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European Parliament President Martin Schulz will mark Europe Day on Wednesday, 9 May, by addressing the House on the state of the European Union and laying out his vision for the future. The debate starts at 15.00. Political group leaders will also take the floor.

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With EU help, regional airports could do much more to boost local economies and ease air traffic congestion at key hubs, say MEPs in a resolution to be voted on Thursday. Ground and air transport networks should be better integrated to make smaller airports more competitive and attractive to travellers, says the draft.

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Some 200 seafarers are being held by pirates who continue to hijack humanitarian aid, merchant and fishing vessels for ransom. The attacks occur mainly off the Somali coast and in the Western Indian Ocean. MEPs will vote on Thursday on a resolution urging the EU foreign policy High Representative to secure the release of the hostages and vessels and support the creation of an international piracy tribunal.

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Parliament debates and votes on Thursday on 43 reports concerning the 2010 accounts of EU institutions and agencies, as part of the EU's annual discharge (approval) procedure. The Budgetary Control Committee wants the House to postpone granting discharge to the European medicines, food safety and environment agencies, as well as the Council of the EU. It has approved the accounts of 39 agencies and institutions.

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As the age of having to deal with Arab dictators and oligarchs is "happily coming to an end", EU trade and investment policy in southern Mediterranean countries should strive to promote their economic progress and transition to democracy, says a draft resolution to be voted on Thursday.

Anti-fraud vetting of Member States' spending of EU funds 9

The spending of EU funds by Member States must be monitored more rigorously, says a draft resolution to be voted on Thursday. Reported cases of fraud have been rising in many Member States, although this may reflect better reporting, rather than a rise in fraud cases. However, as some Member States have yet to upgrade their reporting systems, MEPs may also call on the Commission to step up the legal requirements for them to do so.

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Clearer rules are needed to protect not only the victims of cross-border defamation, but also journalists accused of it, says a resolution to be voted on Thursday.

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MEPs set to favour strict rules for dangerous chemical exports 12

Strict controls should be maintained when exporting dangerous chemicals outside the EU, according to draft legislation to be voted on Thursday. MEPs want to ensure a proposed update to "prior informed consent" rules will not compromise importing countries' interests in terms of health and environment.

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Further information:

- Final draft agenda
- EP Live
- EuroparlTV
- Press conferences and other events
- EP Audiovisual website

Europe Day address by President Schulz

European Parliament President Martin Schulz will mark Europe Day on Wednesday, 9 May, by addressing the House on the state of the European Union and laying out his vision for the future. The debate starts at 15.00. Political group leaders will also take the floor.

Procedure: Statement by the EP President
Debate: Wednesday 9 May
Press conference: tbc

Further information:

- EP President website

New deal to cut mobile roaming prices, including data services

The cost of using mobile phones, smart phones and tablets when travelling within the EU will fall sharply from 1 July this year, under a provisional agreement between MEPs and national governments to be voted by Parliament on Thursday.

The new rules will extend EU price caps on cross-border phone calls, which have been in force since 2007, to data services such as email and web browsing for the first time and will also further reduce the cost of voice calls.

Under pressure from MEPs, the cost of using data services will be capped at 70 Euro cents per megabyte from 1 July 2012 and will then fall in stages to 45 cents in 2013 and 20 cents on 1 July 2014. There is currently no limit to the prices operators can charge for mobile data services.

New retail caps on voice calls will reduce the cost of a one-minute call to 29 cents from 1 July 2012 and 19 cents from July 2014, down from the current maximum of 35 cents. Text messages will also be cheaper, falling from the current maximum price of 11 cents to 9 cents on 1 July this year and 6 cents on 1 July 2014.

In addition, customers will have the option, from 1 July 2014, of buying their domestic and their roaming services separately, from different operators, if they wish, while keeping the same phone number. They will not be charged for switching providers and their home country provider will be obliged to inform them of this right.

Procedure: Co-decision (1st reading)
Debate: Wednesday 9 May
Vote: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Link to the consolidated text:
- Roaming - Questions and Answers
- Press release on deal with Council (28.03.2012):
- Press release on committee vote (28.02.2012):
- Profile of rapporteur Angelika Niebler (EPP, DE):
- Legislative Observatory file:

MEPs to call on the EU to help regional airports to boost local economies

With EU help, regional airports could do much more to boost local economies and ease air traffic congestion at key hubs, say MEPs in a resolution to be voted on Thursday. Ground and air transport networks should be better integrated to make smaller airports more competitive and attractive to travellers, says the draft.

Regional airports are crucial to the EU's territorial cohesion and economic diversification, says rapporteur Philip Bradbourn (ECR, UK). They attract businesses, make regions more popular with tourists and improve quality of life for citizens. They also create jobs, and if are not economically viable then they should get public funding, as their survival is in the public interest, say MEPs.

Rather than build new airports, the EU should help to strengthen links between existing regional ones so as to relieve bottleneck situations at hub airports.

The resolution will call for clear rules to keep low-cost-airlines from dominating or tarnishing the image of local airports, by imposing unfair conditions on them or their passengers. Baggage-weight checks when entering the plane should be forbidden, as this prevents travellers from buying goods at the airport, they claim.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution
Debate: Wednesday 9 May
Vote: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Draft resolution on the future of regional airports
- Profile of rapporteur Philip Bradbourn (ECR, UK)
- Legislative Observatory file

MEPs to call for international maritime piracy court and release of hostages

Some 200 seafarers are being held by pirates who continue to hijack humanitarian aid, merchant and fishing vessels for ransom. The attacks occur mainly off the Somali coast and in the Western Indian Ocean. MEPs will vote on Thursday on a resolution urging the EU foreign policy High Representative to secure the release of the hostages and vessels and support the creation of an international piracy tribunal.

MEPs believe that the fight against piracy can be won only if the EU helps attack its root causes, namely extreme poverty and state failure in the region. They will also say that the lack of adequate prosecution facilities means that even when pirates are arrested, they are rarely tried and sentenced. They could call on Thursday for a special international maritime piracy court to be set up.

Some MEPs are concerned at the growing use by shipping lines of private armed guards. They want security to be provided chiefly by the EU's naval force, EU NAVFOR, made up of naval ships from the Member States. MEPs questioned the Commission, in a plenary debate on 14 March, about the reduction of EU NAVFOR to only two or three ships from 35 in 2009.

Background

The cost of piracy on one of the world's main maritime routes is estimated at €7 billion a year. Sixty of the 4,000 seafarers kidnapped in the region have lost their lives. Despite a significant fall in the number of attacks in 2011, the ransoms paid out by ship-owners still total some €150 million.

Procedure: Oral question to the Commission with resolution
Debate : Wednesday 14 March (see link below)
Vote : Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Video recording of plenary debate (14.03.2012)
- Oral question on facing the challenge of maritime piracy
- Joint draft resolution on piracy

Parliament to question accounts of some EU agencies and the Council

Parliament debates and votes on Thursday on 43 reports concerning the 2010 accounts of EU institutions and agencies, as part of the EU's annual discharge (approval) procedure. The Budgetary Control Committee wants the House to postpone granting discharge to the European medicines, food safety and environment agencies, as well as the Council of the EU. It has approved the accounts of 39 agencies and institutions.

European Medicines Agency (based in London)

MEPs are expected to call for an action plan to improve procurement and contract-management procedures and to demand assurances regarding the impartiality of employees and national experts working for the medicines agency.

European Environment Agency (based in Copenhagen)

MEPs criticise the fact that the Environment Agency's Executive Director was also on the International Advisory Board of the NGO Earthwatch. They point to a possible conflict of interest, stating that the Executive Director and other agency staff went on "research" trips to Earthwatch projects in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, for which the NGO was paid.

MEPs also want the environment agency to clarify its recruitment procedures and provide more information about the credentials of its "guest scientists".

European Food Safety Agency (based in Parma)

MEPs say it is unacceptable that meetings of the 15-strong management board cost an average of €6,175 per member and are calling for "drastic cuts in these excessive costs".

They also point to conflicts of interest, highlighting allegations that the chair of the Management Board has direct links to the food industry and is on the board of directors of an industry lobby group, the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) - Europe.

Council of the EU

Parliament and the Council are engaged in a protracted dispute on the role of Parliament in approving the management of the Council's budget. MEPs hope that mediation by the Danish EU presidency might lead to a workable arrangement.

Procedure: Discharge
Vote/Debate: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Profile of rapporteur for the discharge for the Commission, Christofer Fjellner (EPP, SV)
- Profile of rapporteur for discharge for the European Parliament, Boguslaw Liberadzki (S&D,PL)
- Profile of the rapporteur, Monica Macovei (EPP, RO)
- Profile of the rapporteur, Inès Ayala Sender (S&D, ES)
- Press releases following the votes in the Budgetary Control Committee:

Trading for change in Arab countries

As the age of having to deal with Arab dictators and oligarchs is "happily coming to an end", EU trade and investment policy in southern Mediterranean countries should strive to promote their economic progress and transition to democracy, says a draft resolution to be voted on Thursday.

The political response of the EU and its Member States to the "Arab Spring" events so far has been inconsistent, passive and sometimes even "contrary to the peoples' democratic aspirations", says author of the draft resolution on "Trade for Change" Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE, IT).

The text says the EU should do more to "match its commercial interests with its core democratic values" and suggests specific measures such as European Investment Bank support for small and medium-sized enterprises, facilitating visas for business people travelling to the EU, more scholarships for business people and stepping up the presence of EU trade officials in the region.

The EU should also help to tackle problems in the region, including the black market, long-term unemployment and corruption, adds the text.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution
Debate: Wednesday 9 May
Vote: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Draft resolution on Trade for Change
- Profile of rapporteur Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE, IT)

Anti-fraud vetting of Member States' spending of EU funds

The spending of EU funds by Member States must be monitored more rigorously, says a draft resolution to be voted on Thursday. Reported cases of fraud have been rising in many Member States, although this may reflect better reporting, rather than a rise in fraud cases. However, as some Member States have yet to upgrade their reporting systems, MEPs may also call on the Commission to step up the legal requirements for them to do so.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution
Vote : Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Draft resolution on the protection of the EU's financial interests - Fight against fraud
- Profile of the rapporteur, Zigmantas BALČYTIS (S&D, LT)

Cross-border defamation by the press

Clearer rules are needed to protect not only the victims of cross-border defamation, but also journalists accused of it, says a resolution to be voted on Thursday.

Enhancing legal clarity would cut the cost of court cases, reduce the risk of a "chilling effect" on press freedom and improve people's access to justice, says the draft.

The proposed measures should reduce the risk of "forum shopping" in which a claimant chooses the jurisdiction thought likeliest to produce a favourable result. They would also ensure that journalists do not risk having to deal with differing national sets of laws.

Under the proposals, if a French journalist were accused in a German court of defaming a German citizen, the German court would have to apply the relevant French law.

Procedure: Non-legislatuve resolution
Debate: Wednesday 9 May
Vote: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Draft resolution on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations
- Legislative observatory file
- Press release on the vote on the regulation "Rome II" (10.07.2007)

Patentability of conventionally-bred plants and animals

Plants or animals produced by conventional breeding techniques, such as anti-carcinogenic broccoli or high-yield dairy cows, should not be patentable, a large majority of MEPs are likely to say in a debate with the Commission on Wednesday. MEPs believe that excessively broad patent protection can prevent innovation and progress by small and medium-sized breeders. A resolution will be voted on Thursday.

Procedure: Oral question with resolution
Debate: Wednesday, 9 May
Vote: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Oral question on the patenting of essential biological processes
- Legislative observatory file:
- Draft resolution on the patenting of essential biological processes

MEPs set to favour strict rules for dangerous chemical exports

Strict controls should be maintained when exporting dangerous chemicals outside the EU, according to draft legislation to be voted on Thursday. MEPs want to ensure a proposed update to "prior informed consent" rules will not compromise importing countries' interests in terms of health and environment.

Procedure: Codecision (1st reading)
Debate: Wednesday 9 May
Vote: Thursday 10 May

Further information:

- Draft report on export and import of dangerous chemicals
- Legislative observatory file:
- Profile: rapporteur Dan JØRGENSEN

Other items on the agenda

Other items for discussion and vote include:

- follow-up to the Civil Liberties delegation to Sicily and Lampedusa (*debate Wednesday).*