

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, April 2018

The April plenary session's highlight was the debate on the future of Europe with the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, detailing his ambitions for a reinvigorated Europe, ready to face existing and emerging challenges. Members also heard from the European Council and Commission Presidents on the outcome of the March European Council meeting. High Representative Federica Mogherini made statements on the UN global compacts for migration and refugees, Syria, Russia, the situation in the Korean peninsula and of Greek soldiers arrested in Turkey. Parliament adopted, inter alia, legislative resolutions on greenhouse gas emissions, the circular economy, European political parties and foundations, anti-money-laundering, market surveillance of motor vehicles, and organic production and labelling. Members granted discharge for the execution of the 2016 budget to the European Commission and all EU institutions and agencies, except the Council/European Council and European Asylum Support Office.

Statements on the UN global compacts for migration and refugees, Syria, Russia, the Korean peninsula, and Greek soldiers arrested in Turkey

High Representative for European Foreign Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, informed Members of progress on drafting the UN global compacts on safe, orderly and regular [migration](#) and on refugees, with the plight of those fleeing the violence in Syria again to the fore. This was followed by her statement and a debate on the escalation of violence in Syria, including the [renewed chemical attack](#). The EU has repeatedly condemned the publicly acknowledged Syrian possession of chemical weapons, which is banned by international treaty. Debate continued on two further topics: peace prospects in the Korean Peninsula, and the two Greek soldiers arrested and detained by Turkey.

Joint debate on greenhouse gas emissions

[Reducing greenhouse gas emissions post-2020](#) involves a shared effort between all EU countries. Parliament discussed two proposals to regulate effort-sharing in sectors not covered by the EU emissions trading system (ETS), as well as on balancing emissions and removals from land use, such as wetlands management and forestry activities. The trilogue agreements, now endorsed by Parliament, introduce greater flexibility for these sectors, provided that the target for reducing emissions is reached.

Joint debate on circular economy and environmental reporting

Despite recent efforts to protect our environment, there is still plenty of room to improve the management of waste in the EU. With an overwhelming majority, Parliament endorsed the trilogue agreements on [four proposals on waste](#) during a joint debate on the circular economy and environmental reporting. The four texts cover the framework for the treatment of waste, landfilling, packaging, and technical waste such as old vehicles, batteries and electrical equipment. To accelerate the shift to a circular economy, changes to the proposals increase the targets for re-use and recycling, and make greater demands of the Member States in terms of waste separation and prevention.

EU-Mauritius Fisheries Partnership Agreement

Parliament approved the Fisheries Committee recommendation to consent to the conclusion of a [new protocol to the EU-Mauritius fisheries agreement](#). The protocol provides fishing opportunities in Mauritian waters in return for an annual contribution that seeks to support the local fisheries sector and develop the region's 'blue economy'. The protocol provides fishing opportunities for 40 tuna seiners and 45 surface long-liners, as well as a maximum of 20 supply vessels to assist the operations of those EU fishing vessels. The annual budgetary implication of this programme is €575 000, a total of €2 300 000.

European political parties and foundations

Looking forward to next year's elections, Parliament approved an agreement on a proposal to amend the rules on the [statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations](#). The changes seek greater transparency and protection of EU financial interests, including by ending individual

sponsorship of party registration, changing rules on distribution of EU budget funds, setting the share distributed equally between parties at 10 %, and lowering co-financing requirements.

Discharge 2016 (53 reports)

EU finances were the subject of a joint debate on the decision to grant discharge for the [European Commission and executive agencies'](#) accounts for 2016, as well as those for the [decentralised agencies and joint undertakings](#), and [EU institutions other than the Commission](#). In a total of 53 reports, the Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee concurs with the Court of Auditors' 2016 report that there has been a gradual improvement in the management of EU finances. Members granted discharge on the execution of the general budget for 2016, but postponed discharge for the Council/European Council and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). EASO is currently under European anti-fraud office (OLAF) investigation and the Court of Auditors has pointed to procurement procedure weaknesses. The Council/European Council, denied discharge for the last seven years, yet again failed to submit the information Parliament needs to grant discharge. Committee reports recommend improving payment legality and regularity, where the margin of error could be ameliorated, and where the backlog in payments due to the delay in adopting the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework has reached a record sum.

Anti-money-laundering

Terrorism remains a public concern in the EU, and Parliament approved with an overwhelming majority the trilogue agreement on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing. The proposed [revision of the existing Anti-money-laundering Directive](#) aims at modernising EU tools, to close loopholes exploited by criminals or terrorists to finance their activities. The proposals include greater cooperation between Member States, their financial authorities, and banks, to detect and report on suspicious movements of funds.

Market surveillance of motor vehicles

Emissions concerns also underpin the existing arrangements for [approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles](#) and their component parts, particularly following the 2016 Volkswagen case. Parliament approved the trilogue agreement on a Commission proposal for a regulation on strengthening national market surveillance, increasing checks and ensuring at least 20 % of them are intended to reduce emissions, imposing fines for contravention, as well as fees upon manufacturers to cover the cost of the scheme.

Organic production and labelling of organic products

Members approved the trilogue agreement on the Commission proposal to regulate [production and labelling of organic products](#). The proposal aims at boosting the organic market in the EU by introducing a single set of rules to ensure that consumers can be confident the organic products they buy are produced with due care for animal welfare and without using non-authorized substances, and to prevent fraud.

Gender equality in the media sector

In a third joint debate, MEPs considered the continued effects of digitalisation on gender inequalities. Parliament adopted a non-legislative resolution on [gender equality in the media sector](#) in the EU, calling on Member States to fully implement existing equality legislation and to encourage inspection bodies to monitor women's media sector participation. Another non-legislative resolution [on the emancipation of women and girls with the assistance of the digital sector](#), adopted by show of hands, calls on the Commission to rectify serious gender disparity in the ICT sector.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Committees' decisions to enter into interinstitutional (trilogue) negotiations were confirmed on safeguarding competition in air transport (Transport and Tourism Committee); on exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (Employment and Social Affairs Committee); and on the internal market in natural gas, and on European business statistics (both Industry, Research and Energy Committee). A confirmatory vote was only held on the last of these, and the committees can therefore start negotiations with the Council.

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](#).

