



DEBATE ON WEDNESDAY 20 JANUARY

**Presentation of the programme of activities of the Portuguese Presidency**

*2020 was a year of unparalleled challenges and today we are still in the midst of that same pandemic that changed our lives so dramatically. Emerging from the health crisis, we have to break with austerity once and for all, and end the unnecessary suffering that it brings to people's lives. This starts with rolling out the COVID-19 recovery and resilience packages in all Member States to make sure that no one is left behind. With social rights at the heart of the agenda of the Portuguese presidency, we look forward to welcoming Prime Minister António Costa to the European Parliament next week to present his government's priorities for the next 6 months in full. With the experience, political will and a programme based on solidarity, I am confident the Portuguese government will rise to the challenges ahead.*

President's

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DEBATE ON TUESDAY 19 JANUARY

**Jytte Guteland, S&D coordinator in the environment committee - Council and Commission statements - EU global strategy on COVID-19 vaccinations**

The EU joint procurement and advanced purchase agreements for anti-Covid-19 vaccines are very powerful and useful instruments for the EU as a whole. Together we are stronger. That is why we share the European Commission's concern for unity and avoiding self-centred national positions that could undermine the collective leverage and co-operation. Only by working together will we find the best possible way forward and overcome this pandemic. The S&D Group in the European Parliament were successful in putting this issue at the top of next week's plenary agenda, where we will be demanding better transparency to ensure full confidence among EU citizens and a fair and equitable distribution of vaccines between member states.

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**Isabel Santos, S&D spokesperson on human rights - Council and Commission statements - Humanitarian situation of refugees and migrants at the EU's external borders**

The humanitarian situation of thousands of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina is dramatic, especially after the closing of the Lipa camp in December and the subsequent fire. Now they are left to their own devices, without shelter, struggling to survive hunger, thirst and the freezing Balkan winter. That is why the Socialists and Democrats were pushing to add this topic to the plenary agenda. Unfortunately the conservatives were against the proposal, but we will still discuss the pressing issue in a broader debate on Tuesday morning. We must not ignore what is happening only a few kilometres from the EU's borders. The mismanagement of the situation by Bosnian authorities certainly reflects the dysfunctional governance of the country. However, it is also a blatant example of how much we need a real reflection on EU common asylum and migration policy. We must urgently help those at extreme risk, but also work out a sustainable and long-term solution.

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DEBATE ON MONDAY 18 JANUARY, VOTE ON TUESDAY 19 JANUARY

**Bernd Lange, S&D MEP and Chair of the International Trade Committee - Exercise of the Union's rights for the application and enforcement of international trade rules**

The lack of a functioning WTO Appellate Body, the multilateral authority to decide on trade disputes, made it imperative to update the EU's Enforcement Regulation. The updated instrument allows the EU to suspend trade concessions or impose countermeasures at the end of dispute settlement proceedings even if partner countries try to exploit the situation at the WTO (and appeal cases into the void). The new regulation will empower the EU to better defend its interests.

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**DEBATE ON WEDNESDAY 20 JANUARY, FINAL VOTE ON THURSDAY 21 JANUARY**

**Alex Agius Saliba, S&D MEP and author of the report - The right to disconnect**

Digitisation brings many benefits and advantages for employees such as greater flexibility or less commuting. However, there are also pitfalls. The pressure to always be reachable, always available, is mounting. The boundaries between work and private life have become blurred. The human cost is high: from un-paid overtime, to exhaustion and burnout. We want to change this: work must not invade your private life. After work or while on holidays, workers must be able to switch off their phone or emails without fear of negative consequences. The right to disconnect is vital for mental and physical health, fair working conditions and work-life balance. This is why we call on the Commission to propose an EU right to disconnect for all European workers.

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**DEBATE ON WEDNESDAY 20 JANUARY, FINAL VOTE ON THURSDAY 21 JANUARY**

**Estrella Durá Ferrandis, S&D MEP and responsible for housing - Decent and affordable housing for all**

Already before the pandemic hit, decent and affordable housing was lacking. The Covid-19 crisis has now aggravated housing insecurity. Around 15% the EU population live in overcrowded dwellings; 700,000 people across Europe are experiencing homelessness; one out of ten people in Europe is overburdened by housing costs, and more than 50 million households are experiencing energy poverty. An integrated strategy is required at the European level, creating a favorable framework for national, regional and local authorities to guarantee the provision of housing.

The S&D group defends the right to housing from a human rights perspective, whose enforcement is mandatory for Member States and also for the Commission, and consider the lack of adequate housing, homelessness or forced evictions as a violation of human rights. We advocate for a universalistic model of social housing excluded from competition rules and intended to cover not only the housing need of the most disadvantaged, but also the housing needs of middle-income groups, and implemented in a way that promotes social mixing and prevents socio-economic segregation. The report includes a number of progressive proposals like rental price control measures, exclusion of social spending from fiscal policies, rules for hospitality services avoiding touristification, the revision of the housing cost overburden rate, inclusion of housing sustainability criteria and support for the circular economy. It also tackles financialization and speculation and the need for a well-regulated market to increase the supply of affordable housing for all. The S&D group defend that housing affordability must be included in the European Semester and that the National Affordable Housing Plans should be included in the National Reform Programmes.

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**DEBATE ON WEDNESDAY 20 JANUARY, FINAL VOTE ON THURSDAY 21 JANUARY**

**Pedro Marques MEP and S&D FISC coordinator - Reforming the EU list of tax havens**

In the first ever resolution of the newly established tax matters sub-committee we call for greater transparency and stricter criteria for the EU's tax haven list, as well as real consequences for tax havens. The current EU tax havens list lets the worst offenders off the hook. Notorious tax havens like Switzerland, Hong Kong or Jersey never even made it on the list and the Cayman Islands was struck off the list in a shocking decision last October. To identify tax havens better, the European Parliament's tax sub-committee has now designed a tool with teeth. Firstly, we must include sharper economic indicators, such as a minimum effective tax rate. All countries with a zero tax rate must automatically be put on the list. Only a minimum effective tax rate will put a floor on tax competition. Secondly, the transparency of the whole procedure needs to be beefed up. At the moment, the Code of Conduct Group – which is tasked with screening tax havens – meets behind closed doors and there is little public scrutiny. We call for greater involvement from the European Parliament in the process to ensure proper scrutiny and more transparency. Thirdly, EU countries must be subject to the same rules and criteria as third countries.

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**JOINT DEBATE ON THURSDAY 21 JANUARY**

**Maria Noichl, S&D coordinator in the committee on women's rights and gender equality - Gender Equality**

On Thursday, the European Parliament will hold a joint debate on three reports related to gender equality, a core priority for the Socialists and Democrats. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting women, and especially with low-paid and precarious jobs. We have also seen a spike in domestic violence, additional burdens on work-life balance, with women handling a majority of the unpaid care work. Covid-19 is also increasing the existing digital gender gaps, as now more than ever, digitalized services, education and work are gravely important. That is why the EU Gender Equality Strategy, proposed by the European Commission in March last year, must be vigorously implemented as soon as possible. We are disappointed that some promised actions have been delayed, including a legislative proposal on pay transparency which is a necessary first step to finally end the persisting gender pay gap. We should not waste more time to guarantee that women and men have equal opportunities in Europe, with fair pay, fair pensions, and a life free from violence.

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