Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, October II 2019

The October II plenary session highlights included statements and debates on the outcome of the European Council meeting of 17 and 18 October 2019, and a review of the Juncker Commission’s term. Parliament also debated statements made on behalf of the Vice-President of the European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) on the Turkish military operation in north-east Syria and its consequences, and on the violent suppression of young people’s and students' protests in Iraq. Debates took place, inter alia, on Commission and Council statements on the effects of the Thomas Cook bankruptcy, on the dangers of violent right-wing extremism, on criminalisation of sexual education in Poland and on storms in Europe, followed by debates on accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Members declined to approve the 2017 accounts of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and European Council/Council, and adopted Parliament’s position on the general budget of the EU for 2020, which now goes to conciliation.

Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 17 and 18 October 2019

Members debated European Council and Commission statements on the outcome of the European Council meeting of 17-18 October 2019. After endorsing a revised United Kingdom withdrawal agreement, and approving a revised political declaration in the European Council (Article 50) format, EU Heads of State or Government tackled contentious issues including the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, enlargement, climate change and Turkey. Together with Commission President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, EU leaders also discussed future EU political priorities and the follow-up to the 2019-2024 strategic agenda.

Review of the Juncker Commission

Although the renewal of the European Commission has been postponed beyond the scheduled date of 1 November, current President of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker presented a statement, debated with Members, encompassing a review of the Juncker Commission. Whilst facing some challenging situations during 2014-2019, including terrorist attacks and increased refugee movements, analysis of the Juncker Commission’s 10 priorities shows that two thirds of the Commission’s proposals during the period resulted in changes to the law. However, progress has been slower on growth, jobs, investment and trade.

General budget of the European Union for 2020

Parliament adopted its position on all sections of the general budget of the European Union for 2020. Parliament’s Committee on Budgets proposed to reject the reductions made by the Council and to increase expenditure on social and climate target priorities instead. The budget will now be the subject of conciliation negotiations with the Council. If the institutions reach a compromise, Parliament would vote on that during the November II plenary session. In the absence of an agreement, the European Commission is required to submit a new draft budget.

Discharge 2017: European Asylum Support Office and European Council/Council

Members refused to approve the 2017 accounts of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and European Council and Council. The Budgetary Control Committee (CONT) report on EASO’s budget criticises its internal control system, but notes that the new EASO management has committed to reforms. As to discharge for the Council and European Council, the CONT Committee report underlines that the institution has again failed to provide information requested, to separate the budget of the European Council from the Council’s budget, and to align with the interinstitutional transparency register.

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.