



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 2 September 2014

12787/14

PE 318
INST 394
JUR 594

NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: Partial summary of the meeting of the **Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)** of the European Parliament, held in Brussels on 2 September 2014

The AFCO meeting, chaired by Ms HÜBNER (EPP, PL), covered the following main agenda items:

4. Coordinators' recommendations

The Chair presented the coordinators' recommendations:

- To organise two workshops this year: one on AFCO's future activities (in November) and one on a new European electoral law (in December);
- To continue working on the written questions for the Commissioners-designate;
- To launch a discussion on the work of the AFCO committee and to identify the major issues it should address.

5. General Budget for the European Union for the 2015 financial year

Ms HÜBNER (EPP, PL), the rapporteur for the opinion, briefly outlined the main points in her draft opinion on the BUDG report on the 2015 budget:

- The procedure for the adoption of the 2015 budget had been severely delayed;
- More transparency and openness is needed in the Council, since it adopts its position on the draft budget by written procedure;
- It is regrettable that the Council made further cuts to Heading 3 on Security and Citizenship;

- Adequate funding is required for projects relating to citizens' empowerment and involvement and projects relating to participatory democracy.

Mr LEINEN (DE, S&D) regretted the cut in funding for the involvement of citizens and spoke of the difficulties in implementing the European Citizens' Initiative. On this last point Ms HÜBNER suggested that the matter could be put to the Commissioner-designate at the upcoming hearing.

Mr MACH (EFD, CZ) did not support the causal link - suggested in the opinion - between citizens' lack of knowledge of the EU and the low turnout at European elections. He therefore objected to any calls to increase the budget to better inform citizens of the impact of the EU.

Ms REDING (EPP, LU) shared her experience in dealing with funding during her time as commissioner. She suggested that the way forward, particularly when dealing with funding cuts, was to focus funds on a small number of projects and policies rather than dispersing resources over various policies.

During the vote, the amendments to the draft opinion, all tabled by Mr MESSERSCHMIDT (ECR, DK), were largely rejected. His most notable amendments included:

- calling for the gradual closure of the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee (AM 9);
- ensuring that MEP allowances are replaced by a system of reimbursement of expenditure and that all MEP claims are individually published (AM 7);
- calling for the institutions to act upon the Court of Auditors' negative comments on the EU budget (AM 8);
- launching a reflection on whether the deeper centralisation of power in Brussels reflects citizens' true preferences (AM 1), and
- calling for an evaluation of the expenditure of political parties for activities to promote participation in European political life (AM 5).

➤ The draft opinion was adopted, with 17 votes in favour and 3 against.

6. Preparation for the hearing of the Commissioner-designate

The Chair did not address this point further, having already briefly covered it when discussing the coordinators' recommendations.

7. Any other business

The Chair gave the floor to Ms SPINELLI (GUE-NGL, IT) who presented the discussions of the informal meeting of Ministers for European Affairs held in Italy on 28-29 August. Ms SPINELLI underlined her general impression that while Ministers were concerned with the crisis of confidence in the EU, they had no clear idea as to how to improve the situation. In addition, in relation to economic policy, she perceived some unwillingness to make further changes. She was also critical of Ministers' apparent reluctance to move away from the recently-established Strategic Agenda, arguing that the latter was a "straight-jacket" that the Council could use to restrict the Commission and the EP.

In relation to the Council, Ms SPINELLI reported that there was general consensus to improve the work of the GAC, and to reduce the general fragmentation within the Council. However, she regretted that the EP was to be excluded from the Friends of the Presidency Group which will consider options to improve the functioning of the EU system.

At the meeting, Ms SPINELLI urged ministers to adopt a more flexible approach with regard to the Strategic Agenda and called for greater transparency and citizens' involvement. Finally, Ms SPINELLI regretted that the conclusions of the informal meeting did not include a number of topics, including policies with regard to tax avoidance and data protection.

The Chair closed the discussion by commenting on the fact that despite the EP not being involved in the Friends of the Presidency group, the committee was always free to ask the Presidency to debrief it on the latest developments and discussions.

8. Next meetings

- 6 October 2014, 3 - 6.30pm
- 7 October 2014, 9 - 12.30pm