



26th Summit of Chairmen of parliamentary groups

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Protecting Europeans in the 21st century

The Chairmen of EPP parliamentary groups gathered once more in Brussels on 4 December to discuss important topics on the EU agenda. The **Summit of Chairmen of parliamentary groups in the national Parliaments of the EU and the European Parliament** discussions focused on European defence, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the way forward to a deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union. This was complemented by a presentation on the implementation of the Treaty provisions concerning national Parliaments, particularly on the way they can better fulfil their responsibilities at national and EU level.

Opening the Summit, **Esther DE LANGE** MEP (NL), Chair of the EPP Group for relations with national Parliaments, underlined that in recent years



Esther DE LANGE MEP, Chair of the EPP Group and Ursula von der LEYEN, German Minister of Defence

this fora has addressed the key components of the debate around the Future of Europe. She encouraged these topics to be taken also to the National Parliaments in order to stimulate the debate in the spirit of cooperation. Co-chair of the meeting, **Mart NUTT** MP (IRL, EE), Member of the Constitutional Committee and Anti-Corruption Select Committee of the Estonian Parliament, stressed the importance of complementarity of the European Defence and NATO, which is of extreme importance for the security of the European Union, adding that “defence, security and foreign affairs issues cannot be separated”.

The Future of Europe: European Defence

Stressing that no country will resolve Europe’s problems from an isolated position, the German Minister of Defence, **Ursula von der LEYEN**, welcomed the creation of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), with 23 EU Member States committed to closer military cooperation. Europe responded through this initiative to the changing global political landscape, proposing a structure aimed to support and complement NATO. She mentioned four important instruments that have been or are under implementation for the Security and Defence Union: the **planning** process, aimed at increasing transparency and efficiency of the many aspects of the military sector in Europe and achieving a certain harmonization with NATO; **PESCO**, as the legal frame for those countries that want to commit themselves to be part of an ambitious European Security and Defence Union; the **European Defence Fund**, to which the individual countries and the European Commission contribute; and the **European Headquarter**, given that the creation of “the Army of the Europeans” with national sovereignty in the process of decision-making is the answer to the crisis and fear in Europe.



Ursula von der LEYEN, German Minister of Defence and David McALLISTER MEP, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee

David McALLISTER MEP (DE), Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, stressed the remarkable development in the field of defence and security policy since September 2016, when Jean Claude Juncker presented the European Defence Action Plan. Closer defence cooperation also means spending taxpayer’s money in a more responsible way as well as addressing the primary concerns of the citizens.

Michael GAHLER MEP (DE), Rapporteur on Constitutional, legal and institutional implications of a common security and defence policy: possibilities offered by the Lisbon Treaty, explained to the colleagues from national Parliaments the utmost importance of increasing parliamentary cooperation in defence matters at both national and European level. The efforts at Union level are not meant to be a substitute for decreasing national research spending.



Michael GAHLER MEP, Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Esteban GONZALEZ PONS MEP, Member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Esteban GONZALEZ PONS MEP (ES), Vice-president of the EPP Group, Rapporteur on Constitutional, legal and institutional implications of a common security and defence policy: possibilities offered by the Lisbon Treaty, pointed out that the Member States are simply too small to act on their own at a global level.

Françoise GROSSETETE MEP (FR), Rapporteur on the European Defence Industrial Development programme, said that the total defence budget of the Member States decreased in recent years in comparison to China and Russia, while the US budget is two times higher. To support industrial defence projects, there are three guiding principles that need to be followed: budgetary independence, competitiveness based on excellence and industrial performance; and strategic autonomy.



Family photo at the 26th Summit of Chairmen of parliamentary groups

Martin HEYDON MP (FG, IR), Chairman of the Fine Gael Parliamentary Party, said that PESCO will improve the capacity of the EU and Member States to act in support of international peace and security. As reflected in the PESCO notification, he welcomed the centrality of the UN and multilateralism and assured that Ireland will continue to contribute to operations and remain at the centre of CSDP development.

The European Pillar of Social Rights

Marianne THYSSEN, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs Skills and Labour Mobility, said that growth has returned to the EU. 2017 was the first year in which all Member States of the European Union experienced growth while unemployment and poverty levels are going down. As Europe puts its citizens first, the EU has launched the European Pillar of social rights, which serves as a compass towards more upwards convergence in Europe. In today's dynamic, competitive and

inclusive economy, the labour market is changing due to globalisation and digitalisation and so the Union needs to show people that it wants to accompany them in this fourth industrial revolution. The pillar of social rights is a list of twenty principles grouped around three main ideas: equal opportunities, fair working conditions and access to social modern social protection. The three presidents signing the recent EU Social Summit document in Sweden were all from the EPP so this makes clearly visible that the social dimension is also an EPP topic.

A deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union

Thorsten FREI MP, Member of the European affairs Committee in the German Bundestag, underlined the fact that our achievements as EPP regarding our economic and monetary policy have not been challenged. All the proposals on the table need to be discussed, we need to adopt however a critical view when talking about an EU finance minister, bearing in mind that



Marianne THYSSEN, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs Skills and Labour Mobility



Thorsten FREI MP, Member of the European affairs Committee in Bundestag, Germany



Hans WALLMARK MP, Deputy leader of the Moderate parliamentary group in the Swedish Riksdag

with the UK leaving the European Union it will fall back to its 85% size of industrial output. In the context of cohesion and structural funds, we have to examine this new situation and adapt our strategies accordingly. In the future, liability and control needs to be seen together.

Hans WALLMARK MP (M, SE), Deputy leader of the Moderate parliamentary group in the Swedish Riksdag, said Sweden has a strong interest in a well-functioning European Monetary Union as Euro countries are Sweden's largest trading partners and the EMU is at the core of the European project.

Gunnar HÖKMARK MEP (SE), Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, considered that the experiences of the last years have shown that the rules alone are not enough for achieving the economic or financial objectives of the Union. They need to be accompanied by a sound macroeconomic development, which would ensure stability. This should be a starting point for deepening the EMU cooperation, with a tougher scrutiny regarding the Stability Pact.

Anne SANDER MEP (LR, FR), Member of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, considered the first priority should consist of putting forward credible proposals, especially when they come to the governance of the Economic and Monetary Union. National Parliaments should be more involved in the process and, to reach the full implementation of the EMU, we need to complete the reform of the Banking Union, work further on the Third Pillar, and reach the Capital Market Union at EU level and implementing legislation to establish the stakeholders and the measures to protect this mechanism.



Paulo RANGEL MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group, Chair of the European Ideas Network

The implementation of the Treaty provisions concerning national Parliaments

Paulo RANGEL MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group, Chair of the European Ideas Network, said that to scrutinise their own government, it is important that national parliaments are well informed about the European agenda, so they can perform this scrutiny correctly. In this regard, IPEX, as the main platform to obtain information about ongoing European legislation, needs to be improved, and so does rules of procedure of national Parliaments. Also, in order to increase national ownership, a "national trimester" could be introduced before the European Semester.

A brief look at the 2017 YMN activities

Coordinated by **Tom VANDENKENDELARE** MEP, EPP Group's **Young Members Network** gathered members of national Parliaments up to the age of 40 in a number of meetings aimed at strengthening the EPP's policy options both in Brussels and in the Members States.

After a successful 2016, the **EPP Young MP Erasmus Programme** continued in 2017 as well. The EPP Young MP Erasmus is a one-week exchange programme for young MPs from EU member states, from the EPP political family. During this one week programme MPs are offered a unique opportunity to get an insider view of how policy-making in the European Parliament and how the EPP Group works. Participants are hosted by a fellow young MEP with a similar activity profile,



Irish senator Neale RICHMOND welcomed to the EPP Young MP Erasmus Programme

besides that participants also meet EPP group leaders, policy advisers offering an in-depth understanding of European dossiers that match the topics they are working on, based on a tailor-made programme. The aim is to reinforce the link between the daily work of MPs, that often finds its origins in European legislation, and the European level of policy making, as well as to set up participants with a network of fellow young colleagues in the European Parliament. In 2017 a total of 8 MPs have participated in the Programme: Belgium (1), Croatia (2), Ireland (2), Poland (1), Romania (1) and Spain (2). We were happy to host. With very positive feedback from them, the **EPP Young MP Erasmus Programme** will continue also in 2018, with twelve different weeks available for this year.

The EPP ‘**Young Member Network Sessions**’- series continued in 2017 with an event on the Future of Europe organised in Malta on 29th of March 2017 as a side-event of the EPP Congress. Attracting more than 45 young MPs and MEPs the event was a success, having as main speakers Simon BUSUTTIL,



Young Members Network Meeting during the EPP Congress in Malta

president of Partit Nazzjonalista (Malta) and Kyriakos MITSOTAKIS, president of Nea Demokratia (Greece). Simon BUSUTTIL reminded that The EPP has always been the party to give the vision and leadership for Europe. Sixty years ago it was EPP leaders who had the vision and set up the Treaty of Rome. Today we have different sorts of problems and challenges, but we still need the EPP for its vision and for its leadership. Kyriakos MITSOTAKIS underlined that if we really want to push the European Project further we first have to win a series of national battles in our own countries, and eventually build a coalition of people who think the same way and can demonstrate in practice that this tide of populism and nationalism which threatens Europe and not just Europe can actually be contained and defeated.

In 2017, the **Annual Meeting of the EPP Young Members Network** took place in Brussels, on 30 November. Hosted by **Tom VANDENKENDELARE** MEP, Coordinator of the EPP Young Members Network, the event had on the agenda EPP Party’s preparations for the 2019 European Elections and the future of EU financing (see *Newsletter No. 54*).

Interparliamentary Committee Meeting: **Legal migration avenues needed towards Europe**

On 24 January 2018, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs in the European Parliament has organised in Brussels an interparliamentary committee meeting, entitled “**The European Agenda on Migration - What about legal avenues and integration?**”. It was one more opportunity for representatives at EU and national level, as well as academics and members of the civic society to address key issues related to the subject, such as legal avenues for international protection, labour migration and family reunification, and opportunities and challenges of integration.

Dimitris AVRAMOPOULOS, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, said that investing in legal migration and integration is about social cohesion, stability and economics. It also means a shift from crisis-management to a long-term, structural approach to managing migration, with the support for legal avenues and integration of migrants as main pillars.



Dimitris AVRAMOPOULOS, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship at the LIBE ICM

Several speakers indicated the need for a reformed blue card system as an example of legal migration to Europe. **Tsvetan TSVETANOV** MP (GERB, BG), Chair of the Committee on Internal affairs and public order in the Bulgarian parliament, said that the Blue card dossier will give, the opportunity to attract high-quality workers in Europe, capable to bring added-value to the Internal Market, and will help countering the populist discourse on illegal migration flows. **Roberta METSOLA** MEP (MT), Co-Rapporteur on “The situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration”, Chair of the EP Asylum Contact Group, said that revising the Blue card and reunification legislation will help foreseeing the evolution of migration management in the long run and to the way such management can contribute to EU’s economy and demography.

The role of Member States and national parliaments should not be diminished in this regard. **Stephan MAYER** MP (CDU/CSU, DE) underlined that “the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag believes that national sovereignty should take precedence in the area of national employment market.” **Vinko GORENAK** MP (SDS, SI), Member of the Interior, Public Administration and Local Self-Government Committee, said that “we should avoid transforming illegal migration to legal with new European laws.”

Simon BUSUTTIL MP (PN, MT) believes that the migration issue still has a huge grip on the political debate at national level and therefore citizens should be better informed about the importance of opening legal avenues for international protection, starting from the necessary distinction among the categories of entrants. **Edita PFUNDTNER** MP (Most-Híd, SK), Member of the Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities Committee,



Simon BUSUTTIL MP, Member of the Nationalist Party parliamentary group in the Maltese Parliament

tee, and **Éva-Andrea CSÉP** MP (UDMR, RO), Member of the Committee for Labour and Social Protection, underlined the voluntary nature of the regulation proposed, the former adding that it would be better if each Member States could decide on the relocation of migrants. For **Teresa JIMENEZ-BECERRIL** MEP (ES), understanding the root of the problem is key to addressing the phenomenon. It is also important to work towards the return of refugees to their native countries once the factors that have caused them to leave are resolved, considered **Louis FERNÁNDEZ AZNAR** MP (PP, ES), Member of the Committee on internal affairs in the Senate.

Michał BONI MEP (PL), Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, stated that opening up to the countries near the EU could be an answer to the situation on the labour market. “The European legislations should embody the solidarity between Member States, but should also provide solutions in the benefit of refugees and migrants,” said **José Alberto MARTÍN-TOLEDANO** MP (PP, ES), Member of the Committee on Home Affairs in the Congress of deputies.



Michał BONI MEP, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

COSAC:

The future of the European Union and the role of EU macro-regional strategies

For the first time under the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, representatives of European Affairs Committees from national Parliaments of the EU came together in Sofia, on the 21 and 22 January, for new a meeting of the **Chairpersons of COSAC**. The discussions focused on the future of the European Union and the role of EU macro-regional strategies for sustainable development, stability and security.

Mairead McGuinness MEP (IE), Vice-President of the European Parliament, reminded all present that while we try to build the future of the European Union we should never forget the great things achieved by Europe until now. She suggested that we avoid the language used in certain referendum campaigns which did not communicate adequately the many successes



Mairead McGuinness MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament

that the EU has delivered in the interest of the citizens. She reassured that the European Parliament will be constructive in its work together with the Commission and national Parliaments towards better applying the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Next meetings

- EPP Family Meeting preceding the European Parliamentary Week (EPW), 19 February
- Europol Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG), Sofia, 18-19 March
- Young Members Network meeting on agriculture and budget, Brussels, 5 March
- EPP European Affairs Network, Brussels, 5 March
- Interparliamentary Committee Meeting on “The UN Global Compacts on refugees and migrants and the role of Parliaments”, Brussels, 27 February
- Interparliamentary Committee Meeting on “Empowering Women and Girls in Media and Information and Communication Technologies: Key for the future”, Brussels, 8 March



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