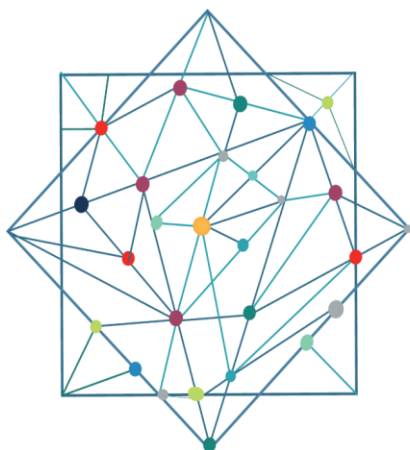


EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT GREECE

34th National Selection Conference

Thessaloniki, 16-19/12/2016

Committee Topics



AFCO | Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Brexit followed by Itexit, Nexit, Frexit and Auxit; how should the EU respond to calls for EU membership referenda in its Member States whilst respecting national sovereignty?

On 23rd June 2016, the citizens of the United Kingdom voted in favour of their country leaving the EU with a majority of 52%. This result was swiftly followed by calls in other Member States to allow for a public vote on the EU membership of their country. These movements are unofficially named after a combination of the country's name and the word exit; Brexit for Britain, Italexit for Italy, Nexit for the Netherlands, Frexit for France, Auxit for Austria and so on. For the most part, they are supported by leaders of anti-EU and far-right parties, however polls conducted on various Member States reveal a growing mistrust towards the EU and, in most cases, a close call between citizens who think that holding such a referendum is necessary or not.

In light of these movements which may threaten the unity and political stability of the EU in the future, the Committee will have to examine whether and how the EU and its institutions should react; should such calls for EU membership referenda be considered as a national matter or would the extent of these movements justify an EU response? The Committee will also have to answer to if and how the EU should respond in the case that these calls become official proposals and are transposed into plans for EU membership referenda in the future.

ECON | Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

A new Europe; with the uncertainty of the financial impact of the imminent Brexit both for the United Kingdom and the EU, how can the EU restructure its financial sector in order to anticipate the potential negative effects whilst taking into consideration new opportunities for EU-based businesses as a result of Brexit?

As the UK government itself has not yet triggered the formal process for withdrawal from the EU and negotiations, which may take up to two years, have not yet begun, the impact of Brexit for the EU and the UK is still absolutely uncertain. However, the leave vote was met with a troubling aftermath; the pound hit its lowest level against the dollar since the 1980s and also lost ground to the euro. With the question of whether the UK will leave the single market as a result of leaving the EU still open, the EU's integrated financial market may be in peril; in fact, it is speculated that leading banks, which up until now could offer financial services to companies and people across the EU from their London base, are planning to relocate from the UK to a rival European city as early as January 2017. On the other hand, it is also argued that Brexit may present new opportunities for the remaining EU Member States, who can attract businesses seeking for a new EU base, while they can also move forward with plans for a deeper financial integration that the UK has long kept off the table, such as the first steps towards a capital market union.

The Committee will have to evaluate the current ambiguous situation and propose an action plan in order to secure the EU's financial market from the potential adverse effects of Brexit; consequently, the role of Member States' governments and a common EU stance on the issue have to be discussed. Lastly, the Committee will also examine the extent to which Brexit may present new opportunities for the EU's financial market and, if so, how Member States can take advantage of these in way that is beneficial for the EU as a whole.

EMPL I | Committee on Employment and Social Affairs I

With the OECD 2016 indicators revealing that EU countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain champion in social and pension spending but still remain on the higher end of income inequality, how can Member States design a sustainable social welfare system that directs social benefits to those who need them the most?

The so-called European social model dictates that economic growth and social progress should go hand-in-hand. Indeed social welfare comprises benefits with social purposes targeted at certain vulnerable groups of a country's population, such as people with disabilities, unemployed, low-income households or the elderly. The model of a social welfare state is mainly based on the redistribution of income and resources, from people who are more affluent or able to the poorer or less able. Relevant data released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2016 reveal that while many EU Member States spend large sums for social welfare purposes income inequality in these same countries persists. This reality will not be sustainable for long; in the era of fiscal austerity, social spending is likely to be heavily influenced by budget cuts and thus the gap between the rich and the poor will deepen, while demographic changes bring out new demands for public social expenditure.

Taking into account the importance of a functioning and fair social welfare state, the Committee is asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the current social welfare systems followed by EU Member States. Consequently, the Committee will have to provide solutions for a welfare system that succeeds in helping vulnerable groups and redistribute wealth and resources in a fair way, but without imposing an unbearable burden on the already struggling economies of many Member States.

EMPL II | Committee on Employment and Social Affairs II

Removing barriers; how can Member States achieve the effective implementation of the 'European Disability Strategy 2010-2020' and ensure the inclusion and active participation of people with disabilities in society?

Eighty million people in the EU, accounting for one-sixth of the population, have disabilities ranging from mild to severe. These people are often prevented from taking part in society and the economy due to environmental and attitudinal barriers. In addition, their rate of poverty is 70% higher than the EU average. In 2010, the European Commission adopted a 10-year Strategy aiming to create a barrier-free Europe that ensures the full economic and social participation of people with disabilities. This Strategy is also linked with the Commission's 'Europe 2020 Strategy' towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Committee will have to look at the 'European Disability Strategy 2010-2020', which sets out a framework for European and national actions in 8 main areas. The Committee will then have to evaluate the progress of its implementation so far and propose further measures and plans of action towards its full implementation, while taking into account the specific needs and diverse situation of men, women and children with various disabilities throughout the EU.

ENVI I | Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety I

Crossing a border for healthcare; how can Member States safeguard patients' rights and work towards removing all barriers in cross-border healthcare across the EU?

Within the EU single market, Member States' healthcare systems have become increasingly interconnected namely through the free movement of patients and health professionals combined with other factors which are raising citizens' expectations for the quality of healthcare in the EU. The Directive 2001/24/EU codifies the patients' rights relating to cross-border healthcare, recognising the right to receive medical treatment in another EU Member State under the main principle that patients should be reimbursed for the cost of their treatment as if it were received in their own country. However, patients may still face limitations such as the level of reimbursement, the need for prior authorisation, Member States' limitations for patient inflow and the possibility of the patient covering other costs associated with their treatment.

The Committee will have to examine and evaluate the current procedure through which patients can receive healthcare in another Member State under the Directive 2001/24/EU. They will then have to identify areas of further action in order to eliminate all existing limitation to cross-border healthcare and take advantage of the possibilities for an improved quality of healthcare for all patients within the EU.

ENVI II | Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety II

Towards a circular economy; with around 88 million tonnes of food wasted annually in the EU and the associated costs estimated at 143 billion euros, what further actions can the EU take in order to prevent food waste and strengthen the sustainability of the food system?

Food waste refers to food that is fit for human consumption but is not consumed because it is spoiled, is left to spoil or is discarded by retailers and consumers, e.g. they have purchased too much or because it does not meet their aesthetic standards. However, an efficient food production and consumption system can have a significant economic impact and also lower its environmental impact, as it reduces the amount of resources used to produce food. Furthermore, a sustainable food production and consumption system is linked to the EU's goal to develop a circular economy that lengthens each product's lifecycle and ensures the maximum value and use of all raw materials, products and waste.

The Committee will have to examine the current actions taken on an EU level to prevent food waste and propose further measures to be adopted towards a common EU approach on the prevention of food waste and the promotion of a circular model regarding the production and consumption of food.

FEMM | Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

'My uterus, my opinion' ; with recent attempts to pass an 'abortion ban' law in Poland failing due to public upheaval and in light of the vast divergences in abortion laws throughout the EU, what common principles can Member States agree on regarding the protection of sexual and reproductive rights of women?

In early October 2016, the Polish government moved forward with plans to adopt a stricter law on abortion; the massive protests that soon followed lead to the withdrawal of the proposal. Poland was already a European country with one of the most very restrictive abortion laws. In general, abortion is legal in nearly all European countries, with the exception of Malta and, to a certain extent, Ireland, however there is a wide variation in the restrictions under which abortion is permitted across EU Member States. Consequently, there are also varying approaches towards women's sexual and reproductive rights, which include access to healthcare services, contraception and comprehensive health information and sexual education.

With the above issues having many legal, moral, medical, religious and other implications that the Committee will have to take into account, its members will have to outline a common EU approach towards women's health and reproductive rights that promotes gender equality and the health and wellbeing of women.

INTA | Committee on International Trade

In light of the EU's accession to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora in 2015, what further actions should the EU take to prevent the illegal trafficking of wildlife across international borders?

Wildlife trafficking has become one of the most profitable criminal activities worldwide, with devastating effects for biodiversity and a negative impact on the rule of law due to its close links with corruption. As a global actor, the EU has an important role to play in addressing this traffic as Europe is currently a destination market, a hub for trafficking in transit to other regions, as well as, for some species, the source region for illegal trade. The EU acceded to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) in 2015 which protects over 35,000 species. Consequently, the EU has adopted an Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking for the period 2016-2020 in order to prevent and combat wildlife trafficking within the EU and strengthen the EU's role in the fight against these illegal activities globally.

The Committee will have to identify measures to be taken for the effective implementation of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking as well as further actions which can assist in reducing the use of legal and illegal transportation supply chains for wildlife smuggling in the global trade market as well as within the EU.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do; with the French 'burkini ban' ruled to be violating fundamental human rights by domestic courts, how should the EU ensure that its Member States respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity towards the integration of Muslims in their society?

During the summer of 2016, a considerable number of local authorities imposed a ban on wearing 'burkinis' in French beaches, which was strictly enforced by police. The rationale for such a move invoked the rule of law and the values of the French people, to which all migrants living in the country must conform. Domestic courts soon ruled that the ban was a breach of fundamental freedoms; however the persistence of French authorities is just an example of how Muslim culture and religion is not yet accepted as a part of European society. This is also evident in comments made by the Czech President, Milos Zeman, in early 2016; *"Let them have their culture in their countries and not take it to Europe, otherwise it will end up like Cologne. (...) Integration is possible with cultures that are similar"*. In 2010, the European Union was home to about 13 million Muslim migrants, a number which has rapidly increased in the latest years, particularly since in 2015 Europe faced a vast wave of Muslim refugees now living in EU countries. These constant flows have contributed to changes in the ethnic and religious compositions of Member States' population.

The growing number of Muslim migrants in EU countries highlights acute dilemmas about how best to respond to the plurality of religious and ethical beliefs in a multicultural EU society, notions of equal citizenship and freedom of thought, religion and expression. The Committee will have to propose further action to be taken in order to ensure the acceptance and effective integration of Muslims, as part of a diverse European society. Lastly, the Committee will have to identify the EU's role in the integration of Muslim migrants and, on a more general note, in ensuring that Member States' respect diversity and the fundamental freedoms of individuals living under their "roofs".

Securing Europe's external borders; with the newly established 'European Border and Coast Guard' becoming fully operational in early 2017, how can the EU take advantage of its enhanced powers in order to effectively respond to the security and migration challenges at the continent's external border?

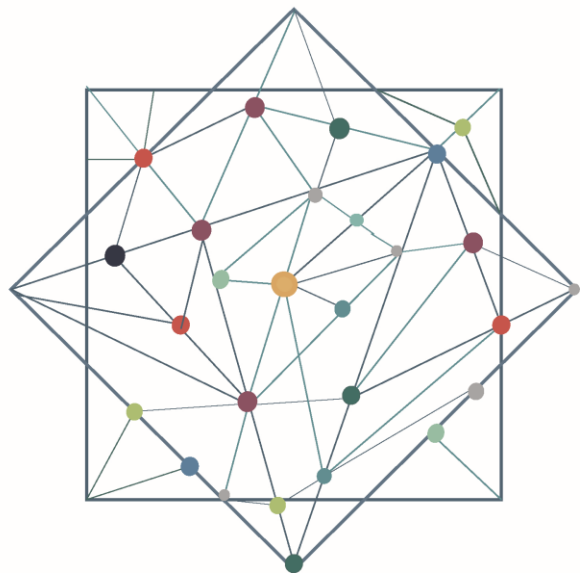
The new European Border and Coast Guard began its activities in October 2016; as a replacement to Frontex, it operates for the security and protection of the Schengen area's external borders. The creation of a new border guard comes at a time when migration flows towards the Schengen external borders have put significant pressure on many Member States, while the vulnerability of these borders threatens security within the Schengen area. The European Border and Coast Guard will follow in the footsteps of Frontex, but has been awarded expanded powers, more personnel and resources to be used for an integrated border management in cooperation with national authorities.

The Committee will have to explore how the EU can take advantage of these new abilities in order to coordinate and effectively manage its external border control. It will also have to consider how this new Border and Coast Guard can deal with the increasing migration flows in a more effective way than its predecessor and tackle security challenges in a way that the absence of internal borders within the Schengen area will not be disrupted.

In search of the golden ratio:
balancing the needs of the social welfare with the
progress of economy

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