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**PARLIAMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE S&D GROUP IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT** • November 2012

### CONTENT

- EU must have a strong budget
- We need all the facts before ruling on Shale Gas
- Resolution on Gaza
- Borg is Approved
- In Short

### EU MUST HAVE A STRONG BUDGET

The EU needs an adequate and flexible long-term budget to strengthen its economy and labour market, said most Members in a plenary debate. This was a signal to Thursday's extraordinary European Council on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020. The Council must agree unanimously, and any deal must be endorsed by Parliament.

S&D group leader Hannes Swoboda, strongly criticised in Plenary the "everyone for himself attitude" taken by some member states during the plenary debate: "We hear people talk about €50 billion less, €80 billion, €100 billion, even €200 billion less. It is a disgraceful race to the bottom, as if the EU budget was merely a numbers game, he said, adding that the EU needs "enough to perform". He also told the media that "To get out of the crisis and make investments for growth we need a strong EU budget. At just 1% of EU GDP, the budget is already small compared to national budgets. If we reduce it further or cut in the areas that are crucial to fight the recession, we will not be able to make any progress in the seven years to come. National interests should not dominate the debate. We have a joint interest in addressing these problems together and the EU budget is the right tool to do so. By investing in research and development, infrastructure, education programmes and other areas that are crucial for European citizens, we can help member states to face the difficult economic times ahead."

## **BORG IS APPROVED AFTER STRONG TENSIONS**

Tonio Borg, Malta's candidate to replace Commissioner John Dalli, was supported by MEPs on Wednesday with 386 votes in favour, 281 against and 28 abstentions. Mr Borg's approval should now be finalised by the Council in the coming days. He will then be able to take up his post as Commissioner for health and consumer affairs. Mr Borg underwent a 3 hours public hearing with Member of the Environment, Internal Market and Agriculture Committees last week. At their request, he then provided written assurances of his commitment to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, tobacco legislation, and the rights of women and LGBT people. The majority of Greens, Liberals and Socialists & Democrats in the Parliament had said they would vote against Mr Borg, a former foreign and justice minister in Malta, voicing strong concerns over his ultra-conservative stand on homosexuality and women's reproductive health.

Mr Borg's remit would include access to healthcare and contraception and the control of sexually transmitted diseases. Mr Borg, who was in Malta on the day of the vote, told Members before the vote that his personal views would not affect his role as health commissioner.

## **WE NEED ALL THE FACTS BEFORE RULING ON SHALE GAS**

The Commission should wait until all the scientific research on shale gas currently under way is completed and only then should it present measures to regulate its possible extraction. In the meantime, member states should be cautious. This is the decision taken by a progressive-led majority in the European Parliament, despite strong pressure from oil and gas lobbies to move forward with this controversial source of energy. S&D spokesperson on the environment Euro MP Linda McAvan said to the media:

"There is still far too much uncertainty regarding shale gas, still too many unanswered questions, such as the size of the reserves in Europe, the health and environmental impact of the hydraulic fracturing technique and whether current EU environmental legislation provides enough protection. We can learn lessons from the United States. They did not have the legislation in place before they started fracking, which led to many of the water contamination problems. In Europe, we still have the chance to wait for full information and draft the right legislation. Companies are still years away from commercial exploitation. Only two European countries have started exploratory works: Poland and the United Kingdom. The latter decided to stop the exploration because seismic activity was detected."

## **PARLIAMENT ADOPTS A RESOLUTION ON GAZA**

European Socialists and Democrats welcomed the European Parliament's adoption of the resolution on Gaza and warmly congratulated Egypt for its effective mediation in achieving a ceasefire in and around Gaza. Véronique De Keyser, S&D vice-president responsible for foreign affairs, said in Strasbourg:

"Civilians both in Gaza and Israel have become again victims of politically driven violence, which is unacceptable. We welcome the ceasefire announced in Cairo yesterday and congratulate the Egyptian authorities for achieving this outcome. We call for full implementation from all sides, as well as for a sustainable solution to the current crisis. Any further air strikes and naval shelling threatening innocent civilian lives in Gaza must be avoided. We call for an immediate end to the firing of rockets into Israel from Gaza by Hamas and other armed groups, and to extra-judicial targeted killings by the Israeli army.

"We strongly support the Palestinian bid to be recognised as an observer state by the UN General Assembly, which will be a milestone on the way to achieving a two-state solution. This should be based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as capital of both states and with the state of Israel living side-by-side an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state in peace and security. We also continue to support Palestinian reconciliation efforts, which are the only way to re-unite Palestinians living in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem."

## IN SHORT

- **EU Must take the Lead on Climate Change** - Despite the financial crisis, fighting climate change should remain a priority. According to a resolution passed by the Parliament, the EU must stand up to its international commitments and show leadership at the upcoming UN climate change summit. Dan Jørgensen, S&D spokesperson on the issue and co-author of the resolution, said to the media in Strasbourg:

"A new report from the World Bank warns us that the temperature will rise even more than we previously thought. This underlines that we must act now in order to prevent catastrophic climate change. We cannot wait until 2020 to take action in fighting climate change. Science tells us that we need to act immediately in order to keep the temperature rise below 2 degrees. The EU has to push for this."

**Internet Protection or Children** - Surfing the web is becoming a habit for our children, who need stronger protection, say MEPs in a resolution voted in Strasbourg. Member states should step up their efforts, through law, cooperation, or sharing good practice, to combat illegal or harmful content and ensure that online resources can be used with less risk, they add. We sought to weigh up the fundamental rights of minors in the digital world - the rights to access, instruction and protection - and to protect their right, as 'digital citizens', under a new form of governance, to develop their interests as persons and European citizens", said rapporteur S&D Member Silvia Costa in plenary debate.

- **"Shadow" banks**, such as hedge funds or trading houses, benefit the real economy by lending to risky ventures that regular banks avoid. But if their loans turn bad, they may collapse, taking regular banks with them, because they lack a capital cushion. Better prudential oversight is needed to reduce shadow banking's systemic risks, without stifling its benefits to the economy, say MEPs in a resolution voted in Strasbourg.

- **Kazakhstan must Improve Democracy**, respect for human rights and the rule of law if it wants closer ties with the EU, European lawmakers said in a recommendation, voted in Strasbourg, for talks on an enhanced partnership and co-operation agreement. "Progress in negotiating the

new agreement must be linked to progress in political reform", says the resolution, insisting that the Kazakh authorities must give binding commitments on ensuring, for example, media freedom, freedom of association, freedom of belief and the independence of the judiciary. The text was drafted by S&D Member Liisa Jaakonsaari .

**Blocking Access to Bomb Making Materials** - Terrorists will find it harder to buy ingredients for home-made explosives, thanks to new rules restricting the general public's access to them. These rules, voted by Parliament, will require a buyer's licence for high-risk chemicals sold in strong concentrations. Home-made explosives have been used in many terrorist attacks, such as the horrendous bombings in Norway last year.

- **The LUX Prize** awarded by the European Parliament in 2012 goes to the film 'Shun Li and the Poet' by the Italian director Andrea Segre, telling the story of a Chinese migrant worker in Italy. S&D Euro MP Petra Kammerevert, member of the European Parliament's culture and education committee, expressed her delight at this decision: "The film portrays the fate – unknown to most Europeans and often ignored – of Chinese immigrants, skilfully linking the issue with a romantic relationship. Funny and pointed dialogues and powerful images make the movie appealing without undermining the seriousness of the issues."

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