

EPP Group Report

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Libya: Gaddafi must not prevail

By Eva Mitsopoulou

"Gaddafi has lost any legitimacy to lead, having committed crimes against humanity, against his own people. It is therefore imperative that the conflict ends immediately. Gaddafi must not prevail. The no-fly zone must be implemented urgently and we should use all other possible means to assist the pro-democratic Libyans to defeat the forces who, through bribery, intimidation and tribal manipulation, are still supporting Gaddafi", said Ioannis Kasoulides (CY), Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for Foreign Affairs, in the plenary debate of the European Parliament on the situation in Libya.

In his intervention in plenary, Ioannis Kasoulides mentioned that at the beginning, the uprising in Libya had the same motivations and characteristics of events in Tunisia and Egypt. "The Gaddafi regime undertook an unprecedented lethal repression using air force, helicopter gunships and ruthless mercenaries shooting to kill unarmed civilians. The massacre caused defections in the army, the government and the diplomatic service. The people in Benghazi and elsewhere took arms from the defecting army and the uprising is now an armed conflict, unequal in terms of power", Kasoulides added.

In the plenary debate, it was emphasised that the protracted conflict is causing a great humanitarian disaster inside and along the Libyan borders and risks creating migratory flows towards the EU and in particular the southern Member States whilst it raises the world price of oil to levels dangerous for the world economy.

Ioannis Kasoulides emphasised the possible consequences in the case that Gaddafi succeeds: "We will be witnessing a situation worse than that of Rwanda to the shame of all humanity. Resolute action is needed now", he concluded.

The Resolution adopted by the plenary of the European Parliament this week, winding up the debate on the situation in Libya, its solidarity with the Libyan people, who have been a driving force for democracy and for regime change, calls on the EU and the international community to take every possible measure to isolate Gaddafi and his regime completely.

Future Euro rescue fund - MEPs ask for Community method to be respected

By Lasse Böhm

In its plenary debate on the proposed EU Treaty change to create a stability mechanism for Eurozone countries, MEPs called for the Community method to be respected. Elmar Brok (D), Co-Rapporteur of the Report on the change of Article 136 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU, emphasised the need for the European Council to make clear that the intergovernmental approach does not lead to a duplication of institutions. At most, it should be used as an avant-garde method creating the possibility to place the new mechanism within the community framework in the future.

"An intergovernmental approach means almost no parliamentary legitimacy and an incapacity to act in many areas, due to the requirement of unanimity. For this reason, the Community method, the Monnet method, is better legitimised and allows for greater capacity to act", Brok said in plenary.

Elmar Brok asked the European Council to ensure that:

- a) the operational features of the permanent stability mechanism and the conditionality measures, involving a programme of economic and fiscal adjustment, will be decided on the basis of a proposal by the Commission;
- b) the European Commission will carry out all the necessary tasks in implementing and monitoring the permanent mechanism and in assessing the financial situation of all the Member States whose currency is the Euro, regularly reporting back to the European Parliament;
- c) the financial assistance under the mechanism will be subject to rigorous analysis and to a programme of economic and financial recovery; those Member States whose currency is the Euro and those representing Member States participating in and contributing to the permanent stability mechanism will act, when deciding to grant financial assistance, on the basis of an evaluation provided by the Commission, the European Central Bank and, in so far as it may be involved, the International Monetary Fund;
- d) no Member State whose currency is the Euro and which has contributed to the permanent stability mechanism should be excluded from accessing it on the grounds of its size;
- e) the secretariat of the permanent stability mechanism will be provided by the Commission.

Eurozone Summit: learning lessons from the crisis

By Eduard Sloopweg

"What lesson should we learn from the financial crisis if it is not that our Member States must stop considering cooperation in the budgetary, fiscal and social fields as taboo?", said the Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament debating the upcoming Eurozone Summit.

"This is what the competitiveness pact - the original version of which has been reviewed to make it more in line with the Community Method, as I hoped for - rightly suggests", continued Joseph Daul.

"Let me measure the progress already made: the implementation this year of the EU-27 consultation procedure on national budget priorities is in itself a revolution. The rules we have put in place to regulate the financial markets are also exemplary."

The EPP Group, just as the EPP Heads of State and Government did the 4th March in Helsinki, supports and applauds these measures.

"It's a pity though that the only two Heads of Government who managed to turn up at the European Socialists Summit in Athens preferred to give their support to the policies destructive to employment in place in Spain, for example, rather than joining Europe's efforts to increase employment", criticised Joseph Daul.

The crisis brought job losses, family tragedies. The least we can do is learn lessons from it.

"First lesson: not to treat lightly the obligations of Member States to respect budget limits. Second lesson: European solidarity can only work if our social and fiscal rules are comparable. Third lesson: Europe must have a European stability mechanism. Fourth and last lesson: even during stormy times, the Euro is holding up and European integration is strengthening. This is the time to consolidate our economy and competitiveness and work for the jobs of the future," concluded Joseph Daul.

Roma: overwhelming support for the first-ever EU Strategy on Roma

By Miklós Panyi

The EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion was adopted this week at the Strasbourg plenary with a vast majority. Rapporteur Livia Járóka (HU), the only MEP of Roma origin, welcomed the success of the Report which aims to ease the burdens of the biggest minority group in Europe. The European Parliament, being the first EU Institution to adopt a tangible strategy on Roma, has made a significant step towards launching a European level strategy.

The most essential novelty of the proposed EU-27 Strategy is that the emphasis is placed on the economic and social roots of exclusion as well as the approach of discrimination. The document highlights the various measures that are necessary to improve the economic situation of the Roma. Effective access to the labour market needs to be ensured by making micro-credit available for entrepreneurship and self-employment. Likewise, affordable and healthy housing is warranted as a minimum prerequisite for a basic level of schooling. School and classroom segregation must also be abolished, and the number of Roma teachers should be increased in the long term. The role of Roma women needs to be redefined with regard to their specific needs. Making it easier for them to get an education and have a career, for example, would help reduce the number of child marriages.

Also, specific EU funds need to be allocated to Roma people which they can easily access and controllably make use of. Another important element of the Strategy is to set up an all-European crisis map to explore the most affected micro-regions to handle the problems. "The Strategy must also take into account the territoriality of exclusion, since geographical distribution of social disadvantages is not uniform throughout the Member States but poverty and social exclusion are concentrated in underdeveloped micro-regions", highlighted the Hungarian politician.

Turkey: European Parliament criticises progress of reforms

By Eduard Slootweg

The European Parliament adopted Ria Oomen-Ruijten's (NL) Progress Report this week on the negotiations between the EU and Turkey.

Turkey will hold parliamentary elections within three months. In her Report, Ria Oomen-Ruijten (NL) pinpoints a number of priorities for the Turkish Government and the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

First, she stresses the need for consensus on reforms between the government and the opposition. "Government and opposition should, for example, find a compromise on the overhaul of the current Turkish constitution."

She congratulated Turkey for the many symbolic steps taken regarding improving minority rights. But dialogue is not enough, concrete steps are expected by the Alevis and the Christian minorities. "Furthermore, I call on the Turkish Government to revitalise efforts in the framework of the democratic opening to comprehensively address the Kurdish issue", Mrs Oomen-Ruijten said.

Regarding the implementation of the Ankara Protocol, Ria Oomen-Ruijten said that this is a crucial element and only the Turkish Government can unblock this.

Regarding freedom of press, Mrs Oomen-Ruijten reacted to the open letter published recently: "Politicians and judicial authorities should be very prudent on the issue of freedom of press. Internet is part of the media landscape and laws curbing the freedom of press should be adapted. My Report, as adopted by Parliament, is very clear on this topic."

Finally, regarding recent developments, Ria Oomen-Ruijten underlined the fact that investigations of alleged coup plans, such as the 'Ergenekon' and 'Sledgehammer' cases, need to demonstrate the strength and the proper, independent and transparent functioning of Turkish democratic institutions and the judiciary. She is concerned about excessively long pre-trial detention periods and stressed the need for effective judicial guarantees for all suspects. She is also concerned by the lack of progress in these investigations and notes that the recent detention of well-known journalists such as Nedem Sener and Achmet Sik might lead to a loss of credibility of these trials which should, on the contrary, strengthen democracy.

Iran: EP demands targeted sanctions against Iran

At this week's session, the European Parliament called for targeted sanctions against representatives of the Iranian regime. Members of the Iranian Government and officials who are responsible for human rights violations or are complicit in these, must fall under the EU sanctions, according to a broad majority of MEPs.

"The EU needs to adopt sanctions to hurt the regime directly. These include travel bans and the freezing of international investment for government leaders and officials. We must make sure that the sanctions only hit the regime and not the general public", said the EPP Group's Shadow Rapporteur, Michael Gahler (D).

In the Resolution, the European Parliament is concerned about the state of human rights in Iran. MEPs have asked the Iranian authorities to cease all forms of torture and to waive penalties such as stoning and flogging. The EU and the Member States must insist on the release of political prisoners and on the reopening of the newspapers which the regime closed down.

In addition, the European Parliament has asked Iran to further meet its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and condemned the country's continued refusal to fully cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the unconditional access to allow international inspectors into nuclear facilities.

Lasse Böhm

Innovative financing way to boost growth and jobs

By Katarzyna Klaus

"We need to judge very carefully the effects of every new type of tax introduced in Europe. The contribution of all sectors of the economy should be fair. That is why the European Commission's upcoming impact assessment of a tax on financial transactions at EU level will play a crucial role in the future of its implementation", said Danuta Hübner (PL), Chairwoman of the Regional Development Committee of the European Parliament and the EPP Group's Spokeswoman on the Innovative Financing Report.

The European Parliament voted in favour of the Report on innovative financing at a global and European level and which covers taxation of the financial sector, European bonds and carbon taxation. The most important topic presented in this own-initiative Report is a potential financial transactions tax (FTT). The impact assessment of the FTT is in the stage of preparation by the European Commission. In these times of austerity, new mechanisms are being proposed in order to improve the European Union's economy. Promotion of growth and creation of sustainable jobs however cannot lead to a relocation of financial activity from Europe to other parts of the world.

The results of the study carried out by the European Commission on whether the FTT could put the competitiveness of the European economy at risk, and its proposal in this matter are expected by June 2011.

Montenegro: Good progress in the EU integration process

By Lada Jurica and Atilla Agárdi

Montenegro has made good progress in the integration process, which was mirrored in a Report adopted by the European Parliament that evaluated the state of play in Montenegro's EU membership bid.

"I would like to encourage the government of Montenegro to continue with reforms and with the EU integration course. I hope that their efforts will soon be rewarded with the opening of accession negotiations", said Eduard Kukan (SK), Chairman of the European Parliament's Delegation for South East Europe, after the Report was adopted.

Kukan welcomed the commitment of Montenegro's government to the integration process and the adoption of the action plan for monitoring the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. "Montenegro will have to focus on progress in key areas which are clearly set out: rule of law, fight against corruption and organised crime, freedom of media, strengthening institutional capacities and

broader involvement of civil society in interactions with the government. Implementing and enforcing legislation in all of these fields will be essential", highlighted Eduard Kukan.

Montenegro's progress will be based on own achievements, therefore the Commission is reluctant to give any kind of enlargement calendar. It is clear, however, that Montenegro will need to fulfil the 7 conditions it was given after it received candidate status before it can advance further towards EU membership and open accession negotiations.

In conclusion, Eduard Kukan recalled the regional aspect of Montenegro's European perspective: "I am glad to see the constructive role that Montenegro is playing in maintaining regional stability, cooperation and fostering good neighbourly relations with other Western Balkan and EU countries. Montenegro is a stabilising factor in the region and I hope that its progress will motivate other countries to step up their efforts in the integration process."