

EPP Group Report

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Mid-term Elections: half of Parliament's Vice-Presidents from the EPP Group

By Gunnar Larsson

Jerzy Buzek (PL) has finished his two and a half year term as President of the European Parliament. In 2009, Buzek became the first President from one of the countries that joined the European Union in the 2004 enlargement. He had exceptional credentials as former Prime Minister of his native Poland and as a leading freedom fighter during Solidarity's struggle against Communist rule. Handing over to the new President, Martin Schulz, he received warm words from leaders of Parliament's groups.

In its mid-term reshuffle, the European Parliament also elected a new Bureau. Parliament has 14 Vice-Presidents and half of these are now Members of the EPP Group. As Members of the Bureau, they will be responsible for drawing up Parliament's preliminary draft budget, deciding on administrative, staff and organisational matters. Parliament's Quaestors are also part of the Bureau.

Spanish MEP Alejo Vidal-Quadras, who has served in Parliament since 1999, has been re-elected Vice-President several times. He is often seen leading plenary proceedings and is a Member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy. Italian MEP Roberta Angelilli and German MEP Rainer Wieland were also re-elected as Vice-Presidents. They are respectively Members of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, and the Committee on Legal Affairs.

Georgios Papastamkos is a new Member of the Bureau. He is a former Greek Cabinet Minister and is a Member of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. He will be joined as Vice-President by Austrian MEP Othmar Karas, who is a Member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and until December was a Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group. Another new Vice-President is Polish MEP Jacek Protasiewicz, a Member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. And finally, Hungarian MEP László Surján, a Member of the Committee of Budgets, was also elected Vice-President.

The EPP Group's two Members of the College of Quaestors, Luxembourg's Astrid Lulling and Ireland's Jim Higgins, were both re-elected.

New fiscal Treaty must respect EU law

The new fiscal Treaty currently being negotiated by 26 EU Member States must recognise the primacy of EU law, the European Parliament demanded in a Resolution adopted at the January plenary. The new Treaty must not set new figures deviating from those contained in the stability and growth pact for the budget criteria for Eurozone members, MEPs warned. The new Treaty should thus "without ambiguity explicitly accept the primacy of EU law over its provisions" they said, while all measures to implement the agreement "shall be taken in accordance with the relevant procedures provided for in the EU Treaties.

The European Parliament also demanded that all countries signing the new Treaty should be treated equally. In particular, all contracting parties, regardless of whether they are Euro members or not, should be allowed to participate in Euro Summit meetings.

In addition, MEPs asked for greater parliamentary participation in the strengthened economic coordination and governance agreed on by the Heads of State and Governments. The cooperation of national parliaments and the European Parliament should take place in the framework of Protocol 1, Article 9 of the EU Treaties, allowing parliamentarians to set their own rules for co-operation.

Should these conditions not be reflected in the ongoing negotiations, the European Parliament reserves the right to take legal steps, MEPs warned in the Resolution.

Lasse Boehm

Raw material from waste from electronic devices

By Thomas Bickl

The collection and recycling of end-of-life electric and electronic devices will be subject to stricter EU standards. The European Parliament successfully fought for more ambitious goals in the new Directive adopted this week. "We have achieved new collection targets. What has been considered waste is turning into precious resources again", said European Parliament Rapporteur Karl-Heinz Florenz (D).

Dealers will be obliged to take back end-of-life devices regardless of whether they sell a new one at the same time. This goes for appliances smaller than 25 centimetres and for big retail shops with a sales area of more than 400 square metres.

The measuring system for the collection of old appliances will change over from the current four kilograms per person per year to 45% of new sales in 2016 and 65% in 2019 or 85% of the total existing e-waste. The new Member States will be allowed two more years to meet the targets.

For the export of end-of-life appliances, the burden of proof will be reversed. In the event of a customs and excise check, it will be down to the company and not the clerk to prove that the devices are still in order and not to be considered as waste. This allows for effective containment of illegal shipping. In return, we will be able to retain precious resources and avoid the often more than questionable treatment in development countries.

There is also good news for smaller manufacturers in terms of less red tape for them. The registration of manufacturers will be simplified and include online business. Official branches in other EU Member States will no longer be required, a legal representative will suffice.

Biocides: tough new EU rules

For the first time, there will be common EU standards on the registration and the use of biocides. The European Parliament adopted a new EU Regulation on biocides this week. "We will have more safety for consumers, users and the environment. The crucial thing is that the same standards will apply throughout the EU", said European Parliament Rapporteur Christa Klässler (D).

Biocides are used for cleaning, hygiene or protection purposes to fight vermin or fungi or to protect timber, for example. For the moment, the assessment and the registration of biocidal products is subject to national legislation and thus varies considerably. This has also led to the fact that we hardly have biocides on the market.

Biocides are indispensable to meet the high hygiene and health standards in modern society. They have effects and side-effects and this is why we need strict rules on their use. Parliament has managed to define a clear ban on cancer-causing and fertility-reducing substances as well as substances damaging hereditary material. In addition, products treated with biocides need to be labelled accordingly. EU-wide registration and such strict criteria are a major step forward for a responsible use of biocides.

EU registration will be phased in by product groups up until 2020. Imported products treated with biocides must also meet the EU standards. The new Regulation will enter into force in September 2013.

Thomas Bickl

Food input supply chain

By Cliona Connolly

MEPs called for a fairer, more secure food supply chain with the adoption of the Farm Input Supply Chain Report at this week's plenary.

Since 2000, total input costs for farmers across the EU have increased on average by almost 40%, with energy and fertiliser costs rising by 60 and 80% respectively. Farm gate prices have increased by 25%, but the massive increase in input costs is creating a substantial imbalance between production costs and return on investment.

"This trend is eroding the possibility for farmers to increase profits and re-invest in their farms", said Mairead McGuinness (IE), Shadow Rapporteur for the EPP Group.

"European farmers are effectively 'squeezed' at both ends of the supply chain. The rapid increase and volatility in production costs coupled with relentless pressure at the other end of the food supply chain to reduce prices places European farmers in an impossible position.

"A secure food supply chain is vital for Europe and the world; however, farmers face significant obstacles in planning for the future. Problems with the forward buying of essential farm inputs and continuing price spikes in the cost of these inputs present farmers with significant difficulties."

The text examines current market structures and identifies problems in the input sector. It also suggests policy options aimed at reducing farm input costs, while also improving their position in the sector.

McGuinness added that the positive vote by MEPs on this issue indicates that the political will and enthusiasm exists to tackle the challenges ahead.