European Parliament

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, March I 2019

Highlights of the March I plenary session included debates on Brexit, preparation of the European Council meeting of 21-22 March 2019, and the latest debate on the Future of Europe, with Peter Pellegrini, Slovakia's Prime Minister. Parliament also held debates on a proposed European human rights violations sanctions regime; the situation in Venezuela and Nicaragua; opening EU-US trade negotiations; climate change; gender balance in nominations to EU economic and monetary affairs bodies; and on the urgency to establish an EU blacklist of third countries with weak regimes on anti-money-laundering and countering terrorist financing. Finally, Parliament adopted first-reading positions on three further proposed funding programmes for the 2021-2027 period. A number of Brexit-preparedness measures were also adopted.

European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS)

Members debated and approved the interinstitutional agreement on upgrading the current European Criminal Records Information System, ensuring that the revised system upholds fundamental rights, that dual nationals will not be subject to the same fingerprinting requirements as third-country nationals, and that the need to include data on dual-national citizens in the system will be re-assessed in a future revision.

Cybersecurity

To increase resilience to cyber-attacks that could severely disrupt citizens' lives, health and environment, it is proposed to give a stronger role to the current EU Agency for Network Information Security (ENISA), and to create a cybersecurity certification framework for IT systems, repealing the previous EU Cybersecurity Act. Members debated two reports: approving a trilogue agreement broadening ENISA's role to consulting and advising governments, citizens and businesses on cybersecurity; and referring the establishment of a European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Centre and a Network of National Coordination Centres, back to the Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee.

Unfair trading practices in the food supply chain

Members debated and approved, by an overwhelming majority, the text of the new directive on unfair trading practices in the food supply chain, to combat the disadvantages small farmers experience when competing against large conglomerates. Parliament's Agriculture & Rural Development Committee has succeeded in ensuring that the rules extend to all types of actors, include all agricultural products, and cover an extended list of prohibited unfair trading practices. The EU Council must formally approve the directive before it enters into force. EU Member States will then have 24 months to introduce the new rules into national legislation.

Revising the European citizens' initiative

Although the European citizens' initiative has enabled a million or more EU citizens to bring issues, such as 'Right2Water' and 'Ban Glyphosate', to the forefront of EU attention, Parliament has criticised the mechanism for its lack of effectiveness. Members debated and approved an interinstitutional agreement on revising the European citizens' initiative to ensure that successful initiatives have greater political impact. The revision includes stronger support for organisers, simpler rules, better digital and physical facilities, longer deadlines for European Commission responses, and a new centralised collection system (by 2020).

European Accessibility Act

Seeking to ensure that the 70 million people in the EU who live with a disability are able to access both products (such as computers or phones) and services (such as transport or banking), Parliament debated, and adopted by a very strong majority, a text agreed in interinstitutional negotiations in view of the

EN

adoption of the long-awaited European Accessibility Act. The proposed directive aims to harmonise accessibility requirements and clarify the definition of the obligation of accessibility, as laid down in EU law.

Visa Information System

Parliament adopted new rules for a revised EU Visa Information System, which will tighten background checks on visa applicants, and improve information exchange between EU countries, where gaps lead to less security for EU citizens.

Minimum coverage for potential losses stemming from non-performing loans

Following the financial crisis, many citizens and businesses found it difficult to repay loans, leading to a large number of non-performing loans on EU bank balance sheets. Members debated and adopted a provisional agreement between Parliament and Council to amend the current Capital Requirements Regulation (CRR), obliging banks to carry minimum reserves to cover losses on such loans.

Safeguarding competition in air transport

Parliament debated safeguarding competition in air transport and approved the text agreed in interinstitutional negotiations. As the original legislation to protect the EU against possible unfair commercial practices in international aviation was ineffective (and never used), the revised regulation seeks to ensure both a high level of connectivity and fair competition with air carriers based outside the EU, allowing the Commission to act if competition is distorted by third-country operators.

Establishment of the European Monetary Fund

Many EU countries experienced financial difficulties during the 2008 financial crisis, leading to the creation of the European Stability Mechanism. Members debated and adopted an interim report, prepared jointly by Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and Budgets (BUDG) Committees, on proposals to transform this intergovernmental mechanism into a European Monetary Fund. The changes would mean decisions on financial support would be taken by reinforced qualified majority (85 % of the votes), instead of unanimity. However, a decision by Council (where there is marked reluctance on the part of Member States), is still pending – the proposal itself being subject to the consent procedure (under which Parliament formally intervenes only at the end, to accept or reject the Council's text).

Guidelines for the 2020 EU budget

Next year, 2020, is the last in the current multiannual financial framework, and Members debated and adopted a BUDG committee report on Section III of the proposed guidelines for the 2020 EU budget. It calls for an ambitious budgetary commitment prioritising innovation and research for economic growth, security, improving living and working conditions for citizens, and combating climate change.

Turkey's 2018 country report

Parliament debated and adopted its position on the 2018 country report on Turkey, which addresses the country's EU accession aspirations. Human rights issues in Turkey led the Committee on Foreign Affairs to recommend formal suspension of accession negotiations. Nevertheless, it also recommends continued dialogue, support for civil society and democratic reform, and recognises Turkey's role in assisting refugees.

EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement

Parliament gave its consent to the conclusion of the EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, which seeks to support the Afghan government in peace- and state-building, as well as development and trade, on fighting terrorism and on human rights.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

An Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) committee decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations regarding type-approval requirements for motor vehicles and their trailers with regard to the safety and protection of their occupants and vulnerable users 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.