

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, March 2018

Highlights of the session included a debate on the future of Europe with Portuguese Prime Minister, Antonio Costa; and debates on preparation of the 22-23 March European Council meeting; on the appointment of the European Commission Secretary-General; on the US decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium; on corporate social responsibility; on conflict minerals; and on protection of investigative journalists, following the deaths of Jan Kuciak and Martina Kusnirova in Slovakia. High Representative, Federica Mogherini, made statements on Syria, the EU-Cuba Joint Council, and EU-Central Asia relations, followed by debates. Parliament adopted, inter alia, resolutions on the post-2020 future multiannual financial framework and own-resources reform; and legislative positions on the common (consolidated) corporate tax; regulation of cross-border parcel delivery; training of professional drivers; and Europass.

Combating violence against women and girls and Istanbul Convention ratification

The March session followed International Women's Day. Parliament debated with the Commission the current tension regarding ratification of the [Istanbul Convention](#) on preventing and combating violence against women. Although all EU Member States, and the EU itself, have signed, only 17 have ratified the convention to date.

Guidelines on the framework of future EU-UK relations

Members debated and adopted, by a large majority, a resolution setting out the EP's proposals on the [future relationship with the United Kingdom](#) after Brexit. Parliament's position aims to feed into the guidelines the European Council is expected to adopt on 22 March, on opening exploratory discussions.

Action plan on alternative fuels infrastructure

Members debated possible investment solutions to achieve the trans-European deployment of [alternative fuels infrastructure](#) action plan adopted by the Commission in December 2017, as part of the clean mobility package, alongside legislative proposals to accelerate the transition to low and zero-emission vehicles.

MFF and own resources post-2020

Parliament adopted two own-initiative resolutions, closely following the texts adopted by the Budgets Committee, on the [post-2020 multiannual financial framework \(MFF\)](#) and on the [reform of the EU own resources system](#), to include, inter alia, the creation of carbon, plastics and digital taxation. Members called for spending limits to be increased to 1.3 % of GNI, to pay for new political priorities (innovation, security, migration) without sacrificing traditional policies, such as the common agriculture policy and territorial cohesion. Programmes for research and innovation, mobility (Erasmus+), the youth employment initiative, support for SMEs and investment in infrastructure in the framework of the Connecting Europe Facility should also be reinforced. Members called upon the Commission to create a sanctions mechanism for Member States that breach the rule of law, but not directly the beneficiaries of European co-funding. Members are against any changes in the structure of the budget. Introducing new EU budget resources should allow reductions in the share of national contributions to 40 %. Parliament also sees Brexit as an opportunity to cancel all Member State rebates. Commission proposals for a post-2020 MFF are due to be presented on 2 May 2018.

European Semester

Following a joint debate on the European Semester, considering two reports on the Annual Growth Survey 2018 that feeds into the [economic and budgetary outlook for 2018](#), MEPs broadly approved the consensual own-initiative report on the 'annual growth review' document, which kicks off the European Semester process.



Although the report takes a position in favour of deepening economic and monetary union (EMU), it stresses that the role of the European Parliament and the national parliaments should be reinforced.

Common corporate tax base

Parliament debated and adopted two legislative resolutions on a [common \(consolidated\) corporate tax base](#), building on the previous proposal for a common corporate tax base. The proposals aim at setting simpler EU tax rules for computing cross-border taxable income for companies, to replace varying national rules.

Fisheries agreement with Comoros

Parliament gave its consent for the termination of the [EU-Comoros fisheries agreement](#), on the grounds that the country has not upheld its responsibilities in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Cross-border parcel delivery services

Sending or receiving a parcel delivery from another EU country costs up to five times more than domestic deliveries. Parliament adopted the regulation on making [cross-border parcel delivery services](#) more transparent, in line with the text agreed with the Council in trilogue. The new rules require maximum transparency in service provision and allow consumers and small businesses, who may lack bargaining power to negotiate reduced tariffs, to find the best deals via a dedicated website.

Training of professional drivers

Recent extreme weather conditions in Europe highlighted the tough conditions under which professional drivers have to work. The EU is updating the rules on [training for lorry and bus drivers](#) and Parliament overwhelmingly approved (604 votes for, 80 against, with 7 abstentions) the trilogue agreement reached in December 2017 on modernising this training, ensuring that qualifications are recognised throughout the EU, and setting up a register to help enforcement authorities end trade in fake licences.

Europass: framework for skills and qualifications

Parliament adopted the proposed [revision of Europass framework](#) with a large majority, approving the text agreed in trilogue. The revisions seek to benefit EU job-seekers and employers through improved services for documenting skills, qualifications and professional experience. Parliament highlighted the importance of the voluntary aspect of the Europass portal and its links to other tools in the field of education and training. Furthermore, it emphasised the importance of the national centres and of respecting the requirements and expectations of all users and providers. The objective is to ensure the tool's full potential and flexibility to meet ever-shifting requirements.

Gender equality in EU trade agreements

Parliament adopted, by a large majority, a resolution prepared by the International Trade, and Women's Rights and Gender Equality committees on reinforcing [gender equality measures in EU trade](#). Although liberalisation boosts employment in the export sector, not everyone benefits equally from international trade. Conscious of the impact of trade liberalisation on women, the EU includes measures aimed at defending women's labour rights in trade agreements. To combat the exploitation of women in export-oriented industries and support those running small businesses, the EU insists on trade and sustainable development chapters in all its trade agreements with third countries, to ensure fair work and remuneration, as well as human rights protections.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Decisions on entering into interinstitutional negotiations for three committees: the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee on a single digital gateway; the Culture and Education Committee on the European solidarity corps; and the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee on empowering Member States' competition authorities to be more effective enforcers and to ensure the proper functioning of the internal market, were confirmed [unopposed](#). Following a vote, Parliament approved the start of negotiations on an Industry, Research and Energy Committee report on a European programme for defence-related industrial development, on the basis of a request made during the February II plenary session.

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](#).