

# EPP Group Report

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## **Radio Spectrum: efficient use of radio frequencies strengthens European competitiveness**

*By Per Heister*

While some fear that the EU2020 Strategy may end up like the Lisbon 2010 Strategy - a lot of words but very few steps towards actually achieving the goals - EPP Group Vice-Chairman Gunnar Hökmark (SE) has moved for real action.

His Report on the first radio spectrum programme of the EU was debated and passed by a large majority in the European Parliament.

Hökmark has enlarged a fairly weak Commission proposal to use more of the 800 MHz band for mobile broadband communication to a more bold policy of freeing a much broader spectrum for all-European use.

"By liberating more frequencies for wireless broadband we can create the best possibilities for fast broadband, new broadband services and a European leadership in an area crucial for tomorrow's competitiveness", said Gunnar Hökmark when he presented his proposal for legislation.

His ambition is to lay the ground for an environment for further development of modern technologies that will enable Europe to perform even better than the US and China with their huge markets.

A bold new radio spectrum programme will enable tomorrow's Google, Yahoo and Apple to emerge in Europe while also making it possible for the European telecom industry to keep the leadership globally.

"This is a big step towards the fulfilment of the Single Market and the creation of a dynamic European economy with the fastest and most qualitative capacity for mobile broadband and new services", Gunnar Hökmark concluded.

The Commission welcomed the Report and the next steps are for Member States to relate to the programme, via the Council deliberations. The question now is can legislation be enacted before the year's end?

## **Discharge 2009: European Parliament approves budget implementation**

*By Sarita Rauta*

The European Parliament voted this session on the discharge Reports for the year 2009. The three biggest discharge Reports were the Parliament, the Commission and the Council.

Ville Itälä (FI), responsible for the Parliament's discharge Report which was adopted with a large majority, said: "In this current economic situation, the European Parliament should set an example in cost-cutting. Instead of consuming more, we have to find new ways of doing things. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we ourselves are critical of Parliament's past spending."

However, there were a few issues which were under intense debate before the votes - the travelling between the three places of work, the LUX Prize and the Members' voluntary pension fund.

As regards the three places of work, the outcome was that the Members adopted the point in the Report which calls for 'the need to critically review potential savings at all levels including at Union level. In light of this situation, stresses that real savings could be achieved if Parliament only had one workplace in the same location.'

The discharge of the Commission was also granted for its budgetary management by a large majority of votes with the ECR, GUE and EFD Groups voting against.

Rapporteur Crescenzo Rivellini (IT) suggested that Parliament shouldn't grant the discharge for the Council because it didn't answer the questions the Parliament had asked it earlier. Instead, the Council said it doesn't regard the Parliament as a discharge authority and this is why it won't answer the questions. The discharge was postponed by a very large majority of Members.

All the other discharges of the other Institutions were granted.

The European Medicines Agency discharge was postponed, as was the discharge for CEPOL, the Police College. All the other Agency discharges were granted.

## **Common Transparency Register for lobbyists**

The Parliament adopted a Report on transparency this session which will provide registering and monitoring for lobbyists wishing to have permanent access to the premises of the Parliament and the Commission.

In the future, lobbyists will be required to register according to a deal struck between the two Institutions. There will be a common code that includes sanctions for those who breach the new rules. They will also be required to give all the elements that identify the legal structure and financial interests of the organisation. Sanctions will be imposed on those who violate the new rules.

As for other entities such as churches, political parties or regions that do not pursue this kind of private interest but instead seek to collaborate in European policies in the name of general values, they will not have to register but with a different legal regime from the other stakeholders, and only if they have independent offices of which the only purpose is to have relationships with the European Institutions.

Carlo Casini (IT), Chairman of the Constitutional Affairs Committee and Rapporteur, said that he hopes that the Council will soon join the other two Institutions in establishing this public register and that his Report is only a first step towards better transparency because there are also further possibilities that the EP is taking into consideration which can be transformed into rules after more mature reflection.

***Francesco Frapiccini***

## **Border-free travel to be upheld**

***By Peter Adler***

During the EPP Group's meetings in Palermo, Italy, in the week leading up to the plenary session, one of the main topics discussed was the challenges posed by the large number of immigrants coming to Europe from North Africa as a result of the 'Arab Spring' and the lack of stability which the uprisings there have caused. The EPP Group held a number of fruitful discussions with representatives of the Member States most concerned, but also with politicians and members of the civil society in some of the North African states.

Manfred Weber (DE), Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for legal affairs, said during the meetings in Palermo that the Schengen Agreement has to be respected.

"We will not accept any attempts to restrict the freedom of movement which is the core symbol of Europe. There must not be any new divisions in the EU", said Mr Weber.

The Schengen Agreement was one of the hot topics during the plenary session in Strasbourg. In the debate, Manfred Weber reiterated his strong support for the Schengen rules:

"We have had Member States that in proportion to their population have clearly taken on more immigrants, as is now the case in Southern Europe. Still, nobody imagines reconsidering the Schengen Agreement because of this pressure. And so I would like to state clearly that we should be carrying this challenge together and I therefore think that it is a real shame that we have to have this debate at all".

Mr Weber warned Denmark against introducing tighter controls at the country's borders with Germany and Sweden, if such controls proved to be incompatible with the Schengen rules.

"To reinstate permanent border controls in Denmark would be unacceptable. Common values, such as the Single Market and the freedom of movement, would not be promoted in that way. It is impossible to build Europe on national egoism. Instead, we need a sense of shared purpose", said Manfred Weber.

## **Bank Stress Tests: EPP Group wants more clarity on upcoming tests**

The EPP Group wants more clarity on the 2011 stress tests on the EU banking sector and wants guarantees from the European Commission that there will be no repetition of 2010, when the stress tests failed to restore confidence in the EU banking sector. The EPP Group debated this issue with Commissioner Barnier in the European Parliament.

Corien Wortmann-Kool (NL), Vice-Chairwoman of the EPP Group responsible for economic affairs, said: "This year, we must make sure that the new round of tests in mid-June increase confidence in the financial markets. The criteria should be stronger and more harmonised and the coverage of the stress tests should be the same in the different Member States. A strong role for the newly-created European Banking Authority is therefore crucial. We want a comprehensive and realistic assessment, identifying all the weak spots in the EU banking sector. For this reason the stress tests should also include exposure to sovereign debt."

Jean-Paul Gauzès (F), the EPP Group's Coordinator in the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, said: "Consolidating the European banking sector is a prerequisite to bringing back growth and job creation. What is more,

implementing credible stress tests is the best way to limit the negative effects on the entire economy of the decisions taken by credit rating agencies."

*Eduard Slotweg*

## **EU Foreign and Security Policy: post-Lisbon assessment looking at the future**

*By Francesco Frapiccini*

The Parliament voted this session on the Annual Report on the main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, giving - after the entry-into-force of the Lisbon Treaty - an overview of the strategic role that the EU should play outside its borders, in particular as regards the development of democracy and respect for human rights, also taking into account the events that have changed politically and socially in the world over the last few months.

The Parliament stated once again its willingness to be a leading partner in the Common Foreign and Security Policy, reaffirming its prerogatives as the holder of the management and budgetary control function on the European civilian and military missions and placing itself as a leading partner with the High Representative Catherine Ashton.

An evaluation of the political/strategic project has been carried out, with particular reference to the relationship between Parliament and the other European Institutions.

Gabriele Albertini (I), Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and Rapporteur, underlines the multilateralism approach and the need for the EU to be always well represented in the different strategic contexts, taking advantage in particular of the new EEAS, the European diplomatic corps that has finally become a reality.

A strong transatlantic alliance, the important relationship with Russia, enlargement, the support of civil rights and the establishment of the rule of law, diplomatic relations with the BRIC countries, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the condemnation of violent regimes are just some of the themes in the Report. The text tries to be as comprehensive and updated to the current situation as possible, giving a prospective reading of all issues that represent the heart of European foreign policy.

## **Youth: investment in young people is key for Europe.**

*By Klemen Žumer*

The European Parliament adopted the Report 'Youth on the Move' by Milan Zver (SL) with a large majority this week in Strasbourg.

In his Report, Zver expresses the desire for young people to have access to information about what their chances of finding employment after completing their studies would be, even before embarking on a particular university programme.

Zver stresses that young people who have completed working or educational exchanges find it easier to find their first employment. Research shows that mobility contributes to a sense of European citizenship and greater involvement in democratic processes.

The economic crisis has brought about tendencies to reduce funds for young people, education and mobility both on a Member State level as well as on the level of the European budget but this leads to a vicious circle. "Funds for young people, mobility and education are not an expense but an investment for the future of Europe's young people and Europe's future in general", Zver said during the debate preceding the vote.

The success of 'Youth on the Move' depends largely on the EU Member States and this is why the Rapporteur calls on them to earmark at least 2% of GDP for higher education.

Young people must therefore be helped to find their first employment but we must not forget that an important goal of university education is also to promote the creativity of young people, their intellectual and social development, and build up their self-confidence.