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PARLIAMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE S&D GROUP IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT • January 2013

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S&D GROUP URGE THE IRISH PRESIDENCY TO DELIVER ON BANKING UNION & YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Hannes Swoboda, president of the S&D Group, called in Strasbourg on Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny to act decisively on the economic and social challenges facing the EU. The debate in the Parliament marked the start of the Irish EU presidency. Hannes Swoboda outlined the crucial items for the S&Ds during the Irish Presidency:

"The key items on which we need to see progress are the completion of a banking union and workable solutions to lower unemployment – in particular the intolerable levels of youth unemployment in European countries. This is not only a waste of resources but also an unacceptable social tragedy and a threat to European society. Finally, we are seeking a guarantee that the Schengen area will continue to be a space with full freedom of movement. Ireland has proved that it can solve crises and it has been doing so working with its people, not against them. This is the model we want to see applied in European problem-solving too."

"It is good news that now even Conservatives such as Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy are joining the social-democratic call for public investment to generate growth in Europe. Those countries that can afford to do so should take action. Growth will not be created by talking about it, but when governments start investing. It is also essential that we find a solution for those countries in the grip of extraordinarily high interest rates. We need to lower the interest rate spread across Europe. That's why Europe needs a redemption fund to complete the banking union."

THE YOUTH GUARANTEE SHOULD BE FOR ALL EU RESIDENTS

Euro MEPs called on EU governments to implement a youth guarantee across Europe to reduce the level of unemployment currently affecting one young person in five.

The parliamentary resolution was adopted with an overwhelming majority and states that any unemployed European resident under 25 or graduate under 30 should be offered a decent job, continuing education or an apprenticeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Pervenche Berès, S&D Euro MP and chair of the employment and social affairs committee, who drafted the resolution, said to the media:

"The level of unemployment among the young is simply unacceptable. Everything must be done to improve the situation. We need to do our utmost to give these young people a chance so they don't become a lost generation. The fight against youth unemployment should be at the top of our agenda. We need to focus on EU citizens but also on EU residents who are the most vulnerable right now. The introduction of a youth guarantee must be properly financed with European funds. Extra funding should be available for member states with higher levels of unemployment. But EU governments will have to show consistency, especially in the discussions on future financing for the EU budget. The European Social Fund should be allocated at least 25% of cohesion funds in the future."

STRICTER RULES FOR CREDIT RATING AGENCIES

The Parliament gave the green light to stricter rules aimed at reducing the "super powers" of the credit rating agencies. S&D Euro MP and negotiator for the Parliament Leonardo Domenici said to the media in Strasbourg:

"These new rules go in the right direction. They will make credit rating agencies more responsible, more transparent and more democratic. But we will need to make sure that the goals we have set are achieved. In recent years, investors and member states have become over-reliant on the ratings of these agencies. On some occasions their sudden announcements have led to damaging speculation on the financial markets exacerbating the eurozone crisis. The new rules on sovereign debt will help prevent credit rating agencies interfering in the political agenda of the EU."

The agreement includes many of the S&D Group's priorities. The credit rating agencies will have to announce in advance a maximum of three dates each year for publishing unsolicited sovereign ratings. The rules set out provisions to remove the obligation to use external ratings in EU legislation. They will also ensure more competition and more transparency on the credit ratings market, including stricter rules on civil liability and conflicts of interest. The agreement proposes a roadmap for the creation of a European credit rating agency. Today three main agencies – Fitch, Standard & Poor and Moody's – influence 90% of the markets through their ratings.

IN SHORT

Mali - During the plenary debate on Mali with Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy, the S&D Group expressed its full support for the French government's decision to launch a military operation against the Al-Qaida-inspired criminal gangs in Mali. S&D MEPs emphasised that not only is the security and well-being of the citizens

of Mali at stake, but also the security of the EU. The lack of the rule of law in the vast tract of land from Mali to Burkina Faso creates a dangerous vacuum, which is being filled by criminal groups with extremist ideology. The S&D MEPs expressed the hope that the French operation will be soon be complemented by support from other EU countries and the African Union. They stressed that the solution to the instability in the Sahel cannot just be military and the intervention should form part of a broader strategy involving good governance, political development, humanitarian measures and – above all – the restoration of the rule of law.

India Must Address all Forms of Violence against Woman - The brutal rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey on a Delhi bus on 16 December 2012 triggered massive protests in her native India and sent shock waves around the world. In a resolution adopted in Strasbourg, Members demand of the Indian government that it adopts and enforces stronger laws to address all forms of violence against women.

Free Access to the EU market for some African Countries - Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Zimbabwe will get duty- and quota-free access to the EU market, under the EU's first economic partnership deal, endorsed by Parliament meeting in Strasbourg, with an African region.

EU Partnership with Iraq - Members backed the EU's first-ever partnership deal with Iraq, aimed at helping it complete the transition to democracy, rebuild and normalise relations with the international community. In a separate resolution, MEPs raise concerns about continuing violence and human rights abuses in Iraq and call for a stronger EU presence there.

Carry-on Luggage - The excessive restrictions and arbitrary charges that some airlines impose on carry-on luggage must end, said MEPs in a debate with Commissioner De Gucht on Thursday. Most speakers urged the Commission to include a reasonable hand luggage allowance rule in the coming revision of air passenger rights legislation, which is to be tabled before the summer.

Combating Biopiracy - The EU must combat the "biopiracy" of multinationals that exploit plants with medicinal properties and traditional remedies originating from developing countries but fail to share the profits with indigenous peoples, say European lawmakers in a resolution adopted by a show of hands in Strasbourg.

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