



STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

State of the Union

Iratxe García, President of the S&D Group

The S&D Group's support of the Commission has never been a blank cheque and we need to see more ambition in the coming months. That's why, ahead of next week's State of the Union debate, our group handed President von der Leyen a letter to demand fresh impetus for action in crucial policy areas such as climate, migration and gender-based violence. Throughout the COVID crisis, we also laid the groundwork for some important policies, such as the protection of the rule of law and common investments in our future, but these fledgling policies need to be made permanent with a more robust structure.

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DEBATE ON TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER - VOTES ON THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

Situation in Afghanistan

Pedro Marques, S&D MEP and vice-president for foreign policy

Following the takeover of the Afghanistan by the Taliban, we are extremely concerned about the humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding. Our message must be one of solidarity, and not of fearmongering. New procedures including safe corridors must be found urgently to continue evacuations through the UNHCR for all who wish to leave Afghanistan and most notably for those most at risk, including through the reopening of Kabul airport and land borders. Support for relief and resettlement in neighbouring countries is necessary but is not a replacement for Europe to shoulder its responsibility in welcoming refugees at risk of prosecution or killing. Our absolute priority must also be engaging with international donors to set up distribution channels for humanitarian aid. The Taliban allowing humanitarian workers to work freely will be the first test for them. Realistic conditions must be assessed for engagement with the country including the resumption of development aid disbursed directly to civil society organisations on the ground. But there must be a strong human rights clause - and particularly respect for women's rights - to be attached to EU financial assistance for the country. The international community must demand concrete commitments regarding the safety and well-being of women and girls in talks with the Taliban, to protect the gains that were made for Afghan women in the last 20 years. We also support the HR/VP to use Afghanistan as a breakthrough moment for asserting the path towards EU Strategic Autonomy. The Afghanistan situation has illustrated that the EU needs to reinforce both its autonomy over decisions and its autonomy over action.

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DEBATE ON MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER - VOTE WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

Fair working conditions, rights and social protection for platform workers

Elisabetta Gualmini, S&D negotiator for better protecting platform workers

It is so easy – with one click on your smartphone you can order food, a car to take you places or a cleaner to tidy your home. During the pandemic we have grown even more accustomed to these nice conveniences of modern life. But how do they affect the lives of the people behind the app? Currently, platform workers are considered as self-employed. As a consequence they are only too often denied paid leave, social security, decent working conditions. We want to change the game of the gig economy. Platform workers must be considered as employees as a general presumption and every time they claim to be in an employment relation, entailing full social and worker's rights. If the platform companies disagree, it is up to them to prove that no employment relationship exists with the worker and they are dealing with genuine self-employed. Already today one in ten Europeans has performed platform work. We call on the Commission to urgently propose EU laws to better protect platform workers.

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DEBATE ON TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER - VOTE ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

Blue Card Directive

Javier Moreno Sánchez, European Parliament negotiator for the Blue Card Directive

At a time when migration remains high on the political agenda, it is important that we do everything we can to improve legal migration to Europe. Next week, the European Parliament will vote on revised rules to the Blue Card Directive that include a more attractive and viable scheme for both skilled third-country nationals and employers in the EU. The new rules should also result in simpler procedures for national administrations to really make the most of legal migration. With the revised rules, Blue Card holders can enjoy greater social protection, improved labour mobility rights and equal treatment for family members. In the future, we intend to go further so that workers in medium and low-paid employment can come and contribute to our society in the same beneficial way that Blue Card holders can now.

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DEBATE ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER - VOTE ON THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

Media freedom and further deterioration of the Rule of law in Poland

Juan Fernando López Aguilar MEP, S&D chair of the civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee and rapporteur

Once again the European Parliament must hold an important debate on Poland, because unfortunately the Law and Justice government is escalating the fight against the rule of law and democracy on so many fronts. They now want to adopt the so-called Lex-TVN bill, which clearly goes against the very essence of the public right to unbiased information and freedom of speech. They say the bill seeks to prevent potential media acquisitions by non-EU countries, but in reality, they want to target independent and critical media such as TVN. Ahead of the expected ruling from the PiS controlled Constitutional Tribunal, we also need to remind the Polish government that by joining the EU, Poland accepted the primacy of the EU law. This means that the ECJ rulings must be fully respected and we will not accept any kind of pressure against the independence of Polish judges, including when they are applying EU law and judgments from the European Court of Justice.

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DEBATE ON TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER - VOTE ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

Direction of EU-Russia political relations

Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, S&D MEP and shadow rapporteur on Russia

Unfortunately, recent years have shown that Russia is choosing confrontation over cooperation. Blatant violations of international law that threaten security and stability in Europe and their ever more aggressive disinformation campaigns are only some of the most egregious examples. What we now need is a forward-looking EU policy towards Russia, that will move the EU from a reactive to a more strategic approach. This requires unity of course. Continued support for Russia's civil society is needed more than ever, in particular in the light of the crackdown on Russian civil society and opposition ahead of this month's Duma elections. Selective engagement on global challenges such as climate change, environment or health, or on conflict prevention and resolution should be used to firmly anchor Russia in the multilateral system.

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DEBATE ON TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER - VOTES ON THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

Situation in Lebanon

Pedro Marques, S&D MEP and vice-president for foreign policy

In a country where stability means the unacceptable continuation of the status quo, the Lebanese people deserve a real paradigm change. The current power-sharing system, the many abuses and widespread corruption must end. The only way forward is ensuring fair, transparent and independent parliamentary, municipal and presidential elections in 2022. On this we have requested and obtained a debate in the next plenary in Strasbourg. We stand beside the Lebanese people but we will be inflexible against those boycotting the changes needed. We will call for targeted sanctions, if necessary.

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