European Parliament plenary session 13-16
December 2010

- EU budget vote and Citizens’ Initiative
- Tough steps against human trafficking
- Possible new rules on legal immigration
- Sakharov Prize; winner Guillermo Fariñas awaits Cuban visa
- Proposed new strategy for Afghanistan

The last Parliamentary Session of the year sees a crucial vote on the European Union's Budget for 2011 on Wednesday. Also during the week MEPs will be asked to decide on how the new "Citizens' Initiative" is going to work. Much tougher penalties on those who traffic human beings into and around Europe are also under review. Immigration and refugees are also on the agenda with a vote on a single permit giving long term resident status to legal immigrants.

The furore around the Wikileaks revelations will be discussed by MEPs Tuesday and the Parliament's Sakharov human rights Prize is due to be awarded Wednesday, although the winner Guillermo Fariñas is still waiting for an exit visa from the Cuban authorities.

In international affairs a proposed new strategy for Afghanistan will be debated as will the European Union's annual report on human rights. Catch up with all the news as it happens here.
European Parliament plenary session 13-16 December 2010

One million signatures: enough to request an EU law

The European Commission will in future have to consider drafting a new EU law if so requested by at least one million EU citizens, once Parliament approves the ground rules for the "citizens' initiative" in Strasbourg next week.

Parliament to vote on EU budget for 2011

The European Parliament is set to vote on the 2011 EU budget at its plenary session in Strasbourg on Wednesday, following a debate the previous day. This was decided by Parliament's Conference of Presidents - the political group leaders and the President of the EP - on Thursday.

Tougher rules to combat human trafficking

Criminals trafficking in human beings will face tougher penalties, while their victims should get better protection and assistance, under a new EU law that comes before Parliament in Strasbourg.

EU-wide protection for victims of crime

Victims of crime who are granted protection by law in one EU Member State may be able to get similar protection if they move to another EU country, under the new European Protection Order on which Parliament votes in Strasbourg next week.

EU residence rights for refugees

Refugees and other people protected under international law could acquire long-term resident status in Europe under a change to EU legislation that comes before Parliament for a vote on Wednesday. The new rules will not apply to the UK, Ireland and Denmark.

Immigration: a single permit to live and work in the EU

A draft "single permit" law, making it easier for legal immigrants to the EU to obtain residence and work permits as well as giving them equal rights with nationals on pay, working conditions and social security, will be put to the vote on Tuesday.

Bailout mechanism on Strasbourg agenda

MEPs will discuss the upcoming EU summit of 16-17 December with the Council Presidency and Commission. Economic policy is the main topic, in particular a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the eurozone, with a treaty change to set it up. The EU's relations with its strategic partners are also on the summit agenda.

Guillermo Fariñas: 2010 Sakharov Prize winner

Cuban political dissident Guillermo Fariñas is the winner of this year's European Parliament Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. The award ceremony is set for Wednesday 15 December at 1pm. Mr Fariñas is currently waiting for an exit permit from the Cuban authorities.

MEPs to debate Wikileaks with Barroso

The cables released by Wikileaks and the whole issue of cyber security will be discussed during Question Hour on Tuesday with Commission President Barroso. The revelations on CIA flights and extraordinary renditions contained in the leaked documents are expected to be of particular interest to MEPs.

Annual report on human rights in the world 2009

MEPs will debate Parliament's annual report on human rights in the world on Wednesday morning with EU foreign policy high representative Catherine Ashton.

Fundamental rights within the EU

The rights of EU citizens are still abused too frequently, says this year's report on fundamental rights in the European Union. MEPs call for "urgent concrete steps, mid-term strategies and long-term solutions, as well as follow up by EU institutions".

Afghanistan: radical rethink of EU strategy
The EU's strategy on Afghanistan needs a radical rethink, according to a draft resolution to be debated by Parliament in Strasbourg.
Focus

Opening of Strasbourg session: 2011 budget, Cancún and Sakharov Prize

- Parliament debates 2011 budget Tuesday, vote Wednesday.
- Cancún summit debated Tuesday
- Sakharov winner Guillermo Fariñas still impeded by Cuban authorities from collecting his prize

The completion of the 2011 budget procedure, a debate on the Cancún climate summit and this year's Sakharov Prize award to Guillermo Fariñas were among the topics on this week's agenda highlighted by Parliament's President Jerzy Buzek as he opened the last Strasbourg session of 2010. Mr Buzek also paid tribute to those who lost their lives under martial law in Poland 29 years ago.

The President first highlighted Parliament's debate on the 2011 budget on Tuesday, with the vote following on Wednesday. He also drew attention to Tuesday afternoon's debate on the Cancún climate change summit, pointing out that a sizeable delegation of MEPs had attended the summit.

Turning to the week's other highlight, the President said "On October 21 Cuban dissident Guillermo Fariñas was chosen as the winner of this year's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Regrettably, Mr Fariñas is experiencing problems leaving the country, even though I made a personal appeal in a letter to the President of Cuba, Mr Raul Castro. We expect that Lady Ashton will take due note of these problems and that she will take this into account in future relations with Cuba. If Guillermo Fariñas were to leave in the next few hours, he could still be here in time to receive his prize".

Mr Buzek then reminded the House that 29 years ago, on 13 December 1981, martial law was imposed on Poland. Thousands were arrested and around 100 people killed. "We pay tribute to those who gave their lives to save Europe from the communist yoke", he said.

Lastly, the President announced that following his behaviour in the plenary chamber on 24 November for which he had made no apology, Godfrey Bloom (EFD, UK) would, in accordance with Parliament's rules, lose seven days' worth of parliamentary allowances.

Agenda changes

The House approved two additions to the agenda. At the request of the EPP group, the report by József Szájer on the Commission's exercise of implementing powers: rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States, will be debated on Wednesday and put to the vote on Thursday. At the request of the S&D group, oral questions to Council and Commission on economic governance and Article 9 of the Lisbon Treaty will be debated on Wednesday afternoon.
Afghanistan - Pino Arlacchi advocates new approach

- Debate Wednesday afternoon on possible new Afghan strategy
- Arlacchi advocates civilian role

The merits of a possible change of strategy in Afghanistan by the European Union and its allies will be debated Wednesday afternoon by the European Parliament. A new report by Italian centre left MEP Pino Arlacchi calls for a more civilian based approach and for the Afghan Government to have the ultimate responsibility for who they talk to. Prior to the debate on Wednesday we spoke to him about his ideas.

Q: What is the main message of the report on Afghanistan?

PA: The main message is that the EU should start think for itself about Afghanistan. Too many mistakes have been made just because the EU followed the USA.

The USA are our friends and because they are our friends, we have a duty to tell them when they are making mistakes. The biggest mistake in Afghanistan - so far - is that the USA said they can win with military force in a country where this is impossible.

After the Kabul and London Conferences it has been finally accepted that the military approach failed and that we have to articulate the civilian strategy for Afghanistan. I am very happy that my colleagues from all political groups substantially contributed to the strategy and all amendments have been tabled in very constructive spirit. So the report ended up stronger than the original draft.

Q: How do you compare the situation nowadays in Afghanistan with the situation earlier?

PA: Times are a bit different. We are there with a huge amount of resources. We are there not only with troops, but also with civilian aid. The European contribution amounts to a budget of 1 billion euro per year.

There is also another budget of another 4-5 billion euro, this money will be more than enough to rebuild Afghanistan. But the paradox is that the social and economic situation in the country is not improving at all. It has not improved almost in the last 10 years. My report starts asking why and is proposing all proper corrections.

Q: What do you suggest concretely?

Only 20% of the money that we send to Afghanistan reaches the Afghan people, 80% of the money gets lost. That is partially because of the corruption of the Afghan government. But most of this money - an I stress very much this fact - is not due to the corruption of the Afghan government, but is due to waste, duplication, over invoicing, excessive and unnecessary expenses for consultancies and security. As this is international aid, we have the duty to intervene and change many things, giving more money to the Afghan government; at least 50% should go to them. So the main objective is the "afghanisation" of the aid.

The other big point of the report is the peace process. We must support it and involve the government of national unity to keep the cease-fire and negotiate a peace agreement, because this is the only political and diplomatic solution. The Karzai government should be free to decide who are its interlocutors, so if they decide they want to involve the Taliban and other insurgents; it is up to them. We should just have assurances that Al-Qaeda will be banished from the country, that the Afghan constitution and women's rights will be respected. And that opium cultivation will be eliminated, because this is a European interest. The main reason we should stay in Afghanistan is the fight against opium cultivation. Because 1,5 million addicts get their drugs from there.

Q: Do you think the publication of secret documents on the WikiLeaks website can endanger lives in Afghanistan?
I don't believe so; I read the documents relating to Afghanistan. Nobody is in danger. There has been a very responsible behaviour, firstly by WikiLeaks and then by the papers which got the documents. They deleted all references to names and places, which could endanger the security of somebody. We shouldn't be hysterical over this.
Parliament approves tougher rules to combat trafficking in human beings

- New rules will apply to trafficking in the sex industry
- Also will apply to trafficking in the sex industry or labour exploitation in, for example, construction work, farming or domestic service

Traffickers in human beings are to face tougher penalties for their crime and victims will be entitled to better protection and assistance, under a new EU law approved today by the European Parliament. The new rules will apply to trafficking in the sex industry or labour exploitation in, for example, construction work, farming or domestic service.

With this legislation, "we will create a tougher environment for the human traffickers and stronger protection for the victims", said Civil Liberties Committee rapporteur Anna Hedh (S&D, Sweden). "We also have to work on the roots of human trafficking, such as the demand for services. The human body is not a commodity that can be used and sold for money", she added.

"The biggest achievement is that this new directive creates a dissuasive environment for traffickers and ensures assistance and protection for victims of trafficking, especially for children. I am convinced that the result achieved is a good one and the adopted directive will create a better legal basis than the old 2002/629 Framework Decision. This is the first time we are making criminal law since the Lisbon Treaty", added Women's Rights Committee rapporteur, Edit Bauer (EPP, Slovakia).

Human beings are trafficked for many reasons. Sexual exploitation, forced labour, begging, removal of organs, illegal adoption and forced marriages are some examples covered by the new rules.

The directive takes a broader view of what "exploitation" means than does the EU framework decision of 2002 (which it is to replace), thus widening the protection to more victims.

The text agreed by Parliament and Council lays down minimum rules for defining criminal offences and sanctions for traffickers and introduces common rules to step up crime prevention and protection for victims. Once the directive is adopted, Member States will have two years to transpose it into their national laws.

Stiffer penalties for traffickers and proceeds to be confiscated

The new directive sets maximum EU-wide penalties of at least five years' imprisonment (i.e. Member States may not impose lower ceilings) or, in specific aggravating circumstances, ten years' imprisonment. These aggravating circumstances include cases where children are exploited, criminal organisations are involved, the victim's life is endangered or serious violence is used. Instigating, aiding, abetting or simply attempting to commit such an offence will also be punishable.

Where legal persons (organisations) are involved, sanctions should include criminal or non-criminal fines and could also include, for example, exclusion from entitlement to public benefits or permanent closure of establishments.

Member States should also ensure that the instruments and proceeds of these crimes are seized and confiscated. They are also "encouraged" to use them to support help and protection for victims, including compensation.

Broader protection for victims
Victims should receive accommodation, material assistance and where necessary medical treatment, including psychological assistance. Legal counselling and legal representation should be free of charge, at least when the victim lacks sufficient financial resources. Victims of trafficking should also have access to witness protection programmes and to compensation schemes.

Assistance and support should be provided “before, during and for an appropriate time after criminal proceedings”, irrespective of a victim's willingness to act as a witness. A requirement not to prosecute or impose penalties on victims is explicitly stated in the text.

To discourage demand, Member States should also “consider taking measures to establish as a criminal offence the use of services” of a victim, with the knowledge that he/she has been trafficked.

Several hundred thousand people are trafficked into or within the EU each year. Many victims are exploited for prostitution (43%, overwhelmingly women and girls), or for menial labour (32%).

The directive was approved with 643 votes in favour, 10 against and 14 abstentions. It will not apply to Denmark or the UK, but the latter may opt in later.
Crime victims to get EU-wide protection

- Victims of crime can get protection in another country
- MEPs voted to make it clearer that the rules will cover all victims of crime

Victims of crime who have been granted protection by law in one EU Member State will be able to request similar protection if they move to another EU country, under the rules of the European Protection Order approved on Tuesday by the European Parliament.

Measures to protect victims of crime already exist in all EU Member States but at present they cease to apply if the victim moves to another country. The European Protection Order (EPO) will enable anyone protected in one EU state to apply for protection if they move to another EU state.

"We wish to send a clear message to the Council: EU citizens want to live in a genuine area of freedom, security and justice and to be protected wherever they are in Europe", said Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio (EPP, Spain), Women's Rights Committee rapporteur. "We must think of the victims, of the people who are frightened and who want to live in peace. With this proposal we have the opportunity to save lives and we should be proud of that". "The European Protection Order is a first small step, but it's the beginning" of a broader framework for the protection of victims' rights in the EU, she concluded.

"We want an instrument that provides effective protection. The law should resolve conflicts, not create them", said Carmen Romero López (S&D, Spain), Civil Liberties Committee rapporteur. "With today's vote we want to send a strong message to the Council. It is now up to the Council to shoulder its responsibilities", she said.

All crime victims to be covered

MEPs voted to make it clearer that the rules will cover all victims of crime, not just victims of gender violence. Most protection measures are granted to women victims of gender violence but an EPO could cover any other type of victim too. "This directive applies to protection measures which aim at protecting all victims and not only the victims of gender violence, taking into account the specificities of each type of crime concerned", says the text of the legislation as amended by MEPs.

The rules will apply to a victim or potential victim who needs protection "against a criminal act of another person which may, in any way, endanger his life, physical, psychological and sexual integrity [...] as well as his dignity or personal liberty". Such acts would include harassment, abduction, stalking and "other forms of indirect coercion".

Keeping aggressors away

An EPO may only be issued if the aggressor is banned by the Member State of origin from places where the protected person resides or which they visit, or if restrictions are imposed on contact or approaches by the aggressor to the protected person.

Leeway for the authorities to decide appropriate measures

The Member State to which the victim moves will have "a degree of discretion to adopt any measure which it finds adequate and appropriate under its national law" to provide protection to the victim.

Protection of victims' relatives

Thanks to MEPs, an EPO may also be requested to safeguard relatives of a beneficiary of a European Protection Order.
The text of the EPO, as approved today by Parliament by 610 votes to 13 with 56 abstentions, is based on a compromise worked out between Parliament negotiators and the Belgian presidency. It must still be confirmed by a qualified majority of Member States in the Council. Once the directive is adopted, Member States will have three years to transpose it into national law.
Focus

Taking stock of human rights in the world: Laima Andrikienė

Against the backdrop of empty seats in the Nobel and upcoming Sakharov prize ceremonies, the European Parliament is taking stock of human rights in the world. Ahead of the debate and vote on this year's report on human rights with High Representative Catherine Ashton, we asked its author Laima Andrikienė to shed some light on Parliament's efforts to protect human liberties around the globe.

Your report is a long catalogue of human rights breaches and Parliament's efforts to counter them. What is of greatest concern?

Human rights abuses remain widespread. The economic crisis hits the rights of the poor hardest; climate change could cause most damage to the developing world and the far North. The misuse of the internet, online censorship and breaches of privacy create new human rights abuses.

The EP's report on human rights in the world doesn't only give a long list of problems, it also suggests solutions. It looks at the abolition of capital punishment, violence against women, the protection of children's rights, the fight against torture, protection of human rights defenders, promotion of democracy and religious freedoms, etc.

It also evaluates the EU's role in United Nations, on the UN Human Rights Council, its cooperation with the International Criminal Court and, most importantly, implementation of EU Guidelines on Human Rights.

What are the weak points of EU's human rights policy and what measures would boost its coherence and effectiveness?

The biggest hopes for better EU action on human rights and democracy in external affairs lie with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. It gives an historical opportunity to fill in the gaps, therefore we urge the External Action Service (EAS) to mirror the purpose and spirit of Lisbon Treaty. The main priority of a coherent foreign policy of the EU should be promotion of democracy and human rights.

Within the EAS, we want a Human Rights and Democracy Directorate to develop an EU human rights and democracy strategy and provide overall coordination within multilateral fora. We also urge Catherine Ashton to establish a post of Special Representative for human rights.

Which of the latest working visits (to countries violating human rights) left the biggest mark on you and why?

Without any doubt a mission to the North Caucasus at the end of the summer. Impressions from North Ossetia and Ingushetia made all the other visits fade away.

The atmosphere in this region of Russia is gloomy: Chechens and Ossetians without rights, terror, impunity, families of the victims of the 2004 Beslan tragedy still awaiting justice. In Moscow, the trials of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev's and witnessing the authorised opposition protest in Triumfalnaya Square were the most striking experiences of the visit. Nor should one forget Khodorkovsky, a former YUKOS oil company chief ruined by Russian authorities. He is an enlightened person radiating peace, spending his days in jail only because he dared to challenge the regime.

Which of the EP's numerous actions brought concrete results?

I doubt that the Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi would have been liberated without pressure on the junta exerted by the EU and the whole democratic world. The EP’s resolutions and statements and parliamentary democracy played their role in it.
Another vivid example is the liberation of 50 Cuban political prisoners this summer. There is no doubt that the EP's efforts and clear position had an important role.

Russia is another example. After statements by the EU and especially EP President Jerzy Buzek and parliamentary resolutions, the opposition was finally granted a right to organise peaceful rallies at Triumfalnaya Square and elsewhere.
No agreement on legislation on a single permit to live and work in the EU

The European Parliament could not agree Tuesday on draft "single permit" law to simplify procedures for legal immigrants to obtain residence and work permits in the EU and also give them the same protection against labour exploitation as EU citizens.

After a series of amendments to the legislation had been adopted, a majority of MEPs decided they could no longer vote for the end result, for various reasons. The amended proposal was rejected (306 in favour, 350 against and 25 abstentions). The draft legislation will therefore be sent back to the Civil Liberties and the Employment committees.

The directive - which complements the so-called "blue card" for highly-skilled immigrants - is designed to facilitate legal immigration where it meets the needs of the European labour market. The aim is to simplify administrative requirements for third-country nationals by enabling them to obtain work and residence permits via a single procedure at a "one-stop shop" and to grant a common set of rights to immigrants legally residing and working in the EU.

The key points of discussion among political groups were the scope of the legislation, equal treatment of third country nationals and EU citizens and whether Member States should be enabled to issue or require other documents, in addition to the permit.

The draft legislation was not intended to apply to third-country nationals who have acquired long-term resident status, refugees, posted workers, intra-corporate transferees or seasonal workers.

A majority, led by rapporteur Veronique Mathieu (EPP, France), the MEP steering the legislation through Parliament, took the view that long-term residents and refugees are already subject to EU rules and that posted workers, intra-corporate transferees or seasonal workers should be covered by other, specific EU directives.

On the other side of the argument, amendments that were tabled by the S&D group, but rejected in plenary, would have included intra-corporate transferees, seasonal workers and refugees in the scope of the law, on the grounds that to do otherwise would create a two-tier workforce.

The draft law would also have stipulated that third-country workers must enjoy equal treatment with nationals with regard to employment-related rights (such as access to social security, education and training) but according to the amended text, Member States would be entitled to restrict some of those rights.

One amendment tabled would have allowed Member States to introduce additional documents with regard to residence. When this was adopted, the ALDE group voted against the final result.

Rapporteur Mathieu expressed her disappointment after the vote that, after one year of negotiating, there would now be no legislation to give equal treatment to third-country nationals working in the EU.

Summary of the debate before the vote

Before the vote, rapporteur Mathieu said "this legislation will allow a better management of migration flows. It aims at erasing the differences between the Member States in terms of work and residence procedures and access to rights for third country nationals working legally in the EU."

Equality of treatment is the key for any economic immigration policy. This directive is not sufficient because it excludes people who need protection such as short term or seasonal workers", argued Employment Committee rapporteur Alejandro Cercas (S&D, Spain). Vijila Blinkevičiūtė (S&D, Lithuania), agreed that "we cannot set up a category of second rank workers in the EU".

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (EPP, Netherlands), replied that those excluded from this directive "have their rights described in other EU directives". For the Liberals, Sophie In't Veld (ALDE, Netherlands), said that her group wanted to "arrive at a first reading agreement. How much progress have we made for a common immigration policy since the Tampere Council?", she asked. She also said that the ALDE would vote against any final result that enabled Member States to require additional documents.

Jean Lambert (Greens/ EFA, UK), said that her group "does not want to see the rights of third-country nationals constrained and restrained". Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE/NGL, France), stated that "this law would create competition between EU workers and third-country nationals and between different categories of migrants. It would create different status and categories of workers".
"The good aspect is the simplification of procedures. However, we should first and help our citizens to get jobs", said Mara Bizotto (EFD, Italy). "My group is against any EU common immigration policy. A single procedure makes it easier for the people to come into the EU", said Daniël Van der Stoep (NI, Netherlands).
MEPs debate Wikileaks case

• Personal case of Julian Assange discussed
• Cyber security fears

The furore surrounding the Wikileaks case and the charges against its founder Julian Assange were discussed by the European Parliament Tuesday afternoon. The Head of the EU's executive, President José Manuel Barroso of the European Commission was in Parliament to answer MEPs concerns.

Spanish MEP Raül Romeva i Rueda (Greens/EFA) told the House that Assange revealed the truth and that should be protected.

Mr Barroso said that "freedom of expression is not negotiable but some data should be protected for the public interest. Some information cannot be accessible to everybody" he told the House.

Concerns raised over cyber security

The Wikileaks case and some "revenge" attacks on companies recently have raised fears over the level of cyber security in Europe. Hungarian Socialist Edit Herczog mentioned that Europe was "digitally dependent".

Mr Barroso said that the Commission had unveiled new measures in September but that it would be urging tougher penalties for those who take part in cyber attacks.

Estonian MEP Tunne Kelam (EPP) asked the Commission President what he was doing to improve coordination between countries in Europe and with NATO. Mr Barroso replied that the issue of cyber security had already been discussed at the last summit with President Obama. He went on to say that "this important issue is not only matter of NATO but also of our bilateral relations with US. We are working together on that".

Personal case of Julian Assange

The founder of Wikileaks now is now in jail in the UK facing possible extradition to Sweden to answer allegations of sexual abuse.

Spanish Green MEP Romeva i Rueda said that "this is harassment; we should not turn a blind eye to it". Italian Liberal Sonia Alfano commented that "this is an attack against freedom of speech".

Some MEPs were also concerned about his possible extradition to the US: "It's obvious that US are forcing Assange's extradition without any legal basis so far" said Italians EFD member Mario Borghezio.

Mr Barroso said that he could not comment on the case but that the UK and Sweden were countries that respected the law and that the law should run its course.
Parliament adopts EU budget for 2011

The European Parliament adopted the 2011 EU budget at its plenary session in Strasbourg on Wednesday. The adopted budget reflects most of MEPs' priorities, while respecting the total limits laid down by the Council. In this year's budget negotiations, MEPs also reached agreement with the Council and Commission regarding several budget-related political demands.

The 2011 budget, as adopted by the full Parliament, includes more funding for the priorities set out by MEPs, including youth, innovation, the Middle East peace process and Palestine. Some examples (all figures in commitments):

1a Competitiveness for growth and employment - MEPs won more money for the Lifelong Learning Programme (+€18 million), the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (+€10 million) and Intelligent Energy — Europe programme (+€10 million).

1b Cohesion for growth and employment - MEPs added a new line, worth +€2.5 million, for the Baltic Sea strategy.

2 Preservation and management of natural resources - MEPs increased the environment programme Life+ by +€6.7 million and support for the management of fishery resources by +€2 million.

3a Freedom, security and justice - MEPs won +€2.35 million for the Daphne programme for the fight against violence against women and children and +€1 million for prevention of terrorism.

3b Citizenship - MEPs obtained +€4 million to support the World Special Olympics in Athens and +€3 million to the Youth in Action programme.

4 The EU as a global partner - an extra amount of +€100 million for Palestine, the peace process and UNRWA.

Regarding the overall figures, MEPs accepted the levels proposed in the Commission's draft budget of 26 November: €141.8 billion in commitment appropriations and €126.5 billion in payments. Parliament has always attached more importance to the level of commitments, since they determine the expenditure.

Furthermore, there is an agreement between Council, Parliament and Commission that, should additional funds be necessary to fulfil the EU's legal obligations, there will be amending budgets during 2011, as the EU budget cannot legally have a deficit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heading</td>
<td>all figures in million euros</td>
<td>Commit.</td>
<td>Payments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a Competitiveness for growth and employment</td>
<td>14,863</td>
<td>11,343</td>
<td>12,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b Cohesion for growth and employment</td>
<td>49,387</td>
<td>36,371</td>
<td>50,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Preservation and management of natural resources</td>
<td>59,499</td>
<td>58,136</td>
<td>60,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a Freedom, security and justice</td>
<td>1,006</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>1,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b Citizenship</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 The EU as a global partner</td>
<td>8,141</td>
<td>7,788</td>
<td>8,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Administration</td>
<td>7,907</td>
<td>7,907</td>
<td>8,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>141,484</td>
<td>122,955</td>
<td>142,965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As % of GNI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1.17%</th>
<th>1.02 %</th>
<th>1.14 %</th>
<th>1.07 %</th>
<th>1.13%</th>
<th>1.01 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* including amending budgets 1-7

Parliament's two budget rapporteurs are Sidonia Jędrzejewska (EPP, PL), who has dealt with the European Commission budget (which includes the EU's operational spending, i.e. the bulk of the overall budget), and Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, DE), who has steered Parliament's work on the budgets of the other EU institutions.

Outcome of MEPs political demands - own resources

Aside from the 2011 budget, Parliament had a number of political demands relating to the implementation of the budgetary provisions in the Lisbon Treaty. MEPs laid down seven such demands in a budget resolution adopted at the Strasbourg plenary session in October. The main ones concerned Parliament's involvement in the talks on the next long-term budget and on a new system of own resources. On the own resources issue, the Commission will present a formal proposal by the end of June 2011, so that it is discussed at the same time as the future financial perspective. Parliament's involvement in these matters was laid down in the Treaty (Art. 312.5, 324 and 311) but needed to be worked out in more detail.

Involvement of Parliament in future MFF talks

After almost two months of negotiations, EP negotiators have achieved an agreement with the Council's Presidency which is backed by the other Member States. It contains a commitment by the next four EU presidencies (the governments of Hungary, Poland, Denmark and Cyprus) on the involvement of the Parliament, which has given sufficient assurances to MEPs.

Parliament also successfully argued for systematic assessments to be made of the European added value of new legislation and its funding; for a report on the cost of "non-Europe"; and for an evaluation of the benefits of synergies between the EU and national budgets. Parliament wants in this way to ensure that EU taxpayers get the best value for money.

In addition, a compromise was reached on the new priorities stemming from the Lisbon Treaty for which no provision had yet been made in the 2011 budget. The European Commission has undertaken to examine how these new priority areas could be boosted in the budgets for 2012 and 2013.

Unlike earlier years, the discussions on all these matters were held at the highest political level, with the participation of Belgian Prime Minister Leterme, Commission President Barroso and many Heads of State and Government.

The issue of flexibility within the budget - to cater for unforeseen expenditure for emergencies or new EU tasks - and the financing of the ITER nuclear fusion research project will need to be resolved at a later stage since no agreement was reached between Parliament and Council.

For each budget line, there are two different types of budget appropriations: commitments and payments. The commitments refer to how much the EU may commit itself to (e.g. sign a contract or start a tender procedure) in a certain year. The payment level regulates the actual payments being made that year.
Empty chair in Strasbourg for Guillermo Fariñas

- He called on MEPs "not allow themselves to be deceived by the siren songs of a cruel regime"
- Called for the release, without banishment, of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience

Cuban dissident Guillermo Fariñas, this year's winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, had to be represented by an empty chair at the prize award ceremony on Wednesday as he did not receive permission to leave his country and travel to Strasbourg to receive the prize.

"Even though activists like Guillermo Fariñas are persecuted and are imprisoned, their voice cannot be silenced. The role of the European Parliament is to amplify that voice", said European Parliament president Jerzy Buzek.

"The Sakharov Prize is the trademark of the European Parliament in the fight for human rights all over the world. The empty chair for this year's laureate Guillermo Farinas is the best example of how important this fight is", added the president.

Addressing MEPs in a recorded message, Mr Fariñas expressed his gratitude to the European Parliament "for not abandoning the Cuban people in these more than 50 years of the struggle for democracy". He explained that he had accepted the Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Thought "because I feel myself to be a tiny part of the rebellious spirit that nourishes the people I am proud to belong to."

Mr Fariñas criticised the government in Havana, saying "Unluckily for those who misgovern us in our own homeland the fact that I cannot leave and return voluntarily to the island where I was born is, in itself, the most irrefutable witness to the fact that unfortunately, nothing has changed in the autocratic system ruling my country."

He called on MEPs "not allow themselves to be deceived by the siren songs of a cruel regime practising 'wild communism'" when analysing EU policy towards Cuba. According to Mr Fariñas, a change of direction in these relations should only occur if the following five pre-conditions are met:

- the release, without banishment, of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, with a public commitment never to imprison non-violent political opponents;
- an end to the violent beatings of and threats to the peaceful opposition;
- an announcement that all Cuban laws that contravene the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be reviewed and repealed;
- granting the means, in daily practice, for establishing opposition parties, mass media not subordinate to the 'State socialism' system, independent trade unions and any other kind of peaceful social bodies;
- public acknowledgment that all Cubans living in the diaspora have the right to take part in Cuba's cultural, economic, political and social life.

Guillermo Fariñas

A doctor of psychology and a journalist, 48-year-old Guillermo Fariñas has denounced the Castro regime. He is the founder of "Cubanacán Press," an independent press agency aimed at raising awareness of the fate of political prisoners in Cuba.

Mr Fariñas has spent years in confinement and has gone on hunger strike 23 times so far as a non-violent means of fighting oppression in Cuba. His efforts to secure free internet for all earned him a Reporters Without Borders Cyber-Freedom Prize in 2006.
In July 2010, Mr Fariñas nearly died after a five-month-long hunger strike he began on 24 February, following the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a fellow political activist who passed away after 80 days of hunger strike. He ended the strike after the Cuban government gave in to his plea and released 52 political prisoners.

Guillermo Fariñas is the third winner from Cuba to receive the €50,000 prize, after Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas in 2002 and Ladies in White in 2005.

**Empty chair ceremony - not the first time in the European Parliament**

This is not the first time that the Sakharov Prize has been awarded in the absence of the laureate. In 2008 China's most prominent human rights activists, Hu Jia, was also not able to take part in the ceremony as he was incarcerated, but a video message from his wife Zeng Jinyan was played to MEPs. For other winners, such as Aung San Suu Kyi in 1990 and Damas de blanco (Ladies in White) in 2005, close family members or representatives took part in the ceremony but up to now the winners have still not received the prize in person.

**The Sakharov Prize**

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honour of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded by the European Parliament every year since 1988 to individuals or organisations who have made an important contribution to the fight for human rights or democracy.
Gather a million signatures and ask the EU to pass a new law

- The required million signatures must be collected within 12 months
- Countries will verify the signatories' details

The European Commission will in future have to consider drafting a new EU law if so requested by at least one million EU citizens, now that Parliament has approved the ground rules for the "citizens' initiative" laid down by the Lisbon Treaty. MEPs also made the procedure much more user-friendly than initially proposed.

"Today the European Union is opening itself up to participatory democracy. The citizens now have the same right of political initiative as we have here in Parliament and in Council. Now it is up to our citizens to act", said rapporteur Alain Lamassoure (EPP, FR) in the debate preceding the vote, in which his report was approved by 628 votes to 15 with 24 abstentions.

Co-rapporteur Zita Gurmai (S&D, HU) added "the citizens' initiative is a unique opportunity. For the first time citizens can now get together and let us know if we are doing our job properly. We need this badly".

How will it work?

Once the legislation is in place, a "citizens' committee" consisting of people from at least one fourth of the Member States (i.e. currently seven States) will be able to register an initiative with the Commission. After the Commission has made an initial admissibility check, they can start collecting signatures either on paper or online.

The required million signatures must be collected within 12 months. A minimum number of signatures needs to be gathered in each Member State for them to count towards the seven mentioned above, ranging from 3750 signatures in Malta to 74,250 in Germany.

Member States will verify the signatories' details. For this purpose, each State will decide which information is needed and most will require an ID card number. All signatories must be citizens of the European Union and old enough to vote in European elections.

At the end of the process, the Commission will decide within three months if a new law can be proposed, and it will have to make its reasons public.

Key achievements of the MEPs

Parliament's main aim was to make the procedure as simple and user-friendly as possible, to avoid causing frustration to the public. Its key demands have been accepted. Thus, for example, the admissibility check will now be carried out at the outset, rather than after 300,000 signatures have been collected.

The minimum number of Member States from which signatures must be gathered was lowered from one third to one fourth, and a proper follow-up will now be guaranteed to all initiatives backed by one million signatures, including a public hearing.

Finally, thanks to MEPs, the Commission will help the organisers of an initiative by providing a user-friendly guide, by setting up a point of contact and by providing online collection software free of charge.

Next steps

The Council is expected to adopt the new legislation formally within a few weeks. After this, the Member States will have one year to enact the necessary national legislation. People should thus be able to launch citizens' initiatives from the beginning of 2012.
EP supports permanent crisis mechanism to shore up the euro

• Come ahead of EU Summit in Brussels on Thursday
• MEPs warn against deciding the bailout mechanism details in back-room, late-night deals among Member States
• The permanent "bailout" mechanism for Member States in financial difficulty must clearly detail how the private sector would be brought in

The permanent "bailout" mechanism for Member States in financial difficulty must clearly detail how the private sector would be brought in to help, how non-Eurozone countries would be involved, and how the EU budget would be affected, says a resolution adopted by Parliament on Thursday. The need for a unified European bond market, the introduction of Eurobonds and the creation of a European stability agency to handle debt crises are also discussed.

MEPs warn against deciding the bailout mechanism details in back-room, late-night deals among Member States. They argue instead that these must be negotiated by Parliament and the Council, to ensure the mechanism's accountability, transparency and legitimacy vis-à-vis markets and citizens. Furthermore, the mechanism must be strongly linked to forthcoming legislation setting up a new economic governance model.

Clarity is of the essence

Parliament calls for great attention to be given to clarity on a number of issues, arguing that otherwise it will be difficult to ensure stability.

It also argues that private sector participation in any burden-sharing should be handled on a case-by-case basis, and calls on the Commission to present a comprehensive description of how investors, savers and market participants will be involved and to state explicitly that the mechanism will be fully consistent with IMF policy regarding private sector involvement.

The Commission is asked to clearly indicate and prioritise which EU spending would need to be sacrificed if almost half the EU budget were to be requisitioned, as would be possible under the current (temporary) bailout mechanism rules.

Eurobonds?

The source of the current debt crisis, frozen debt markets which have made it difficult and expensive for some Member States to re-finance their debt, is also addressed. MEPs call for the creation of a European stability agency to ensure a unified and highly liquid European bond market and ask the Commission to look into and come forward with proposals on what other instruments could be devised to ensure appropriate access to finance for Member States.

Principles

Other than the need for the private sector to take some of the burden, the resolution stresses that the conditionality for obtaining assistance from the mechanism should aim to restore sustainable growth, rather than restore stability at the expense of the most vulnerable, by lowering minimum income and aggravating poverty and inequalities.

Corporate tax rates

The Commission is urged to speed up draft legislation defining a common consolidated corporate tax base.

Next steps
The European Council is expected to adopt the general framework for the bailout mechanism on Friday with the details regarding its functioning set to be worked out in 2011. Meanwhile, MEPs in the EP Economics Committee responsible for hammering out a deal with Member States on economic governance will continue their work with a view to presenting their proposed positions officially in January.