

# Pittella: Member states are to blame for the refugee deadlock



[EurActiv.com](#), by [Sarantis Michalopoulos](#), [Daniela Vincenti](#),

Gianni Pittella [[European Parliament](#)]

Europe is on the brink of collapse due to the “foolish and short-minded illusions” of EU member states, Gianni Pittella said in an interview with EurActiv.

*Gianni Pittella is the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) chief in the European Parliament.*

*Pitella spoke with EurActiv's Sarantis Michalopoulos, and Editor-in-Chief Daniela Vincenti.*

**Mr. Pittella, at the beginning of the year you launched a sort of ultimatum to President Juncker, urging the Commission to take stock of what has not been done so far. Do you expect a quantum leap? What about your requests to Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker?**

I don't like the idea of ultimatums. In political terms, I prefer to stand for ideas, hard negotiations, even fights where needed, in order to find concrete solutions that can tackle problems. Nevertheless, we decided to support Juncker on the basis of precise measures on flexibility, investment and the social agenda. Our support remains crucial for the existence of this Commission. This support is not unconditional. It's not a blank cheque. Our support is strictly linked to the implementation of our priorities. Therefore, in front of whole of my group, I urged Juncker to deliver. The clock is ticking.

## Did you get some feedback?

At the beginning of the year, I kicked off tough negotiations with President Juncker, and this pressure is beginning to yield results. Juncker personally committed to present new proposals on health and security at work. He also agreed to revise the Posting of Workers Directive. For the S&D group, this is a priority, a red line. As is the case with the presentation of a comprehensive package of measures against tax avoidance and evasion. The package presented yesterday by Moscovici is an important first step in line with our group request that taxes must be paid where profits are produced. We call on Juncker to deliver on these.

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## What about flexibility and the investment plan?

In economic terms, we believe that Europe can no longer be the guardian of austerity, or as the watchdog of the 0.1%. This Commission, under our pressure, has rightly reinforced the concept of flexibility. Now, we must not back away from these commitments, or else we risk hindering the recovery of the EU economy. Member states should count on flexibility on the basis of precise criteria, instead of receiving it as a political gift.

On the investment plan, we call on the Commission to boost its efforts to make it a success story. We will tell it very clearly to Mr. Katainen next week, in our group meeting: the outcome of the plan, in terms of economic growth, and the fight against unemployment, are not yet adequate.

**The European Commission said that Greece was seriously neglecting its obligations when it comes to external border controls. Greece has also been given three months to avoid being suspended from the Schengen area. The EPP's leader, Joseph Daul, also spoke in favor of suspending countries from Schengen. Do you agree with such an approach?**

First of all, let me be very blunt on this: we are now facing the crumbling of Schengen, because nothing was done 3-4 years ago, when Greece and Italy were saving people from drowning in the Mediterranean, to the general indifference of all other member states. Having said this, we should all thank Greece for continuing to save thousands of refugees on an everyday basis, despite its difficult economic outlook. I do believe that Greek authorities must be helped concretely by Europe in order to fill gaps in the registration process. Again and again, selfish national rhetoric means that member states continue to look at the finger rather than the moon. Greece is not the problem.

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The problem stems from the fact that the relocation system doesn't work, nobody knows where to go, and who should pay, to return those who have no right for refugee status. The outdated Dublin system must be revised and Frontex has not yet started supporting member states in the control of external borders. Do we want to blame Greece for this? That's a far too simplistic a response.

## So, who is to blame? The Commission?

Honestly, the EU Commission has delivered here. Who is lagging behind? Who is not living up with the expectations? The member states. Europe risks collapse as a result of the foolish and short minded illusion

that we can face this problem by raising walls, closing borders, setting thresholds, discriminating on the basis of religion, or building a mini-Schengen. Let's start by penalizing non-cooperation and rewarding those who cooperate. Europe should be a family, and not an a la carte menu where you pick and choose the bits you like.

**Rome and Brussels have been on a collision course lately over the €3 billion aid package for Turkey. Is this the actual reason? The EPP leader in the Parliament, Manfred Weber, accused Renzi of undermining the EU's credibility. Renzi stressed that there was a double standard in energy policy, with the Commission terminating the South Stream gas pipeline project, which aimed at bringing Russian gas across the Black Sea to Italy, while Brussels does little to stop the Nord Stream 2 project, intended to supply Russian gas to Germany, across the Baltic Sea. What do you expect from the Renzi-Merkel bilateral meeting?**

Manfred Weber's statement against Matteo Renzi was ridiculous, and I think he also realizes that. Nobody can claim the Italian Prime Minister is willing to destroy Europe, as Renzi is one of the most pro-European leaders in the EU. He put concrete issues, such as flexibility and the need to boost growth in Europe, on the table with President Juncker, and also with Merkel. Renzi is fully aware that there is no lasting solution to the refugee crisis, and the fight against terrorism, without fruitful cooperation with Germany.

This cooperation must be founded on the basis of equality. With the spreading of populist and radical movements across Europe, (and) Eastern Europe looking to Poland and Hungary as an example, Portugal and Spain on the way to find their own political stabilization, and the UK on the edge of voting for an EU referendum, the ties between Italy and Germany are crucial for the whole of the European Union. Together, Renzi and Merkel can contribute to making a better Europe. Political will is needed. Both are willing.

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