

DECEMBER PLENARY 2011

## CONTENT

- *Saving the Euro: MEPS Debate Latest European Council Deal*
- *In Short*

**SAVING THE EURO: MEPS DEBATE LATEST EUROPEAN COUNCIL DEAL**

The leader of the European Parliament's Socialists and Democrats highlighted in Strasbourg the EU summit's failure to offer a way out of the crisis, saying nothing on jobs or growth, nothing on the role of the ECB and nothing on funding for states in crisis.

Martin Schulz joined cross-party condemnation of the British Conservative government's stance at last week's EU summit. Deploring the UK's increasing self-isolation caused by Prime Minister Cameron, Mr Schulz said: "The other 26 could not allow themselves to be blackmailed by unreasonable British demands such as opt outs from the working time directive and the refusal of stricter financial regulation, the lack of which was one of the main reasons for the financial crisis in the first place, as shown in the fall of RBS. "David Cameron has scored a classic own-goal. He will have to return to the negotiating table to undo the damage."

Speaking in a Strasbourg debate, Mr Schulz made a passionate appeal for efforts to regain public trust. "The Council talks all the time about winning back the trust of the markets. It is time we did more to win back the trust of our citizens." The new agreement should include measures to create growth, employment and security for the people of Europe. "In place of democracy dancing to the tune of the markets, markets must be regulated in the interests of democracy."

Mr Schulz called for the Parliament to have a full role as an equal institutional partner in designing the new accord agreed on by the summit. If it is not given such a role, he added, "I can only recommend to the European Parliament not to take any further step in the process. We will be forced to block any fast-track attempts to deal with this question."

In the Plenary debate, European President Herman Van Rompuy regretted the intergovernmental nature of the new deal and the fact that not all member states had supported the agreement. Both he and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso underlined that the Summit's focus on fiscal responsibility was not enough to solve the Eurozone crisis. The EU must also have measures to restore growth. Mr Barroso reiterated his support in the Chamber for Eurobonds to build a stronger, more liquid EU bond market. Video of the debate - [click on "Conclusions of the European Council Meeting"](#)

**IN SHORT**

**CROATIA'S EU ACCESSION: GREEN LIGHT FROM THE PARLIAMENT** - Parliament gave its consent to Croatia's EU membership in a vote during the mini-plenary session in Brussels, on December 1st. The proposal was passed with 564 votes in favour, 38 against and 32 abstentions. Croatia could become the EU's 28th Member State on 1 July 2013.

While acknowledging Croatia's preparedness for accession, MEPs invite Zagreb to tackle remaining challenges, especially concerning judicial reform and the fight against corruption and organised crime. They urge Croatia to step up its efforts to prosecute war crimes, comply with all International Criminal Tribunal recommendations for the former Yugoslavia and encourage the return of war refugees, especially Serbs. Finally, MEPs call on Croatia to continue making structural reforms to its economy, stimulate employment by reviving the labour market and pursue fiscal consolidation in order to boost competitiveness. [Resolution in full - click on 01.12.2011](#)

### **EU IS AT CROSSROADS, WE FIGHT FOR ITS FUTURE OR WE REGRET IT IN FUTURE**

The Polish presidency concludes at the end of the year and Prime Minister Donald Tusk was present during the plenary session of the European Parliament to review the past six months. Most MEPs praised the presidency, but Tusk wasn't too optimistic. "Although we are happy with the work done, I cannot say that Europe is more united now. Today I can say that we are at crossroads. We have to answer the question of whether we walk the community road, or the road of national selfishness. Either we fight for the future of Europe now, or cry for Europe tomorrow," he said. This has been one of the best presidencies in recent years, Socialist leader Martin Schulz said, calling on the EU to adopt new instruments that are adequate for 21st century.

**ARAB SPRING ACTIVISTS RECEIVE SAKHAROV PRIZE IN STRASBOURG** - President Jerzy Buzek awarded in Strasbourg Parliament's annual Sakharov prize for freedom of thought to five "Arab Spring" activists for their contribution to the historic changes in the Arab world. During the ceremony, President Buzek pointed out that "the historical events also remind us of our responsibilities, including the need to support an emerging, young and vibrant civil society." The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honour of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded by the European Parliament every year since 1988 and has become a well known symbol of the fight for human rights and democracy.

**BORDERS LIFTED FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE** - Victims of violence or abuse will soon be offered protection across the EU after the endorsement of the European Protection Order (EPO) by Euro MPs in Strasbourg. The EPO, an initiative originally requested by 12 Member States and promoted by EU's Spanish Presidency, deals with domestic violence, forced marriage, paedophilia, human trafficking, organised crimes of terrorism and female genital mutilation. National authorities in 27 member states will recognise one another's protection orders issued on the basis of domestic criminal law. Member States will have three years to transpose this directive into national law. "Protection will know no borders. There are thousands of victims who will now be able to live in peace", added Civil Liberties Committee rapporteur and S&D Group Member Carmen Romero López. [Resolution in full - click on 13.12.2011](#)

**RUSSIAN ELECTIONS: MEPS CALL FOR NEW FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS** - In a resolution adopted in Strasbourg, MEPs stress that the running of the election showed that Russia does not meet election standards as defined by the OSCE, and express concern about reports of fraud and the preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODIHR report on procedural violations, lack of media impartiality, harassment of independent monitors and lack of separation between party and state. The resolution calls on the EU and Russia to speed up negotiations for a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Parliament favours a legally-binding agreement that includes all areas related to democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Finally, the resolution stresses that international challenges, in particular with regard to Syria and Iran, cannot be solved without a coordinated approach which includes Russia. [Resolution in full - click on 14.12.2011](#)

**BASHAR AL ASSAD'S DEPARTURE ESSENTIAL FOR SYRIAN DEMOCRACY** - The Group of the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament called for the immediate resignation of Bashar Al-Assad and is in complete solidarity with the Syrian people struggling for freedom, dignity and democracy, in a plenary resolution adopted by.... Véronique De Keyser, vice-president of the S&D Group, said that "the dictatorial regime of

Bashar al-Assad has no more legitimacy for the Syrian people and faces complete international isolation because of its increasingly repressive and bloody acts. We welcome the positive steps taken by the UN Human Rights Council, the Arab League and Turkey. On the other hand, we deplore the lack of an adequate response from the UN Security Council and continue supporting EU efforts in this field. We continue to support the emergence of organised Syrian opposition forces and encourage them to establish a united platform with the aim of achieving freedom and democracy for all in Syria. Bashar al-Assad must give up power immediately and unconditionally so that democracy can be established in Syria and so that the country can regain its place in the international community." [Resolution in full - click on 14.12.2011](#)

**MEPS REJECT EXTENSION OF THE EU-MOROCCO FISHERIES AGREEMENT AND CALL FOR A BETTER DEAL** - Parliament voted to reject by 326 to 296 votes and 58 abstentions a proposed extension of the controversial EU-Morocco fisheries agreement. It called on the Commission to negotiate a new, more environmentally and economically beneficial deal, which should take account of the interests of the Sahrawi population. The current protocol, which has applied provisionally since 28 February 2011, will cease to apply immediately. [Resolution in full - click on 14.12.2011](#)

**NEW LABELLING RULES** - New consumer-friendly labelling rules for fruit juices and nectars were approved by the Chamber in Strasbourg. They aim to prevent potentially misleading names for mixed juices and "no added sugar" claims. The Parliament approved the update to existing legislation with 585 votes in favour, 33 against and 1 abstention. S&D Group rapporteur Andrés Perelló Rodríguez said: "Our priority was to offer consumers accurate information so they would know what they are buying. Parliament played a key role in banning added sugar in products sold as juices and in clarifying the presence of sugars or sweeteners in similar drinks." [Resolution in full - click on 14.12.2011](#)

**S&D GROUP WIN FIGHT FOR MORE TRANSPARENCY** - EU citizens will soon have the right to know what their national ministers stand for when meeting behind closed doors in Brussels, after groundbreaking legislation was adopted in Strasbourg to make EU institutions more transparent and accountable. This will also apply to the European Court of Justice, the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank, although only relating to their administrative tasks. The new provisions were strongly opposed by conservative MEPs, who in a heated debate before the vote compared pro-transparency advocates to criminals and argued that citizens should not be influencing decision-making. "Only through transparency can citizens participate in an informed way in the democratic process, which is even more important in the current crisis", said Civil Liberties Committee rapporteur and S&D Group member, Michael Cashman. "What we are talking about is a right that allows citizens and their representatives outside Parliament and the institutions to make sure that we are accountable: parliamentarians accountable for what we do in their name; the Commission accountable for what they do; and equally the Council of Ministers accountable too", he added. [Resolution in full - click on 15.12.2011](#)

**SMART, HEALTHY TRAVEL IN A SINGLE EUROPEAN TRANSPORT AREA BY 2020** - To complete a safe, efficient, low-pollution single transport area the EU must set itself realistic but binding environmental and safety goals for 2020, says Parliament in a resolution passed in Strasbourg with 523 votes in favour, 64 against and 37 abstentions. These include halving the number of road deaths and serious injuries, and doubling the number of pedestrians and cyclists in towns, from 2010 levels. Pollution, noise and congestion costs should be included in the prices paid by users, MEPs add. The "roadmap to a single European transport area" with figures, as approved by Parliament, supplements the long-run view of a Commission white paper on the future of EU transport policy. [Resolution in full - click on 15.12.2011](#)

**REINFORCING EU LEGISLATION ON HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK** - The effects of new technologies on health must be assessed and nanomaterials must be covered by current EU health and safety rules, says a resolution, passed in Strasbourg, on a mid-term review of the EU's 2007-2012 health and safety at work strategy and adopted with 371

votes in favour, 47 against and 15 abstentions. Furthermore, individuals who legitimately warn of risks at work should be protected from any pressure to remain silent, say MEPs, calling on the Commission to propose a directive to protect these workers. Finally, Work-related stress is a major obstacle to productivity in Europe, MEPs say, calling on the Commission to take measures to ensure that the EU Framework agreement on work-related stress of 8 October 2004 is duly implemented in every Member State and asking employees' and employers' organisations to raise awareness among employers, workers and their representatives of the need to reduce work-related stress. [Resolution in full - click on 15.12.2011](#)

**18 NEW MEMBERS IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT** - the process of ratifying the protocol allowing 18 additional Members to join the European Parliament has been successfully completed, after having it started on September 2010, following a decision by national governments in June 2010 to adopt a proposal modifying the EP composition. As a consequence, the text entered into force on December 1, thus giving the 18 additional seats to 12 Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and UK). For the Socialists and Democrats Group in the European Parliament, the number of MEPs increased by five, the Group welcoming new members from Spain (2), Sweden (1), Austria (1) and Malta (1).

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