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Interview



Richard Corbett, Member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, on the Lisbon Treaty:

"Better functioning institutions means better law-making in the areas that matter most to citizens: tackling climate change, working together to cope with the financial crisis, and governing our single market"

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> **Electronic communications: Socialists strike the right balance between copyrights, regulation and accessibility**

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On Wednesday 6th May the European Parliament adopted the so-called "Telecom package" aimed at reforming the existing European electronic communications framework. This is a step forward in enhancing the consumer rights and their access to electronic communications networks. Important amendments were put forward by the Socialists with the view to increase consumers' rights.

The Socialist members in the European Parliament have supported a set of measures that should increase access to electronic communications for European consumers. Among others, the PES Group insisted on making it easier for consumers to change service providers (e.g. mobile telephone operators) and on the traceability of the calls made to the emergency number 112. Moreover, appropriate services to provide information on missing children under the number 116000 should be set up at a national level. Disabled end users of networks should benefit from the same access to services as other end users by using appropriate technical means. More privacy measures are added, such as the "opt in" for cookies allowing for an explicit enabling of this specific application that can



provide info on the favourite web pages of a user, his/hers online shopping habits, etc. instead of ticking the "disabled" mode.

The Trautmann report focused on two interrelated aspects: coherence of the investments in new communication infrastructure with the principles of the internal market and their respect of consumers' rights. To this end, a monitoring body - the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) - will be set up to ensure that the legal framework is applied consistently in the 27 Member States. The key point of the report with regard to the regulation of the electronic communications market is the introduction of co-regulation in relation to distribution and management of radio frequencies. In the digital era, national borders are irrelevant in determining the optimal spectrum use. Moreover, joint responsibility of the Member States coordinated by BEREC should contribute to the reduction of the digital gap, encouraging media and cultural pluralism, increasing social and territorial cohesion and interoperability of services.

An important step forward was achieved by the Socialist Rapporteur with regard to the balance between copyright and Internet accessibility. End users are not the sole guilty party for illegal downloading, but also the companies that provide the necessary software. Moreover, the denial of access to Internet could only be made following the decision of a competent court and cannot be arbitrarily decided by operators.

"We have introduced consistent provisions for end users of electronic communications. It is important to make internet access a right and not a privilege, thus reducing the digital gap throughout Europe. Internet is a space of freedom of expression, but not lawless and without boundaries. With this piece of legislation, we set reasonable limits, respectful of the fundamental rights of the users" said Catherine Trautmann, Socialist Rapporteur on electronics communications networks and services.

> Socialists debate a cooperative security project for Europe and its neighbourhood

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On the 28th of April, the European Socialists gathered prominent representatives of the Russian, Ukrainian and European Parliament as well as academics at a seminar on the security systems in Europe. The conference was a follow-up of two other events, held in Sofia and Bucharest, searching for new effective solutions at the Eastern European borders.

A few days before the official launch of the Eastern Partnership involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and potentially Belarus the Socialists recalled the importance of an inclusive approach towards the Eastern neighbours and the urgency of setting up a cooperative structure for security and stability meant to build trust and foster sustainable relations among all the parties involved.



The participants were unanimous to recognise the necessity of finding a common denominator in their approach to security in the wider Europe. Stability must be achieved by giving up the "colliding blocks" approach rooted in the Cold War period and reforming international security-related organisations - not only military organisations such as NATO but also other Bretton Woods institutions (UN, IMF, the World Bank) and OSCE. The Medvedev-Sarkozy proposal to create a Euro-Atlantic security architecture was taken as a basis for discussion on the new collaborative model.

In a multipolar world, Europe should play the role of initiator in the setting up of the new security model. We cannot imagine a common space of cooperative security in Europe and its eastern neighbourhood without active involvement of Russia. Moreover, it is important to devise functional structures for cooperation that maintain the interest for Europe and the European model alive and to take into consideration the emergence of new sub-regions of key importance for European security, such as the Black Sea region.

"During the last years the PES Group was the only political force to put forward a proposal for a cooperative structure for security and stability. The main strength of our initiative is a balanced approach towards all stakeholders, including Russia, Ukraine and Turkey. Our understanding of security is broader than military security. The future of international organisations such as NATO must be reconsidered", concluded Jan Marinus Wiersma, Vice-President of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

> Socialists' initiative to support families with newborn children staggered by the right wing

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On Wednesday 6th May the Parliament debated on the directive aimed at improving the health and safety of pregnant workers and young mothers and therefore promoting gender equality on the labour market. But the conservative forces at the last minute blocked the report and referred it back to the competent committee. The Socialists were dismayed by the position of the right against the introduction of the compulsory paternity leave and the extension of the maternity leave.



In the debate the Socialists pointed to the insufficient character of the current regulations that do not offer sufficient guarantees for young mothers to enable them to combine infant care with job security and career prospects. The PES Group promotes the extension of the maternity leave to up to 20 weeks including a compulsory paternity leave of 2 weeks leave which would put parents on an equal footing.

In addition to the Commission's proposal on the mandatory character of the prolonged maternity leave and the introduction of the paternity leave which wouldn't fall under the scope of the revised directive, Socialists insisted that women should not be penalised for having children, both in the work place or at home. Therefore, the Commission's proposal to prolong the maternity leave to 18 weeks, of which 6 weeks on full paid and mandatory after birth, should not only reinforce the obligation for employers to facilitate the return to the work place, but also should be complemented by at least 2 weeks of paternity leave.

The right has used its old arguments against the extended maternity leave and flexible work arrangements claiming that it would block the access of young women to the labour market and increase the pay gap. Young women would become more expensive than man and not hireable. The conservatives also wanted to reduce the Socialist proposal on maternity leave to maximum of 16 weeks (only 4 being mandatory) without making the link with the rampant fall in the birth rate that is sweeping across Europe.

"The European Parliament has missed a chance to improve the situation of women willing to combine work and family life. Clearly the right does not have the same concept of society. They have to understand the importance of shared parental responsibility. We will consider this issue as our priority in the new legislature", said Edite Estrella, the Socialist Rapporteur.

> Interview with Richard Corbett on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty

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The European Parliament debated during the last session of the 6th term on a series of reports aimed at clarifying the impact of the progressive provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon on the institutional balance and the European citizens. Among others, the treaty provides for the introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative, which is meant to strengthen democracy and

citizens' rights in Europe. Richard Corbett, Socialist MEP who plays a key role in the institutional reform of the Parliament, shared his views on the subject.



What are the major changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon and what is the foreseeable impact on the lives of the European citizens?

The major reforms in the Lisbon Treaty would, if ratified, make the EU more democratically accountable. All European legislation would be subject to co-decision between directly elected MEPs Parliament and government ministers in the Council - a double democratic safeguard. At the same time, it would make the EU institutions more efficient.

It would also increase the role of national parliaments by giving them a direct say in the development of legislative proposals, and more powers to shape the position taken by their ministers in negotiations.

The impact of this on the peoples of Europe will be subtle but real. Better functioning institutions means better law-making in the areas that matter most to citizens: tackling climate change, working together to cope with the financial crisis, and governing our single market.

The Lisbon treaty provides, among others, for the introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)? What is the purpose of this initiative and how would it work in practice?

The Citizens' Initiative will mean that 1 million citizens will be able to submit proposals to the European Commission where they consider that European legislation is required.

This will strengthen citizens' rights of participation in the European political process and be additional to the existing right to petition the Parliament. In practice, it could be used to promote a campaign - such as legislation on anti-disability discrimination.

Although the mechanics of organising the citizens' initiative have not been finalised, I have some concerns that the proposals in the Kaufmann report on this issue could lead to the citizens' initiative process becoming bogged down or hampered by onerous bureaucratic requirements (like Member States having to check every signature and pre-certification by the Commission that it is legal). I feel that it is important to make sure that the citizens' initiative is easy to understand and use.

Should the Lisbon treaty be adopted, what new tools does the PES Group have at its disposal to better serve the citizen?

As one of the main political groups in a Parliament that is the only EU institution that is directly elected by the peoples of Europe, we will be working in a Parliament that will be more influential - a co-legislator of equal standing with Council on all European legislation. We will use that legislative power to strengthen consumer rights, environmental standards, fair trade, employment rights and dealing with multinational corporations, so that our common market is not a free-for-all left to unregulated market forces, but operates fairly and effectively.

We will also be responsible for electing the President of Commission, and will keep our existing powers to hold the Commission to account.

The Lisbon Treaty is not about increasing the policy areas of the EU, but is rather a treaty to strengthen parliamentary democracy. In an EU of 500 million people, it is vital that our institutions are as transparent, accessible and democratically accountable as possible.

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Kindly note that this is the last edition of our newsletter in this parliamentary term. Publishing shall resume in September 2009.