommendations. It notes that, despite countless campaigns, targets and measures in recent years, the gender pay gap remains wide with women across the EU earning 17.5% less on average than men. The resolution calls for a multifaceted strategy from European institutions, Member States and the Social Partners to tackle the full range of causes of the persistent gender pay, including a European equal pay target to reduce the pay gap by 10% in each Member State to ensure equal payment for women and men for the same work and for the same qualifications. The report also acknowledges that "families in the European Union are diverse" and include "different-sex and same-sex parents [...] who deserve equal protection under national and European Union law". The Parliament also "regrets the implementation by some Member States of restrictive definitions of 'family' in order to deny legal protection to same-sex couples and their children". In the field of hate crime, the EP has also urged the Commission "to include homophobic and transphobic violence and harassment in its action programmes against gender-based violence". Finally the Parliament has called on the Danish Presidency of the EU to unblock the proposed horizontal anti-discrimination Directive. [Adopted Text - Click Here](#)

End to Hormone Beef Trade War - EU concessions to help put an end to the 20-year hormone beef trade war with the USA and Canada were approved by European lawmakers. The deal allows the EU to keep its ban on imports of hormone-treated beef, in return for increasing its quota for imports of high-quality beef from the US and Canada. The US and Canada, for their part, have already suspended duties, imposed in retaliation against the EU's hormone-treated beef ban, on previously "blacklisted" products originating in 26 EU Member States (all except the UK). Euro MP George Cutas, spokesperson of the S&D Group on the issue, said to the media in Strasbourg: I welcome the conclusion of the memoranda of understanding between the EU and the USA and between the EU and Canada. The solution allows for the suspension of sanctions on EU products, while guaranteeing that beef imports to the EU will be in line with EU requirements. In exchange we will raise the quota for high-quality hormone-free meat from US and Canada". The deal was approved at the first reading with 650 votes in favour, 11 against and 11 abstentions.
[Adopted Text - Click on 14.03.2012](#)

EP Calls for an EU Diabetes Strategy -The EU needs a dedicated strategy to tackle its growing diabetes problem, says a resolution adopted by MEPs. This is essential to improve research cooperation and focus on prevention and early diagnosis, they say. In addition to the EU's estimated 32 million diabetes sufferers, there are another 32 million citizens with impaired glucose tolerance, which has a high probability of progressing to clinically manifest diabetes. In addition, the number of people living with diabetes in Europe is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030, as a result of the obesity epidemic, the ageing of the European population and other factors. Up to 50% of all people with diabetes are currently unaware of their condition.
[Adopted Text - Click on 14.03.2012](#)

Additional Support for Higher Education - MEPs adopted a resolution calling for more funds and support to encourage student mobility and make European higher education more attractive and competitive. This would involve reinforcing the so-called Bologna Process, which aims to create a European Higher Education Area by making quality standards and degrees more compatible throughout the continent. In addition to the EU, the Process is also implemented in 20 other European countries. [Adopted Text- Click on 13.03.2012](#)

Chocolate Must be Child-Labour Free - As the world's leading consumer of chocolate and home to many major chocolate manufacturers, the EU must help ensure that children are not exploited to make it, say MEPs in a resolution passed in Strasbourg. The House gave its consent to renew the International Cocoa Agreement, on production and trade, but took the opportunity to raise awareness of the problem of child labour in cocoa fields.

"Appalling numbers of children are engaged in hazardous activities on cocoa fields. The new International Cocoa Agreement will give us more instruments to address this issue but more needs to be done. All policymakers and stakeholders involved in cocoa production must live up to their responsibilities to eradicate child labour from cocoa production", said rapporteur and S&D Group Member and Committee Chair Vital Moreira.
[Adopted Text - Click on 15.03.2012](#)

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