

Beat: Politics

European Conservatives and Reformists and Alliance of European Conservatives

European Council meeting, 20 - 21 March

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USPA NEWS - ECR Leaders meet in Brussels before the European Council. Arrivals and statements by David CAMERON, UK Prime Minister, and Martin CALLANAN, leader of the ECR Group.

(Source: ecrgroup.eu & europartv.europa.eu)

Mixed media sources.

Leaders and representatives of the parties making up the European Conservatives and Reformists and Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists met today in Brussels, ahead of the European Council meeting. Following a debate, the leaders adopted a joint communiqué covering European reform, economic reform, political reform, Europe's demographic challenge, energy policy, the EU budget, the Euro crisis, international affairs, and global crime and terrorism.

ECR LEADERS' SUMMIT - Brussels, 20 March 2014 - COMMUNIQUÉ

The Leaders of the ECR, meeting in Brussels for their second Summit, considered the need for substantial economic and political reform of the European Union. They

discussed the crisis in Ukraine, energy policy, and the implications of developments in the euro-area for the wider EU. The Leaders of the ECR were updated by Martin Callanan, Chairman of the ECR Group, and by Jan Zahradil, President of the Alliance of the ECR member parties, on progress in widening and deepening the work of the ECR. They looked forward to further expansion of both the Group and the Alliance, particularly in the context of the forthcoming European Parliamentary elections in May

1-REFORM IN EUROPE

We believe it is in the national interests of both its Member States and their neighbours that the European Union is a success but it currently faces enormous challenges which must be urgently addressed if it is not to fail. Economically, the steady loss of global competitiveness must be reversed and the euro area crisis must be overcome in order to re-establish growth and prosperity. Politically, the out of date centralising vision of some, that has damaged the EU's standing and legitimacy in the eyes of too many of our citizens, must be rejected in favour of new direction which has the support of public opinion. These objectives can only be achieved by a sustained commitment to substantial economic and political reform.

2-ECONOMIC REFORM: EUROPE'S GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

We support a growth strategy that ensures that the right policy framework is in place to allow businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive, creating employment, generating wealth, and raising living standards. We believe this policy framework must ensure that both services and manufacturing sectors are able to thrive in Europe and we oppose policies which will result in the export of jobs, particularly in manufacturing, to other parts of the world because of high costs or over-regulation.

We therefore stress the crucial importance of cutting red tape, and call for greater use of impact assessments of new regulatory proposals. We believe that by establishing a more business-friendly regulatory environment including support for innovation, lower jobs taxes, and labour market flexibility, we can also encourage re-shoring - bringing jobs back to Europe.

The development of vibrant SMEs is vital to the economic future of Europe and so particular attention should be paid to ensure their efforts to take advantage of globalization are not hampered by excessive tax or regulatory burdens.

We believe that the single market must be developed further to fulfil its full potential, particularly in services and the digital economy. We believe that there is great potential in developing closer trade and economic links throughout the Mediterranean area and that progress in this direction will help underpin the progress of the Arab Spring and relieve the pressure for emigration. European economic interests throughout the Maghreb and indeed throughout Africa need to be developed in the face of global economic competition.

3-POLITICAL REFORM: INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

"We are committed to significant institutional reform of the European Union to ensure it focuses on the areas where it can deliver added value. We believe that this should involve changes to the treaties to improve the terms of membership for all its Member States.

"ç We oppose the abuse of existing treaty arrangements to advance further European integration. The ECR will therefore not nominate an individual to stand as a candidate to be the next President of the European Commission as part of the campaign for the election of the next European Parliament as no such electoral procedure is envisaged in European law.

4-EUROPE'S DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

In order to boost Europe's global competitiveness a new strategy aimed at tackling the enormous demographic challenges that we face needs to be developed.

Dealing with this demographic challenge should therefore become a new policy priority for all European countries. A crucial element of such new initiatives must be more focus on supporting demographic renewal through improved support for families and especially children.

5-ENERGY POLICY

Recent events in Ukraine have shown that energy security is a core strategic interest for Member States of the European Union. Our long term goal should be real energy security for the Member States of the European Union as a whole. This would mean that EU Member States would no longer be vulnerable to external pressure. And this bold ambition "" to make full use of our indigenous energy resources, to have a single integrated energy market across the whole EU, to have the maximum diversity of supply "" would mean cheaper prices for consumers and make our industries more globally competitive. It is the right European project at the right time.

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7-THE EU BUDGET

We reaffirm our belief that the EU budget must be based upon the concept of European added value and guided by the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, value for money, and subsidiarity.

We reaffirm our commitment to achieving equal payments for farmers across the EU.

The cost of holding meetings of the European Parliament in more than one location cannot be justified and so we support the principle that the Parliament should have the right to decide on a single seat.

8-EURO AREA CRISIS

The on-going euro area crisis has had a significant adverse impact on the whole European Union. To mitigate the economic and financial crisis and in response to structural shortcomings in the architecture of the economic and monetary union, it is essential that all members of the European Union and particularly members of the euro area pursue economic reform, re-establish sound public finances, safeguard financial stability, and improve economic governance as the basis for long-term recovery and a return to prosperity.

Whilst a limited strengthening of some aspects of the architecture of EMU may be necessary to ensure the single currency is able to return to stability, we consider that the European Union and EMU cannot be democratically sustainable without a decentralisation of powers. Progress towards further integration of the euro area must not infringe on the prerogatives of national parliaments of euro area members, especially whenever any transfer of sovereignty is envisaged, and should fully respect the wish of those non-members of the euro area that have an opt-out from future membership to retain their respective national currencies.

Given that the terms and conditions of membership of the euro area have changed so significantly since its creation and continue to evolve, the commitment to join the euro in the future - given by most European Union members who are not yet members of the euro area - should be reviewed as part of any future Treaty change.

9-INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Ukraine

We support the people of Ukraine and their desire to choose their own future. We welcome the efforts of the new Ukrainian Government to re-establish democracy and the rule of law.

We utterly condemn Russia's illegal violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The referendum in Crimea was

illegal and illegitimate and so will not be recognised internationally. We call on Russia to uphold international law, to respect its agreements with Ukraine, and to begin a dialogue with the Ukrainian Government in order to re-establish peace and good relations in the region. Whilst hoping that the situation can be de-escalated quickly and that normal relations with Russia can be quickly re-established, we agree that additional measures will need to be taken progressively to ensure Ukraine's sovereignty is respected by Russia.

Eastern Partnership

We welcome the initialling of Association Agreements including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Georgia and Moldova during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and we underline the importance of signing and implementing these agreements as soon as possible. We reaffirm our support for democratic opposition and human rights defenders active in Belarus.

Persecution of Christians

We reiterate our support and commitment to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion or belief. We are alarmed by the rising number of cases of intolerance, repression and violence directed against Christian communities in many parts of the world particularly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. We call on all Member States and the European Union to work closely with the relevant national authorities to ensure the rights of Christian minorities are respected.

Middle East Peace Process

We welcome the resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestine Authority as we believe that direct negotiations between the two sides are the only way to secure long-term stability and political reform in the Middle East. We reiterate our support for a two-State solution, to be agreed and respected by the Israelis and the Palestinians, and based on 1967 borders with agreed land for peace swaps.

Arab Spring

With conflict in Syria and the on-going humanitarian crisis, continuing political unrest in Egypt, and the fragility of new governments in countries such as Libya, it is clear the early hopes of the Arab Spring are far from being realised. We believe that the Arab Spring represented the start a long process rather than an instant solution and so we reaffirm our support for the efforts of those governments which are committed to democratic political, social and economic reforms. We call on all parties in the Arab world to show the leadership and vision needed to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy within the rule of law.

Iran

The threat of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is one of the greatest dangers to the peace and security of the world. We therefore support the efforts of six major world powers to reach an agreement with Iran on its nuclear ambitions and welcome the recent international agreement as an important first step which must be fully implemented. In order to secure a comprehensive and final settlement that fully addresses the concerns of the international community, we believe that sanctions must in the meantime be enforced robustly.

10-GLOBAL CRIME AND TERRORISM

Crime is increasingly a cross-border phenomenon, with a global reach and organisation. We reaffirm our support for the fight against international terrorism and organised crime through the use of inter-governmental and EU cooperation, and agreements with our international partners.

We are concerned about the growth of cybercrime and the linkage between online and offline criminal activities, such as child pornography. We support efforts to combat cybercrime, including the establishment of the European Cybercrime Centre, and by Member States increasing the security of information networks.

We deplore the scourge of human trafficking. The European Union encompasses source, transit and destination countries and the open borders across much of the continent present law enforcement authorities with specific challenges. We re-affirm our support for efforts by lawmakers and public authorities to prioritise the fight against this heinous crime.

(Source: ecrgroup.eu & europartv.europa.eu)

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