

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, January I 2019

Highlights of the January I plenary session included the latest debate on the future of Europe, with Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, Spain's prime minister, and a debate on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Members also debated the reform of EU asylum and migration policy, reviewed the Austrian Council Presidency and discussed the incoming Romanian Presidency's programme. Among the subjects debated and voted, Parliament adopted positions on 12 more of the three dozen funding programmes proposed for the 2021-2027 period, enabling negotiations with the Council to be launched on each proposal as and when the latter has agreed its position.

Use of vehicles hired without drivers

Following the Commission proposal to update the 25-year-old rules on the [use of vehicles hired without drivers](#), Parliament adopted its position at first reading based on the Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) report. Freight operators could reduce their environmental impact by hiring vehicles in other EU Member States to reduce journey distances, and newer model rental vehicles could potentially be better for the environment. However, negotiations in Council seem unlikely to proceed rapidly, as some EU Member States disagree with the proposals, fearing a loss of revenue from vehicle taxes and registration.

Authorisation procedure for pesticides

Parliament adopted, by a very large majority, recommendations on [authorisation procedures for pesticides](#) from its special committee on pesticide authorisation (PEST). This committee was set up to examine EU pesticide authorisation procedures, following the controversial 2017 renewal of the licence for glyphosate. It recommended reinforcing the EU's capacity for independent, objective and transparent assessment; fast-track approvals for biological pesticides; and greater monitoring of their impact on the environment.

Gender mainstreaming in the EU: State of play

Parliament debated a report from the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) on [gender mainstreaming in the EU](#). While gender may not at first glance be a central consideration in policy on trade or the environment, neglecting this aspect can perpetuate inequalities between women and men. For this reason, the EU has put in place a strategic engagement for gender equality for the 2016-2019 period. However, the FEMM committee report highlights that there is still some way to go to improve the current gender balance in Parliament itself, particularly in political and administrative posts.

Situation of fundamental rights in the European Union in 2017

Members debated a report from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee on the [situation of fundamental rights in the EU in 2017](#). The report draws on six main areas where the decline in rights in 2017 was most significant, namely the rule of law, migration, women's rights, freedom of the press, racism and hate speech, as well as the mandate of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Despite the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights, this was also the year that saw the first formal EU action following up on criticisms of the rule of law in EU Member States, including over moves to reduce women's rights, curtail freedom of expression or judicial independence, and to discriminate against minorities.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Thirteen committees' decisions (from JURI, ECON, LIBE, PECH, TRAN and ITRE) to enter into interinstitutional (trilogue) negotiations were [confirmed](#). Only two votes were held, with both mandates being [approved](#).

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](#).

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