

EPP Group Report

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Stability and Solidarity: EU Summit promises safer future for Eurozone

By Gunnar Larsson

The spring EU Summit in Brussels was in many ways ground-breaking as it finalised the European Stability Mechanism, which will replace the temporary European Financial Stability Facility. The new mechanism will safeguard the stability of the Eurozone, following a turbulent year on the world's financial markets.

Speaking in Parliament, EPP Group Chairman Joseph Daul (FR) commended the decisive outcome of the Summit, calling the decision to seal a pact in protection of the common currency and Europe's economy an indication of the political will of European leaders to learn from the financial crisis.

Attacking Socialists who have brought some of Europe's economies to near bankruptcy, Daul said: "Europe distinguishes itself in the world for its model of social market economy, a model our citizens are understandably attached to and which is based on the principle of solidarity, but is difficult to uphold in the context of globalisation."

German MEP Werner Langen, Member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, called for more commitment from national governments. Without such commitment it will not be possible to durably solve Europe's problems.

Along with Council President Herman Van Rompuy, Commission President José Manuel Barroso also took part in the debate on the conclusions of the Summit. Barroso took a broader view on future challenges. "We have been discussing process and instruments for a very long time", he said. "Now is the time to put process and instruments at the service of substance. Process and instruments are important, but they are at the service of the substance and cannot substitute it. The challenge we need to resolve is our economic renewal. The truth is that, in order to be able to invest, we need confidence. Confidence depends on our capacity to modernise, to innovate and to become more sustainable and more competitive."

Migration Flows - more has to be done

By Francesco Frapiccini

This week, Parliament discussed migration flows from North Africa as a result of the emergency situation in Lampedusa, where thousands of people have landed over the past weeks, and voted on the Report on 'migration flows arising from instability, and the role of the EU foreign policy in dealing with this issue'.

The joint debate followed a statement by Commissioner Malmström who announced measures to strengthen actions already taken by the European Commission on this issue.

EPP Group MEPs welcomed the Commission's measures, but at the same time underlined that more has to be done, especially in terms of solidarity, to tackle what "is not the problem of a single Member State, but a European one", as Mario Mauro, Head of the Italian (PDL) Delegation of the EPP Group, said. "The calls for European solidarity and especially the reference to Directive 2001/55, which is a signal of the Commission's willingness to overcome the inaction of the last months, are also positive".

He also explained that we have to focus on the overall political situation, which is the real worrying point: "The events happening in the Mediterranean countries are comparable to the fall of the Berlin Wall when Europe was able to find solidarity. Today we have to be able to set up a Neighbourhood Policy for Mediterranean countries worthy of the name.

Jacek Protasiewicz (PL), EPP Group Shadow Rapporteur on the Report, pointed out the need to increase the synergy between development and security in EU policy. The North African revolution has taught the EU that the aid distributed by official channels through dictatorship regimes is not solving the problems. "Our aid must help the people, not the dictators", he said. "EU development aid must be based not only on conditions for economic reforms, but also on those in the area of democracy and human rights. Now we know that young people in countries like Libya are not only asking for their daily bread: they are also asking for freedom and democracy".

Single Market Act: a boost for economic growth and competitiveness

By Girts Salmgriezis

This week, the European Parliament adopted three Reports on the Single Market Act: on one Governance, one on the impact on citizens, and one on enterprise and growth.

"The European Union's Single Market is the cornerstone of European integration. The re-launch of the Single Market is as important for the economic growth and global competitiveness of Europe as the enhanced implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy. I am glad that Members of the European Parliament were able to agree on a clear set of priorities on the measures necessary for revitalising the Single Market", said Sandra Kalniete (LV), author of a Resolution on Governance and Partnership in the Single Market.

Agreement on the final text of the Reports was reached after extensive negotiations among the largest political groups and represents a broad consensus and support from the European Parliament, which the European Commission expected. There is now a clear and strong signal to the Commission regarding the key proposals which the Parliament expects it to propose in line with the re-launch of the Single Market.

The EPP Group's priorities for re-launching the Single Market are ensuring stronger political leadership, enhancing the freedom of movement, fostering the Digital Single Market, and implementing a global strategy that guarantees a level playing field among all partners.

The EPP Group asked the European Commission to bring forward the necessary instruments in order to contribute to the concrete improvement of citizens' lives and businesses alike.

European Political Parties now entitled to European legal statute

By Theo Georgitsopoulos

Marietta Giannakou's (GR) Report on the regulations governing political parties at EU level and their funding was adopted, with a very large majority, by the European Parliament this week.

In her Report Mrs Giannakou calls for the adoption of a special European legal statute for European political parties and their political foundations. In this way, European political parties can acquire a legal personality under EU law. Furthermore, this could be the first step towards improving the regulatory framework of European political parties.

The Report distinguishes between the creation and the funding of EU political parties. To be funded, an EU political party should be represented by at least one MEP. Mrs Giannakou also proposes:

- the possibility of direct membership of natural persons;
- the rise of the present ceiling of €12,000 per year for donations to €25,000 per year and per donator;
- the organisational convergence of political parties at EU level with the aim of the creation of a transnational party system in the future;
- the independent resources that European political parties are required to demonstrate could be reduced to 10% of their total budget, to further enhance their development

On the positive outcome of the vote, Mrs Giannakou said that European political parties should act as representatives of the European public interest. This Report paves the way for more democratisation within the EU and for a better efficiency of the EU political system. It will also enable EU citizens to participate more actively in the political life of the EU endorsing the provision of Article 10, paragraph 4 of the Lisbon Treaty *'that political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union'*.

Syria, Bahrain and Yemen: The EU has to act

By Eva Mitsopoulou

In a plenary debate in the European Parliament on the situation in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, José Ignacio Salafranca (ES), EPP Group Coordinator in the Foreign Affairs Committee, said: "The EP is sending a message of support to the people of these countries for their courage and determination and for their legitimate democratic aspirations."

In his intervention, Mr Salafranca also stressed the need for the Commission to make full and effective use of the existing support given through the current programmes and asked for further EU financial assistance that could eventually better assist the countries and civil societies in the Middle East and in the Gulf on their way towards long-term stability and development.

The rejection of violence towards peaceful demonstrators, the promotion of dialogue with the participation of all democratic forces and civil society and the fundamental political and economic reforms coming from within these countries are the key elements for transition towards democracy and respect of human rights. These were the main points stressed by the EPP Group Members in the debate. Furthermore, it was underlined that the EU is ready to provide prompt support as and when requested towards this aim.

The Resolution adopted by the plenary, winding up the debate on the situation in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, states that the use of violence by a state against its own population must have direct repercussions on its bilateral relations with the EU and recalls that the EU can use numerous tools to deter such actions, such as the freezing of assets and the imposition of travel bans.

Iceland: a positive step on the road to EU membership

MEPs supported by a large majority the Resolution on Iceland's Progress Report 2010, concerning the country's EU membership bid. Iceland is already part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and its legislation is to a high extent aligned with that of the European Union. For the moment, the screening process is still in progress and the first negotiation chapters might be opened during the summer.

The Rapporteur, Cristian Preda (RO), welcomed the reforms increasing the independence of the judiciary, while stressing the need for a thorough implementation of these measures. He also noted that he hopes for a positive result to the upcoming Icesave referendum, allowing the negotiations to concentrate on substantive issues instead of bilateral conflicts.

MEPs also encouraged Iceland to keep up a good pace in the ongoing negotiations on mackerel quotas, in particular with the goal of reaching a resolution of the mackerel dispute based on realistic proposals which safeguard the future of the stock, protect and maintain jobs in the pelagic fishery industry and ensure a long-term, sustainable fishery.

Eugen Sandu

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - EP Resolution calls for opening of accession negotiations

The Plenary of the European Parliament adopted a Resolution by a large majority this week on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Resolution assesses the country's progress on European integration and calls on the European Council to open EU accession negotiations with the country immediately.

Eduard Kukan (SK), Head of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, highlighted that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia needs to show strong commitment to the reform processes. Main challenges concern areas such as public administration and judiciary, the fight against corruption, freedom of speech and media freedom, and the economy", Eduard Kukan continued.

Eduard Kukan also stressed the importance of engagement in political dialogue and hopes that the upcoming early general elections will help to overcome the political crisis in the country. He calls on all political parties to take part in the elections and make all efforts to ensure that they are free and fair and in line with the best international standards.

Finally, Mr Kukan encourages the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's future government to step up its efforts in finding a mutually-acceptable solution with Greece on the name issue.

Atilla Agárdi