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Debriefing of the September plenary session

13-16 September 2021

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State of the European Union

On Wednesday, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, delivered the annual State of the European Union address to the European Parliament. The speech touched upon several topics that are high priorities for the Greens/EFA. In response to President Von der Leyen's address, the Greens/EFA Group has called for faster action on climate protection. Ahead of the debate the Greens/EFA also sent a letter to President Von der Leyen and Commissioner Frans Timmermans calling for a massive step up in the pace of concrete climate action.

Philippe Lamberts, President of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, made the following comments:

"We welcome the announcement by President Von der Leyen of a new proposal for a forced labour import ban, which we have long called for. This will be a useful tool for the EU to put pressure on China and others to end the use of forced labour. However, the EU as a truly geopolitical player must lead by example. We will

only be able to defend and promote the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law abroad if we respect them within our borders. We must work as one Union if we want to exert influence outside our borders. The Afghanistan disaster has once again shown the limits of a global Europe.

"We must not accept that the people of Afghanistan are now defenceless in the face of the Taliban's extremist ideology. The EU must support the admission of refugees, humanitarian visas, the rapid distribution of people across the EU and a long-term ban on deportations to Afghanistan. A lack of a strategic vision must not end in the loss of human lives."

Ska Keller, President of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, made the following comments:

"We call on Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Commissioner Frans Timmermans to step up the pace on climate protection and make the EU the global climate champion. The planet cannot wait for crucial measures like the phase out of coal to be implemented only after 2030. President Ursula von der Leyen must launch a socially just climate transition for the credibility of the Green Deal. In the Common Agricultural Policy, the EU has failed to live up to its climate obligations. The Green Deal's promise of an agricultural transformation will not be fulfilled if EU member states are not committed to climate protection, animal welfare and the protection of biodiversity.

"The question is not what climate protection costs. The question is what it will cost us to miss the opportunity for climate protection to be the driver of our economy and competitiveness."

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- [Letter to Ursula von der Leyen and Frans Timmermans](#)
- [Plenary speech by co-president Philippe Lamberts](#)
- [Plenary speech by Jordi Solé](#)
- [Plenary speech by Anna Cavanazzi](#)
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- [Plenary speech by Sylwia Spurek](#)
- [Plenary speech by Sven Giegold](#)

New proposal for a ban on products made with forced labour

In her State of the European Union address on Wednesday, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced a new proposal for a forced labour import ban. This is something the Greens/EFA Group has long called for and we welcome this initiative as a concrete step towards stopping goods based on exploitation from being sold to European consumers.

Philippe Lamberts, President of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, made the following comment:

"We welcome the announcement by President Von der Leyen of a new proposal for a forced labour import ban, which we have long called for. This will be a useful tool for the EU to put pressure on China and others to end the use of forced labour."

Anna Cavazzini MEP, substitute member of the International Trade committee, comments:

"This historic announcement comes after a lot of pressure from the European Parliament and civil society. It is high time that we are able to stop goods based on exploitation from being sold to European consumers. It's great to finally see strong action from the EU against forced labour."

- [Press release](#)
 - [Heidi Hautala twitter](#)
 - [Anna Cavazzini twitter](#)
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Situation in Afghanistan - Debate and vote

On Tuesday, MEPs debated the situation in Afghanistan and on Thursday they voted in favour of a joint resolution. The Greens/EFA Group have been calling for a coordinated European approach to evacuate those in need of protection, to issue humanitarian visas and to enhance resettlement as well as the application of the Temporary Protection Mechanism. Across the EU, cities have shown readiness to host people fleeing. Humanitarian aid needs to increase, including for third countries hosting refugees.

With the Taliban now controlling large parts of Afghanistan, millions of people have been displaced and a humanitarian crisis is unfolding quickly. It is urgent that the European Union ensures the protection of people at risk, including women and girls, human rights defenders, LGBTI+ people, religious and ethnic minorities, journalists, writers, academics and artists.

Tineke Strik MEP, Greens/EFA spokesperson on Afghanistan in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, comments:

"The EU has a responsibility to the people of Afghanistan. The EU must coordinate further evacuations of people who worked for us or who are at imminent risk of Taliban persecution. The EU needs to ensure the granting of humanitarian visas for those arriving in a neighbouring country. We call on the Commission and Member states to increase and ensure access for humanitarian aid to the Afghan people and to redirect developing assistance to non-governmental actors."

"All EU countries must take responsibility for refugees. It's time to step up resettlement, facilitate family reunification and prepare for the arrival of Afghan refugees at our border. They must receive immediate protection, even if their request was already rejected before. The Temporary Protection Directive was designed to equally divide refugees between Member States and the Commission and Council must now finally make use of it."

- [Press release](#)
- [Plenary speech by MEP Tineke Strik](#)
- [Plenary speech by Hannah Neumann](#)
- [Plenary speech by Jordi Solé](#)
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Identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU - Debate and vote

On Thursday, the European Parliament adopted a ground-breaking report on identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU. The co-rapporteur for the report was Diana Riba i Giner MEP, from the Greens/EFA Group. In order to put an end to gender-based violence, this report calls for gender-based violence to be added to the list of cross-border crimes in the EU. This would provide the EU with the legal basis for a directive that also tackles aspects linked to criminal law.

1 in 3 women in the European Union has experienced physical and/or sexual violence, 1 in 2 has experienced sexual harassment, 1 in 20 has been raped, 1 in 5 has experienced stalking and 95% of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are women.

Diana Riba i Giner MEP, Greens/EFA member of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee and co-rapporteur, comments:

"This is a historic moment in the fight against gender-based violence in the EU. In adopting this report, the Parliament has taken the first step towards having the tools to ensure common legal definitions and standards to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence, including violence against LGBTIQ people."

"By adding gender-based violence as a new EU crime in the Treaties, the Commission will have the capacity of proposing a holistic and ambitious directive on gender-based violence. The directive would not only act in the fields of prevention, support and training, in line with the spirit of the Istanbul Convention, but it would be much more comprehensive, addressing the criminal aspect of gender violence."

- [Press release](#)
- [Plenary speech by Diana Riba i Giner](#)
- [Plenary speech by Gwendoline Delbos-Colfield](#)
- [Plenary speech by Sylwia Spurek](#)
- [Plenary speech by Terry Reintke](#)
- [Plenary speech by Alice Kuhnke](#)
- [Tweet by Saskia Bricmont](#)
- [Tweet by Piernicola Pedicini](#)
- [Adopted text](#)

Media freedom and further deterioration of the Rule of law in Poland - Council and commission statements

This week, the European Parliament debated and adopted a resolution on the deterioration of the situation in Poland around the rule of law and media freedom. The Greens/EFA welcomed the European Commission's recent action regarding disciplinary law for judges, but the same proactivity should be shown with other rule of law, fundamental rights and media freedom issues. As regards the Council, we insist it should prioritise Article 7 hearings and be prepared to address recommendations to Poland.

A cross-party action with Terry Reintke and other Greens/EFA MEPs took place outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Terry Reintke MEP, Greens/EFA shadow rapporteur on the resolution and member of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee, comments:

“This media law is just the latest step in the Polish government’s playbook of how to turn a democracy into an autocratic state. First the government went after minorities, then the institutions of the State and now they’re going after the media. The Commission’s recent infringement actions against the Polish government are welcome but drops in the ocean when it comes to the dismantling of democracies in Europe.

“The European Commission must ensure the correct implementation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and ensure transparency around media ownership and provide space for truly independent media to flourish. The European Commission needs to use the tools at its disposal and start infringement procedures in situations where Member States are not upholding standards around media pluralism, independence of the media and freedom of speech. The Article 7 process needs to move forwards in the Council if member states are serious about protecting the rule of law and media freedom.”

- [Press release](#)
- [Plenary speech by Terry Reintke](#)
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Presentation of the Fit for 55 package after the publication of the IPCC report and Natural disasters in Europe - Commission and council statements and debate

In the words of the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, the latest IPCC report is "Code Red for humanity". Although the Fit for 55 package is welcome, certain important measures will not be in place until after 2030, such as the phasing out of free allowances in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), the phase-out of combustion engines by 2035 at the earliest, or a full EU minimum tax on kerosene and maritime fuel by 2032. During this debate, the Green/EFA Group called for a quicker introduction of the proposed measures, in addition to further measures which can deliver significant emission reductions at a faster pace.

Bas Eickhout, Vice-President of the Greens/EFA Group and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, comments:

“Floods, forest fires, heat waves and droughts are making the terrible consequences of climate change clear for everyone. The Fit for 55 package is welcomed but it needs to go further if we are to avoid ever worsening effects. It’s clear that the EU needs to up its ambition on renewables, on energy efficiency, and on ending the era of fossil fuels.

“We need fast and effective adaptation measures. We need the coal phase-out by 2030 and an end to fossil fuel subsidies. The surplus certificates from CO2 emissions trading must be taken out of emissions trading. We call on Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Commissioner Frans Timmermans to make the EU the international climate champion ahead of the UN climate conference.”

- [Press release](#)
- [Letter to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Vice-President Frans Timmermans calling for a massive step up in the pace of concrete climate action](#)
- [Plenary speech by Ska Keller](#)

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Strengthening transparency and integrity in the EU institutions by setting up an independent EU ethics body - Vote

After long negotiations, the European Parliament finally voted on the creation of an independent Ethics Body to stop conflicts of interest and corruption in the European institutions. This has been an initiative of the Greens/EFA, and Daniel Freund MEP is the appointed rapporteur in the European Parliament.

The existing rules to prevent politicians from becoming lobbyists are poorly enforced, and multiple cases of unethical behaviour and 'revolving doors' have shaken the trust of European citizens in the EU institutions. The Greens/EFA Group believes an independent ethics body can help to address some of the worst practices.

Daniel Freund MEP, Greens/EFA rapporteur and Member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO), comments:

"The EU's ethics system must be built on a solid foundation if we are to build trust in the European project. The current set up of self-regulation has failed to stop the numerous recent cases of conflicts of interest and revolving doors. It's clear that we urgently need an independent body to oversee ethics issues inside the EU institutions. EU officials must be accountable to the public. An independent EU ethics body will improve the EU's credibility in the eyes of the public and prevent scandals which have plagued Europe's institutions for too long."

"This is our chance to win back the trust that has been eroded through the current fragmented and poorly enforced rules. Officials working in the European institutions must be held to the highest standards in order to ensure democracy and transparency. All MEPs who support greater democratic accountability should support this report."

- [Press release](#)
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Human and animal health: Criteria for the designation of antimicrobials to be reserved for the treatment of certain infections in humans - (Vote on an Objection to a Delegated Act)

The veto of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee initiated by the Greens/EFA Group against the EU Commission's legal act on the Veterinary Medicines Regulation - which sets criteria for the use of reserve antibiotics in animal husbandry - did not get a majority. Despite strong support for the Greens/EFA attempt at reconciling the interests of human health and the care of sick animals, a majority of MEPs voted in the final vote to exclude any antibiotic reserved for humans in the future from use in veterinary medicine. The Greens/EFA compromise proposal called on the European Commission to adopt the criteria of the World Health Organisation and to allow a legislative proposal for the individual treatment of sick animals with reserve antibiotics if other antibiotics are no longer effective. The European Commission must present a list of antibiotics reserved for humans by 28 January 2022.

Martin Häusling, Greens/EFA Group shadow rapporteur on the EU veterinary medicines regulation, comments:

"The opportunity for a win-win solution for human health and the care of sick animals has been missed. Human health and the care of individual sick animals continue to be played off against each other. The basic problem of the mass administration of reserve antibiotics in animal fattening remains untouched. It is to be feared that the EU Commission will only put very few substances on the final list of reserve antibiotics and that the majority of antibiotics will continue to be used in factory farming. The problem of the development of resistance in veterinary medicine does not lie in the supply of sick animals with antibiotics that are basically reserved for humans; the problem is the massive use of antibiotics in animal fattening. The Christian Democrats first supported the Greens/EFA demands and then did a U-turn in the final vote. The backdown does a disservice to human and animal welfare."

- [Press release](#)

Report on the implementation of EU requirements for exchange of tax information: progress, lessons learnt and obstacles to overcome - Debate and vote

On Thursday, Members of the European Parliament voted on a report by Sven Giegold, a Greens/EFA MEP, that assesses the implementation of EU rules regarding the exchange of tax information between Member States. It is the first implementation report the European Parliament has ever put forward in the area of economic and monetary policy. The European Directive on Administrative Cooperation in the Field of Taxation (DAC) has been in place since 2011 and has since been extended six times. While progress has been made, the report identifies significant shortcomings with regard to the effective implementation of EU tax law in the Member States.

Sven Giegold MEP, Greens/EFA rapporteur and member of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, comments:

"Billions of euros in tax revenue are lost every year due to tax evasion, tax avoidance and tax fraud. Citizens have a right to know what Member States are doing about it."

"Good progress has been made in EU tax law. Yet, EU Member States are not doing enough to make tax cooperation work in practice. Failure to properly apply existing tax rules leads to increasing inequality and creates risks for fraud, corruption and tax evasion and avoidance. There is still a lot of information about income and assets that is not systematically shared across borders and the information that is shared is underused and of mixed quality."

"Unfortunately, our findings are incomplete as the Council and the Commission refused to give the Parliament access to the information needed to fully assess the effective implementation of this Directive. The"

Commission effectively obstructed the Parliament's right and responsibility to control the Commission's work as enshrined in the Treaties. Therefore, it is key that the Parliament voted with a large majority: The European Parliament must use all legal means at its disposal to get access to the documents needed to complete its work, including by going to court."

- [Press release](#)
- [Plenary speech by Sven Giegold](#)
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Contact person



Katy Cadwallader

Communications assistant



Helena Hellstrom

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