



Views on Hungary, fundamental rights and EU values

Plenary sessions [19-05-2015 - 20:31]

The situation in Hungary, following Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's remarks on the possibility of reinstating the death penalty there and the government's public "consultation" on immigration, were debated by MEPs, Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, Latvian State Secretary for European Affairs Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica for the Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers and Mr Orbán himself on Tuesday afternoon.

European Parliament President Martin Schulz opened the debate and welcomed Mr Orbán before passing the floor to the Latvian Presidency of the Council.

Speaking for the Council Presidency, Latvian State Secretary for European Affairs Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica reiterated that "the European Union is not just an economic and political union", but also a "union of shared fundamental values". She welcomed Parliament's concern for the "preservation of democratic values", but as the Council had not discussed the situation in Hungary, she was "not in a position to comment", she said.

Commission Vice-President for fundamental rights Frans Timmermans pointed out that reinstating the death penalty would be contrary to EU fundamental values and could trigger EU Treaty [Article 7](#), which foresees the possibility of depriving a member state of its voting rights in the Council.

However, Hungary does not have "concrete plans" to reinstate the death penalty, he said, adding that if it were to take steps to do so, then the Commission "would not hesitate to act".

As to the public consultation on migration, "framing it in the context of terrorism is malicious and wrong" and will feed prejudice, Mr Timmermans said.

Group speakers take the floor

Manfred Weber (EPP, DE), called any talk of reintroducing the death penalty "dangerous" and "damaging" and thanked Mr Orbán for clarifying that this will not happen. On the immigration consultation, Mr Weber said that it is good to ask the people, but that "the words used create an atmosphere that we don't like in our group".

S&D leader Gianni Pittella (IT), said the seriousness of Mr Orbán's statements should not be underestimated. They went too far and were "weapons of mass distraction", he said, adding that "the real issue here is not an attack on democracy, but emptying democracy and making it banal".

Timothy Kirkhope (ECR, UK), doubted whether the debate was even necessary. "A member state has a right to discuss important issues. We are each other's partners, not each other's keepers", he said. "This debate may be dressed up as a fundamental rights discussion, but it is in fact an opportunity for political point-scoring which doesn't do anybody any favours", he added, noting that the electorate in Hungary approved of its leader.

Sophie In 't Veld (ALDE, NL), said that the Council's "non-statement" signalled its "moral bankruptcy". There is "no place" for the death penalty in Europe or "anywhere in the

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world", she stressed, asking the Commission to check the legality of the Hungarian migration questionnaire. Parliament must elaborate proposals for enforcing fundamental rights, she added.

"This is not a left/right debate - it is about hate speech against migrants, Roma, and the death penalty, said Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL, FR). "How far are we allowing Hungary to go before we act?", she asked, adding that Treaty Article 7 was "a decoy which doesn't really work".

Rebecca Harms (Greens, DE), said that the wording used by the Hungarian government in the immigration survey "simply isn't serious", but it nonetheless "contributes to raising hatred against a group of people". She stressed that "we have all agreed upon the fundamental rights" and that "the EU will not be able to work without these fundamental values being upheld".

Speaking for the EFDD group, Laura Ferrara (IT), called the public consultation in Hungary "shocking, because it feeds prejudice against migrants". She also advocated monitoring respect for fundamental rights in EU countries not only before, but also after, they join the EU.

Zoltán Balczó (NI, HU) wondered whether public debate on immigration was a taboo subject. "You here in Parliament want to define what we can even talk about. I can reassure you: the Orbán government is fully on the track defined by the Lisbon Treaty, complying with your expectations, despite its rhetoric", he said.

"We Hungarians like to speak frankly", said Mr Orbán. "Therefore we say that we want Europe to stay European, and we would like to preserve Hungary for Hungarians". He added that he found the Commission's proposals "absurd, almost crazy". On the death penalty, Mr Orbán stressed that we "must not shy away from discussing a problem" and that "Hungary stands by the freedom of speech".

Next steps

A resolution by political groups will be put to the vote in June.

Further information:

- Video recording of debate (19.05.2015): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/plenary/>

Political Groups

- Press Release by S&D Group: <http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/orb%C3%A1n-reminiscent-berlusconi-and-embarrassment-hungary-says-pittella>
- Press Release by ALDE Group: <http://www.alde.eu/nc/press/press-and-release-news/press-release/article/silence-on-hungary-marks-moral-bankruptcy-of-council-45265/>
- Press Release by ALDE Group: <http://www.alde.eu/nc/press/press-and-release-news/press-release/article/hungary-underscores-need-for-mechanism-to-monitor-state-of-democracy-rule-of-law-and-fundamental-ri/>

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