

EPP Group Report

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EU budget for 2014-2020

By Pedro López

European Commission President, José Manuel Durão Barroso, presented the proposal to the plenary to finance the European Union for the period 2014-2020, the so-called multiannual financial framework. This is the starting point of long negotiations between the Member States and the European Parliament, which has the duty to approve the final deal.

The European Parliament has its own proposal, adopted in June and drafted by Spanish MEP, Salvador Garriga, which calls for a 5% increase in the EU's budget for 2014 to 2020. But, as he said during the debate, it has not been taken into account by the Commission which is opting for a 'near freeze' of the resources.

The Commission proposal is focused on achieving the EU's 2020 objectives for growth and employment and includes a significant increase - 46% - in the amount foreseen for research and innovation and the strengthening of education, training and European youth programmes, following the wishes of the Parliament. But, on the contrary, proposes a significant cut in spending on agriculture against the views expressed by MEPs.

"We appreciate the efforts on cohesion, new trans-European networks, energy efficiency, immigration, own resources and on research especially. We regret that the Common Agricultural Policy is the only policy that loses in net terms so that other common policies gain. You must deal with the legitimate concerns of those active in agriculture", Garriga said.

Salvador Garriga anticipated that the Commission proposals, together with the austerity period due to the economic crisis and restrictions in national budgets, will leave little room for manoeuvre for negotiations between the Parliament and the 27 Member States. Nevertheless, he made a call to all governments to keep in mind during the upcoming difficult negotiations that the next multiannual financial framework should make the EU "a reference for the future, not a scapegoat for national shortcomings".

Polish Presidency Priorities: the answer to the crisis is more Europe

By Joanna Bekker

On the 1st of July, Poland took over the rotating EU Presidency from Hungary. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk presented the ambitious programme of the 6-month EU Presidency during the July plenary session in Strasbourg.

“The European Parliament has been an Institution and a place that has never lost faith in the meaning of a united Europe”, said the Prime Minister in his opening speech.

“Is the answer to the crisis - both the current crisis of the financial situation of some states, but also the deeper crisis, the crisis of trust in Europe, the global crisis - less Europe? The answer is a united Europe”, said PM Tusk.

On the dilemmas and challenges which face the Union, Donald Tusk referred to the debate on barriers within the Schengen area. “It is in the interest of the Union to safeguard these fundamental rights of European citizens. The Union must strengthen its external borders and FRONTEX but not create barriers within the Union.”

“I am convinced that the answer to the crisis is more Europe, more European integration and this requires strong European Institutions”, stressed Donald Tusk.

“Polish priorities, or rather European priorities, during the Polish Presidency are in line with our conviction that with more Europe, the less crises we will face”, he added. A secure Europe in terms of military capacities, energy security and food security is one of the three main priorities of the Polish Presidency. The second priority is the progress that Poland wishes to make in the field of the internal market, and the third regards the openness of the Union towards its neighbours - those that aspire to become EU members as well as those who will never be EU members but who share the same values as the EU. “Our vision is a practical one. We want more Europe within the EU but also around its borders.”

EPP Group Chairman Joseph Daul (F) welcomed the determination of the Polish Presidency. “European integration will be at the heart of the new Council Presidency's priorities - the Euro and the internal market - much to the satisfaction of the EPP Group”, said the Chairman to Donald Tusk. “My Group expects a lot from your political will and your leadership. Europe needs it.”

Hungarian Presidency has strengthened Europe

By Miklós Panyi

In a difficult economic and political environment, like the Euro crisis and the upheavals in Northern Africa, the first-ever Hungarian Presidency managed to accomplish significant progress on all of its priorities and thus essentially contributed to the strengthening of Europe.

One of the main successes of the Hungarian Presidency was the completion of Croatia's accession negotiations, which gives the integration of the Western Balkans new impetus. The first European Roma Strategy is also an historic achievement. The Presidency also hammered out the launch of Europe's second macro region initiative - the Danube Strategy. Important steps were taken in Romania and Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen area, as these countries have met the requirements of the accession.

Due to the efforts of the Presidency team, 98% of the agreement on Economic Governance has been reached, while the first European Semester has been launched in order to strengthen budgetary discipline. The decision of the Member States in February to create a common energy market by 2014 will help to improve Europe's energy security. On top of these, further important decisions have been made in the fields of the Common Agricultural and Cohesion Policies.

Over the past six months, the Hungarian Presidency has also reacted firmly to the unexpected and extraordinary situations such as the events in North Africa and the consequences of migration and refugee influx, and the aftermath of the nuclear catastrophe in Japan.

Not only the long list of achievements, but the positive remarks of top EU leaders - including José Manuel Barroso, Jerzy Buzek and Herman Van Rompuy - and MEPs is clear evidence of the Hungarian Presidency's successful performance.

It is now up to Poland to take the lead!

CRIS: Parliament pushes for strong economic governance and global stability

By Sarita Rauta

The European Parliament voted on the final Report of the special committee on the financial, economic and social crisis (CRIS) this week in Strasbourg. The aim of the special parliamentary committee was to analyse and evaluate the extent of the financial, economic and social crisis and to provide comprehensive recommendations for future structural policies.

The CRIS Report was adopted by a broad majority with 434 votes in favour, 128 against and 33 abstentions, out of a total of 595 votes. The EPP Group line was 100% successful.

It is clear that the EPP Group consolidated the line previously set in Committee on the importance of growth, competitiveness, free and balanced trade, deepening of the internal market, especially in the services sector, and opening up public procurement, with the support of the ALDE Group. The S&D lost their very few different proposals on these matters as did the Greens.

It is important to underline that the concrete proposals on Eurobonds, which were EPP Group proposals, received overwhelming support from the House as well as the Group's other key proposals on the financing of the EU 2020 Strategy, taxation coordination and education.

The key amendment on the budget "of sufficient size to accommodate the Euro in a sustainable way" was adopted.

The only mandate of the special committee was to draft the Parliament's analysis and recommendations for the crisis. After this final adoption of the Report in the plenary sitting, the Committee will be dissolved.

North African reform must continue

By Peter Adler

The European Parliament adopted a Resolution this week calling on the people of the countries of the Arab World to persist in the ongoing process of transformation towards modern, pluralist democracies where fundamental civic and human rights are respected. Ioannis Kasoulides (CY), Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for external relations, and José Salafranca (ES), EPP Group Coordinator in the Foreign Affairs Committee, spoke in the plenary debate.

"We must, again, strongly condemn the disproportionate use of force by the regimes against peaceful demonstrators", said Ioannis Kasoulides. "We deplore the large number of persons killed and wounded, and I wish to extend my condolences to the families of the victims. The immediate end to the bloodshed and the release of the people arrested is a prerequisite for the continuation of the transition process".

"The EPP Group calls on the political leaderships of the Arab countries to honour their commitments by engaging without delay in an open and constructive political dialogue, involving all democratic political parties and movements and representatives of civil society", said José Salafranca. "The aim must be to pave the way for genuine democracy and the implementation of institutional, political, economic and social reforms, which are essential for long-term stability and development in these countries and in the region as a whole".

The two MEPs also stressed the importance of religious freedom and freedom of thought: "The protection for the various religious communities in Syria, including the large number of Iraqi refugees that have arrived in the country, must be guaranteed. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are inalienable human rights which must be guaranteed by the authorities. We urge the authorities to provide reliable and efficient protection for all religious groups present in these countries and to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of members of all religious communities", said Mr Salafranca.

On the recent events in various countries of the region, Mr Kasoulides said: "The EPP Group welcomes the Council's decision to impose restrictive measures on Syria and persons responsible for the violent repression against the civilian population. We strongly condemn the recent armed attacks in Yemen, including the attack of 3 June 2011 on the Presidential compound. We welcome the lifting of the 'state of national safety' in Bahrain as well as the call made by King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa for a national dialogue. We also support the democratic transition process in Egypt and Tunisia, as the first examples of the current process of democratisation and new wave of participation by citizens, and notably youth, in the Arab World. The EPP Group further wishes to state its

continued support for the commitment of the international community to protect civilians in Libya, including through the intensification of pressure on the Libyan regime, and to support the building of a democratic Libyan state. We repeat that Colonel Gaddafi must relinquish power immediately."

Derivatives: more transparency and stability

Derivates will soon be subject to EU regulation. This week, the European Parliament adopted its position on the future EU legislation. Members call for more transparency and stability in particular with those derivatives that are dealt with from stock exchanges and can cause massive disruptions of financial markets. "We are determined to have a piece of legislation with a minimum of exemptions for a maximum stabilising impact", said EPP Group Member Werner Langen (D), European Parliament Rapporteur on the Regulation on derivatives.

Members want to include all off-exchange (OTC) derivatives and make them subject to risk-oriented assessment and clearing. Such derivatives have hitherto been processed on a bilateral basis. That black box worth trillions of Euros has to be made more transparent. Parliament calls for standard procedures, reporting requirements and the use of clearing devices at organised trade platforms. National supervisory authorities and the European agency for Securities and Markets (ESMA) are to be in charge of the supervision.

All derivates will be subject to a notification requirement. "The volume of all transactions has to be transparent to have maximum stability of financial markets and to enable supervisory authorities to do their work properly. Risk management will not be possible otherwise", Mr Langen said. Negotiations with Council on the final wording of the Regulation are to begin after the summer break.

Thomas Bickl

Dialling 112 can save your life, but needs improvement

The European emergency number 112 can be a life-saving number and should run smoothly in all Member States. Róża Thun (PL), the EPP Group's spokeswoman on the issue, admits that the Commission should ensure full accessibility to the number, including persons with disabilities. In its Resolution, the EP calls on the Member States to improve the accuracy and reliability of caller location information under the new EU telecoms rules and upgrade technology with the ultimate goal of mandatory automatic location for all 112 calls. The Parliament believes that those Member States that do not fulfil their obligations should be penalised.

"The European emergency number 112 first and foremost needs to be 100% reliable. We need to make eCall a mandatory service and assure the automatic location of callers, including roaming callers", said Roza Thun. "We need to put more effort into informing citizens about the existence of 112. Right now, only 26% of EU citizens can spontaneously identify it as the number to call for emergency services from anywhere in Europe", she added.

MEPs underlined the importance of the promotion of the 112 emergency number. Raising awareness and increasing the effectiveness of emergency lines should be prioritised by Member States. MEPs also called on the Commission to establish the 'reverse 112 system' - a system of warning and alerting citizens in case of emergency and disasters.

Katarzyna Klaus

Food Packaging: better food information for consumers on its way

There will soon be binding EU standards for nutrition information on the packaging of foodstuffs. The European Parliament endorsed a new EU Regulation this week. "In the future, citizens will find far more and better information on food packaging than before. All labelling indications have to be legible and, for the first time, a nutrition box will be mandatory", said EPP Group Member Renate Sommer (D) who is the European Parliament Rapporteur.

The nutrition box will include the energy content per 100g/ml and the content of sugar, salt, fats and protein. Further strict rules are foreseen against misleading food packaging. Imitates must indicate on the front of the pack in a prominent font size the substitute ingredient used ('made with vegetable fat', like in imitated or analog cheeses) in order to be clearly identified. The origin of fresh meat will have to be labelled too.

For all other product categories, such as milk and milk products, meat in processed food and food consisting of only one ingredient, the Commission is asked to conduct an impact assessment on possible labelling provisions. The new standards will apply from October 2013.

Thomas Bickl

Security scanners at airport check-ins

By Pedro López

Four years ago, the European Parliament firmly rejected the use of the so-called body scanners at airport security control check-ins. These devices, which show if a passenger is carrying dangerous items, generated concerns on the respect of passenger privacy and health, due to radiation technology they used.

The evolution of the technology has provided new arguments to recommend the use of these devices as they provide an added value in the fight against terrorism. The Parliament this week approved a Resolution on civil aviation security that sets down the conditions for the use of the now-called security scanners at airport check-ins.

Security scanners at check-in controls cannot use ionising radiation; they should not display, process or store any type of body image whatsoever to guarantee the protection of personal data. Moreover, passengers must be allowed to refuse to undergo this type of scanning, but on the understanding that they must then be subject to other kinds of security checks which could be more complicated or lengthy. For the European Parliament, the information for passengers on the type of scanners and how they will be treated under the new screening process is essential, as well as an improvement of the formation of the staff in charge of security duties.

"We now have systems that offer a clear added value in terms of security without risks to passengers", said Lu s de Grandes (ES), who drafted the text adopted by a big majority of the Parliament. The new machines "are not those that we have seen in the past in the newspapers and on television, they no longer show a human body but a standard image that simply indicates if the passenger is carrying something dangerous or not", he explained.

The Resolution also tackles the issue of liquids, aerosols and gels, calling for a transformation of the ban on carrying liquids into an obligation to screen them from 2013.