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

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### **SWOBODA CONDEMNS VIOLENCE IN TURKEY & DEMANDS OPENING OF CHAPTERS 23 & 24 OF EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS**

The European Parliament plenary session held - upon request of the Socialists and Democrats Group - a debate on the recent events in Turkey, where days of protests and demonstrations against government construction plans in Istanbul have resulted in 4 dead and over 5,000 people injured so far. Hannes Swoboda, president of the S&D Group condemned the violent response of police forces in Turkey during the debate:

"We condemn in the strongest terms the violence - four people died, thousands are injured, and now children are attacked with teargas - and we condemn the ignorant and autocratic response and rhetoric of Mr Erdoğan. He must understand that leading a democratic country means representing the entire population, and not waging war against those that disagree. We demand that the chapters 23 and 24 in the Turkish EU accession negotiations (Judiciary & Fundamental Rights and Justice, Freedom & Security respectively) are opened immediately. This is where there are problems and this is what we must address urgently: free speech and the rule of law in Turkey."

The S&D Group also backed the resolution on Turkey adopted in Strasbourg. The resolution demands an immediate end to the violence and the release of imprisoned activists. It condemns Prime Minister Erdoğan's inflammatory rhetoric and calls for serious reforms to guarantee fundamental rights in Turkey.

### **S&D GROUP CRITICISES THE SUSPENSION OF GREEK STATE BROADCASTER**

## **ERT**

Following Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras unilateral decision – without governmental consultation - to close public broadcaster ERT and the massive protests against it, S&D Group president Hannes Swoboda, said:

"A diverse and pluralist media landscape is essential to European democracy. The decision in Greece to shut down the public broadcaster goes against this principle and as such can only be condemned. High-quality media services such as those provided by public television and radio must be guaranteed to ensure a viable democracy. On behalf of the S&D Group, I express our sympathy with those who are protesting against this decision. The Greek government must take action to restore a properly functioning independent public broadcasting service in Greece."

## **PARLIAMENT BACKS SCHENGEN REFORM DEAL**

Freedom of movement within the Schengen area will be better protected thanks to MEPs' input to the new Schengen governance rules. Inspection teams will in future be able to make unannounced visits to internal borders to halt any attempt to impose illegal checks. S&D vice-president Sylvie Guillaume, who was among the leading negotiators of this reform, said:

"Over the years, the old system has proved to be inefficient, dysfunctional and unfair for both asylum seekers and states. Unfortunately, EU governments have so far only seemed concerned about reducing their financial and administrative burdens and the risk of abuses. The reform of the Dublin mechanism and the Asylum Procedures Directive approved in Strasbourg should ensure better protection standards for asylum seekers. We particularly welcome a series of new provisions such as the guarantee of a personal interview for all applicants, a six-month time limit for decisions on asylum applications, reinforced protection for minors, provision for decisions to be suspended while appeals are processed and free legal assistance. But it is only a first step.

"One of the crucial challenges ahead is the need to create an efficient responsibility-sharing regime that promotes effective solidarity between member states. I am not sure that the new early-warning system will be up to the challenge. We should redouble our efforts to ensure that the Common European Asylum System finally becomes a reality. The success or failure of this system will depend on the way it is applied and implementation must be closely monitored. This is particularly the case for the guarantees for unaccompanied minors, the effectiveness of the identification mechanism for vulnerable persons, the quality of personal interviews and the application of accelerated and border procedures. Enough talk, let's act!"

## **NEW ASYLUM POLICY RULES**

New rules laying down common procedures and deadlines for handling asylum applications and basic rights for asylum seekers arriving in the EU were endorsed by Parliament meeting in Strasbourg. The Common European Asylum System will also stop transfers of asylum seekers to member states unable to ensure decent living conditions for them. The S&D Group backed a reform of the EU asylum instruments. Procedures, reception standards and decisions on granting protection currently vary considerably from one country to another, making the asylum system a 'lottery' for refugees.

## **EU COUNCIL HAS A MORAL OBLIGATION TO ACT NOW!**

Speaking in Strasbourg ahead of the EU Summit at the end of June, S&D Group president Hannes Swoboda said:

"The EU Council and the member states have a moral obligation to act. We are faced with an economic, political and social crisis and it is time to create a real social, economic and fiscal union. On the multi-annual financial framework and the fight against youth unemployment, he said:

"There is only one answer to the growing anger of citizens and that is an active fight against youth unemployment. The €6 billion allocated in the EU budget to fight youth unemployment over the next seven years is nowhere near enough to respond effectively. But, €6 billion is a start and we must now make sure it is used in the most efficient way. I am deeply disappointed that the European Council did not reach an agreement – we did our utmost in the European Parliament. We must 'frontload' the money in the first years of the multi-annual financial framework so we can finance the youth guarantee and get young Europeans working immediately. With flexibility and the revision clause we could get additional money to finance it for the later years. We must invite the European Investment Bank (EIB) to act faster and more efficiently and to improve conditions for small and medium-sized companies, which at the moment cannot get financing or face excessively high interest rates."

He concluded by criticising the trend towards national rather than European action:

"Meetings and agreements between individual countries – such as the planned summit on youth unemployment in Berlin – are not the solution. Such action is merely electoral campaigning. The Commission and the Council have to take up their responsibilities and come forward with European solutions to European problems."

## **NEW FUND FOR EUROPEAN AID TO THE MOST DEPRIVED HAS WON CROSS-PARTY MAJORITY**

S&D Group Member Costell has successfully won a cross party-majority in the Parliament for a new Fund for European Aid to the most deprived citizens for the next seven years. MEPs have given their green light to the provision of 3.5 billion euros to help pay for food for people suffering from food poverty and for basic material assistance for the homeless and children. The vote opens the way for negotiations with the Council of Ministers on the new Fund. Following the vote, the EP's negotiator Emer Costello said:

"Today MEPs have sent a clear signal to the Member States that Europe must stand by the most deprived. Almost 120 million Europeans or a quarter of our total population are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Over 40 million suffer from 'severe material deprivation', meaning that they are unable to put a basic meal on the table every other day. Almost six million children do not have two pairs of shoes. Over four million people are homeless. This new Fund would be a practical expression of solidarity with people who live at the extreme margins of our society."

"Since 1987, the EU food distribution programme has been an important source of support for organisations that combat food poverty. The new Fund would allow continued European support for such schemes but would go beyond the current programme by introducing European support for the distribution of basic material assistance, such as starter packs for the homeless or clothing

and footwear for children, and for flanking measures that aim to help end-recipients re-integrate into society. The forthcoming negotiations with the Member States won't be easy but we must reach a successful conclusion so that food banks and NGOs will be able to draw down funds in time for their 2013/14 campaigns. Ending the food distribution programme in December without a replacement programme would pose a direct threat to food aid programmes in many Member States.

## IN SHORT

**Datagate: S&D Group Calls for a Full Investigation** - The S&D Group called in Strasbourg on the EU to protect citizens' privacy and investigate whether EU governments were involved in the US PRISM scandal. S&D Group leader Hannes Swoboda said:

"Data protection is an integral part of every EU citizen's right to privacy. We will not accept any government or company simply ignoring this right. We demand that the European Commission and European Council provide full disclosure on the data surveillance connected to the PRISM case. If any European government was aware or even involved in spying on EU citizens' data, this must have the most serious repercussions. The Commission must clarify whether IT companies involved have respected EU data protection legislation by giving the US government access to EU citizens' data. Any EU-US trade pact will have to fully ensure the highest standards of data privacy for all citizens and the reform of EU data protection law must guarantee these standards for EU citizens when using US-based Internet companies. It is no good the EU having strict regulation on data protection if those standards are not guaranteed when using US-based Internet companies".

**Shameful Right Wing Vote on Social Investment & Youth Unemployment** - The European Parliament voted a resolution in Strasbourg on the social investment for growth and cohesion, in reaction to a Communication presented by the Commission. Right-wing forces in the House won a number of shameful amendments detrimental to social investment and youth unemployment. The European Right managed to delete important references to youth, unemployment allowance as well as labour mobility and social inclusion programmes. [Click here \(http://www.deputes-socialistes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Amdt-PPE-Résolution-Paquet-Investissements-sociaux.pdf\)](http://www.deputes-socialistes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Amdt-PPE-Résolution-Paquet-Investissements-sociaux.pdf) - to see the amendments in detail.

**A delegation of S&D Euro MPs today expressed their solidarity with workers demonstrating in the streets of Strasbourg against social dumping** - Workers from the building, farming and forestry sectors were mobilising ahead of a crucial vote next week in the Parliament on the enforcement of an EU law on rights for workers posted abroad. Several S&D Euro MPs spoke out during the protest outside the European Parliament. Stephen Hughes, S&D vice-president and negotiator on the posting of workers directive said to the media in Strasbourg:

"The outcome on this directive is a question of choices. Do we want a Europe of exploitation, a Europe of undercutting, a Europe of social dumping? Or do we want a Europe of opportunity, of fairness and of equal treatment – a Europe of up not down? Well, we know what we want to achieve. We will fight for a directive that protects your rights, a directive of high social standards, a Europe of fairness." S&D spokesman for social affairs Alejandro Cercas added:

"The Socialists and Democrats are fighting for clear rules and principles to protect workers against social dumping and unfair competition. We want to prevent our social model from being

undermined. We will fight together to stop social dumping – 'No pasarán'." S&D Group MEP and chair of the employment and social affairs committee Pervenche Berès said: "We want to ensure equal pay for equal work. We say no to social dumping and letterbox companies. It's all about protecting workers."

**EU-US Agreement** - The EU-US trade agreement will be mutually beneficial but we will closely watch the negotiations on sensitive areas, said Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament today, ahead of a Council meeting tomorrow to adopt a negotiating mandate on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. S&D Euro MP Vital Moreira, chairman of the international trade committee and author of the parliamentary report, said:

"The Parliament will have the final say, as its consent is required for the trade agreement to come into force. This is why we expect the Commission to keep us informed about the process along the way. The partnership agreement offers a lot of potential for economic growth and job creation. Europe and the United States are close partners and their co-operation will ease the way out of the crisis and bring new impetus to world trade." S&D spokesperson on trade, MEP Bernd Lange, said:

"There are some sensitive economic areas and some cultural differences that must be taken into account in this negotiation. This is what the Parliament stated in its resolution. We have higher standards in data protection and European citizens are particularly worried about how the US acquires and uses confidential data. We expect the negotiating mandate to exclude cultural and audiovisual services, as the plenary requested."

**Commission & Council Urged to Lift Veil on EU Decision Making** - As the Commission and Council still refuse to give better and wider access for the EU citizens to EU legislative documents, the House adopted a resolution calling on the other two EU institutions to lift their opposition and resume the negotiations with the Parliament on a revision of the Regulation on Public Access to Documents. The legislative revision of the Regulation on Public Access to Documents started back in 2008 but there has been stalemate in the negotiations for almost a year. That stalemate has been brought about by the refusal of the Commission, and to a lesser extent of the Council, to move towards the Parliament's position for better and wider access by the EU citizens to EU legislative documents.

**Historic Vote Against the Extractive Industries' Bribing** – Following the vote in Strasbourg, by 2015 European oil, mining, gas and logging companies will have to disclose the payments they make to governments for access to natural resources. The new transparency requirements will cover companies active in the extractive or logging industries to publish an annual report outlining the payments made to governments. Companies will have to report payments at both country-level and project-level. The new rules will be a major new weapon in the global fight against corruption, ensuring that citizens of resource rich countries can hold their governments to account for the exploitation of their natural resources. In 2008 alone, African oil, gas and mineral exports were worth 9 times the value of international aid. S&D MEP Arlene McCarthy, the Parliament's rapporteur has worked closely with NGOs including The One Campaign, Oxfam, Global Witness and the umbrella group Publish What You Pay (PWYP) in order to secure this tough new law. Arlene added: "After 18 months of tough negotiations we have a set EU rules of that we can be proud of and that show how effective cooperation, between legislators, citizens and action groups, can deliver real change."

**The European Parliament Backs Neven Mimica as Croatia's First Commissioner When the Country Joins the EU on 1 July** - He will serve as consumer protection commissioner for the duration of this Commission's mandate, which will be until next year's European elections. MEPs voted in favour of his appointment following the green light given by the EP's consumer protection and food safety committees that questioned him on his priorities at a hearing earlier this month. Mr Mimica will still have to be confirmed by the Council before he can take up his duties.

**Mutual recognition of professional qualifications: Members strike deal with Council** - Doctors, nurses, architects and other professionals moving to another EU country will find it easier to get their qualifications recognised there thanks to a provisional deal struck by MEPs and the EU's Irish Presidency. It will bring in an electronic card listing professional skills and oblige professionals' home countries to do more to help them to obtain recognition abroad.

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