

## FINAL LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers, we must part again.

Welcome to this year's last issue of EU-Now. Seeing the events unfold in these busy days made me realise that maybe the true winner of this whole process was cooperation. Both directives, in fact, were approved in both chambers and passed. An excellent result, that denotes a willingness to listen to each other and find beauty in compromise. The discussions got heated (in the Parliament more so than in the Council, but no surprise there), though the tones still remained acceptable, and constructive debate triumphed.

Of course, not *everything was perfectly splendid and peaceful, but minor inconveniences do not define the work of everyone. Some members of the right-wing parliamentary factions, for example, had very strong opinions about us, this newspaper, accusing us of attacks and fake news, but we are above that. We believe that the work done here is very important and those who follow us are with us. Ms. Castelanelli, has released a statement that denotes maturity and openness to dialogue:*

*"Many are always pointing their finger. Empty attacks and narratives of egoism only hinder the work of the Parliament and the Press. They are not a constructive way to represent our citizens." This is the attitude we appreciate and have committed ourselves to promoting in our pages, and we're glad to see that we're not alone in this.*

I would like to thank the experts for their incredibly educational presentations that surely had a significant impact on the discussions, it has been an honor.

I would also like to congratulate myself with the boards of both chambers for their work, the Commissioners, the Director General and the Deputy Director General, the legal advisor and our social media manager, always behind the scenes.

Finally, thank you to my tireless team of editors and journalists, who worked as one symbiotic organism: we made it!

Anush Zakharyan  
Editor in Chief

## THE LAST PRESS CONFERENCE

### *Words of discrimination and incommunicability between MEPs*

In these two days of political negotiations, we have heard MEPs use inappropriate language regarding the LGBTQIA+ community time and time again. First and foremost, the expression "both genders" was used repeatedly during interviews, speeches, and debates, as well as incorrect sayings such as "same-sex individuals" and "same-sex families" (what are these two supposed to mean?) when debating on the Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers. It appears, indeed, that MEPs enter unknown territory when discussing gender, identity, and sexual orientation. What it indicates is the total neglect of the existence of a consistent minority within the European Union.

*Continues on page 3*

## SENSE AND SENSIBILITY IN THE COUNCIL

### *FINLAND VS GERMANY*

This morning the Ministers started the session by discussing the submitted amendments concerning the Directive on work-life balance. Afterwards, they exchanged views about a dilemma, not a Shakespearean one, but not of less importance (*si parva licet*).

Should informal meetings (aimed at sharing data on improvements in work-life balance) be compulsory or not? - That was the question.

At a first glance, the discussion was peaceful, but soon after it got heated.

Some Ministers claimed that informal meetings on a yearly basis should be compulsory, others instead asserted that they should not be compulsory, and that each Member State should freely decide whether to participate in these meetings or not.

This matter led to a little clash between the Minister of Finland (Ms. Gozzi) and the Minister of Germany (Mr. Jacobi), protagonists and deuteragonists of the debate.

In response to the proposal of establishing informal and non-compulsory meetings to keep track of possible improvements in the work-life balance sphere, the Minister of Germany replied with determination that: *'we don't believe it to be necessarily on an international level to have these [informal meetings] formalized'*.

What is more, the minister pointed out: *'In contrast to the ministers of France and Finland, we have a lot of confidence that member states will actually seek to cooperate and exchange. We don't believe they need to be forced to have yearly summits. We don't think that member states are as inactive and passive as it has been said by these ministers. It's quite shocking to see'*

The minister then clarified that he did not mean that there is no need to formalize the decisions, but he meant that member states should not be forced to exchange data.

Proceeding with his argument, Mr. Jacobi stated: *'We absolutely support member states coming together yearly or every six months or how often they want, we just don't believe it's necessary to force them to and that's really the main difference. Finland imposes this duty to member states, we don't believe that should be done'*.

Ms. Gozzi, representing Finland, did not hesitate to reply: *'We want to ask Germany to read carefully the amendment as we carefully chose the word and the modal should rather than must concerning the yearly meetings, therefore leaving member states the possibility to refuse to join the meetings while still warmly welcoming them to participate so in the light of this meeting being an occa-*

## SENSE AND SENSIBILITY IN THE COUNCIL

*sion where countries like Finland (which already has a very effective legislation on work-life balance) can share their progress to other member states improving their legislative framework'.*

In response to this linguistic excursus, the reply by the minister of Germany reached a climax with this interesting statement: *'It's not about semantics'.*

What is remarkable is that these divergences between Germany and Finland found fertile ground in the press conference, as well.

Having noticed the stress put by Ministers on the idea of the EU, during the conference journalists addressed to Germany the following question: *'Don't you think that this concept (union) is valid only if all member states collabo-*

*rate and share among each other? If some countries share their improvements and others don't, how can members keep track of the progress, which is a common goal in the whole Union?'*

Mr. Jacobi answered with resolute optimism that Germany does not worry that Member States would not choose to attend these meetings, because the spirit of the Union is extremely strong. According to the Minister, it is really a matter of trust - *'The trust that we have is great, we have trust in each Member State'.*

In addition: *'It doesn't mean that we need to stop making laws, but there is a time and a place for this trust. The place of trust, the place of good faith'.*

We noticed how Ministers showed disa-

greements in this respect. Nevertheless, they showed their commitment and their priority: to reach a common goal after sharing standpoints, after diverging and converging into common points. This reflects the guiding principle of *mutual sincere cooperation, established by the Treaty on European Union.*

Overall, after two days of debate, I would say that Ministers of the Council did a great job, proving that cooperation and constructive dialogue are extremely important for a future of change because, as John Donne once said, *No man is an island entire of itself.*

Nare Haroutyunian

## THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE DIRECTIVE HAS BEEN APPROVED!

### *Can this be a sign of change?*

Yesterday the proposal about the directive on work-life balance for parents and carers was approved, so we decided to ask some questions to Mr. Babuscio, who, as a member of the Greens faction, was a determined sustainer of the proposal.

**You said that you are happy with the result, so my question is: do you think this directive can actually solve the problem of gender inequality?**

*As I said in my opening speech, the Green/EFA group thought that the directive needed to be implemented with some amendments. If we could, we would ask to increase the payment for leave at least on 80% and not just to the equivalent to sick leave. This directive clearly does not solve all the problems of gender equality, but it is undoubtedly a good start. I am happy for the results because, at least the parliament, showed itself as cooperative. If we had had the possibility to propose some amendments, we would surely have reached our goals.*

*We are satisfied with the coalition which has been formed by us, the GUE/NGL, S&D, Renew Europe, and Non-attached members. As it happened for the first proposal, we put aside personalism and ideologies and we all worked to reach the same purpose. For the second proposal the vote was almost unanimous (just one MEP voted against), but this should not be read as a complete share of intents. Due to the impossibility to propose amendments, we were on the same ground but for different reasons: the progressive coalition would have made this more strict, the conservative parties would have made more rigorous the division between what they called "natural families" and not natural ones, together with a precise gender differentiation. We clearly disagree with this last position. This is a form of discrimination.*

**You said that women have the most brilliant academic career but they are still paid less, and that the reason for this lies in the treatment reserved to women which is based on sexism. Could you talk a little bit about this?**

*Nowadays, 45% of women in the Union are graduated (against the only 34% for men), but still just one out of four managers of big companies are female. This is a shame. Sexism shows itself in different manners and on several grounds. According to me, that a woman has to choose between having a family and continuing working is a terrible manifestation of the patriarchal society we live in.*

*Moreover, work life balance is just a part of a broader problem of discriminations, which also appeared clear today in the debate: some parties of the parliament, even if they have supported the directive, do not really embrace the battles for women rights as we do. Actually, they do not embrace struggles for minorities or discriminated groups' rights at all. For instance, when taking into consideration LGBTQIA+ rights they completely denied the fact that those should be matters for the European Parliament. This is clearly a trial to leave to nation states the possibility to completely ignore those subjects, as a lot of nations governed by these right-wing parties usually do.*

Davide Vardanega



## THE LAST PRESS CONFERENCE

The behavior of elected representatives is understandable when put into context. Indeed, charts on discrimination in the European Union show a complex pattern of institutional and private discrimination for the LGBTQ+ minority. In a survey conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, almost half of all respondents (47%) said they had personally felt discriminated against or harassed on the grounds of sexual orientation. Considering that people identifying within the minority mentioned above vary between 2 percent and 8 percent of member countries' population, this implies up to four percent of their citizens are discriminated against on a daily basis. Yet, when presented with these facts during the press conference, the situation exploded, highlighting the incapability of MEPs of communicating

across factions.

*"Different countries have different standpoints on this matter. We cannot find common ground here,"* - claimed Miss Dal Colle, the leader of EPP.

*"We have always tried to defend their rights (referring to citizens) against the decisions of some parties that are more authoritarian than us, which always try to shut us up,"* - replied ID representative Danieli.

*"How can you try to address this topic without using simplifying words when discussing with people who exclude the possibility that there could be another gender identity or sexual orientation? How to address this topic when people still talk about traditional families? (...)* The problem is a problem of who you're

*dealing with. You use simplifying language to discuss with people who disagree with you to find common ground,"* - explained Mr. Babuscio, Greens EP.

What these three comments have in common is the disillusion towards the capacity of MEPs to find a space of understanding and mutual communication within the walls of European Union institutions. Opponents are "different", there to "shut you up" and, inevitably, force you to moderate and shape your language so as to "find common ground". The problem is that this negotiation often has a price: minorities' rights to human dignity, institutional recognition and a safe workplace.

Giada Santana  
Vice Editor in Chief

### MR. DANIELI: THE DISRUPTIVE VOICE OF ID AND HIS CHALLENGE TO THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Danieli and the ID have been characterized for being one of the most outstanding and disrupting coalition of the European Parliament: every sentence was capable of rousing chaos, discussions and fights. In particular, the first day was the most intense since the Regulation on Sustainable Investment Framework was seen as a new source of disparity among local and multinational businesses; as well as a new method for Europe to overcome the national sovereignty.

I had the pleasure to meet Mr. Danieli after the closing ceremony. In the morning, when the MEPs were discussing the last amendments of the Directive on work-life balance, Mr. Danieli remarked a statement of Mr. Pozzebon: *"Many politicians put the quantity over quality"*. I asked him what quality changes he would have proposed, if he had not found himself in such a hostile environment as he himself described the Parliament of the past days. Then, we talked about how EPP was the only group, along with the ID, considering them as a true coalition, equal to the others, and not just as a nuisance (and even his bromance with the ECR's MEP Pozzebon, that maybe we could see bloom in a distant future under the sign of nationalism). In fact, Mr. Pozzebon and Mr. Danieli were the strong, disruptive, and controversial voices of these debate sessions. I think we could not have had a more enjoyable opposition. However, if they had worked a little bit on the contents and proposals, even in a hostile environment, we could have appreciated them more (as political subjects of course).

For the MEP, the disappointing points of both directives were the fact that at the time they had more urgent things to think about, such as the COVID19 pandemic. However, social and economic issues were important too, and in certain sense related to the pandemic.

**I asked him: "Do you think that the concept of family will evolve?" and he replied:**

*"I think that at the moment, as my colleague Ms. Abenova said, a family with children is only able to exist with a father and a mother unless we don't find a way to make it possible*

*for men to have children too. However, now the natural family is like that. So, at the moment families with only a mother or a father exist too, maybe because the partner died, they divorced and so on. We know that this situation exists, but there are exceptions"*.

I would like to raise the attention on monoparental families, which in Europe are 15%. The country with the highest rate of monoparental families is Denmark with 29.33%. If we want to talk about numbers in order to be as accurate as possible, monoparental families with more than one child are more than a million. Therefore, the statement of Mr. Danieli seems hazardous, a fruit of negligence towards families that are not considered normal. The MEP added: *"You can't consider those families as an exception treat them as they didn't exist, and then expect their children, being grown up, not to be outrageously wrathful with those institutions that defines themselves as 'on the side of people' while ignoring all those people that do not respect their canons. Actually, this is not directed only to ID and ECR, but also towards every MEP in the Parliament that deliberately ignored other families, except for the LGBT ones"*.

Mr. Daniel is confident that in the future, if the scientific community (not specified whether he is referring to the anthropological, sociological, or biological community) finds another definition for 'natural family', the ID will react according to this very definition. Unfortunately, Mr. Danieli cannot tell me which scientific figure he is actually based on, making me strongly doubtful on his words. He should probably understand that in the scientific field, unless you bring evidence to your thesis, it is better to avoid any statement.

Nevertheless, I have enjoyed the challenge that Ms. Abenova and Mr. Danieli have thrown down to the biological community. Maybe in the future, when Europe starts redistributing the funds not only to epidemiological research, but also among all the scientific branches; we will see the first biological born man giving birth to a child like Zeus did with his son Dyonisus.

Giulia Saccone

## MS. CASTELANELLI: A SINGULAR AND COURAGEOUS CHOICE

When I heard that someone outside the Conservative Wing voted in favor of the amendment of Article 15 on States' ability to manage the funds provided by the Sustainable Investment Framework, I was undeniably surprised. I wondered who that someone could have been, and I came to the conclusion that probably was a *turncoat (voltagabbana) with original and courageous intentions. I was right on two out of three things, and, unfortunately for the gossip hunters it was not the turncoat. The MEP from the Non-Attached Members, Ms. Camilla Castelanelli, voted in favor of the amendment of Article 15 proposed by ID.*

She stated that the approval was for her country, Greece, which has been struggling and suffering from a detrimental crisis since 2015. Then she added:

*"Greece has the need to take control back, especially on its economy and on its green investments. So, I think that what they proposed wasn't too far right extremist, and that it could apply to all populist parties all around the Parliament. Even if I am a far left extremist, I think I have to do everything that's possible for the Greek people".*

Asking if she had heard the reaction of her connational from the GUE/NGL, Mr. Campagnolo, was obvious. She answered that she had not, since during the last elections, in 2019, Syriza has been detached from the *Komunistikos komma elladas* and probably this is the main reason why she lost to *Nea Demokratia*. Furthermore, the Party left the GUE/NGL group in 2010, as *"Syriza wasn't doing enough for the Greek people, especially its extremism cannot be compared to our real communism extremism"*.

Concerning her group reaction, Ms. Castelanelli replied:

*"My party is a eurosceptic one, especially a populist. So in my opinion, the Greek middle class comes first than everything else. They just asked me why and then they accepted my position"*.

Listening to her declaration, I asked Ms. Castelanelli a fundamental question for all of us: "But with this action for your people, aren't you afraid of the negative effects that your action could have in Eastern Europe? I mean, do you remember what happened in Hungary with the CAP funds? A real criminal group was established around those funds, and this

group was directly ruled by Viktor Orbán.

*"Actually yes, I have to admit that I'm afraid of this, but I am more concerned about what the European Union can still do to Greece. We have asked for help with the economic and refugee crisis, but no one answered"*.

She does not see a pro-EU future for Greece, but simply a forced domestic partnership under the same roof until Greece is able to be independent

Ms. Castelanelli's action might sound as reckless and egoistic towards the future of the European countries that are still struggling with their corrupt governments; or at least, it was more thoughtful than the vote made from Mr. Cortivo, from Renew Europe: he voted in favor of the same amendment of Article 15 due to a *technical problem on the vote. Indeed, as the leader of Renew Europe Ms. Khayari stated: "He didn't raise his hand on purpose"*.

I will not judge whether her words are true or not, but I will leave the judgment to our fellow readers.

*Giulia Saccone*

## THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

*The time to take stock of this 4th edition of VeUMEU has come.*

These two days of negotiation on the Proposals drafted by the Commission on Work-life Balance and Sustainable Investment Framework were days of tension in the Council of the European Union. Days full of discussions, motions, points of information and personal privilege, amendments, and votes. As in all the negotiation processes, there were some conflicting opinions between the Member States, but also understanding and agreement.

During the first day of the negotiation, the Directive on work-life balance was discussed. The vast majority of the Ministers agreed on the need for its implementation domestically. However, there have been some strong negotiators, who have made their voices heard by demonstrating their disagreement on some aspects of the Directive. In particular, the main points of disagreement concerned the time period necessary for the collection of information regarding the Proposal (discussion between Ministers on whether a 5- or 3-year period was more appropriate), and the introduction

of yearly informal meetings between countries in order to exchange and analyze data on the progress made at the national level and its potential improvements. There have also been interesting suggestions on flexible working hours, on the extension of parental leave, and on the possibility to work remotely.

The second day of the decisional process, instead, saw the Regulation on Sustainable Investment Framework at the center of the debate. As for the Directive, almost all the Ministers stressed the urgency of such a Regulation in the EU framework, especially, due to the increasing deterioration of the environment and the worsening of climate change in the last years. Exactly as for the first Proposal, the negotiation has been characterized by some friction and disagreements between the Member States, specifically on the use of nuclear energy as a transitional source and its sustainability.

However, despite the usual difficulties encountered by Ministers in a multilateral negotiation, the general atmosphere was filled with peace, cooperation, equi-

ty, and unity. Indeed, at the end of the two days of negotiation both Proposals passed, showing the importance and urgency of both Directive and Regulation to be implemented. Moreover, it showed a strong desire of the Ministers to find common ground.

Not all Ministers achieved what they hoped to achieve before the negotiation began. Some had to make concessions, maybe promises, and compromise in order to reach a final agreement. However, in the end, all the Member States were happy and satisfied with the results achieved.

Therefore, we can conclude by saying that this 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the VeUMEU within the Council of the European Union left a mark mainly because of the politeness, acceptance, and cooperation of its Members; and more importantly by a sense of belonging to a single and united society in the name of progress and integration: the European Union.

*Greta Bordin*

**A MASSIVE THANK YOU FOR THIS UNUSUAL  
BUT STILL WONDERFUL VEUMEU2020 TO ALL  
THE PARTICIPANTS FROM THE STAFF**



 **EUnow!**

**EUnow! is:**

**Anush Zakharyan**, Editor in Chief

**Giada Santana**, Vice Editor in Chief

**Greta Bordin**, Editor and Council Coordinator

**Marco Zaupa**, Editor and Parliament Coordinator

**Journalists:**

Davide Vardanega

Giulia Saccone

Nare Haroutyunian

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