

EPP Group Report

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Euro: collective decision of Eurozone countries essential

By Eduard Sloopweg

"Europe must go for a big bang, a federation, the United States of Europe, or quite simply, integration", said Joseph Daul (F), Chairman of the EPP Group, debating the economic situation with Commission President Barroso.

For Joseph Daul: "The time has come for the Eurozone countries and for all other EU states who want to be involved, to take decisive action by adopting, together and at the same time, measures which are strong enough to put an end to the doubts on Europe's ability to assume its responsibilities."

In the debate in the European Parliament on the economic crisis, Joseph Daul said that on a proposal by the Commission, the governments of the Eurozone and all those in the Union who wish to do so, should decide to deal drastically with their debt, collectively, and on the same day, by taking coordinated measures to guarantee the sustainability of the pension systems or to ensure the effective harmonisation of their fiscal policies, particularly on companies.

"By making an economic government reality, a government run by all the Eurozone countries, Europe would kill two birds with one stone: it would show its capacity to act in the long term, and it would strengthen unity among its citizens, who would finally be subject to the same rights and duties. By taking coordinated measures of budgetary discipline while promoting the necessary growth of our economies, the Eurozone would arm itself with converging rules, and would give a clear and strong signal of its willingness to strengthen integration", continued Joseph Daul.

"Our citizens, although they are aware that this European crisis calls for a European response, not just a national response, are still questioning the capacity of national and European leaders to put an end to this crisis of confidence and low growth.

What's at stake in the next three months is Europe's capacity to get back on the path to growth and employment, to preserve its way of life and defend its values. Only with a major act of integration will we finally be able to live up to the challenges", concluded Joseph Daul.

Frontex - renewed mandate will strengthen EU external border agency

By David Stellini

The European Parliament has approved a new law giving the EU's external borders agency, Frontex, a renewed mandate with more resources and tools at its disposal. The vote was carried with 431 votes in favour, 49 votes against and 48 abstentions.

This law will boost the agency's effectiveness and it will increase the democratic scrutiny of Frontex by the European Parliament.

The Parliament's Rapporteur, Simon Busuttil (MT), described the vote as the "climax of more than a year's work", striving to reach an agreement on the complex and controversial subject of strengthening the Union's external border agency.

Busuttil welcomed the introduction of the notion of European Border Guard Teams as a step towards a stronger European identity for the agency.

"When national border guards participate in Frontex missions they will now act as European Border Guards. This underscores the idea that in a free movement Schengen Zone, the strengthening of our external borders is not just a matter for frontier Member States, but a matter of common concern", Mr Busuttil said.

"Sadly, most Member States failed to honour their pledges of providing assets for Frontex's missions. I think this was the most pressing issue because it hindered the effectiveness of the agency", said the EPP Group MEP.

With this new law, Frontex will be able to purchase, lease, own and co-own assets. Through compulsory solidarity, Member States will be legally bound to honour their commitments for national border guards assigned or seconded to the agency. Frontex will also have the power to process personal data obtained during missions and use it in the fight against criminality.

"Serious accusations have been levelled against Frontex when it came to saving lives at sea. This new law sets up a Consultative Forum on fundamental rights which would act as a watchdog on Frontex. The new Office of a Fundamental Rights Officer within Frontex would help it navigate better. But crucially, in the case of a breach of human rights, Frontex missions would be suspended or terminated", Busuttil concluded.

Arab uprisings: EPP Group commends Libyan people for their courage

By Eva Mitsopoulou

"The EPP Group can no longer tolerate the bloodshed in Syria and the lethal force used by the Syrian Authorities that has led to over 2600 unarmed civilian demonstrators losing their lives. We also firmly believe that it is shameful that the UN Security Council has not until now been able to agree on a Resolution and are contenting themselves with a mere Statement", said Ioannis Kasoulides (CY), Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for external relations, in the plenary debate on the situation in Syria.

In his intervention in plenary, Mr Kasoulides also deplored the passiveness Russia and China, as permanent Members of the UNSC, are demonstrating towards the developments that are taking place under their very noses and for failing in their duties. Mr Kasoulides supports a tougher approach towards them, as French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé has already pledged.

The EPP Group Members speaking in the same debate expressed their regret at the delay with which the Arab League reacted to the events in Syria. They welcomed the adoption by the Council on 2 September 2011 of new restrictive measures against the Syrian regime, including a ban on the import of crude oil to the EU and stressed that the only solution to the current crisis is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process.

Speaking in the debate on the situation in Libya, José Ignacio Salafranca (E), EPP Group Spokesman on Foreign Affairs, said: "The EU must establish the Arab Spring as one of its priorities for two reasons. First of all, to rise to the cries of freedom and dignity that can be heard all around North Africa and the Arab countries. And secondly, to avoid radical Islamic fundamentalism nestling into our environment, thwarting the transition process in these countries and, especially, threatening freedom with barbarity and fanaticism again."

The need for providing humanitarian aid, guaranteeing security and border controls and ensuring not only the economic reconstruction, but also the process of transition in very difficult circumstances that will make sure there is no impunity for crimes against humanity, were some of the main points raised by the EPP Group Members during the debate.

A Resolution on the situation in Syria and a second one on the situation in Libya were adopted by the plenary of the European Parliament on Thursday 15 April 2011, winding up the relevant debates.

Energy: new monitoring regime in EU energy markets

By Miklós Panyi

The different market monitoring activities of Member States are currently unable to cope with the cross-border nature of different energy products. Thus the adoption of the Regulation on the Energy Market Integrity and Transparency (REMIT) Report is a crucial step towards the implementation of the Single Energy Market which would establish a Union-level supervision of wholesale energy trading transactions. EPP Group Shadow Rapporteur András Gyürk (HU) welcomed the first reading compromise on the matter reached by the European Parliament as it will increase transparency and deliver quick results to the consumers.

The purpose of the Regulation is to enhance transparency and prevent market abuse especially in cases of cross-border trading transactions. The Union-wide monitoring activity will be exercised by the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) which shall be responsible for data collection, trade monitoring and coordination of the Member States' potential actions. National regulatory authorities shall have access to ACER's database and carry out investigation and proper enforcement.

The exact method and form of reporting shall be elaborated by the European Commission and approved by the Parliament and the Council. Furthermore, the Regulation takes a significant step towards the creation of a single European energy market by establishing a database of wholesale energy trading transactions and creating a European register for energy traders where no licensing scheme exists.

"It is inevitable that we establish a robust database which enables ACER to identify market players and fully understand the energy markets. Nevertheless, the administrative burden of such a regime should be minimised and parallel reporting should be avoided", highlighted András Gyürk.

Women approaching retirement age should not be ignored

By Atilla Agárdi

The plenary session of the European Parliament adopted a Report this week by Edit Bauer (SK) on the disadvantageous situation of women approaching retirement.

The Report deals with and formulates recommendations to the European Commission and the Member States on the most neglected age group on the labour market. A shameful fact is that the employment rate for women over the age of fifty is only 37 percent, the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy being to reach 75 percent. According to Edit Bauer, rigorous steps should be taken to keep this age group on the labour market preventing them from spending their retirement years in poverty. Mrs Bauer said that these women possess knowledge, skills and experience that must not be neglected.

Unfortunately, women over fifty often have to face multiple discrimination on an everyday basis. They are overshadowed not only because of their gender, but also because of their age. Women are considered old much earlier than men and this in itself indicates a clear discrimination. In addition, the gender pay gap among older women is much deeper than in any age group. This is mainly due to the fact that women are often forced to interrupt their careers, most often because of childbirth or homecare of their dependent family members. These so-called 'inactive periods' accumulate and have a significantly negative impact on the reckoning of pension.

Furthermore, we have to prevent women being penalised simply because of motherhood or taking care of family members. In her Report, Edit Bauer calls on the European Commission and Member States to take these factors into account while preparing the pension reform.

Anti-corruption: how to fill the gap between law and reality

On Monica Macovei's (RO) initiative and with the EPP Group's support, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on anti-corruption in the EU. It follows a debate with the Council and the Commission on how to fill the gap between anti-corruption law and reality, and to respond to the firm expectation of citizens for EU action to combat corruption.

Corruption is estimated at €120 billion annually, about the size of the EU annual budget and it has a distorting impact on the economy, competition and the internal market.

European citizens who pay taxes and respect the law must be sure that their money is not lost to corruption, fraud and abuse. The economic crisis, with its lack of confidence among people, requires the urgent implementation of an anti-corruption mechanism. This is even more important when we discuss various forms of assistance and safety nets in the Union.

The Commission needs to prioritise the fight against corruption in the context of its security agenda for the years to come, including the human and financial resources allocated to it.

The Commission adopted an anti-corruption package in June 2011 which includes a reporting mechanism.

Eugen Sandu

Raw materials' policy is employment policy

"Raw materials' policy is employment policy. We want to reduce the EU's dependency on third countries, keep jobs inside the EU and ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of the European economy. For this we need a comprehensive raw material strategy", said Paul Rübiger (AT) the EPP Group's Shadow Rapporteur of the Report on an 'Effective raw materials strategy for Europe'. The Parliament adopted the Report this session with an overwhelming cross-party majority. The Report defines the Parliament's guidelines for a future raw materials' strategy of the EU.

"In the light of exploding raw material prices, we have the choice to stay on the sidelines and watch the others deciding the game, or we fight for fair prices and well-balanced access to raw materials", stated Rübiger. He pointed out that it is self-evident that environmental standards and sustainability criteria have to be met: "One of our requirements for the new strategy is that it has to be in line with development policy goals." But access to raw materials also has to be ensured within Europe.

The EPP Group welcomes the Report which focuses on access to strategic and critical raw materials as well as on the issues of resource efficiency, recycling and substitution of raw materials including efficient waste management. China currently controls access to 97 percent of the world-wide available so-called rare earth elements, which are indispensable for the IT sector.

Daniel Köster