Plenary round-up – Brussels, January II 2020

The highlights of the January II plenary session included discussion and the vote on the agreement on the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU, the ceremony to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and a debate on the von der Leyen Commission’s first work programme, for 2020. Parliament also debated the coronavirus outbreak, the humanitarian situation on Greek islands, the strategy for sustainable mobility and transport, and the EU’s response to devastation following floods in Spain. It also debated statements on the rights of indigenous peoples and India’s Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019. Finally, Members adopted Parliament’s calendar of part-sessions for 2021 and 2022.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

Holocaust remembrance in the EU takes place around International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, the date on which the Auschwitz Birkenau extermination camp in Poland was liberated. The European Parliament has long warned against the rise of neo-fascist violence, and particularly the increase in violence against Jews, calling for EU countries to take action to counter revisionist narratives that aim at denying or trivialising the mass murder of 6 million European Jews. Jewish communities in the EU have consequently been shrinking recently, in reaction to increasing anti-Semitic acts. The commemoration provides an ideal opportunity to promote public discourse on the facts of the Holocaust. It is also an occasion in many EU Member States, as in Parliament itself, to honour the victims of the less well known Roma and Sinti Holocaust.

Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union

Members gave consent in a single vote to the conclusion, by the Council on behalf of the EU, of the treaty on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. The Withdrawal Agreement was agreed between EU leaders and the UK Prime Minister in October 2019. It includes provisions covering citizens’ rights, the financial settlement, rules on the transition period, governance, protocols and annexes. It will enter into force at the end of January, whereupon the United Kingdom will become a third country, ending 47 years of EU membership. With the departure of 73 British Members, the Parliament itself will consequently change. Twenty-seven seats will be redistributed among 14 Member States, with the remaining 46 seats held in reserve for future EU enlargements and/or the possible creation of a transnational constituency.

Commission 2020 work programme

Members heard and discussed a statement on the Commission’s work programme for 2020, adopted on 29 January 2020. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has announced considerable changes in the focus and scope of the Commission’s work for the next few years. President von der Leyen’s ambitions include forging a stronger partnership between the Commission and Parliament by, among other things, providing greater support for Parliament’s right of legislative initiative, prioritising dialogue between the institutions during international negotiations, and submitting legislative proposals in response to Parliament resolutions adopted by a majority (in line with Article 225 TFEU).

Negotiations ahead of Council’s first reading

The President announced two committee decisions to enter into interinstitutional negotiations, on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund 2021–2027 (EMPL) and on a framework for the recovery and resolution of central counterparts (ECON). Parliament’s earlier first-reading positions provide the mandates. 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.