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Debriefing of the January 2024 plenary session

15-18 January 2024

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Hungary: Frozen funds

In December, the European Commission caved into Viktor Orbán's threats to derail EU support for Ukraine with the release of €10.2 billion of previously frozen funding to Hungary. Prime Minister Orbán then proceeded to block the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework including EU financial support to Kyiv, at the European Council Summit. The blame for this disastrous situation, allowing Orbán to hold EU decisions to ransom at each Council Summit, rests entirely at the feet of the Member State governments and their refusal to act on the democratic backsliding in Hungary. The Commission is failing in its duty as guardian of the treaties to defend European values and the rule of law by caving into Hungary.

It should be clear that Viktor Orbán's voting rights in the Council are being abused for his personal interests, to serve his autocratic ambitions, which puts European democracy in danger. The Greens/EFA Group are calling on the Council to adopt recommendations under Article 7(1) and solve the issue of the

Hungarian presidency; for the Commission not to release funding to Hungary under the RRF and Conditionality Regulation, and to trigger a new infringement procedure. The Greens have long been fighting for Article 7(2), which would remove voting rights in the Council needs unanimity of member states to work. The Belgian Presidency needs to put its efforts into building this unanimity, starting by adopting Council recommendations towards Hungary under Article 7(1).

Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, Greens/EFA MEP and European Parliament Rapporteur on the situation in Hungary, commented:

"Once again, the Parliament is having to step in as the Commission and Council seem happy to give a carte blanche to Viktor Orbán to continue his bullying tactics and attacks on the rule of law. Last year, this Parliament recognised that Hungary is no longer a democracy. Initiating legal proceedings against the Commission is an extreme tactic but an essential one, given what's happening in Hungary."

- Text adopted
- Press release
- Social media

Israel/Gaza conflict

At the request of Greens/EFA, Members of the European Parliament debated and voted on a resolution on the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. This debate focused on the need to reach a ceasefire and the risks of regional escalation. The Greens/EFA Group calls for a permanent ceasefire, the release of all hostages and demands that journalists and aid workers working in the region be protected in accordance with international law. The EU must use all the tools at its disposal to bring an end to this conflict and alleviate the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Jordi Solé MEP, EFA-President, and First Vice-President of the Greens/EFA who is negotiating the resolution on behalf of the Greens/EFA, commented:

"We Greens/EFA call for a permanent ceasefire. A permanent ceasefire is crucial for bringing an end to this human suffering and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza after more than 100 days of war and with 23,000 people killed, amongst them at least 10,000 children, entire families, journalists, doctors, teachers, and aid workers from international agencies. We strongly condemn both the disproportionate response by the Israeli military and the brutal attacks committed by Hamas against Israeli civilians on 7th October and urge for all hostages to be released."

- Text adopted
- Press release
- Social media

Fiscal rules and economic governance

MEPs voted on Parliament's trilogue mandate for the reform of the EU's fiscal rules. The proposed reform is overly focused on debt reduction and will lead to a return of austerity, at a time when we need to boost investment. The obsession with debt-reduction will force governments to choose between investments and social spending with enormous societal and political consequences.

Inflexible, one-size-fits-all budget rules will not only impede investment and cut social support to those who need it, they will destroy the political legitimacy of EU economic policy. The Greens/EFA call for rules that maintain debt sustainability instead of elevating an ideological objective to reduce debts above more pressing policy priorities such as the green transition and war on our doorstep. The Conservative, Liberal and even many Social Democratic politicians have failed to learn the lessons of the financial crisis.

Philippe Lamberts MEP, President of the Greens/EFA Group, and negotiator in the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, commented:

“The reform, as it stands, will make it impossible for Member States to invest in the kind of projects and social spending that are essential to get through the multiple crises we face. The climate emergency, carbon neutrality, green industrial revolution, war in Ukraine: All this requires public authorities to invest a minimum of two percent of GDP every year for the next 25 years. It is inevitable that part of these investments will be financed by borrowing.”

- Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs report
- Press release
- Social media

Support needed for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems to support sustainable fisheries

There were several major debates on the future of the marine environment on Thursday, one of which on an EU Action Plan that foresees better protection from destructive fishing practices. The Greens/EFA Group highlights the benefits of marine protected areas both for biodiversity and for EU fishers that rely on healthy oceans for their activity.

Grace O'Sullivan MEP, Greens/EFA Member of the Fisheries Committee, commented:

"The EU made a legal commitment to end overfishing by 2020. Member States have failed to achieve that and they are now facing the repercussions, as citizens and civil society groups are now taking them to court over the failure to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. In response, the Council and Commission tried to legalise overfishing through the back door by removing an important safeguard to prevent the collapse of fish stocks. I am proud to say today that the European Parliament successfully stood its ground and backed our fishing communities and our oceans."

- Text adopted - Impact of illegal fishing on food security – the role of the European Union
- Text adopted - Implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy and future perspectives
- Text adopted - EU Action Plan: protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries
- Text adopted - Implementation of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation in fisheries and aquaculture - Regulation (EU) 1379/2013
- Press release
- Social media

Plastic pellets and the impact on micro plastic pollution in the maritime and coastal habitats

MEPs, together with the Commission, debated the recent ecological disaster off the coast of Galicia, with plastic pellets reaching Portugal, Spain, France, and the Netherlands. The Greens/EFA Group calls for urgent measures to be taken to mitigate the impact on the environment and the marine fauna and ensure that international maritime transport is included in the on-going EU negotiations on measures to reduce the release of microplastics in the environment.

- Press release
- Social media

Empowering consumers in the green transition

The Greens/EFA Group has long demanded that consumers be given reliable information to make more sustainable choices when buying products and services. MEPs voted on the Commission's proposal giving consumers stronger rights to ensure they can make more informed choices. This will help protect them against greenwashing and other unfair commercial practices, by banning things such as false green claims on the environmental performances of products, claims based solely on carbon offsetting, or premature obsolescence. This legislation is an important step towards more long-lasting products.

- Text adopted
- Social media

Fight against the resurgence of neo-fascism in Europe

The Greens/EFA condemn in the strongest terms the rise of neo-fascist and right wing-extremist movements in the EU and elsewhere. Neo-fascists parades in Italy and the newly revealed plan of German right-wing extremist party Alternative for Germany plan to deport people in massive scale show the growing and very concrete threat of democracy we need to firmly stand up against.

- Press release
- Social media

F-Gases and ozone depleting substances

Following December's trilogue negotiations, MEPs debated and voted on the phase out of Ozone depleting gases, which create the hole in the stratospheric ozone layer, and of fluorinated gases (f-gases), including those in air conditioners and heat pumps. The Greens/EFA welcome in particular the revised f-gas Regulation, which will accelerate the transition towards natural alternatives, benefitting the climate, environment, health, and EU industrial competitiveness.

- Text adopted
- Press release
- Social media

Adding hate crime and hate speech to the list of EU crimes

MEPs voted largely for adding hate crimes and hate speech to the list of EU crimes. The decision is needed to enable the EU co-legislators to establish minimum standards concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions for hate speech and hate crimes, and to protect human dignity, prevent harm, ensure equality, and combat hatred and intolerance, irrespective of the motivation.

- Text adopted
- Press release

Programme and priorities for the Belgian Council Presidency

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo of Belgium presented the priorities of the Belgian Council Presidency. The Greens/EFA urged the Belgian Prime Minister to ensure the way is clear for the last major files of this mandate, including the MFF, directive on platform workers, funding for Ukraine, and more.

Gender dimension of the cost-of-living crisis

This parliamentary report considers gendered poverty in the EU and calls on the European Commission to address the cost of living and energy crises facing the public and in particular the way women are disproportionately affected.

- Text adopted

Green/EFA motions for resolutions

- The ongoing persecution of Falun Gong in China, notably the case of Mr Ding Yuande
- The humanitarian situation in Gaza, the need to reach a ceasefire and the risks of regional escalation
- The threat of famine following the spread of conflict in Sudan
- Tajikistan: state repression against the independent media

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Next issue of Greens/EFA Plenary debriefing: 9 February 2024

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