

EPP Group Report

Issue 10 / October 2011



Protecting children from sexual abuse

By Elisabetta Montano

The new Directive on combating sexual abuse and the exploitation of children and child pornography is an innovative legislative instrument and represents a step forward for the protection of our children. The Directive is based on the text of the 2007 Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

The Directive will replace the existing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA of 22 December 2003 on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography which was much more limited in its content.

The new Directive sets out minimum penalties for offences related to sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and child pornography. Higher penalties are foreseen especially in cases where an abuse of a position of trust, authority or influence over the child occurs, or when the child is in a particularly vulnerable situation. A whole set of additional aggravating circumstances have been introduced.

The text provides a specific article on seizure and confiscation of revenues related to child pornography, a specific article on prevention, and new provisions on assistance and support.

Sex tourists travelling abroad to abuse children will also face prosecution under new rules on jurisdiction. The Directive introduces the concept of 'child sex tourism' for the first time in EU legislation.

New forms of abuse and exploitation, such as on-line grooming, will be criminalised. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure the prompt removal of such websites and to endeavour to obtain the removal of such pages hosted outside of their territory. Blocking is optional and subject to transparent procedures and adequate safeguards.

The text is the result of a long procedure to which the Council agreed in June.

Disability: EU strategy to help people with disabilities

By Miklós Panyi

The Report by *Ádám Kósa* (HU) on the mobility and inclusion of people with disabilities and the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 was adopted with a large majority in the Strasbourg plenary this session.

"The inclusion of the 80 million people with disabilities in the European Union is of the utmost importance for handling and creating a more active and sustainable ageing society in Europe. Their social and labour market inclusion offers a previously-neglected opportunity for meeting Europe's future workforce needs. People with disabilities and older people could be the real answer to the general shortage in the active and working population", highlighted the Rapporteur. The Report aims at changing the approach towards people with disabilities as it regards them as workforces, consumers and taxpayers of the future.

The Kósa Report also aims to introduce revolutionary measures by promoting barrier-free accessibility; special communication techniques for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, as well as the blind, and proposes new patterns and obligations for inclusive education systems with stronger support for parents of children with disabilities, with emphasis on the importance of the early recognition of special needs.

The Report was adopted with a huge majority apart from the horizontal anti-discrimination amendment refused by the left-wing and liberal groups. "As there is little hope of having the horizontal Anti-discrimination Directive adopted in the Council in the foreseeable future, the voting down of the EPP Group's amendment is regrettable as it prevents promoting a considerably faster process aimed at improving the situation of people with disabilities", explained Mr Kósa, the only deaf Member of the European Parliament.

Budget of the European Parliament and other Institutions

By Francesco Frapiccini and Sandra Carreira

The European Parliament adopted, by a large majority, the proposal presented by José Manuel Fernandes (PT) on the budget of the European Institutions for 2012. In a period of economic, social and financial crisis, the European Institutions have made all possible cuts, enshrining one of the lowest budget figures in history, without calling into question the need for governance, and the achievement of commitments and legal obligations.

José Manuel Fernandes, Member of the Committee on Budgets and Co-Rapporteur of the EU Budget for 2012, was satisfied with the fact that the Parliament's proposal has even gone below the expectations set out by the Council. The proposed European Parliament budget for 2012 is an historic budget, having an increase of only 1.9% compared to the figures of previous years. Travel costs will be reduced by 5%, general expenditures will be frozen and savings of about €21m will be made in translation and interpretation services.

The European Parliament and the other European Institutions want to achieve their objectives with sustainable growth. This means doing more with fewer resources. This budget is the minimum possible level of increase in order to be able to accomplish the European project.

European Commission's budget

The European Commission's budget is particularly important because it contains the bulk of spending foreseen for 2012. It is important to highlight the Parliament's responsible approach, its awareness of Europe's economic crisis but also the conviction of the need to use EU funds effectively, emphasising the role of the EU budget as a tool for revitalising the economy.

Giovanni La Via (I), the EPP Group Shadow Rapporteur, pointed out the strong support for a budget that promotes growth and research in order to create new jobs showing that European spending generates clear and visible benefits for the Union and its citizens. The Parliament is in favour of a series of higher investments concentrated in limited but selective lines fully reflecting the priorities expressed over the last months.

La Via expressed the hope that the Council understands the EP's approach and will be open to negotiations on the basis of collaboration, focused on the definition of a realistic and intelligent budget, capable of reaching the goal of a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the European citizens.

Ukraine: European Parliament condemns Timoshenko verdict

The European Parliament has condemned the court sentence against former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko. The verdict is an abuse of justice, a broad majority of MEPs said in a Resolution negotiated by EPP Group Member Elmar Brok (DE).

"The law which formed the basis for the verdict dates back to Soviet times and must be abolished", Mr Brok highlighted. "Its only purpose is to be an instrument for the government to systematically persecute the opposition. The EU must act in order to prevent the opposition being silenced", Mr Brok said.

The European Parliament called on the Ukrainian Government to allow Ms Timoshenko and other opposition politicians to take part in the next elections. "The verdict against Ms Timoshenko has to be lifted, since it is obviously a politically-motivated sentence", Mr Brok said.

Should the sentence not be reviewed, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine will be put into question, the Strasbourg plenary said.

Lasse Böhm

New skills and jobs for Europe

After almost 400 proposed amendments and 47 compromises, the European Parliament adopted Regina Bastos' (PT) Report on the creation of a European Agenda for New Skills and Jobs in the EU, anticipating the needs of the labour market in the next decade.

The main objective of this Report is to reform the EU labour market, in an attempt, on the one hand, to create more jobs in the EU and, on the other hand, to better match the skills of jobseekers to the new jobs coming on to the labour market, especially jobs requiring highly-skilled employees.

Regina Bastos, Rapporteur, considers that Europe faces 4 main challenges: the creation of jobs, the necessity to develop a more competitive economy, the sustainability of the welfare systems and the difficulty in finding qualified people to fill job vacancies.

"For this reason, we need to improve basic skills, as well as skills in science, innovation, IT and communication and in foreign languages in addition to the need to tackle school drop-out rates. Co-investing in education and life-long learning is also of great importance and better coordination between educational institutions and enterprises is essential in order to boost a new sustainable

economy, based on the investment in ecological qualifications", said Regina Bastos.

The rules on flexicurity, achieving more flexibility and more security simultaneously, need to be adapted to the socio-economic context of each Member State in order to guarantee a more flexible labour market and modern welfare system.

Sandra Carreira

G20: EP discusses economy ahead of Summit

Late October-early November must be the most important period of international summits on the economy ever. The EU Council met twice within less than a week and within a week the G20 will meet in Cannes.

EPP Group Vice-Chairman Gunnar Hökmark (S) led the preparations for the European Parliament's input to the G20 meeting.

Hökmark introduced the EP positions:

- The world economy can easily be described as an imbalance between countries with surpluses and those with deficits.

Hökmark underlined that currency policies in some major economies are contributing to the imbalances. The lack of competitiveness in a number of other countries is also adding to imbalance.

- We need to achieve a balance at global level, and that requires global governance and proper Institutions.
- In countries and regions with a lack of competitiveness, we need new policies and reforms. But at the same time we need to ensure that we have a flow of trade with these emerging economies which are currently protecting themselves with artificial currency policies.

Looking at the institutional framework for international action, Hökmark stressed that the more we want global governance, the more need there is for accountability, transparency and legitimate Institutions.

"The Report underlines the importance of the IMF and the WTO because, within a better structure, decisions and discussions in the G20 can also achieve legitimacy and transparency by being implemented in the IMF", Mr Hökmark said.

Per Heister

Services Directive: Implementation as seen by the EP

The Report on the mutual evaluation process of the Services Directive looks again (after the Report on the implementation of the Services Directive) at the work undertaken by the Member States and the European Commission when transposing and implementing the Directive. In the Report, the EP raises its concerns about the state of the single market for services and gives its support to further actions aimed at removing barriers. The mutual evaluation exercise did not cover all of the provisions of the Directive; it focused on the requirements for which the Directive did not provide for a prohibition, but which left a certain degree of discretion to the Member States.

The Report focuses not only on the process of mutual evaluation but also comments on the results and follow-up on the mutual evaluation as outlined in the European Commission Communication and makes recommendations for the further application of the mutual evaluation in other legal instruments.

"The implementation of the Services Directive can bring about economic gains of up to €140 billion and up to 1.5% growth of EU GDP. We need those numbers to be turned into reality", said Małgorzata Handzlik (PL), Rapporteur on the mutual evaluation of the Services Directive.

"The first prerequisite for the functioning of the services market, which is a correct and proper implementation, is not complete. Therefore we must call on the European Commission to take further enforcement measures when deemed necessary", Mrs Handzlik concluded.

Katarzyna Klaus