

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, February 2019

The February plenary session highlights included a further debate on the Future of Europe, with Giuseppe Conte, Italy's Prime Minister; debates on Syria, and the future of the INF Treaty and its impact on the EU; and discussions on Roma integration strategies, and on a reflection paper on a sustainable Europe by 2030. Parliament also held debates on the conclusion of three EU-Singapore agreements; the implementation of Treaty provisions; and the rights of LGBTI people. Members adopted legislative texts, inter alia, on a multiannual plan for stocks fished in the Western Waters; a Union civil protection mechanism; minimum requirements for water reuse; screening of FDI; electronic road toll systems; mutual recognition of goods; cross-border payments and currency conversion charges; and common rules for access to the international market for coach and bus services. Finally, Parliament adopted positions on six further proposed funding programmes for the 2021-2027 period, clearing the way to the launch of negotiations with the Council.

EU-Singapore Partnership

Members supported conclusion of the [Free Trade Agreement](#) (425 votes in favour, 186 against, 41 abstentions) and the Investment Protection Agreement with Singapore (436 in favour, 203 against, 30 abstentions). They also gave the green light to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Bilateral negotiations with Singapore were launched in 2010, in place of negotiations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a whole. The negotiations with Singapore were completed in 2014. However, a dispute over trade policy powers arose between the Council and the European Commission, which then sought the opinion of the European Court of Justice. Signed in 2018, the three agreements, on free trade, investment protection, and cooperation, will significantly increase the EU's trading presence in the region, adding to the successful ratification of the EU-Japan free trade agreement. The Council can now proceed to conclude the three agreements. The Investment Protection Agreement also has to be ratified by each individual Member State, in accordance with its internal procedures.

Implementation of Treaty provisions

In a joint debate, Parliament discussed and adopted texts on [implementation of the Treaty provisions on EU citizenship, enhanced cooperation, and political control over the Commission](#). Members debated [EU citizenship issues](#), calling on the Commission to end disenfranchisement of citizens residing in another EU Member State; to improve political and legal follow-up to successful Citizens' Initiatives; and to boost participation in European elections by improving gender-balanced representation, information dissemination, and intensifying dialogue with citizens. Members called on the Commission to propose a regulation simplifying the legal framework for [enhanced cooperation](#), whereby groups of countries can act together in the absence of agreement among all Member States. Regarding Parliament's [political control of the Commission](#), Members called for the executive to convert more Parliamentary initiatives into legislative proposals; for reinforced capacity in scrutinising the preparation and implementation of delegated and implementing acts; for political dialogue on Parliament's stalled proposal on the right of inquiry; and for the Commission to review its administrative procedures for senior staff appointments.

EU-Cote d'Ivoire fisheries agreement

Members debated and [approved](#) the EU's conclusion of the [new protocol to the EU-Côte d'Ivoire fisheries agreement](#), which determines the €682 000 financial contribution paid in return for fishing rights in the area. The protocol should promote genuine sustainable development in local fisheries, and increase the added value to Côte d'Ivoire, in exchange for this use of its natural resources. The new six-year protocol (2018-2024) provides fishing opportunities for the EU tuna fleet in Côte d'Ivoire waters.

Multiannual plan for fisheries stocks in the Western Waters

Parliament [approved](#), by a large majority, the interinstitutional trilogue agreement on a [multiannual plan for fisheries in the Western Waters](#), part of the north-eastern Atlantic. Once adopted by the Council, the new regulation is expected to enter into force in spring 2019. The proposed plan covers fisheries exploiting stocks of fish and crustaceans living close to the sea bottom (known as demersal species), including deep-sea stocks. Parliament is keen to minimise the socio-economic impact of the measures proposed, by ensuring recreational fisheries do not have significant impact on fish stocks, and by expanding the management area for seabass.

EU-Morocco Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement

Parliament [approved](#) the conclusion of the [EU-Morocco Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement](#), despite concerns regarding disputed waters around the Western Sahara. This agreement will provide fishing rights for 128 EU vessels, in return for an average annual EU contribution of €40.15 million.

EU framework for FDI screening

Members adopted the text agreed in trilogue on the creation of a [framework for the screening of foreign direct investment into the EU](#). Under the framework, Member States would retain the power to decide on FDI in their countries, but the Commission will be able to screen and if necessary publish an opinion on FDI, particularly should the investment have a negative effect on another EU Member State. Such inward investments often concern sensitive areas such as water, health, media, aerospace, and election infrastructure, by foreign investors who may be directly or indirectly controlled by foreign governments.

Electronic road toll systems

Parliament debated and adopted the text of a directive on [electronic road toll systems](#) following agreement with the Council. The updated rules will ensure vehicles do not need to carry large numbers of on-board devices, and improve information exchange on vehicle data, allowing for the pursuit of vehicle owners registered in another EU Member State for unpaid tolls.

Mutual recognition of goods

The principle of [mutual recognition of goods crossing EU borders](#) allows for frictionless trade in goods lawfully marketed in one Member State in any other EU country. Parliament debated and adopted a text agreed with the Council, to revise the current rules so as to address some shortcomings in their application. Member States will now have to justify any market access restrictions, speed up goods assessment, and improve problem-solving procedures. This could mean introducing SOLVIT-based procedures to resolve disputes between companies and authorities more quickly.

Cross-border payments and currency conversion charges

Parliament adopted an agreed text on a Commission proposal to review [cross-border payments and currency conversion charges](#). The new legislation would reduce charges for cross-border euro payments and improve transparency regarding conversion fees.

Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2018 country report

Parliament adopted its report on the [Commission's 2018 country report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#). The country has made little progress in its EU accession ambitions, with inter-ethnic tensions making headlines, political, judicial and public administration reforms still lacking, and corruption persisting.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

One parliamentary committee decision, to enter into interinstitutional negotiations regarding European Border and Coast Guard, from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) committee, was [confirmed](#).

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](#).

