

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, February I 2018

Highlights of the session included the second in a series of debates with EU leaders on the future of Europe, with Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenković; and the debate and vote on the composition of the European Parliament after Brexit. The European Commission also made statements on fair taxation packages and the manipulation of scientific research by multinationals in the wake of revelations on emission tests on monkeys and humans by the German car industry. Parliament decided to set up a special committee on the Union's authorisation procedure for pesticides (PEST). Parliament adopted agreed first-reading positions on, inter alia, a regulation on ending unjustified geo-blocking and two regulations on EU external action funds – among the priorities for 2018 in the Joint Declaration agreed by the Council, Commission and Parliament.

Statements on the Western Balkans, Zimbabwe, Venezuela and UNWRA

Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, made statements on a number of issues. The first of these, and a high priority on the current Bulgarian Council Presidency's agenda, concerned possible EU enlargement to the [Western Balkans](#). A statement on the [situation in Zimbabwe](#) followed, where the forced resignation of Robert Mugabe has yet to lead to a new era of fair and free elections. Mogherini also made statements on the situation in [Venezuela](#), and on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Joint debate on Turkey

VP/HR Mogherini also took part in a joint debate on [Turkey](#), which followed her statements on the current human rights situation, and on the latest developments in Afrin in Syria, where the Turkish military operation has led to many casualties, including civilians.

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

The Executive Director of the 2017 Nobel Prize winner, the International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Beatrice Fihn, addressed the plenary, and urged the European Union to spearhead the abolition of these weapons throughout the world. Fihn encouraged all Member States to sign up to the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#), as it represents a political means for ensuring a world free from nuclear weapons. Fihn also called for Members to exert pressure in their respective countries to gain support for the treaty. The treaty was adopted on 7 July 2017 by 122 out of 192 countries, but no nuclear power has signed. It will enter into force 90 days after ratification by 50 countries.

Summertime arrangement

A debate followed a Commission statement on current summertime arrangements, with Members regularly hearing of citizens' concerns over the time change and research finding a lack of benefits and some negative effects from [changing the clocks twice a year](#). Members voted in a resolution to call on the Commission to propose an amendment to Directive 2000/84/EC to change the current arrangements.

End of unjustified geo-blocking

Purchasing items online is sometimes complicated by a technique known as [geo-blocking](#), as well as other forms of discrimination based on customers' nationality or residence. These practices, where some online outlets refuse to supply products or services, or charge higher prices, because the client lives in or is from another country, threaten EU e-commerce and cross-border goods and services markets. Parliament approved a compromise negotiated with the Council to end this unjustified discrimination. As some services are excluded from the legislation, the new law will be reviewed after two years, at Parliament's request, providing an opportunity to extend it to cover digital copyrighted content and audiovisual services.



Cost-effective emissions reductions and low-carbon investments

A large majority of the European Parliament approved the interinstitutional agreement reached on reform aimed at strengthening the Emissions Trading System (ETS), while safeguarding EU industrial competitiveness. This brings the EU closer to formal adoption of a European directive that will [reform the EU ETS for the period 2021-2030](#), making it more effective and allowing the EU to implement its commitments under the Paris climate agreement. The EU hopes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 % from 1990 levels by 2030. A reformed ETS is key to achieving this ambition, and the proposals on the table would reduce greenhouse gas emission allowances by 2.2 % per year from 2021. Support for modernisation and innovation, essential to accelerating the [transition towards clean energy](#) in the EU, is also included in the plans for reform.

EU external funds – joint debate

The President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), Werner Hoyer, took part in a joint debate on [EU external action funds](#) and the EU guarantee to the EIB to cover the risks of funding projects in countries outside the EU, concerning a reform aimed at combatting the root causes of illegal migration to Europe. Parliament's Committee on Budgets is keen to promote good financial management of the Guarantee Fund for external actions, and has highlighted the need for transparency, and a strong focus on development and the consequences of climate change. Members approved the first-reading agreements reached with the Council.

Composition of the European Parliament

Parliament voted on the Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) Committee proposal on the [composition of the European Parliament](#) to adjust the current distribution of seats after Brexit. Members adopted amendments rejecting all reference to transnational lists, which could have opened the possibility of creating a European constituency with Members elected from transnational lists. A large majority supported the AFCO proposal for the 2019-2024 legislature which would see a reduction in the size of the Parliament with no loss of seats for any country, and supporting the reallocation of 27 seats – ensuring degressive proportionality is respected – of the 73 that will become vacant once the United Kingdom withdraws from the EU. The proposed distribution now has to be agreed by the European Council, and then Parliament must give its consent for its final adoption.

An [oral question](#) requested clarity on the timescale for Council's adoption of Parliament's long-proposed reforms that would strengthen the European dimension of the elections and bring greater electoral equality for the citizens of the Union. The President in Office of the Council stressed Member States' agreement with the general aim of the proposal, but underlined their view that 'harmonisation should only be pursued in case of strict necessity and after a rigorous examination of the added value it will bring'.

European Central Bank Annual Report for 2016

The Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee report on the [ECB's 2016 annual report](#) notes that inflation in the euro area remains stubbornly below target, despite the ECB's accommodative monetary policy, and that economic growth and unemployment rates are also uneven. Discussed in the presence of Mario Draghi, President of the Bank, the adopted report calls for action on the plans for the capital markets union and the banking union. However, the report also underlines the importance that the ECB's next report take account of the risk of possible redistribution of assets to stronger economic actors, to the detriment of individuals and their personal savings, pensions and insurance.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

The decision of the Environment, Public Health & Food Safety (ENVI) committee to enter into trilogue negotiations on the monitoring and reporting of CO₂ emissions from, and fuel consumption of, new heavy-duty vehicles, as well as the Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs (LIBE) committee on a centralised system for the identification of Member States holding conviction information on third country nationals and stateless persons (TCN) to supplement and support the European criminal records information system (ECRIS-TCN) were approved, following a vote in plenary. Economic & Monetary Affairs (ECON) and ENVI committee announcements on negotiating mandates on four further proposals were confirmed [unopposed](#).

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