

English Version:

President Schulz should respect the majority of the European Parliament

On April 3rd a large majority of the European Parliament (EP) voted to postpone the vote on the resolution on the EP discharge 2012 decision. The reason for this highly unusual move was a last-minute unilateral decision by EP president Martin Schulz to strike out a section (1) of the report adopted by the EP's Budgetary Control Committee (COCOBU), which was critical to the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, for failing to release crucial documents to the Budgetary Control Committee concerning the revision of the OLAF legal base.

Last week the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, informed the Conference of Presidents about the reasons why he declared inadmissible the paragraph 47 of the resolution (1) which had been adopted by the Budgetary Control Committee (COCOBU). Only last Friday the EP President, finally, sent a letter in which he answered the critical remarks on his affair from several letters by the COCOBU Chair, Mr Michael Theurer.

However, these arguments of Schulz (mainly that the Dalli case refers to 2013, whereas the discharge is on 2012, and confidentiality reasons) can hardly be taken seriously. The final vote of the resolution should take place this Wednesday in Strasbourg. Three members of COCOBU today asked President Schulz to permit a vote this Wednesday the resolution with paragraph 47 included.

Michael Theurer: "The COCOBU committee is of the opinion that there is no legal basis for ruling § 47 inadmissible. Moreover from a democratic perspective it is not acceptable that a report voted on by a parliament's committee is not put in full to the Plenary. That is a clear disrespect of a democratic decision of the COCOBU committee which was taken in line with all the rules. The members of the COCOBU committee will consider whether to consult the European Court of Justice."

Not only do the requests from COCOBU, with respect for confidentiality rules, for clear information on the way OLAF dealt with the case of Commissioner Dalli also date from end of 2012 - the same year as the discharge procedure. Also the Legal Service of the EP came to the conclusion, early January 2013, that the transmission of the OLAF report was valid under confidentiality procedures. Since COCOBU is the parliamentary committee that has the obligation to control the work of OLAF, It's parliamentary work was hindered by the denial of access to the relevant documents.

Also COCOBU was denied for many months access the highly critical report on how OLAF dealt with the Dalligate investigation by the Supervisory Committee.

Inge Gräßle: "The Conference of Presidents is fed with partial truths and does not see the whole picture of information. This is more than regrettable and devaluates the decisions taken by this body. Schulz omitted important parts of information and manipulated the decision of persons that are not aware of the details.

The Supervisory Committee wanted the legislator to be aware of loopholes in an on-going legislative procedure. That is why they sent an opinion on possible failures in an investigation through official channels. This was used by the EP President to block the access for the intended recipients: the Members of the Budgetary Control Committee. During the debate today Schulz showed a grave ignorance towards the whole dossier and towards Parliament's rights."

MEP Bart Staes, first vice-chair of COCOBU: "The last-minute and unprecedented stunt by EP president Schulz to rule an important section of the report adopted by the EP's budgetary control committee inadmissible amounts to little short of censorship. This worrying move to delete a section of the official report, which was critical of his own actions, seriously undermines the democratic principles of this house, which is a shame especially with the upcoming European elections. Some members of his political group have reproached us that we are electioneering by raising this issue but we simply want to do our work as members of COCOBU. But I want to state very clearly that if Schulz proceeds to have the resolution voted without paragraph 47 we will indeed remind him and voters until the last day of the electoral campaign, that he has no respect for the majority of the EP even when he was its President."

Only last week the European Ombudsman published an opinion in which it urges the European Commission to release hidden documents on the Dalligate scandal: two letters and two internal notes concerning the resignation of former Commissioner John Dalli. Access to these documents to the NGO was refused by the Commission, with arguments that the Ombudsman has now called "not convincing". In its complaint, CEO had accused the Commission of secrecy, the selective release of documents and failure to fulfil its obligations under EU transparency legislation (Regulation 1049/2001). It seems the secrecy is the red line in the way both the EC and EP dealt with the case of Commissioner Dalli.

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(1) The full text of the section ruled inadmissible reads:

47. Criticises the fact that an OLAF Supervisory Committee report to Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control was not forwarded to it by the President but, rather, was held back for more than two months; criticises the fact that there was a three-month delay before Parliament's Administration forwarded witness summonses from a Belgian court to the three Members concerned; criticises the fact that the Committee on Budgetary Control was hampered in its work because a hearing on the work of the Task Force for Greece was cancelled and a hearing on 'Governance – the European Commission as administrative authority' was held up for more than a year;