



People's News

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MPs call for withdrawal of Iceland's EU application



Iceland's parliament, the Alþingi

Members of parliament from all parties but one represented in the Alþingi (Iceland's parliament) have tabled a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Iceland's application for EU membership. The proposed resolution would nullify the resolution passed by the Alþingi on 16 July last year giving the coalition government of Samfylking (social democrats) and VG (left-green) a mandate to apply for EU membership.

The government is split on the issue. Samfylking is in favour of membership while VG is opposed to it. Samfylking, the only Icelandic party with EU membership on its agenda, made it a condition for forming a coalition government with VG that an application for membership was part of its programme. This was approved by VG, stating at the same time, that it had the right to oppose membership in public debate as well as in a referendum at the end of negotiations. Cabinet ministers said, when introducing their resolution to the Alþingi in the summer of 2009, that they just wanted exploratory talks with EU not accession negotiations. The resolution was passed with 33 votes against 29.

According to opinion polls the majority of Icelanders is against Iceland's entry into EU. The polls show a constant majority of 60-70 per

cent on the no-side. In Alþingi, Samfylkingin is isolated as the only pro-EU party and the party suffered heavy losses in local elections on May 29 last, as did VG.

The resolution in the Alþingi on the withdrawal of Iceland's EU application confirms that there is a growing consensus on the view that it is contrary to Icelandic national interest to maintain an application for membership in the face of growing public and political opposition. Iceland is a member of EEA (European Economic Area) and the Schengen scheme. The country conducts significant trade with EU-countries as well as co-operation in other fields.

The resolution will not be debated nor voted on until after the Alþingi reconvenes on 1 October.

ECJ rulings on workers' rights pose problems

The EU is still no clearer on how it should balance the freedom of the internal market and workers' rights following a series of key judgements in recent years by the bloc's highest court, seen as tipping the scale more towards the protection of economic interests.



EUObserver reports that a hearing on 2 June on where to go next with a law governing the hiring of foreign workers – the Posting of Workers Directive – saw little agreement between the European Commission, business and trade union representatives.

'We are still far from social and political consensus ... on the measures to be taken at European level' admitted Armindo Silva from the social rights directorate in the European Commission.

The discussion came to the fore in 2007 and 2008, particularly when the court – based on the freedoms of the internal market – ruled in its Viking case that unions cannot strike against firms moving from one member state to another due to lower wages, while a verdict in the so-called Laval case suggested that unions cannot force a foreign company to observe local pay deals.



Both cases, involving Finnish and Swedish unions respectively, had implications for the collective bargaining arrangements, in which

employers and unions agree wages, that underpin Nordic countries' social models. The rulings sparked a fundamental debate in the European Union about whether the bloc's internal market rules should be allowed to trump rules on social rights. The questions raised go to the heart of whether the EU is predominantly an economic club or more a political club guaranteeing a certain level of social protection.

Wanting to intervene before the court made another such judgement, European Commission president José Manuel Barroso promised in autumn last year to present a new EU law to improve how the posted-workers directive is interpreted and implemented. But those giving input to the discussions do not even agree whether the original law should be overhauled completely, whether there should be no tweaking at all, or whether an amending law tackling the directive's most controversial elements is sufficient.

Maxime Cerutti from BusinessEurope, an umbrella organisation for European businesses, predictably said 'there is no need to revise' the directive. He pointed out that the Viking and Laval rulings recognise the right to strike as an EU fundamental right but it is not an 'absolute right' and needs to be used 'proportionately'.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) strongly disagrees, however. It wants to re-open the directive and establish minimum conditions for posted workers and says the law as it is opens the way to social dumping.

'The issue here is balance and we don't see it', said Catalene Passchier of ETUC. She said if the court was really balanced in its approach it would not have looked only at the question of whether the internal market was being undermined but also whether companies moving services to other countries are undermining social rights.

The rulings have serious impact on the right to strike and therefore social rights, according to Ms Passchier. 'There is an enormous risk that when we do take, or consider taking action, in order to protect workers in a situation with a cross-border dimension ... we run serious risks of being taken to court'.



The European Commission, for its part, has yet to publicly commit itself either way but has indicated a full revision of the controversial directive is unlikely. 'We are not

convinced of the need for a complete overhaul of the directive', said the Commission's Mr Silva, 'But that does not mean we should not look for solutions to improve aspects where we feel that the application of the directive has been less satisfactory'.

He specifically pointed to the phenomenon of letter box companies – companies that have no

economic activity in the country of origin but may have established themselves to avoid the labour and social security rules of the host country. Another area of scrutiny concerns 'sub-contracting chains' where it not clear who is in charge.

It is expected to give a broad idea of how it will approach the topic when it issues an internal market review later this year. A legislative proposal is set to come in 2011.

Mr Silva indicated that the Commission will draw much of its inspiration from a report on re-vamping the internal market by ex-commissioner Mario Monti. The May document, amongst other things, suggests a provision guaranteeing the right to strike and a mechanism for the informal solution of legal disputes concerning the directive.

EU expected to back Israel's investigation



The Mavi Marmara

A senior EU diplomatic source has said that there is a 'good chance' that EU foreign ministers will back Israel's plan for a probe into the killing of nine Turkish citizens in international waters last month.

Israel on said it will mount an 'independent public commission' led by a retired judge, Jacob Turkel, to see if its commandos broke international law during the raid on the Gaza-bound Mavi Marmara in the Mediterranean Sea on 31 May.

Two international observers, Northern Ireland peace process veteran David Trimble and

Canadian jurist Ken Watkin, are to have observer status but no voting rights in the panel. Both men could prove sympathetic to Israel's use of deadly force. Mr Trimble two weeks ago founded a 'Friends of Israel Initiative' to combat what it calls an 'international delegitimation campaign' against the Jewish state. Mr Watkin is currently embroiled in a political dispute in Canada over an alleged cover-up of torture in Afghan jails.

The White House in a statement called the Israeli enquiry model 'impartial, credible and transparent' – enough said!

Group to take fisheries repatriation campaign to Brussels



ROSA, an alliance of fishing groups from England, France, Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland is to take its campaign for repatriation of the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy to Brussels to present its arguments to the European Parliament and Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Commissioner, Maria Damanaki.

ROSA; the name is an acronym for 'Reclaim Our Seas Alliance' was established earlier this year. The People's Movement has played an active part in the organisation since its foundation.

A spokesman for the alliance and secretary of the Fishermen's Association Ltd, Roddy McColl, says that 'recent pronouncements by Commissioner Damanaki reveals that there is a wide gulf between the interests of fishing communities the length and breadth of the European Union and EU policy as it is developing'.

'The starting point for the current review of the CFP seemed to be a recognition that the policy has been a disastrous failure. Now we are witnessing an attempt by Commissioner Damanaki to recover lost ground.'

'The strategy seems to be to restrict and control discussion of changes to fishing policy within narrow limits; to exclude rational discussion of options that are supported within wide sections of the fishing industry; and all the time, advance proposals that copper fasten the most highly centralised policy of the EU.'



'Thus, the call for a repatriation of control of policy, management and stocks back to individual EU maritime

member states is ruled out of discussion as not "respecting the Treaty" while the commissioner begins to try to soften up the widespread opposition to the introduction of a policy of "individually tradable (fishing) rights" on an EU-wide scale during a recent speech to the EU Parliament. All this is done under the pretence of seeking to bring "decisions closer to those affected".'

Caitlín Uí Aodha, the secretary of the Irish Fishermen's Organisation says that 'it is our intention to remind the powers-that-be in Brussels that the fallacy of the EU Common Fisheries Policy is that the necessary common approach to the economic, environmental and social issues facing member states can only be addressed by a centralised fishing policy and a continuous erosion of their sovereignty. ROSA represents a new strategic direction for fishing policy that gives member states with an interest in a particular fisheries area the primacy of deciding the right policy for that area.'

'The essentials for the way forward for fishing by the fleets of EU member states are:

1. To call a halt to the centralising process that has characterised EU fisheries policy and,
2. To initiate immediately the process of repatriating control of policy, management

and stocks back to individual EU maritime member states.

That is the outcome that we are looking for from the review of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.'

Big Brussels is watching you!



Civil rights watchdogs and MEPs have attacked new EU plans to gather data on people who voice or share 'radical messages' in a bid to pre-empt terrorist attacks. Political activists labelled as 'extreme right/left, Islamist, nationalist or anti-globalisation' may in future find themselves under surveillance in line with a new, so-called, EU 'data compilation instrument' put at the disposal of police and security forces in member states.

The 70-question long 'instrument', covering ideologies, dissemination channels, personal and professional data on 'agents', would help police and security officials gather comparable intelligence across the EU, which could later be pooled together into a single data base.

Although non-binding, the guidelines can legitimise police co-operation and new practices in the member states. The instrument was made public last month by Statewatch, a civil liberties watchdog, after being agreed by EU ministers in April.

The data selection criteria are very broad and 'flexible', with member states and EU institutions being 'invited and advised to make best use, as they see fit, of the data compilation instrument provided for them, by amending it and tailoring it to their specific requirements', the internal EU document says. MEPs dealing with justice and home affairs expressed their outrage at the decision which was not subject to any parliamentary oversight.

'It's all incredibly vague. The danger is that this is spreading the net too wide, instead of gathering targeted information on people who are seriously becoming a terrorist threat', British Liberal MEP Sarah Ludford said. She has formally asked the Council to give an explanation of its decision.

Van Rompuy backs French in struggle over EU economic government

A power struggle is currently going on at the top of the euro zone. European Council president Herman van Rompuy and French president Nicolas Sarkozy are in favour of plans for an 'economic government' forum among euro-zone members, while German chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commission president José Manuel Barroso are opposed to this. Van Rompuy is clear: 'we need a strong economic government in the European Union and most of all in the euro zone. I'm working on that.'

Support for euro drops again in Sweden

A recent poll conducted by the Novus Opinion Institute revealed that 61 per cent of Swedes oppose membership of the euro zone, with only 25 per cent in favour and 14 per cent having no opinion. A similar questionnaire carried out in May 2009 showed a much larger 49 per cent of respondents to be in favour of adopting the euro.

Germany joins European austerity moves with €80 billion cuts by 2014

German budget measures announced last week will see €80 billion cut from the budget by 2014. Net spending cuts in the first year will be €11.1 billion, followed by €16.1 billion in 2012, €25.7 billion in 2013, and €32.4 billion in 2014. The plan includes new taxes on air travel and the nuclear power industry, and some form of financial transaction tax, in addition to a banking levy already agreed by the German

government. A decision on the abolition of conscription in the armed forces has been postponed.

Meanwhile, EU and national leaders have attempted to shore up confidence in Hungary, following damaging comments likening the country's situation to that of Greece. Euro zone chairman Jean-Claude Juncker said: 'I do not see any problem at all with Hungary. I only see the problem that politicians from Hungary talk too much.'

Spanish public sector workers held strikes against the average five per cent pay cut proposed by the government. Meanwhile in Germany, the first labour protests at the government's €80 billion austerity package were announced by the Verdi public sector workers' union with mass rallies in Berlin and Stuttgart.

Its leader Frank Bsirske said the brunt of savings would fall on public sector workers and the unemployed while the wealthy would continue to live in a 'tax oasis'. Other unions later joined the call, while German industry and economists have largely welcomed the proposals due to their focus on spending cuts rather than broad-brush tax rises.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's list of austerity measures is intended to show that Europe's largest economy will lead by example. The largest part of the cuts in the four-year programme will fall on welfare payments and benefits for the long-term unemployed. A lower proportion will affect banks and other businesses, with the government intending to introduce a financial transactions tax and a new tax on flights leaving Germany.

The announcement by the Romanian government that it plans a 25 per cent cut in public sector salaries and 15 per cent reduction in pensions has also seen people take to the streets in the east European country this week.

Where are the Lisbon jobs?



The People's Movement held a poster parade through Dublin city centre on Saturday, June 12, to mark the second anniversary of the referendum in which Irish voters rejected the Lisbon Treaty. Carrying dishonest referendum posters promising job creation as a result of the Lisbon Treaty, members of the Movement publicly raised a question that must be in the minds of many: 'where are the Lisbon jobs now?' A letter condemning the policies of the main political parties was delivered to the Green Party at Leinster House, and to the Labour, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil parties at their respective offices.

Galway jobs protest



Members of the Galway branch of the People's Movement demanded the jobs that were promised to us during the Lisbon referendum outside a meeting on the employment

situation organised by the Labour Party on June 17th.

Ministers approve EU healthcare plan reforms



European health ministers have approved reforms to an existing cross-border healthcare scheme which will enable patients to receive certain care abroad without prior authorisation

at home. At a meeting in Luxembourg, EU governments reached political agreement on new measures which will apply common rules for the scheme for public patients throughout the union's 27 member states.

The new system is designed to override legal uncertainty stemming from European Court of Justice (ECJ) rulings on patient mobility. The draft directive will come into force once agreement is reached with the European Parliament on the final parameters of the legislation. It will then fall to minister for health Mary Harney, who did not attend the meeting, to introduce national legislation to implement the new EU rules.

Patients will require prior authorisation for treatments which involve overnight hospital accommodation or which require a highly specialised and cost-intensive medical equipment and infrastructure. However, a draft directive implies that patients who receive day care abroad will not require pre-authorisation at home. By applying common rules, the new system may also make it easier for patients to recoup costs from the state.

In a statement, the ministers said the new system aims to ensure that patients 'enjoy the same rights when receiving cross-border healthcare as they would have enjoyed if they had received healthcare in a comparable situation' at home.

‘As a general rule, patients will be allowed receive healthcare in another member state and be reimbursed up to the level of reimbursement applicable for the same or similar treatment in their national health system if the patients are entitled to this treatment in their country of affiliation.’

Our new pamphlet on the directive can be downloaded in PDF format [here](#).

Polish plans based on Article 28 of Lisbon

The Polish government has held a series of meetings in Brussels in the run-up to its 2011 presidency with sensitive issues, such as EU military co-operation, on the agenda. They brought new ideas on how to boost the EU’s joint military capabilities.

Named the ‘Chobielin Initiative’, the scheme will be based on Article 28 of the Lisbon Treaty which foresees joint work on defence missions by militarily-advanced EU states.

Dwindling EU development aid



EU member states’ funds for development are dwindling and increasingly being used instead as channels for public cash for domestic

companies and promoting national vested interests rather than poverty reduction in the poorest of countries. Some states are even counting the cost of deporting refugees back to their home countries as ‘development aid’.

‘The EU is becoming very opportunistic in terms of aid. The definition of aid is changing’, says Hussaini Abdo, country director for Action Aid in Nigeria, a UK-based development group. ‘Spending can go instead on debt relief, repatriating migrants ... There is even talk of counting remittances – the money sent home

by immigrants. This is taking the fruits of the labour of migrants and calling that aid.’

According to an annual report from Concord, an alliance of Europe’s main development NGOs and charities, published on 10 June, EU development aid for 2009 amounted to €49 billion, one billion less than in 2008. In 2005, EU states committed to achieving 0.56 per cent of gross national income (GNI) for development by 2010, but the sums committed as of this year amount to 0.42 per cent of GNI – well off-course from achieving the 0.7 per cent of GNI to be met by 2015.

Together this amounts to an €11 billion shortfall with some of the bloc’s major economies responsible for much of the drop: Italy (€4.5 billion), Germany (€2.6 billion) and France (€800 million).

But countries are changing what they mean by development aid and regularly include debt cancellation, spending on student exchanges, and refugee costs as spending on aid: €1.4 billion on debt, €1.5 billion on students and almost a billion on deportation and other refugee expenditure. When these sums are stripped out, the real spending on aid comes to just 0.38 per cent of GNI in Europe and a shortfall of €19 billion on prior commitments.

A number of countries, notably France and Italy, have made agreements with developing countries that force them to co-operate on repatriation of migrants before they can access the aid, making development aid into a tool of anti-immigrant policies.

The report notes that until recently this had been done on the quiet, but with countries seeing the popular support they can win from a tough-on-immigration stand they have begun to announce such moves officially, with large amounts going towards reinforcing border controls and security training in neighbouring and Mediterranean countries. Instead of

providing money to those countries that most need the cash, EU countries also tend to focus their aid on neighbouring countries, those with key geopolitical interests or where they can best tie aid to employing domestic firms to realise projects.

In 2008, the top ten recipients of EU aid included Afghanistan, Turkey and Palestine. Iraq alone received a full 10.5 per cent of European aid. Some 18 per cent of the European Commission's development budget in the same year went to EU pre-accession countries and those in the bloc's neighbourhood policy.

Very little actually makes its way to the least developed countries – known as 'LDCs' in development jargon, such as those in Africa. So far only five EU countries – Luxembourg, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands – have managed to deliver 0.15 per cent of GNI to LDCs and yet this was a commitment made by all western EU states as part of the 'Brussels Declaration' in 2001.



Countries often use aid to funnel money to domestic companies. Aid to China makes up a large proportion of Polish aid and aims to

boost national exports for example. This sort of activity, termed 'tied aid', has existed for as long as governments have offered development assistance but in the last few years, this has taken off as a share of aid.

The poverty focus of aid is drifting. In 2008, Greece spent large sums on funding the National Museum of Egyptian Culture in Cairo and training on museum staff in Georgia, including on how to run the gift shop and producing copies of items in the museum. Five countries tied more than 30 per cent of their aid in this way: Spain, Italy, Greece, Austria and Portugal. The latter two are particularly fond of

this approach, with 50 per cent of aid 'tied' in the case of Austria last year, up from 21 per cent the previous year, and a full 70 per cent of Portuguese aid.

As a result of the drop in spending, African countries are coming to the conclusion that Africa will not be able to meet any of its Millennium Development Goals, the eight targets agreed in 2000 by 192 UN member states for third world countries to achieve by 2014, such as eradicating extreme poverty and reducing child mortality – 'not because of a lack of commitment from African leadership, but because the resources necessary simply have not been delivered' according to Mr Abdo.

'Across the continent, some 70 per cent of people now live below the poverty line [\$1 a day], which rises to 90 per cent in countries such as Niger, Mali and Malawi.' After some years of improvements, he said, the continent is now seeing reversals: 'More people are now dying from malaria than Aids, maternal and child mortality are increasing. This is the predictable response to shrinking resources.'

Budget protest at Commission offices



The People's Movement protested at the Dublin offices of the European Commission on Friday, 18 June, against the new procedure under which the Commission will review Irish budgets before they are presented to the Dáil.

Spain seeks EU backing on plan to lift Israeli blockade of Gaza

Spain is drawing up new proposals for lifting Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip following international outrage over the killing of nine pro-Palestinian Turkish activists in a freedom flotilla. Miguel Moratinos, the Spanish foreign minister, is to present Madrid's ideas to EU colleagues amid signs of disagreement between member states and demands for tougher action.

Israel has rejected a French idea that EU forces would check the cargoes of ships heading for Gaza to ensure they are not carrying goods Israel would consider a security risk. Bernard Kouchner, France's foreign minister, called the response from Jerusalem 'rather negative'. Another idea is the revival of the EU Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah crossing point into Egypt.

Chris Patten, Britain's former EU external affairs commissioner, has urged the EU to demand an immediate end to the blockade, open dialogue with Hamas, and not let the US monopolise policy.

'Today's miserable and brutal stand-off in the Middle East requires new political initiatives. The EU is Israel's biggest trade partner and the largest provider of development assistance to Palestine yet it has been content to play a largely very quiet third fiddle to the US. It is true that the US has the primary external role in the region, and that any peace settlement will require Israel's willing agreement. But none of this justifies the EU's present nervous self-effacement. This policy gives Israel carte blanche. It makes Europe complicit in outrageous and illegal acts.'

Patten calls for the UN to be tasked with preventing weapons entering Gaza while the EU should take the initiative with Turkey and the Arab League to re-establish a national unity

government of Fatah and Hamas for the West Bank and Gaza.

Van Rompuy planning 'foreign policy' summit



EU leaders are to gather for a special meeting in September to discuss the foreign policy objectives of the Union. 'We have ... to redefine our role in the world, in the new world

with emerging powers and the new polarity' said Belgium's EU ambassador Jean De Ruyt while presenting the plan for his country's EU presidency, due to start 1 July. 'We certainly have to redefine our relations with the emerging countries, our relationship with India, with China, is not what it should be. It is based on the relationship adapted to a situation of 10 years ago.'

September's topic underlines Mr Van Rompuy's own keen interest in external affairs rather than just the economic issues he has been most associated with to date. As the president, his job is to give political impetus to the regular EU meetings but also to represent the bloc on common foreign and security issues at leader level.

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