

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, December 2018

The December plenary session was marked by the terrorist attack that took place in Strasbourg on 11 December. Members had that very day debated the report of Parliament's Special Committee on Terrorism, concluding its year's work. The December plenary session also featured debates on the preparations for the same week's European Council and Euro Summit meetings, as well as on the future of Europe, with Nicos Anastasiades, President of Cyprus. Parliament awarded the 2018 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought to the imprisoned Ukrainian filmmaker, Oleg Sentsov, and adopted a report on the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Parliament adopted the EU's 2019 budget, and held debates and voted on proposals on a digital services tax; risk assessment in the food chain; risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work; revision of the statutes of three EU agencies; as well as an own initiative legislative report on expedited settlement of commercial disputes. Finally, Parliament adopted positions on seven of the three dozen proposed funding programmes for the 2021-2027 period, enabling negotiations with the Council to be launched.

Award of the Sakharov Prize

This plenary session marks the 30th anniversary of the European Parliament's [Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought](#), which this year goes to imprisoned Ukrainian filmmaker, Oleg Sentsov. Awarded annually for a specific achievement in human rights, the 2018 Sakharov Prize is recognition of Sentsov's courageous contribution to the 'Euromaidan' resistance against Russian aggression in Ukraine, and as a representative of political prisoners worldwide.

EU-Japan Partnership Agreement

Parliament gave its consent, with a comfortable majority, to the conclusion of the [EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement](#), following a joint debate. The Strategic Partnership Agreement provides the legal framework for future EU-Japan relations, increasing the possibilities for cooperation between the two partners in areas such as combating climate change and cybercrime. Importantly for EU businesses, the Economic Partnership Agreement, the largest-ever bilateral free trade deal, will provide customs-free access to the Japanese markets for EU companies.

Digital services tax

During a joint debate on a proposed [digital services tax](#), Members discussed and adopted reports on two proposals: for an interim digital services tax on revenues from certain digital services, and for corporate taxation of a significant digital presence. The first proposal would broaden the Member States' tax bases, by making revenue from digital content services taxable in the short term. The second, for a permanent system, would define the circumstances under which a digital company's 'significant digital presence' in a country would make it liable to pay tax. The final rules, however, require unanimity in the Council.

EU agencies: Cedefop, EU-OSHA and Eurofound

Members adopted interinstitutional agreements on proposals to [revise the statutes of three decentralised EU agencies](#) that support the EU's wider employment-related objectives. Reports from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs confirm the need to define the agencies' tasks to avoid any overlap. A new governance structure proposed for each agency should include independent representation on behalf of the Parliament on their management boards dealing with strategic and budgetary priorities.

Protection from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work

Members adopted, by a very large majority, the interinstitutional agreement on the second revision of the Directive on the [protection from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work](#). The

agreement sets a limit value for diesel vapour of 0.05 mg/m³, with a transition period of two years. The change to legal exposure limits to certain chemical agents will benefit an estimated 15.6 million EU workers.

Transparency and sustainability of EU risk assessment in the food chain

Members debated and adopted, by a comfortable majority, a report on [risk assessment in the food chain](#), which supports the Commission proposal to revise the General Food Law to widen public access to commercial studies used by the European Food Safety Authority. Parliament also agreed to the ENVI committee opening trilogue negotiations on the proposal

EU-Ukraine Association Agreement

Against the background of continuing Russian aggression in the region, Members debated and adopted a report on progress on implementation of the [EU-Ukraine Association Agreement](#). While the report acknowledges the progress the country has made on implementation in very difficult circumstances, it nevertheless expresses dissatisfaction with the continued level of corruption and politicisation in the country's institutions. Parliament also calls on the EU and its Member States to adopt targeted sanctions if Russia does not release captives seized in the Kerch Strait, or in the event of further military escalation.

EU Budget 2019

When budgetary conciliation on the first draft budget for 2019 failed to find agreement, the Commission put forward a new draft budget. Based on this second draft and subsequent negotiations, the European Parliament and Council agreed the [general budget for the European Union for 2019](#) (with Parliament adopting the agreed text by 451 votes in favour, 142 against, with 78 abstentions), which sets out €165 795.6 million in commitments and €148 198.9 million in payment appropriations. Compared to the 2018 budget, this represents an increase of 3.2 % in commitments and 2.4 % in payments. Parliament also approved: [draft amending budget No 6/2018](#), and two instances of mobilisation of the Flexibility instrument, to address the ongoing challenges of migration, refugee inflows and security threats, and [to provide for the payment of advances in the 2019 budget](#).

Findings and recommendations of the Special Committee on Terrorism

Parliament debated and adopted the final report of the [Special Committee on Terrorism](#) on the fight against terrorism in the EU. The report highlights that, while each Member State is responsible for its own national security, cooperation is vital to effective counter-terrorism and intelligence. The committee also underlined that an effective fight against terrorism requires, among other things: an appropriate data retention regime; an EU centre of excellence for preventing radicalisation; swift removal of terrorist content posted online; [external borders that are well secured](#) through interoperable databases and biometric checks; checks on financial flows; better tracking of suspects; and tighter control of explosives and firearms.

Expedited settlement of commercial disputes

Members considered, and adopted by a large majority, a report requesting that the European Commission make a proposal on [expedited settlement of cross-border commercial disputes](#). The report proposes the introduction of a European [expedited civil procedure](#) to solve cross-border business disputes, to cut costs and accelerate the process of adjudication to 6-12 months by instigating tight deadlines and ending lengthy appeals on procedural grounds.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Thirteen parliamentary committee decisions (from ECON, REGI, ITRE, LIBE, JURI, IMCO, AFCE) to enter into interinstitutional (trilogue) negotiations were [confirmed](#). Only one vote was held, on an Economic & Monetary Affairs Committee report on minimum loss coverage for non-performing exposures, where the committee's decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations was approved. Parliament also confirmed two Employment & Social Affairs Committee decisions, on a European Labour Authority and on the coordination of social security systems, following requests made during the November 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](#).

