

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, April II 2019

Highlights of the April II plenary session (the last of the current legislature) included debates on the conclusions of the April 2019 European Council meeting on the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, and the final debate in the series on the future of Europe with the Prime Minister of Latvia, Kirsis Karins. Important debates also took place on the rule of law in Romania; failure to adopt an EU digital services tax; protecting the European elections against international cybersecurity threats; and on the possible extradition of Julian Assange. Members debated a number of external relations situations: in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe after cyclone Idai; in Libya; in Sudan; and US recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory. The legislative proposals adopted included those on collective investment funds, banking reform, prudential requirements, covered bonds, CO₂ emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles, and promoting clean, energy-efficient vehicles. Members voted on a number of legislative proposals (see below), including a partial agreement on the Horizon Europe programme.

Protection of whistle-blowers

By a large majority, Members adopted the agreement reached with the Council on the long-awaited proposal for an EU directive giving [whistle-blowers greater protection](#) when they report on breaches of EU law (such as money laundering, or contravening environmental or food safety regulations).

Collective investment funds

Members debated and voted on proposals on collective investment funds, which pool investment capital in collective securities portfolios. While the EU provides passporting to ensure a wide range of [cross-border distribution of investment funds](#), the EU market remains both small and national. The proposals align national rules and harmonise verification, creating economies of scale and opening up the market.

Prudential requirements and supervision of investment firms

Parliament voted to agree to an update of the current complex and inefficient EU regulatory framework for [prudential supervision and requirements of investment firms](#), which facilitates savings and investment in EU capital markets, to take account of the size and nature of investment firms and the risks involved.

Transparent and predictable working conditions

Members debated and approved an interinstitutional agreement on proposals to reform labour market rules, [ensuring transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU](#), to end the unfair employment practices that have affected EU citizens in the wake of the financial crisis.

Horizon Europe

An EU success story – the key role played by the Horizon 2020 programme in the first ever observation of a black hole – underlines the importance of EU research funding. Members debated and approved a partial agreement to establish and implement Horizon 2020's replacement, [the Horizon Europe programme](#), which could generate 100 000 new jobs, and could see 35 % of its budget allocated to climate objectives.

Market surveillance and compliance of products

Members debated and voted to adopt proposals encouraging fair competition between businesses and protecting consumer health and safety, through the [market surveillance and compliance of products](#), with greater coordination of rules on surveillance of harmonised industrial products in the single market.

Fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation platforms

After debating proposals for a regulation on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of [online intermediation services](#), Members voted to adopt an agreement on the proposals, which seek fairer

contractual relations between online giants (such as Amazon and Google) and other online businesses (such as hotels or restaurants).

Food chain risk assessment transparency

In a direct response to citizens' demands for improved public access to the scientific studies carried out on sensitive products and substances, notably regarding a ban on glyphosate, Members debated and adopted an agreement reached during interinstitutional negotiations on a regulation concerning the [transparency and sustainability of risk assessment in the food chain](#).

Supplementary protection certificate for medicinal products

Due to the lengthy testing and trials necessary to obtain EU market approval, pharmaceuticals firms can extend the patent protection on their products through a [supplementary protection certificate \(SPC\) for medicinal products](#). Members debated and adopted a compromise on proposals to improve the intellectual property rights regime for the industry, which suffers from competitive disadvantage in export markets.

Coordination of social security systems

Parliament decided not to close the first reading procedure on a regulation on [social security system coordination](#), but to leave it to the next Parliament. The European Commission proposal seeks to: ensure benefits do not overlap; secure equal treatment; allow for aggregation of insurance, work or residence periods; and ensure benefits from one country can still be received if the citizen moves to another country.

European Border and Coast Guard

Members debated and approved a provisional agreement to strengthen the [European Border and Coast Guard](#), including measures to engage 5 000 EU border guards (from January 2021), with a further 5 000 operational staff by 2027. The changes aim to ensure uniform border management standards throughout the EU, and to provide more support for national authorities involved in managing migration and the fight against cross-border crime at the EU's external borders.

EU Visa Code

Parliament debated and approved an agreement on the revision of the [EU Visa Code](#), which would increase the visa fee to €80, simplify the procedures for requesting visas and harmonise multiple-entry visa rules. The proposals also seek non-EU country cooperation in re-admitting their illegally staying nationals.

Adapting legal acts to Articles 290 and 291 TFEU

Members approved a revision that would adapt legal acts to the Treaty of Lisbon. The proposal aligns '[regulatory procedure with scrutiny](#)' (RPS) measures, from 64 basic acts, with the delegated acts procedure, where European Parliament and the Council have the right of veto and may revoke the delegation. However, agreement on a further 104 acts, and on acts in the justice policy field, will have to wait until the new legislative term.

Digital tools and processes in company law

Members debated and approved an agreement on measures to improve the [use of digital tools and processes in company law](#), which should make it easier to set up and register a business in the EU, including greater use of online submission for official company documentation.

Covered bonds

Finally, Members debated and approved a compromise on proposals on [covered bonds](#) – debt securities issued by credit institutions, secured by a pool of mortgage loans or public sector debt. Covered bonds provide vital long-term finance for many EU Member States, channelling funds to the property market and the public sector. However, both use and regulation of these bonds varies greatly between EU countries, and a common definition is lacking.

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](#).

