

MAY PLENARY 2011

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**BORDER CHECKS IN SCHENGEN AREA**

Proposals to bring back national border checks in the EU's Schengen zone provoked anger from the European Parliament's S&D Group in Strasbourg. S&D Group leader Martin Schulz led an assault on the response to migration from trouble-torn North Africa. He accused the French and Italian governments of populism and claimed Commission President José Manuel Barroso and his home affairs commissioner Cecilia Malmström had caved in under their pressure. In addition, on the new measures announced by the Danish government later this week, Martin Schulz told the media that:

"Reinstating border controls and curbing EU citizens' free movement is becoming a new popular trend among European conservative and liberal governments when elections are approaching. We expect the European Commission to immediately ask the Danish authorities for clarifications and to analyze the announced measures before their implementation. We also urge the Danish Government to wait for the Commission's assessment before taking any further step. The S&D Group will firmly react to any attempt to undermine the EU treaty, either for free movement of goods or persons at internal borders".

Speaking in a Strasbourg debate the S&D Group leader rejected claims that migration to Europe was a crisis. "Four hundred thousand fleeing from Libya to Tunisia -- that's a crisis. But 20,000 crossing the Mediterranean into Europe -- that's not a crisis for Europe. If we could have proper burden-sharing in Europe, we wouldn't have this problem." He added: "We are losing our European spirit here. In the EU, one of our important achievements is our freedom of movement.

**EU OFFICE IN LIBYA TO BUILD DEMOCRACY & TOUGHER SANCTIONS ON SYRIA**

S&D Group leader Martin Schulz welcomed the announcement by EU foreign policy chief Cathy Ashton that she is to open an office in Libya to prepare for elections after the demise of the Gaddafi regime. Mr Schulz criticised Member States for taking a nation-based approach to Europe's foreign policy challenges. In a wide-ranging Strasbourg debate on the EU's foreign, security and defence policy, Mr Schulz rejected criticisms of high

representative Ashton as "inspired by people are only thinking about their national foreign policies." He welcomed Baroness Ashton's announcement that she is to open an office in Benghazi and denounced arms sales to the Gaddafi regime by Germany, France, the UK, Italy and Belgium. The House also called the high representative Ashton to intervene in order to bring about a ceasefire in Libya. A parliamentary amendment calls on Baroness Ashton "to take concrete initiatives to secure an early ceasefire in order to halt the bloodshed and suffering of the Libyan population" and urges her "to play a strong and direct role in fostering political initiatives in this direction."

Calls for an arms embargo by EU Member States on Syria, Yemen and Bahrain and for a moratorium on the executions of four Bahraini protestors were among key demands made in two resolutions passed in Strasbourg. European Lawmakers also urged the EU to suspend ongoing negotiations for an Association Agreement with Syria.

## **EUROPEAN LAWMAKERS TIGHTEN UP REGULATIONS GOVERNING LOBBYISTS**

Plans to tighten up regulations governing lobbyists who daily attempt to influence EU policy were approved by the European Parliament in Strasbourg, and could be in place as soon as next month. Members gave their backing to plans for a joint register of lobbyists and other interest groups seeking access to Parliament and the Commission. Parliament urges that lobbyists' exchanges with lead MEPs be listed in a "legislative footprint annex" to parliamentary reports. It also hopes the Council of Ministers will take part in this "transparency register". The Commission's "register of interest representatives" and the Parliament's "list of lobbyists" will now be unified under the new transparency register.

The name change to "transparency" from "lobby" register is designed to make it easier for non-commercial organisations such as think tanks, churches, local authorities and political parties to sign up. Representing the Council of Ministers, Hungarian Minister Eniko Gyori told Members the Council's contribution would be limited because it is "less exposed" to lobby activities than the commission or the Parliament.

## **IN SHORT**

**Japan trade deals get conditional backing** - Japan needs to reduce its non-trade barriers further before negotiations for a free trade agreement can begin, say MEPs. Parliament's resolution on EU-Japan trade, passed by a show of hands, backs a free trade agreement. However, it also states MEPs' dissatisfaction with the "negligible progress in the High Level Group," which has been holding informal negotiations on removing some existing barriers to trade for several years. Parliament makes it clear that "significant commitments on removing non-trade barriers and obstacles to access to Japanese public procurement" are needed before any negotiations for a free-trade agreement can begin. In addition, Members also argue for that a safeguard clause should be included in any future agreement, especially in sensitive sectors such as the automotive, electronics, aviation and machinery industries.

**Free Trade Agreement with India** - S&D Group voted against a resolution on a planned free trade agreement between the EU and India because it did not guarantee rights both for Indians and Europeans. S&D spokesperson on trade, Kader Arif, said to the media in Strasbourg: "The EU cannot forget its principles when it comes to trade policy. On the contrary, the Lisbon Treaty says that commercial policy must contribute to sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights. We also regret that a conservative-led coalition rejected the amendment to guarantee equal treatment of workers and effectively apply compliance with International Labour Organisation standards as part of the agreement. We cannot accept the opening-up of services and social dumping through lower salaries for immigrant workers based in Europe. We will keep a close eye on developments to make sure that the EU-India trade

agreement respects the principle of equal pay for equal work." The resolution was carried with 390 votes in favour, 276 against and 10 abstentions.

**Nuclear Stress Tests** - The S&D Group called on the Commission to make nuclear plant stress tests mandatory and to run them under EU authority and the supervision of independent experts. After a debate between commissioner Oettinger and members of the industry and environment parliamentary committees, S&D vice-president Marita Ulvskog said: The Commission cannot give in to member states pushing for more lenient tests. Stress tests must include not just natural disasters, but also man-made threats such as terrorist attacks or plane crashes. The Commission together with the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group and independent experts should set the criteria to be applied in the tests. An independent European umbrella organisation should be set up to ensure the highest nuclear safety in the EU. The role of independent experts is important, because questions could be raised about the objectivity of nuclear plants' licence owners conducting these tests. All of Europe's 146 nuclear reactors will be subjected to the safety tests, and S&D members would like to see the final assessment made public by the end of the year."

**Safety tests also for nuclear weapon storage sites** - Members of the S&D Group in whose constituency the last US nuclear weapons are stored, demand safety tests also for these nuclear storage sites, in line with the European stress-test for nuclear power plants that was debated in Parliament this week (see previous heading). The Social-Democrats Debora Serracchiani from Italy, Kathleen van Brempt from Belgium, Thijs Berman from the Netherlands and Norbert Neuser from Germany share the common trait that the last US nuclear weapons in Europe, dating from the times of the Cold War, are stored in military facilities in their constituency. "After the nuclear tragedy in Fukushima the concerned European citizens demand best possible safety measures for all sources of nuclear radiation and clear information about where the US nuclear weapons are stored" underline the four MEPs. "We support their demand and would like to see these nuclear weapon sites to be included in the European stress-tests for nuclear power plants." The group of S&D MEPs coordinated their efforts and voiced their demand to the European Commission.

**Fighting Antibiotic Resistance** - Resistance to antibiotics in livestock and pets has become a huge issue in recent years. To cope with this growing problem and the consequent treatment failures, European lawmakers issued a call for more research and better monitoring of the effects of antimicrobials on food-producing animals and pets. It would also help if antibiotics were used less, stress Members. All Member States should "perform regular systematic surveillance and monitoring of animal antimicrobial resistance in both food producing and companion animals", says Parliament's resolution, which was tabled by S&D Group Member Paolo De Castro and President the Agriculture Committee on behalf of that Committee .

**Forest Protection** - The Parliament called in Strasbourg for new laws on forest fires, including a ban on building on forest land burned down by arsonists, and asked the Commission to present a White Paper with an ambitious strategy on forest protection. As stated in the report, Euro MPs now expect the Commission to bring forward a White Paper on forest protection, addressing financial resources, knowledge exchange and promotion of research and the protective functions of forests for Europeans in the context of climate change.

**Seven Women are Beaten to Death Everyday in Europe** - Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament called on the Commission to present a comprehensive directive to fight and prevent violence against women. Euro MPs, academia and civil society representatives attending a conference organised by the S&D Group, agreed that only a multifaceted strategy can be effective. S&D spokesperson on women's issues Britta Thomsen said. "The Commission is soon to present a package with measures to help victims of crime but we are afraid that it will not sufficiently address violence against

women. The Parliament has repeatedly called for a directive. We need to see a stronger commitment from the Commission on terror exercised against women. Seven women are beaten to death everyday in Europe. There are far more deaths caused by gender violence than victims of terrorism and yet not enough efforts are being undertaken."

**New Textile Labelling Rules** - Consumers will no longer risk inadvertently buying textiles that contain real fur or leather, thanks to new textile labelling rules approved by Parliament. The new rules should also ensure that new fibres and innovative products reach the market faster. The Commission will be asked for an assessment report, by 2013, on a possible origin labelling scheme, which may be accompanied by a legislative proposal.

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