

interview _____

Doru Franțescu

Policy Director, VoteWatch Europe



In May 2014, European citizens are expected to elect their representatives in the European Parliament. With more at stake than before, the revitalisation of the citizens' interest in the European project is not only highly desirable, but also necessary as more and more European citizens are sceptical about the work of the European Union institutions. In your opinion, which factors led to such developments?

You correctly noticed that over the last few years the citizens' level of interest and trust in the European project seems to have been decreasing, as shown by the Eurobarometres, the decreasing turnout in the EU elections and also by the recent electoral results in several Member States, which show a strengthening of populist political forces.

Unfortunately, the activity of the EU institutions does not generate enough interest among the public and leads to little debate at national level. The European decision-making process is a technical one and for that reason it is often perceived as lacking transparency. Also, the local media tend to provide little coverage to the impact of the activity of our European representatives.

However, contrary to the perceived trend, the European institutions have, during the past few years, taken steps that are meant to increase the transparency level of the decision making process. These changes are not obvious for the public and the European institutions have... **p.2**

event _____

European Union and its Neighbourhood

Annual Conference and the Fourth Edition of EIR Excellence Awards

The European Institute of Romania organized in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 12 December 2013, the annual conference entitled *European Union and its Neighbourhood*. The event was honoured by the presence of representatives of the Presidential Administration, of the Parliament, of the Government of Romania and of embassies of EU member states in Bucharest, as well as experts and analysts from Romania and from abroad, researchers specialized in European affairs and in foreign policy ... **p.5**



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“The European decision-making process is a technical one and, for that reason, it is often perceived as lacking transparency”

... therefore the difficult task to promote and to explain in a clear manner the policies and positions adopted at European level. A coherent communication strategy, conducted at both inter-institutional level and EU - member state level, is essential so that this information can reach the public.

VoteWatch Europe, the organization that you co-founded, monitors the legislative process of the EU institutions and offers public access to detailed information on the activity of the European Members of the Parliament. In view of the activity you undertake, which are the most important steps taken in order to increase the transparency of the EU?

First of all, the activity of the MEPs is public. The EP website offers unrestricted access to the reports, questions and discourses of all MEPs. The website also offers live streaming of the plenary sessions, while older recordings are available as well. Moreover, the MEPs voting attendance lists are made public by the EP.

VoteWatch Europe uses the information made available by the European Parliament, for analysing the positions of each EP group on the existing reports (legislative or non-legislative).

However, the VoteWatch team can only analyse certain recorded votes (*roll call votes*). For greater transparency of the decision-making process, we hope that the EP will introduce roll-call votes for all final votes, regardless of the nature of the reports (currently this only applies to legislative reports). We also want the decision making process in the Parliamentary Committees to be made more transparent through the adoption of roll-call votes.

Why is it important that the European citizens are up-to date with the activity of the EU institutions? How do European policies impact on the daily lives of Romanian citizens, for example?

More than 70% of national legislation originates in legislation taken at EU level. The impact of the EU policies is therefore quite considerable, the European Union being responsible with decision making in fields such as monetary and fiscal policy, environmental policy or agricultural policy. These are policy fields of great interest for all EU citizens, including Romanians.

Even if they are part of different political groups, according to the political ideology they support, the MEPs often vote along the same line when it comes to national interests. For example, when the EP votes on topics such as structural funds

or freedom of movement in the EU, the Romanian MEPs tend to vote alike, regardless of their political family.

A recent example in this regard is the adoption of an agricultural legislative package that consists of all agricultural policies to be developed by the EU in the next 7 years. The Government of Romania, as well as our MEPs (regardless of their political affiliations), have opted for generous subsidies for the farmers, as well as for a fairer division of funds among Member States, as Eastern European farmers are currently disadvantaged. The compromise reached provides that these payments be balanced by 2020, which is in the best interest of our country.

If pessimist scenarios regarding the increase of the number of Eurosceptics in the EP turn out to be true, we can expect the adoption of legislative projects that would be less favourable for Romania. Is the “anti-European” danger that serious? How will Romania’s interests be affected if new extremist groups will appear in the EP?

A new composition of the EP will trigger a change of policy trajectory at the European level. If predictions turn out to be true, the number of anti-EU parties represented in the EP will considerably grow. A new Eurosceptic group which will promote a more aggressive anti-EU policy might indeed be formed.

In this case, the EP might face significant legislative bottlenecks. This is not in the best interest of Romania, as radical parties generally promote exclusivist policies, which might hinder the adoption of anti-discriminatory and EU integration policies in the Strasbourg plenary meetings.

However, the force of the populist parties should not be overrated. VoteWatch analysis shows that the impact of the political groups on the legislation is not determined only by their size, but also by the intra-group cohesion (maintaining a certain political discipline in the voting process) and the capacity of building coalitions with other political groups. So far, the radical groups in the EP scored much lower than the more centrist groups on these indicators. We should keep in mind that radical parties promote narrow national interests in the first place and will, most likely, encounter problems in adopting common positions.

What else can we expect from the future EU elections?

We hear more and more often about the advantages and disadvantages of Eurozone membership in the states that

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were most affected by the economic crisis. Other states such as UK or the Netherlands are weighting the effects of EU competencies revision. All the pros and cons discussions of this type generate public debates and higher engagement of national civic actors. The novelty is actually the increased presence of European topics in the national debates.

There will be high stakes in the 2014 EU elections also because, for the first time in the history of these elections, the EP will have an active role in appointing the new European Commission President. The main European parties are already

preparing to nominate their candidates for this position. The likelihood of nominating the candidate of the political party that will get the highest percentage of votes in the elections is being considered. The aim is to create a stronger bond between the citizens and Brussels, by increasing the legitimacy of the European leaders, the transparency of the nomination process, and the engagement of the constituency in this process.

Interview by Alexandra Pop,
research assistant in Brussels, former EIR intern

opinion

From Marshall McLuhan to Social Media

Marshall McLuhan, a popular philosopher of communication theory who belonged to the Toronto School (alongside Harold Innis, Eric A. Havelock, Edmund Snow Carpenter or Northrop Frye), is known for foreseeing the birth of the World Wide Web and for bringing a great contribution to the study of media. There is no point in mentioning how much the communication between people and especially mass media have evolved throughout the years, yet it is of utmost importance to draw attention to the impact of social media. The famous statement of Marshall McLuhan was that “the medium is the message”, thus shedding light upon the too often ignored influence of media and technology upon society.

Until the end of the 20th century, the printing press and the TV and radio were the main pillars of information and communication that people relied on. Today, however, we are witnessing the emergence of social media and the advent of online publications in the digital age, which completely replaces the already obsolete forms of media. Russell Neuman, the highly acclaimed John Derby Evans Professor of Media Technology at the University of Michigan, believes that “new media” will “alter the meaning of geographic distance, allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication, provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication, provide opportunities for interactive communication and allow forms of communications that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect”.¹

It is interesting to point out that an overwhelming number of people sign in online first thing in the morning. SOASTA, a mobile testing firm, claimed that a total of 84% of people check an app as soon as they get up, 45% look up the weather and close to this percentage (more precisely 40%) choose to sign on to Facebook². Therefore, since more and more people adhere to the “web”, it is true to state that social media is no longer just a trend, but a lifestyle.

Alongside the emergence of social media, an opportunity has been opened for those who want to express their thoughts and share their ideas. The Internet is a perfect *Concilium*, in which people can participate in a “well informed, non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social structures”.³ Furthermore, on social networks nowadays, it has become more and more popular to spread personal stories and to engage in a different kind of communication that would otherwise not exist without the help of new media. The digital technologies signal a radical shift and pave the way for boundaries of all types to be broken (linguistic, geographical, with respect to time zones), messages, ideas and opinions to be conveyed in a blink of an eye (even subjects that in some countries can be banned by government) and, ultimately, the freedom of speech to be encouraged.

What is more, on Facebook, for instance, there is a visible and an ongoing gravitation to become part of various groups, whether they comprise information regarding students’ associations, faculty courses, local communities and even movies and music



¹ http://www.festoonmedia.com/whitepapers/images/New_Media_Branding.pdf, accessed on 12 November 2013

² http://www.socialnetworkingwatch.com/all_social_networking_statistics/, accessed on 4 November 2013

³ Ibidem

bands. The sense of belonging plays, therefore, an important part even in the virtual world. Furthermore, job descriptions, admissions to universities or call for papers for various academic simulations and even invitations to summer camps and youth exchange programs can be posted online. For instance, students can easily choose and get news from organizations, associations or universities.

Social media can also represent an important connection between citizens and institutions. The European Parliament, for instance, has an active account on Facebook and manages to post on a regular basis announcements that are of growing interest to any EU citizen. They focus on various subjects, ranging from youth unemployment, protecting people's personal data, the financial management of the European Union, EU's treatment of crisis countries, ways of dealing with organized crime, corruption and money laundering, the future of defense, communication, culture and art to protection of marine ecosystems, the improvement of trade opportunities and even the background of successful movies which competed for the LUX Film Prize. Citizens can, therefore, be more drawn to posts from the European Parliament if they receive them in their News Feed on Facebook or if, whilst tweeting, they stumble upon videos such as the one entitled "The EU institutions explained by their Presidents".⁴

Another point worth mentioning in this discussion is that this type of media favours the conversation between users and PR professionals and creates the beneficial environment for a vast array of businesses to promote their products and services. A study carried out by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, looking at the Fortune Magazine's Fortune 500 list, revealed that of the total of 500 companies „77 percent keep active Twitter accounts, 70 percent have a Facebook page, and 69 percent have YouTube accounts.”⁵

Did McLuhan see all this coming? Can we predict how social media will look like in the future? Now that's a question worth answering...

Ștefania Iuliana Popa, intern

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publications

EU Migration Policy - Implications for the Labour Market



The Europe Direct Information Centre - Bucharest (EDIC) is pleased to announce the publication of the brochure *EU migration policy - implications for the labour market*. The brochure, edited in Romanian, is a result of the EDIC project, implemented by the European Institute of Romania, aiming to facilitate the access to information on institutions, policies and priorities of the European Union, the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

The publication presents a range of useful information for those interested to know and benefit from the facilities of the European Union in the exercise of one of its fundamental freedoms: free movement of persons. This paper is meant both for European citizens, whose journeys on the Union's labour market reflect their mobility, and for other groups of people interested in working in the Member States, which acquire a migrant status.

Migration, EU's policy and programmes in the field are briefly explained and illustrated. Thus, readers can find out what the migration is about and why do we need it, as they are able to discover information about EU's migration policy or the Stockholm Programme and its objective: to ensure, by 2014, the rights and obligations comparable to those of EU citizens to third-country nationals legally residing in the Member States. Moreover, freedom of movement, establishment of residence and access to the Schengen area are clarified and differentiated.

⁴ https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/media, accessed on 8 November 2013

⁵ http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-57595401-93/fortune-500-companies-give-social-media-a-thumbs-up/, accessed on 20 November 2013

Those interested will find in the pages of the booklet matters of general significance, European, or others specific to Member States, with regard to migration flows and facilities for migrants, labour market issues in the EU and the Member States. The last pages are reserved to presenting immigration in Romania and informing the Romanian citizens concerned with working in other EU member states.

The brochure includes information sources and various statistical data, European and Member States portals, to meet the need of knowledge of people in a position to move and work in the EU.

For more details, please visit the EIR website, at: <http://www.ier.ro/europe-direct-bucure%C8%99ti/publica%C5%A3ii.html>

Iulian Oneașcă

event

European Union and its Neighbourhood

Annual Conference and the Fourth Edition of EIR Excellence Awards

The European Institute of Romania organized in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 12 December 2013, the annual conference entitled *European Union and its Neighbourhood*. The event was honoured by the presence of representatives of the Presidential Administration, of the Parliament, of the Government of Romania and of embassies of EU member states in Bucharest, as well as experts and analysts from Romania and from abroad, researchers specialized in European affairs and in foreign policy.

The conference tackled subjects such as: the recent Summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius; its consequences in the context of political and economic evolutions of the Eastern partners; the future of this cooperation initiative; possible roadmaps for the Republic of Moldova and Georgia following the initialling of the Association Agreements, visa liberalisation in the region, steps to take in preparing the future Summit in 2015.

Providing an opportunity to discuss about the European Neighbourhood Policy, deemed to be an example of strategic comprehensive foreign policy, the conference pointed to the need for an analytic and realistic approach of this policy. The fact that the Republic of Moldova and Georgia initialled the Association Agreements/DCFTA with the EU, despite the pressure proves, according to the speakers, their determination in the negotiation process. Hopefully, the Association Agreement will be signed as soon as possible and its ratification will follow in a timely manner. Romania wishes to be the first state to ratify the Agreement. Furthermore, an important step remains, namely the visa liberalisation with the Republic of Moldova in 2014. Whereas Ukraine did not sign the Association Agreement, the speakers emphasized that the process was temporarily suspended, the participants expressing their hope that Ukraine will take the appropriate decisions for the continuation of their European path.



Moreover, the event focused on the role of regional cooperation in promoting stability, security and economic prosperity, as well as European values in the Western Balkans. Considering the emphasis placed by EU's enlargement strategy on the good neighbourhood relations as essential element of the Stabilisation and Association process, a current theme is the Romanian Presidency of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process (SEEC) and the coordination of its agenda with the rotating Presidency of the EU Council. Romania's priorities in the South-East Europe cooperation process are based on internal stability, rule of law, fundamental rights and freedom and good neighbourhood relations. As regards the SEEC Presidency of 2013-2014, Romania wishes to achieve tangible results in fields such as: justice and home affairs, economy, finance, defence, science and research, education and energy. The speakers approached the subject from the perspective of European values, noting a bipolarity in the Eastern area of the continent, as well as a geopolitical competition in the area. From a historical perspective, the Balkan area was perceived as a region of instability and an unsafe place on account of conflicts and political unrest in the states of this area. EU is expected to attempt to collaborate more intensively in the field of fight against organized crime through various institutions, services, organizations or agencies. At the same time, the cooperation between EU and Western Balkans states could be a successful one and the Union's role and influence in the area should be seen in a *soft power* perspective.

The ceremony for granting the EIR Excellence Awards has been held during the last session of the conference. Mrs. **Gabriela Drăgan**, the Director General of EIR, has underlined the initiative for granting these awards, wishing to promote the spirit and European values, the event marking the 125th anniversary of the birth of Jean Monnet, renowned architect of the European construction. The winners of the fourth edition are: Ms. **Natalia Gherman**, a strong diplomatic personality from the Republic of Moldova, holding the positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Vice-Prime-Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Mr. **Leonard Orban**, one of the key figures in Romania's European integration, the first Romanian European Commissioner, as well as former Minister of European Affairs and, last but not least, Mr. **Vasile Pușcaș**, currently a PhD Professor at "Babes-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca who is noted for his negotiator and diplomatic skills in supporting Romania to achieve, in the year of 2007, full membership of the European Union, His Excellency being at that time Minister-Delegate and Chief Negotiator with the European Union.

For more details about the event, please consult: <http://www.ier.ro/en/news/conference-european-union-and-its-neighbourhood.html>

Oana Mocanu

Economic and Trade Forum China – Central and Eastern Europe (Bucharest, 26 November 2013)



The Economic and Trade Forum *China - Central and Eastern Europe* was held at the Palace of Parliament, being organized by the Government of Romania on the same day of the reunion of Heads of Government from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as China.

Aside from high government officials, the forum was attended by over 1500 businesspeople, of which about 300 Chinese, 800 Romanians and over 400 from other countries in the region (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, FYROM, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary).

The Forum was built around a plenary session and five workshops focused on main areas of cooperation between China and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), namely: infrastructure/transport, energy, agriculture, IT&C and tourism. The main goal of the Forum was to promote economic and trade relations between participating countries and China by identifying new opportunities for cooperation, as well as specific projects focusing on fields such as: infrastructure, transport, energy, agriculture, IT&C tourism, banking and financial sector.

The Romanian representatives stressed the fact that both CEE and China have to deal with common challenges: how to create a sustainable economy; how to capitalize creativity; how to ensure equal opportunities for the younger generation etc. China needs reliable friends and policies which, on a long term and to a global level, can involve a stronger Europe. However, in order to increase its role as a global player, Europe should allow other CEE countries represented at the Forum to join the community club.

There are concerns related to the Chinese "offensive", yet the presence of Chinese investments in Romania does not pose any threats, but indicates the gap between CEE and rich Western states. A fractured Europe - this is, in fact, the real risk. More investments are a net plus for the EU. The Romanian representatives expressed their hope that, after the Vilnius Summit, the EU will embark on a new project: the "New Silk Road". China, Russia, India and the USA already have such a strategy. Romania and CEE must become the entry gates between Eurasia and the *Transatlantic Free Trade Area (TAFTA)*. "Romania as a bridge between East and West" must develop into a new political strategy.

A Committee¹ will be established at the governmental level in order to manage the strategic investments, more precisely to ensure the smooth functioning of the major planned investments. Romania should focus on developing its logistic, industrial, as well as energy potential (natural gas reserves; electricity and renewable energy sources; a regional hub for services and technical expertise in the gas and oil explorations field).

¹ <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gm4dmmrgha/decizia-nr-481-2013-privind-infiintarea-comitetului-interministerial-pentru-monitorizarea-indeplinirii-angajamentelor-asumate-de-romania-cu-ocazia-reuniunii-seftilor-de-guvern-ai-republicii-populare-ch>

The Chinese representatives at the Forum supported the need for consolidating a balanced development in Europe, emphasizing the similar state of development of the two sides (namely China and CEE). The Chinese - CEE cooperation will also enrich the one between EU and China, as CEE countries were among the first to have established diplomatic relations with the new China, the economic ties passing the financial crisis test. The economic development prospects in the region are very good and on the rise, a cooperation between our regions being beneficial for both sides. As developed economies show signs of improvement, the emerging economies are subject to pressure and this is why measures against economic protectionism are imposed.

China wishes to have a balanced trade by importing high quality agricultural products and by encouraging Chinese tourism in the region, being ready to strengthen the cooperation with CEE in areas such as infrastructure, nuclear energy etc., all these leading to massive investments. China's development will not be sustainable, unless it is based on cooperation with other countries.

For more information, please visit:

<http://gov.ro/en/news/economic-and-trade-forum-china-central-and-eastern-european-countries-bucharest-november-26-2013>

<http://www.mae.ro/node/23446>

<http://invest.gov.ro/about/>

Mihai Sebe

in focus

The Eastern Partnership Summit (Vilnius, November 2013)



Source: <http://www.eu2013.lt>

On 29 November 2013, the European Union's Association Agreements with Georgia and the Republic of Moldova were initialled and other important cooperation agreements between the European Union and Eastern Partnership countries were signed at the 3rd Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. Important EU leaders such as José Manuel Barroso, Herman Van Rompuy, Catherine Ashton, together with the Heads of State or Government of the 28 EU Member States were present alongside the leaders of the six Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).

In Vilnius, important agreements were signed, such as: a framework Agreement with Georgia on participation in EU crisis management operations; a visa facilitation Agreement with Azerbaijan and a civil aviation Agreement with Ukraine.

Notable progress was achieved by the partner states since the previous 2011 Warsaw Summit. Measures taken by the Eastern Partnership countries represent a reconfirmation of their commitment to implement reforms in order to accelerate political association and economic integration. Association Agreements and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA's) were initialled with the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, following the recent finalisation of negotiations. EU representatives took note of the Ukrainian Government's decision to suspend temporarily preparations for the signature of the Association Agreement and DCFTA. During the press conference, the President of the European Council emphasized¹ that the EU was still open for ratification of the agreements, provided that Ukraine was willing to do so and the benchmarks set out were fulfilled. EU leaders also took note of the Ukrainian people's option in favour of political association and economic integration with the EU.

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/139764.pdf

Visa liberalisation remains a top priority for the next Summit in 2015, as this is a core objective of the Eastern Partnership. As far as the Republic of Moldova is concerned, major steps have been taken in this direction with the proposal to waive the visa requirements for Moldovan citizens holding a biometric passport. With the agreement with Azerbaijan signed at the Summit, there are now five countries (out of the six Eastern Partners) that have or will soon have a visa facilitation agreement with the EU. Also, after a long period of frozen relations, talks have been resumed with Belarus regarding a visa facilitation agreement. Participants at the Summit welcomed Azerbaijan's progress in negotiations on the Association Agreement and EU officials declared they stood ready to launch negotiations on a DCFTA following Azerbaijan's accession to the World Trade Organization.

Energy security has been a major topic on the Summit agenda, as network developments and gradual integration of the Eastern partners on the EU's internal energy market are issues that will be addressed with greater interest in the future.

During the press conference, Mr Van Rompuy mentioned there could be no trilateral negotiations in the EU's bilateral relations with any of its partners, as that would impact that state's sovereignty. Moreover, Mr Van Rompuy indicated that economic integration was not a zero sum game, as this would certainly bring benefits to Russia as well. Regarding Ukraine's decision to suspend the signature of the Association Agreement, Mrs Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of Lithuania, stated "No external pressure or threats can prevent sovereign states from pursuing the path of their choice"².

At the press conference, EU representatives wished to offer guarantees in regard to the benefits of the partnership, offering to this extent the concrete example of waiving visa requirements for Moldovan citizens. Furthermore, participants reaffirmed the importance they attached to the common principles of the Eastern Partnership, to strengthening the efficiency and independence of the judiciary, to tackling



Source: <http://www.eu2013.lt>

corruption and implementing public administration reform, and by this managing to build a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased interactions and exchanges.

To conclude, it can be said that the Vilnius reunion represents a moment of differentiation between the countries of the Eastern Partnership, as some, such as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, have taken important steps forward, while Ukraine stopped before taking the final leap. For the rest of the partners, the road is still very long, as many issues need to be addressed before any realistic talks about an economic integration are possible. Furthermore, while trying to fulfil the benchmarks set out, the Eastern Partners are still very vulnerable to pressures exerted by Russia and to internal struggles for power. What the Vilnius Summit proved is that significant changes may occur anytime.

Vladimir Deşliu, intern

EP

EP Strasbourg Session: 9 – 12 December 2013

European MEPs show solidarity with the Ukrainian protesters who rally for a European future

The results of the Vilnius Summit and the future of the Eastern Partnership, especially as regards Ukraine, were presented in the statement of Vice-president of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton. The statement was supported by the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, and followed by the common debate on existing external instruments and the establishment of a stability instrument. MEPs agreed that the partnership has to ensure the freedom and the expression of creativity of citizens of the partner states. They affirmed that EU remains united and keeps the door open for future evolutions. Debates pointed out the need for an explicit position of the EU institutions as regards the Ukraine issue, especially taking into account the attitude of the Ukrainian people, in order to ensure the right of expression, in a democratic way: "We should be



Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/

² <http://www.eu2013.lt/en/news/pressreleases/strategic-eastern-partnership-agreements-signed-in-vilnius->

helping the people of Ukraine who express in a clear way that they want to go to the European Union, that they accepted the western values it stands for. This is our moral duty.”¹ Some of the MEPs still deemed the summit to be a success, considering the Agreements initialled with the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

The MEPs voted a resolution on the future of the Eastern Partnership, saying they regret the decision of the Ukrainian Government to temporarily suspend the preparations for signing the Association Agreement and the DCFTA between EU and Ukraine; they express their solidarity with Ukrainians who protest peacefully and support Ukraine’s political association and economic integration with the EU; they also condemn the excessive and unjustified use of force by police against protesters.

Preparations for the European Council meeting of 19 - 20 December was the subject of a priority debate which provided an opportunity for MEPs to express different points of view regarding European citizens’ concerns about the cost of living, the need for competitiveness and financial efficiency. The priorities of the December EU Summit were debated in the presence of the President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso and of the Lithuanian Vice-president for European Affairs, Vytautas Leškevičius. The agenda of the Bruxelles Summit will feature the Common Security and Defence Policy, instruments for solving the banking crisis, the Economic Growth and Employment Pact, migration, energy and EU enlargement. MEPs also debated the distant perspective of a European army, of an industry in the field, and also the near future perspective of improving interoperability, of means of defence.

The session had two common debates on *fishing*: EU’s policy in the field and fishing zones in the North-East Atlantic. It is shown in a report of the Fishing Committee that, pursuant to TFEU, in order to promote sustainable development, environment protection requirements have to be applied particularly as regards the conservation of the stocks of deep sea species.

Another common debate on *Strategies for Roma integration* started from reports presented by the Committee for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and by the Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. The debate focused on the *Progress in the implementation of national strategies for Roma integration*.

Two programs were presented: “Justice 2014 - 2020” and “Rights and citizenship” for 2014 - 2020, as well as a report on *EU’s Civil Protection Mechanism*.

Further current issues debated in the EP Plenary Session were *capitalizing on the potential of cloud computing in Europe*; the 2011 Convention of the International Labour Organisation on *decent work for domestic workers*; *the mandatory automatic exchange of information* in the field of taxation; *EP relations with institutions representing national governments*. Unemployment forecasts for the Euro zone show an increase up to 12.2% in 2013 and a slight decrease in 2014, but there are significant differences between Euro zone countries as regards the unemployment rates, which range between 4.3% and 25%, as shown in the *2012 Annual Report of the Central European Bank* which was subject to debate. MEPs adopted a resolution on this subject, providing suggestions for the boost to be given to the real economy and to small enterprises to help them overcome the crisis.

For further details, please visit: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ro/>

Mariana Bara

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131210STO30406/html/Debate-MEPs-call-on-EU-to-support-Ukrainians-demonstrating-for-European-future>



Merry Christmas
and
a Happy New Year!



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