

Press release – Parliament condemns all forms of racism, hate and violence and calls for action



In a resolution adopted on Friday with 493 votes to 104 and 67 abstentions, the Parliament “strongly condemns the appalling death of George Floyd” in the US, as well as similar killings elsewhere in the world. MEPs call on the US authorities to address structural racism and inequalities, criticise the police crackdowns on peaceful protesters and journalists and President Trump’s threat to deploy the army as well as his “inflammatory rhetoric”.

The Chamber supports the recent massive protests around the world against racism and discrimination and condemns “white supremacy in all its forms”. MEPs denounce the “episodes of looting, arson, vandalism and destruction of public and private property caused by some violent demonstrators” demanding at the same time that “the disproportionate use of force and racist tendencies in law enforcement” be publicly denounced whenever and wherever they occur.

Use of force by law enforcement authorities should always be “lawful, proportionate, necessary and the last resort”, MEPs stress, insisting that “excessive use of force against crowds contravenes the principle of proportionality”. The EP underlines that cases of police brutality and abuse should not go unpunished and that citizens have the right to record scenes of police violence to use as evidence.

End racial and ethnic profiling, increase diversity within the police

The text calls for the EU and its member states to end racial and ethnic

profiling in criminal law enforcement, counter-terrorism measures and immigration controls. New technologies in this field must not discriminate against racial and ethnic minorities, it adds.

Police and law enforcement authorities must have “an exemplary record on anti-racism and anti-discrimination” and should strengthen training in this regard, MEPs say, calling also for more diversity within police forces.

European crimes against humanity committed against black people in the past

The EU institutions and the member states should officially acknowledge past injustices and crimes against humanity committed against black people, people of colour and Roma, according to Parliament, which declares slavery a crime against humanity.

Combating discrimination in all areas must be an EU priority, say MEPs, who urge the Council to “immediately conclude the negotiations on the [Horizontal Directive on non-discrimination](#)”, blocked by EU countries since the Commission proposed it in 2008.

Freedom of speech does not protect racism and xenophobia

The resolution underlines that racist and xenophobic speech is not covered by freedom of expression. MEPs regret that extremist and xenophobic political forces worldwide increasingly resort to the “distortion of historical, statistical and scientific facts and employ symbolism and rhetoric that echo aspects of totalitarian propaganda, including racism, anti-Semitism and hatred towards minorities”.

[Press release – COVID-19: Boosting aid for farmers from the EU rural development fund](#)



The emergency measure, approved in the Parliament by 636 votes in favour to 21 against, with 8 abstentions, will allow EU member states to use EU money remaining from their rural development programmes to pay out a one-off lump-sum in compensation to farmers and small rural businesses particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. This targeted liquidity support from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) should help them stay in business.

More money and time to make payments

The compensation payable to the worst-hit farmers could be as high as €7,000, which is €2,000 more than proposed by the EU Commission. The ceiling for the support for agri-food SMEs should remain at the level of €50,000, in line with the Commission's original proposal.

The amount to finance the liquidity support measure should be limited to 2% of the EU envelope for rural development programmes in each member state, up from 1% initially proposed by the EU Commission.

MEPs also decided to give member states more time to release the support. They extended the 31 December 2020 deadline for payments until 30 June 2021, but applications for support will have to be approved by the competent authorities before 31 December 2020.

Quote

"I very much welcome the results of today's plenary vote. This proves once again that Council and Parliament can work closely and quickly together when EU agriculture urgently needs help. We have now given EU countries another tool to help farmers financially during the Coronavirus crisis. My thanks go also to the Croatian Council Presidency for their fruitful and straightforward cooperation", said rapporteur and Agriculture Committee Chair [Norbert Lins \(EPP, DE\)](#).

Next steps

The draft regulation, as approved by MEPs and informally agreed by member states, will now be submitted to the Council for final endorsement. Once approved by both the Parliament and the Council, the new EU law will be published in the EU's Official Journal. It will enter into force immediately afterwards.

Background

The emergency measure was [proposed](#) by the EU Commission as a part of a [wider package](#) to help farmers deal with effects of the COVID-19 crisis. To ensure its swift approval, the Agriculture Committee asked for the draft legislative proposal to be dealt with under [urgent procedure](#) and forwarded it directly to the plenary. But MEPs also decided, after consulting the Council, to improve it by proposing amendments to raise the ceilings for the aid and to extend the time to release it.

[Press release – Czech PM: MEPs call for conflicts of interest involving EU funds to be resolved](#)



In a resolution, adopted on Friday by 510 votes in favour, 53 against and 101 abstentions, the European Parliament deplores that the Czech Prime Minister continues to be actively involved in implementing the EU budget while still allegedly controlling “Agrofert”, which is one of the largest beneficiaries of EU subsidies in Czechia.

While a formal EU investigation into conflict of interest is still ongoing, MEPs insist that those confirmed to be involved in these cases at the highest

level of national governments have to choose among three possible ways to resolve this. They can give up their business interests, refrain from applying for EU funding or abstain from decisions that concern their interests, including ultimately by resigning from public duty.

MEPs ask the Commission to set up mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest related to EU funds. The rules should include an obligation to publish the final beneficiaries of EU subsidies and direct payment ceilings per natural person.

Finally, the Parliament condemns use of “defamatory language and hate speech” used by Prime Minister Babiš against MEPs who were part of the [fact-finding mission to Czechia in February 2020](#) to follow up on reported irregularities in management of EU funds.

Quote(s)

[Monika Hohlmeier \(EPP, DE\), Chair of EP Budgetary Control Committee](#): “If the conflict of interest of the Czech Prime Minister is confirmed, he has to remove his business interests by giving up control over any company receiving EU subsidies, refrain from participating in decisions that impact subsidies received by any company where he is the final beneficiary, or ultimately, step down as a Prime Minister. Alternatively, any company under his beneficial ownership should cease to receive EU subsidies concerned by the alleged conflict of interest. We also call on the EU and the member states to do more to protect EU taxpayers’ money from oligarchic manipulations. The existing mechanisms are apparently insufficient.”

Next steps

The EU Commission’s formal investigation into the Czech PM’s conflict of interest has been ongoing since January 2019. In November 2019, all payments from the EU budget to companies directly or indirectly owned by PM Babiš were suspended.

In December 2019, the Czech prosecutor-general re-opened the investigation into misuse of EU funds by one of the Agrofert group’s sub-projects “Stork nest”. The investigation was originally opened following the report by the EU fraud watchdog OLAF.

Background

“Agrofert group” is a conglomerate of over 230 companies, with over 34,000 employees. Prime Minister Babiš established the Agrofert Group and allegedly still is its beneficial owner. The group has been one of the largest beneficiaries of EU subsidies: MEPs say the group has received CZK 973 284 000 (around € 36,5 million) in agricultural subsidies for 2018 alone and a further €16 million from EU Cohesion Funds over the period 2014-2020. Currently, no EU law obliges a member state to disclose the final beneficiaries of EU funds.

[Press release – Bold measures needed to protect cross-border and seasonal workers in EU, MEPs say](#)



The COVID-19-crisis has further exposed and exacerbated social dumping and the existing precariousness of the situations of many mobile workers employed in the EU's agri-food, construction and healthcare sectors.

In a resolution adopted on Friday, Parliament urges the Commission to assess the employment, health and safety conditions of cross-border and seasonal workers, including the role of intermediary agencies and subcontracting firms, to identify shortcomings in EU and national legislation and, possibly, revise the existing EU laws. The text also calls for a swift and balanced agreement on the [coordination of social security systems](#) that is needed to combat social fraud and the abuse of mobile workers' rights.

Urgent measures needed to protect seasonal and cross-border workers

MEPs urge the Commission to issue new, specific guidelines for cross-border and seasonal workers in the context of COVID-19, to propose long-term solutions to deal with abusive subcontracting practices and to ensure that the [European Labour Authority](#) (ELA) becomes fully operational as a matter of priority. Member states must increase the capacity of labour inspectorates and ensure quality housing, which should be decoupled from their remuneration, says the text.

The resolution was adopted with 593 votes in favour, 34 against and 38 abstentions.

Next steps

The European Commission is expected to present guidelines to protect cross border and seasonal workers shortly.

Background

In 2018, the largest number of cross-border workers went from Poland to work in Germany (125 000 people, many of them working within the construction field), from France to Luxembourg (88 000), from Germany to Luxembourg (52 000), from Slovakia to Austria (48 000, most of them women working in the healthcare sector in Austria) and from France to Belgium (46 000).

An estimated 800 000 to one million seasonal workers are hired in the EU each year, mainly in the agri-food sector: 370 000 in Italy, 300 000 in Germany, 276 000 in France and 150 000 in Spain.

Seasonal and cross-border workers can be employed in another EU member state based on their right to free movement within the EU. The legislation of the host member states applies based on the principle of equal treatment. Access to unemployment benefits and social protection is regulated through the coordination of social security systems, currently under review. 1.3 million people in the EU live in one member state and work in another.

The text will be available in full [here](#) (19.06.2020)

[Press release – MEPs call for free movement across borders to be swiftly and fully re-established](#)



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MEPs express their concern about remaining [internal border controls in the Schengen area](#) and their impact on people and businesses, in [a resolution](#) adopted on Friday by 520 votes in favour, 86 against and 59 abstentions.

They stress that a swift and coordinated return to a fully functional Schengen area is of utmost importance to safeguard freedom of movement, one of the main achievements of European integration, and to ensure the EU's economic recovery after the pandemic. MEPs reject any uncoordinated, bilateral action by individual EU countries and highlight the principle of non-discrimination in the reopening of borders.

MEPs also urgently call for a discussion on a Recovery Plan for Schengen to prevent any temporary internal border controls from becoming semi-permanent. The plan should also include contingency plans in case of a potential second wave.

Civil Liberties Committee Chair and rapporteur [Juan Fernando López Aguilar](#) (S&D, ES) said: "While it is good news that more and more internal border restrictions are being lifted, the way in which it has been done leaves a lot to be desired. Without the return to a fully functional Schengen Area, we are still missing an essential stepping-stone on our way to recovery. A complete return to free movement, no discrimination, mutual trust and solidarity are of utmost importance and core values of the EU."

Future of Schengen: new governance and enlargement

In the medium-term, MEPs stress that a reflection on how to enhance mutual trust between member states and ensure a truly European governance of the

Schengen area is needed. In light of new challenges, they call on the Commission to propose a reform of Schengen governance.

MEPs also ask Council and member states to increase their efforts in Schengen integration and take the necessary steps to admit Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia into the Schengen area.

Background

After introducing [internal border checks](#) to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, EU countries have started to lift controls and related travel restrictions. [The Commission recommended](#) to Schengen countries that they should lift the internal border controls by 15 June 2020; the Commission in turn set up an [online platform](#) called Re-open EU with up-to-date information for travellers.

[The Schengen Area](#) encompasses most EU member states, except for Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania. Of non-EU states, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein have joined the Schengen Area. Europe is celebrating this week the 35th anniversary of the agreement that was signed on 14 June 1985 in Schengen (Luxembourg) to abolish internal border controls.