

FEBRUARY PLENARY 2012

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PROGRESSIVE RESOLUTION ON HUNGARY ADOPTED BY EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament meeting in Strasbourg adopted a resolution tabled by the four centre-left political groups in the Parliament on threats to democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Hungary. It was agreed to draw up a report on whether EU laws and values are respected in Hungary. Further to this report, Parliament will decide whether to invoke EU Treaty Article 7, which could lead to suspension of Hungary's voting rights in the EU Council of Ministers. The resolution also calls on the European Commission to monitor closely the possible amendments and the implementation of Hungarian laws and their compliance with the letter and spirit of the European treaties and to conduct a thorough research to ensure:

- the full independence of the judiciary, notably that the National Judicial Authority, the Prosecutor's Office and the courts in general are governed free from political influence;
- that the regulation of the Hungarian National Bank abides by European legislation;
- that the institutional independence of data protection and freedom of information is restored and guaranteed by the letter and the implementation of the relevant law;
- that the rights of the Constitutional Court to review any legislation is fully restored;
- that the freedom and pluralism of the media is guaranteed by the letter and the implementation of the Hungarian Media Law, especially with regard to the participation of civil and opposition representatives in the Media Council;
- that the new electoral law meets European democratic standards and respects the principle of political alternation;
- that the rights to exercise political opposition in a democratic way are ensured inside and outside of the institutions;
- that the law on churches and religious denominations will respect the basic principles of the freedom of conscience, also that it refrains from subjecting the registration of churches to the approval of the two-thirds majority in the parliament;

The Parliament also expresses its serious concern about Hungary with regard to the exercise of democracy, the rule of law, the protection of human and social rights, the system of checks and balances, and equality and non-discrimination. The resolution was approved with 315 votes in favour, 263 against and 49 abstentions. Commenting to the media, S&D Group Leader Hannes Swoboda said:

"I am grateful that the resolution found a majority in the Parliament today. We need to make it clear that we follow our own path on the serious question of safeguarding democracy and rule of law in the European Union. At the same time we must make sure that with our actions we do not make the country and its people suffer even more.

"The ball is now in Orbán's court. Instead continuing with the angry rhetoric he has used in recent days he should understand that it is time to take action for his people and come up with concrete legislative proposals to improve the situation of the Hungarian people".
[Adopted Resolution \(Click on 16.02.2012\)](#)

ALTERNATIVE TROIKA TO GREECE -"WE DO NOT WANT ANOTHER SWARM OF LOCUSTS DESTROYING GREECE"

The S&D Group confirmed in Strasbourg they would send an 'alternative' Troika to Greece to find alternative solutions to end the crisis. Commenting on the future of Greece, S&D Group Leader Hannes Swoboda said:

"We have seen what locusts like hedge funds can do in the economic world. We cannot allow another swarm of locusts such as the Troika – consisting of the European Commission (EC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB) – to descend on the country and impose their ideas. This would amount to a dictatorship and not co-operation with a country which is part of the European Union. We need to develop a support strategy for Greece. After World War II the Marshall Plan helped Europe restructure and rebuild; to overcome the crisis we need to offer similar assistance to Greece now."

The S&D Group's Troika will consist of three highly respected MEPs from the Group who have extensive professional experience in economics and finance. The members will be:

Elisa Ferreira (Portugal)
Robert Goebbels (Luxembourg)
Ivailo Kalfin (Bulgaria)

The Troika will go to Greece in the coming weeks and will be accompanied by a working group to come up with concrete proposals for combined action from Greece and the EU, to relaunch growth and jobs in Greece. The working group will co-operate closely with Greek experts, politicians and representatives of civil society. Solidarity with the Greek people and practical solutions to stimulate the economy instead of harsh austerity measures will be at the centre of their work.

MERKOZY DECIDES TO STOP FOOD DISTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN POOR

The European Parliament backed a decision to unblock funds for the next two years for a successful EU programme that has supported the distribution of free food to millions of EU citizens at risk of poverty over the last 25 years. The programme, on which 18 million of the EU's poorest people in 20 Member States has a budget of up to €500 million per year. However, this EU programme may end permanently following a bilateral deal between the French and German governments to stop it after 2013. The European Commission has officially informed the European Parliament about the Franco-German position and might now decide not to renew the EU 'Food for Free' programme. S&D rapporteur on this programme, Daciana Sărbu told the media in Strasbourg:

"Merkel and Sarkozy seem to believe that there will be no more poor people after 2013. Their deal is a lethal strike against thousands of charities and NGOs distributing food to millions of EU citizens who struggle to have a proper meal even every second day.

"During the last months the European Socialists and Democrats have loudly raised the alarm and campaigned in favour of this important programme. With today's vote we finally succeeded in ensuring there will be no funding cuts for 2012 and 2013, despite attempts to block it from some EU governments. We will now keep fighting to extend this programme beyond 2013 and call on all the political groups to join our call to debate this with the European Commission next month in Strasbourg". French socialist delegation leader, Catherine Trautmann MEP added:

"Austerity for the most deprived people is unacceptable. The most vulnerable citizens in this crisis need a social Europe. Political change in France and Europe is becoming increasingly urgent."

IN SHORT

S&D Group Calls on Dutch Government to Condemn PVV's Anti-Migrant Hotline -

The S&D Group adopted a resolution calling on the Dutch government to condemn Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) hotline "Meldpunt Midden en Oost Europeanen" which openly incites to discrimination against EU workers from Central and Eastern European countries and is creating divisions between communities in Dutch society.

An introductory statement on the website of the hotline quotes: "Are they causing you problems? Or did you lose your job to a Pole, Bulgarian, Romanian or other Central or Eastern European? We would like to hear from you!".

The resolution points out that the Dutch Government has an obligation to all European citizens to ensure that they are not being discriminated against and stigmatized by society and needs to take the necessary action to ensure the respect of the right of EU workers to move freely in the EU and the fight against all forms of racial and ethnic discrimination. The resolution welcomes the statement by the vice President of the EU Commission, Viviane Reding, condemning the PVV initiative and we reaffirm that Commission should always react in similar cases when fundamental principles of the EU are at stake. It finally states that it is vital that the Dutch government focuses on solutions for real problems such as the exploitation of workers, unfair competition relating to working conditions, social dumping, applying minimum wage, tackling fraud by slumlords and labor brokers".

Trade Agreement with Morocco -The Parliament voted in Strasbourg on liberalising trade between the EU and Morocco for agricultural and fishery products. The agreement liberalises with immediate effect 55% of tariffs on EU agricultural and fisheries products and 70% of tariffs on Moroccan products within ten years. The agreement was approved with 369 in favour, 225 against and 31 abstentions. The leader of the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Hannes Swoboda welcomed the agreement and will be travelling to Morocco next week. [Click on the Agreement](#)

Russia to reform Electoral Law and Halt Arm sales to Syria - Barring opposition candidates from standing in Russia's 4 March presidential elections once again undermines political competition and pluralism, says the European Parliament in a resolution passed on Thursday. It calls for urgent reforms to Russia's electoral law. The resolution strongly urges Russia to join the international consensus so as to allow the UN Security Council to act to resolve the Syrian crisis. Parliament stresses that as a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia needs to take its responsibility for international peace and security seriously. It also calls on Russia immediately to halt all arms and military equipment sales to the Syrian government. [Adopted Resolution \(Click on 16.02.2012\)](#)

Bank Deposit Guarantee - The Parliament called on EU governments to strengthen the protections for bank account holders in the event of a bank failure, in a resolution adopted with the full support of S&D Euro MPs. Following the vote, S&D Group Member Peter Simon, author of the resolution, said: "We have to draw the lessons from the 2008 financial crisis and make sure that the next crisis is not financed with taxpayers' money. [Adopted Resolution \(Click on 16.02.2012\)](#)

Access to Books for the Blind - Blind people should have access to books and other published works in special formats, such as Braille, large print or audio. This requires a targeted exception to copyright rules, says a Parliamentary resolution adopted in Strasbourg, calling on the Council and Commission to support a binding international treaty to make it possible. Only 5% of books are currently accessible to the blind in richer countries, and fewer than 1% in poorer ones. [Adopted Resolution \(Click on 16.02.2012\)](#)

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