

## Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, September 2017

In addition to the State of the Union address by European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, the main debates held during Parliament's September plenary session included questions such as fire safety in buildings, the impact of hurricane Irma, breaches of human rights and a series of statements related to external relations presented by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini.

On the legislative front, Members voted, inter alia, on proposals concerning the WiFi4EU regulation (an initiative to promote internet connectivity in local communities), security of gas supply, the European Accessibility Act and the European Venture Capital Funds and European Social Entrepreneurship Funds investment schemes. Parliament pushed the Council to move forward with ratifying the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women. It also raised concerns over the EU Common Position on arms export, as well as adopting three resolutions aimed at modernising EU-Chile trade relations.

### State of the Union

The key debate of the September plenary session followed the [State of the Union](#) address by Jean-Claude Juncker. Noting that the overall outlook has changed for the better over the past year, notably thanks to an accelerating economic recovery, President Juncker based his address on the scenarios proposed in the Commission's [white paper](#) on the [future of Europe](#) of March 2017, followed by the series of more detailed reflection papers on [economic and monetary union](#), [EU finances](#), [EU defence](#), the [social dimension](#) and [harnessing globalisation](#).

Much interest focused on Juncker's advocacy of various euro area and EU institutional reforms. He proposed the designation of a euro-area finance minister, who would preside over the Eurogroup, as well as being a member of the Commission. He supported the development of a European Monetary Fund, but not the creation of a separate euro-area budget, preferring a dedicated budget line within the EU budget. He also said there should not be a separate euro-area parliament either. He favoured combining the presidencies of the Commission and the European Council, and supported a new, additional transnational constituency for the European elections. On the policy front, he advocated a pro-innovation industrial strategy, a reinforced social pillar, an authority to supervise fairness in the single market, better handling of migratory flows, and new trade agreements.

### Special committee on terrorism

Parliament voted on the composition of the special committee on terrorism which has been mandated to investigate shortcomings in the EU fight against terrorism. The constituent meeting took place on Thursday 14 September, with Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE, France) elected as chair.

### Fire safety in buildings

Following the Grenfell Tower fire in London on 14 June 2017, Council and Commission representatives made statements on fire safety in buildings. With a view to harmonising fire-testing of building facades at EU level, the current revision of the [Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#) and the possible revision of the [Construction Products Regulation](#) could help to prevent such disasters happening in the future.

### Myanmar

As part of the regular Thursday debates on breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, particular attention was devoted to the rapidly escalating humanitarian disaster with regard to the [situation of the Rohingya minority](#) in Myanmar.



## WIFI4EU – Promotion of internet connectivity in local communities

Reflecting an agreement reached with the Council in trilogue negotiations on the proposed text, Members adopted their position at first reading on an [initiative](#) to promote internet connectivity in local communities (WIFI4EU). The aim of this regulation is to offer free Wi-Fi access in public places, such as libraries and hospitals, whilst also protecting citizens from data mining for commercial use, as well as from advertisements.

## Security of gas supply

The revision of the 2010 regulation on [security of gas supply](#) was approved after a debate during this session, again reflecting a text agreed with the Council in trilogue negotiations. The report of the Industry Research and Energy (ITRE) committee supports the Commission's regional approach to security of supply. It also proposes a uniform definition of 'protected customer' in the EU, to ensure that a high (national) supply standard does not prevent gas sharing in an emergency.

## European Accessibility Act

Members discussed and adopted a position on the proposed legislation on [accessibility for products and services](#). This proposed directive, known as the European Accessibility Act, should provide a common EU definition of, and implementation framework for, accessibility requirements for certain products and services in the internal market making them accessible to persons with disabilities. Parliament's delegation is therefore now ready to negotiate with the Council on the proposal, once the latter agrees its position.

## European Venture Capital Funds and European Social Entrepreneurship Funds

Following trilogue negotiations, Parliament also adopted its position on proposals for two EU investment schemes, the [European Venture Capital Funds and European Social Entrepreneurship Funds](#). These aim to boost EU businesses by offering a new and simplified way to raise and invest capital in small European companies. This revision proposes to adapt the schemes to make them more attractive, by removing limitations on managers, decreasing costs and widening the field of assets eligible for investment.

## Istanbul Convention

In an interim report, Parliament called on the Council to speed up EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – otherwise known as the [Istanbul Convention](#). The Convention provides a framework for legally binding measures to prevent violence against women, and sets standards for a response to such acts. Parliament's report raised some concerns regarding the scope of the EU's accession, as well as the lack of progress on ratification.

## Arms Exports

Members adopted an own-initiative resolution on the implementation of the [EU Common Position on arms export](#). The EU's Common Position on arms exports is the only legally binding region-wide arrangement on conventional arms exports. The second annual report on arms exports analyses the implementation of eight criteria of the Council common position, reporting and parliamentary scrutiny. It has encouraged transparency between Member States, but a report by Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee points to the need for a supervisory body to monitor implementation of the agreement, as well as increased possibilities for sanctions and continued transparency and information sharing.

## EU-Chile trade relations

With regard to modernising [EU-Chile trade relations](#), Parliament recommends an ambitious upgrade to the current agreement, including further liberalisation of services. The proposals include an emphasis on retaining public service regulation in the hands of governments, and focuses on social, environmental and political values, as well as human rights. As for the agreement on trade in organic products, Chile and the EU agree mutual recognition of rules on organic food production.

## Opening of trilogue negotiations

The AFET, ECON, EMPL and ENVI committees announced their decisions to enter into interinstitutional negotiations on six legislative files, all of which were approved. For further details, please see [Europarl](#).

*This 'at a glance' note is intended to review some of the highlights of the plenary session, and notably follow up on key dossiers identified by EPRS prior to the session. It does not aim to be exhaustive. For more detailed information on specific files, please see other EPRS products, such as 'legislation in progress' briefings, and the plenary [minutes](#).*