Strasbourg Focus - 18/21 May

PLENARY SESSION PRIORITIES – GUE/NGL GROUP IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Agenda on migration — Cornelia Ernst - Germany

The new agenda on migration comes as a major disappointment. Instead of the radical change in paradigm that is long overdue and that we are asking for, the Commission wants to continue its failed policy. The very few new and potentially good things that are in the Commission communication, such as relocation and resettlement, come too late and are too little and too vague. There is no mention of fundamental rights, instead they want to beef up border control even further, this time even bringing in the army. Deaths will increase, not decrease.

Foreign and Security policy — Sabine Lösing - Germany

This debate and these reports have to be seen as a "military wish list" for the Council meeting in June. The reports call for more robust interventions, demand enhanced armament cooperation – including pooling and sharing, to adopt NATO capacity targets for defence spending (min. 2% of GDP) and support the merging of civilian and military research to use civilian capabilities for military purposes. The Tarand/Kukan report looks for possibilities to skim EU funds for military purposes despite Art. 41 (2) TEU and demands the expansion of costs eligible under the ATHENA mechanism, which questions the principal of "costs lie where they fall". This would lead to the automatic financial involvement of each member state in every EU military mission. We reject both reports and have tabled minority reports and amendments on both.

Maternity Leave Directive — Inês Zuber - Portugal

The eventual withdrawal from the legislative process of the draft directive on maternity leave will affect the lives of millions of working mothers who will continue to be discriminated against due to the fact that they have children. It is significant that the European Council is always in tune on cuts in wages and workers' rights but cannot find consensus to strengthen the rights of families and mothers. If, in the EU, there was real concern about the problems of aging and to increase birth rates, if there was real concern about workplace discrimination regarding workers who are pregnant or who are mothers, the Commission would have assumed its responsibilities as mediator and the Council could have easily decided.

Trade in conflict resources — Helmut Scholz - Germany

Warlords in conflict regions finance their weapons by stealing and selling natural resources.Much of this ends up in products used by European consumers. We need to stop this irresponsible trade with a binding regulation that forces any company that places a product on the EU market to prove that it is "conflict-free".The Commission proposes a voluntary approach to this goal. INTA rapporteur Winkler proposes an obligation only for EU-based smelters and refiners. That would affect only twenty companies, and would change nothing for more than eighty per cent of conflict resources brought into trade. Sakharov laureate Mukwege, expert NGOs and more than a hundred bishops called the INTA proposal absolutely insufficient. Based on civil society proposals, we are tabling amendments demanding a binding regulation including for downstream companies, with exceptions only for micro-enterprises.

Turkey — Takis Hadjigeorgiou - Cyprus

We support Turkey's accession and welcome any progress made in the country, first and foremost for the benefit of its people. However, EU-Turkey relations are interlinked with Turkey's political will to solve the Cyprus problem. The election of Mr. Akinci creates some positive prospects concerning the process of reunification. It is up to Turkey now to show whether it is sincere in its intentions and commitment to the reunification process. Within this context, the upcoming resumption of talks on reunification of Cyprus on May 15 (on the basis of the UN parameters for reunification as contained in the Progress Report) is a good starting point for Turkey. We endorse the positive climate that has been created recently in Cyprus and we view it as a step forward.