

S&D Interparliamentary Newsletter - Connecting with National Parliaments

BRUSSELS, 23/04/24

S&D MEPS & MPS JOIN FORCES

Gender equality – the basis of democracy, not a cherry on top

Dear Arielle,

On International Women's Day 2024, the S&D Group decided to join forces with their Members from national parliaments at the Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) Interparliamentary Committee Meeting (ICM) to **call for greater gender equality in society and in sports. For European social democrats, advancing standards in the area of gender equality means advancing democracy, social wellbeing and progress.**



In the wake of Spain's victory in the women's world cup final last summer, and in the run up to the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, this year's FEMM ICM, devoted to 'women in sport', could not be more topical. Sport has historically been a male preserve, with women's participation historically excluded and overlooked. **In fact, it was only in 1991 that all new sports in the Olympics were obliged to have a women's event, and only in the 2012 Olympics that women competed in every discipline. Finally, for the Olympics in Paris, there will be as many women as men participating.** While the Olympic Charter considers the **practice of sport to be a human right**, the keynote speakers at this ICM reminded parliamentarians about the scandals and setbacks, which occur at all levels in sport across the

EU.

S&Ds Members did not hesitate to underline at the conference that empowering women in sports involves providing equal opportunities, supporting female athletes' development, and promoting gender equality within the sporting community. Encouraging women to participate in sports and showcasing their achievements through media coverage are equally essential steps in empowering women.

This year's IWD also had a very special political dimension due to the upcoming **European elections**, a lot is indeed at stake. **Though equality between women and men is a fundamental right** - recognised since the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the EU Gender Equality Index stipulates that if we continue at the current pace, gender equality within **the EU will only become a reality in 60 years from now**. This trajectory has slowed even further in recent years, when we have witnessed a **growing backlash against gender equality and women's rights**. Rights that we had considered to be established and guaranteed are now more and more called into question. This is becoming a reality in a growing number of EU member states. In addition, this trend goes **hand in hand with general anti-democratic movements**, which endanger our core values and the bases of our pluralistic and democratic societies. For the progressive family, **gender equality** is not a cherry on the top, but part of the **backbone of democratic society**.

One key **obstacle in achieving gender equality is the lack of political and financial investment in adopting effective measures**. This is the reason why, for the progressive family, the **fight for equality is a key element in June's elections**. **A strong progressive force in Europe and in the new European Parliament is therefore, indispensable to achieve gender equality**.

S&D calls for peace, democracy and gender equality at the plenary meeting of COSAC

[The parliamentary dimension of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU](#) organized the [LXXI Plenary Meeting of COSAC](#) (Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union) from 24 to 26 March 2024 at the European Parliament, Brussels.



COSAC brings together the European affairs committees of national parliaments (from EU Member States, candidate countries, EEA countries, microstates and observers) and a delegation from the European Parliament. Once again, the progressive family was very well represented at this Conference. Indeed, thanks to the PS Speaker of the Belgium House of Representatives and Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs, [Eliane Tillieux](#); the **two MEPs**, [EP Vice-President Marc Angel](#) (S&D, LU) and S&D AFCCO coordinator [Domènec Ruiz Devesa](#) (S&D, ES); the **33 National Members of Parliament and socialist keynote speakers** such as [Nicolas Schmit](#) and [Latifa Gahouchi](#), Belgium PS Senator and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men, **the S&D family not only steered the debates but also left their footprint on the final outcomes of this LXXI COSAC plenary meeting**. The 71st plenary meeting of COSAC focused on a variety of issues ranging from the review of the 2019-2024 European legislature to gender policy and the representation of women and men in parliament, open strategic autonomy focusing on competitiveness and resilience, and

discussions on democracy and the rule of law in Europe, with a focus on how best to continue into the next legislative period.



One of the highlights of this plenary meeting was certainly the exchange on the fight against fake news during the elections and the debate on the situation in Ukraine with **Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze**, Chair of the Committee for the Integration of Ukraine into the European Union. COSAC firmly *“calls on the EU and its Member States to continue to provide strong political, diplomatic, economic, military, technical and humanitarian support to Ukraine and its people for as long as necessary to put an end to Russia’s war of aggression and to restore Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”* in its final contribution. S&Ds also ensured that this COSAC plenary addressed the Middle East. COSAC parliamentarians firmly reiterated its firm condemnation of the attacks committed by Hamas and insisted on Israel’s right to defend itself but within the limits imposed by international and humanitarian law. **COSAC parliamentarians** condemned the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and **called for a rapid and immediate humanitarian pause, leading to a sustainable ceasefire.**



The fight for gender equality is at the heart of the parliamentary dimension of the Belgian Presidency, and this is why the 71st plenary of the COSAC meeting devoted one entire session to it. We also learned during this debate that **Belgian parliaments rank among the best for gender equality in Europe.** Although gender equality is inscribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is not yet a reality in many parliaments today: **indeed, 67% of members of national parliaments in the European Union are men, and only six national parliaments in Europe have more than 40% female members.** COSAC *“supports the introduction of concrete measures to ensure equitable access to political office by promoting gender parity in electoral lists, candidacies and appointments to political positions. COSAC calls for the gender dimension to be taken into account, in all areas, when drafting and implementing legislation and when drawing up budgets”.*



Finally, this plenary COSAC assessed the situation of democracy and rule of law, which has grown increasingly worrying in some Member states. Koen Lenaerts, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, reminded parliamentarians that they have an important responsibility to defend values such as democracy, an independent judiciary and freedom of the press. In its final contribution, COSAC declared that strengthening democratic values requires recognition of the role of national and European parliaments. **S&Ds fully supported the introduction of the green card for national parliaments at the Conference on the Future of Europe and at this plenary COSAC meeting.** It appears important for the progressive parliamentary family to improve the early warning system and to reinforce the coordinates between the European and national parliaments at political party and group level. For S&Ds, the **heart of European democracy lies in the strength of its parliaments:** at a European and national level. It was therefore essential to the S&D Group to integrate in the final contribution the importance of deepening this cooperation, “to remind the European Council to follow-up on *the implementation of the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe* and to examine the proposals set out in the [EP resolution of 22 November 2023](#)”.

Renewed engagement between the Swiss Social Democratic Party & the S&D Group

The EU and Switzerland are close neighbours with strong cross border links. The EU is Switzerland's first trading partner, while Switzerland is the fourth largest partner for the EU. About one and a half million EU citizens live in Switzerland, and approximately 450.000 Swiss citizens live in the EU. A few hundred thousand EU citizens cross the border daily to work.

Between March 2022 and November 2023, the EU and Switzerland were engaged in exploratory discussions on the future of their bilateral relations. On 15 December 2023, the Commission and the Federal Council published the [Common Understanding](#) that provides a written record of the outcome of the exploratory talks. The Common Understanding confirms both sides' ambitions to conclude the negotiation this year. **The EU and Switzerland launched negotiations to deepen bilateral relations on 18 March 2024.**



Less than a month later, on 10 April, [Iratxe García Pérez](#), leader of the S&D Group, and [Andreas Schieder](#) (S&D-AU), S&D Shadow [Rapporteur on EU-Switzerland relations](#), warmly welcomed a fourteen-strong SP Delegation led by **the speaker of the Swiss National Council (Lower House)** [Eric Nussbaumer](#) and [Jon Pult](#), deputy leader of the SP party.

For the S&D Group, the EU and Switzerland are close neighbours with strong cross-border links, joint priorities and shared challenges. These are the predominant reasons why S&Ds support the quick conclusion of these talks and why we remain committed to upholding such strong links with one of our European neighbours.

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- [S&Ds: “Less air pollution will save lives and safeguard public health”](#), 22.04.2024
- [With the ecodesign of products, sustainability is set to become the norm, thanks to S&Ds](#), 22.04.2024
- [S&Ds contest harmful deal on the new EU retail investment law, brokered by liberals in cooperation with the far right](#), 19.04.2024
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- [Socialists and Democrats grant discharge to Commission for spending EU budget 2022](#), 11.04.2024
- [The right to abortion must be included in the EU Fundamental Rights Charter!](#), 11.04.2024
- [Despite EPP opposition, S&D Group secures monthly scrutiny sessions with Commission President](#), 10.04.2024

WHAT'S NEXT

- 6 May, **S&D Interparliamentary Network Meeting**, online
- 24 - 27 May, **NATO - Parliamentary Assembly**; Spring Session, Sofia - Bulgaria
- 6 - 9 June, **European elections**

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The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (the S&D Group) is the second largest political group in the European Parliament. We stand for an inclusive European society based on principles of solidarity, equality, diversity, freedom and fairness. We promote social justice, jobs and growth, consumer rights, sustainable development, financial market reforms and human rights to create a stronger and more democratic Europe and a better future for all citizens.

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