



Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament

PRESS CONFERENCE with Hannes Swoboda
Tuesday 11 December at 10.10 LOW N-1/201

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New EU-Russia agreement / Rapporteur

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Wednesday, 12 - December 2012



Hannes Swoboda

The report takes stock of the negotiations with Russia over a new agreement to replace the one currently in force dating from 1997. Hannes Swoboda stressed the EU's willingness to enjoy a strategic relationship with Russia, but signalled that this is only possible if Russia moves closer to EU values. In particular the S&D Group will focus on the requirements that the EU intends to include on respect for democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. At the same time, the report takes the pragmatic view that cooperation with Russia is necessary on a number of pressing global issues, such as the situation in the UN Security Council regarding Syria; Iran's nuclear programme; and global counter-proliferation and anti-terrorism efforts, among others. It takes a very critical view of Russia's troubling internal developments, made manifest by laws and judicial practices that increasingly stifle free speech and legitimate political activity. Despite negative developments in these areas in present day Russia, dialogue and engagement, not a revival of Cold War-style rhetoric, remain the best options in terms of relations with the country.

Transitional arrangements for bilateral investment agreements between member states and third countries / Rapporteur

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Monday, 10 - December 2012



Vital Moreira

Since the Lisbon Treaty, protecting foreign direct investment has become an exclusive competence of the EU and an integral part of the EU's external trade policy. This draft regulation is aimed at ensuring the smooth transfer of this competence from member states to European level. Agreement was reached with the Council in October 2012 in early second reading and we are now adopting the Council's position and finalising the deal. The deal is welcomed by our Group because on the one hand it creates legal certainty for the member states' existing bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and on the other hand it gives the Commission the appropriate tools to develop an EU-wide investment policy. In addition, the regulation stipulates that new BITs should match the EU's objectives for external action (development, human rights etc) which was also important for our Group.

Recommendation on the proposal for a Council decision authorising enhanced co-operation in the area of the creation of financial transaction tax / Rapporteur

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Anni Podimata

Our Group has fought hard over the last two years for the introduction of a financial transaction tax (FTT), a socially just measure which will help share the costs of the crisis more fairly and discourage the most speculative and risky transactions. Next week the European Parliament has to remain consistent in its position and give the green light for the enhanced co-operation procedure, which will allow the 11 interested member states to proceed quickly and establish the FTT. We will continue pushing for an FTT covering all financial markets, institutions and instruments.

EU-Colombia/Peru trade agreement / Shadow Rapporteur

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Bernd Lange

In order to use the trade agreement as a tool to achieve clear improvements – in particular for trade unionists in Colombia – the S&D Group successfully put forward a resolution requesting that the two governments develop transparent and binding roadmaps on human, labour and environmental standards before any trade agreement would enter into force. In the roadmap presented in October 2012, Colombia commits itself among other things to ensuring the participation of civil society in applying the trade agreement, increasing the budget for protecting trade unionists and increasing the number of labour inspections. In addition, the S&Ds introduced an obligation for the European Commission to monitor and report on the sustainability issues in the trade agreement. A monitoring group of the European Parliament was also created at the request of the S&Ds, to ensure the roadmaps are fully implemented, in close co-operation with civil society.

Implementation of the bilateral safeguard and stabilisation mechanism for bananas of the association agreement between the EU and Central America / Rapporteur

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Jörg Leichtfried

The 'bilateral safeguard clause and the stabilisation mechanism for bananas' aims at protecting Europe's industry and economy from any serious damage that could be caused by the Agreement establishing an association between the European Union and its member states on the one hand, and Central America on the other. To address existing concerns about the situation on human rights and decent working conditions in Central America, this regulation also includes provisions such as: enhancing compliance with International Labour Organisation labour standards; setting up monitoring on employment rates and working conditions; reporting on the fulfilment of obligations under Title VIII of the association agreement, 'trade and sustainable development'. Therefore, after intense negotiations with the Commission and the Council, the present safeguard developed from purely trade-orientated standard wording into a safeguard clause that also reflects our responsibilities on advocating human and social rights.



Véronique
De Keyser

European Parliament's resolution (Statement by the VPC/HR) on the Israeli government's decision to expand settlements in the West Bank / Vice-president in charge of Foreign Affairs

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The UN General Assembly updated, with an overwhelming majority, the status of Palestine to a non-member observer state last week. The S&D Group welcomed this decision and called on Israelis and Palestinians to work together for a just and lasting negotiated solution to the conflict. The two-state solution, based on pre-1967 borders and with Jerusalem as the capital of both states, is the only viable option in this regard. Therefore, S&D members are extremely worried by the Israeli government's recent announcement, following the UN decision, to build around 3000 new settlement units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This irresponsible step goes against the spirit of peace. Therefore, the European Parliament should call on the Israeli government not to implement this decision and to put an end to all settlement building without delay, as this constitutes a major threat and obstacle to the two-state solution and undermines the hope of peace.



Karin
Kadenbach

Protection of animals during transport / Shadow rapporteur

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Too many animals are currently transported in unacceptable conditions on European roads. I am happy that the S&Ds will this week vote for a strong call to limit the transport of animals destined for slaughter to eight hours. This is great news for the over 1 million EU citizens who have signed the '8hours' petition and also for the majority of MEPs who signed Written Declaration 49/2011 on this issue. We also need an increase in the number of spot inspections and more effective and dissuasive penalties against rule-breakers.



Bernhard
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Creation of unitary patent protection / Rapporteur

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The debate on the creation of a unitary patent is as old as the internal market itself. Now, 50 years later, in times of economic and social crisis, the S&D Group confirms its commitment to support Europe's innovative resources. The biggest opportunity to strengthen innovation in Europe with respect to intellectual property rights is the creation of an EU patent. The creation of a unitary patent would put an end to decade-long unfruitful negotiations. The unitary patent which should be granted in the 25 member states is based on a single application. This process will reduce costs by 70% for applicants, roughly down from 32,000 Euro which is now the cost for patent protection valid in 25 member states. Patent proprietors should pay one common annual renewal fee for European patents with unitary effect. We will not give up our legislative rights to a body outside the EU framework, in particular on sensitive matters linked to limitations on patentability, such as software and biotechnologies. The European Parliament cannot be cut off and prevented from adopting future sectoral measures, in accordance with the EU's competences.



Raimon
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Review of the EU's human rights strategy / Shadow rapporteur

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The S&D Group welcomes the report on the EU's human rights strategy review. This aims to improve the effectiveness and consistency of the EU's human rights policy and also stresses the role of the European Parliament in implementing this reshaped policy framework. Although there is a need for better co-ordination and co-operation between the European Union and its member states, the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Human Rights is a step in the right direction.



Libor
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Situation in Ukraine / Rapporteur

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The S&D Group welcomed the legitimate and orderly nature of the October parliamentary elections in Ukraine, as well as the fact that the majority of parties in the new parliament were elected on a pro-European platform. However, we also call on the Ukrainian government to address the various irregularities noted by domestic and international election observers, such as the misuse of administrative resources or problems with voting tabulation, and to start work on revising the election legislation. Most importantly, the S&D Group remains fully committed to working toward a closer political and economic association between Ukraine and the EU, and we encourage the Ukrainian government to carry out the necessary reforms, notably by strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, reforming the judicial system and stepping up the fight against corruption.

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