

## Plenary round-up – Brussels, September 2020

The September 2020 plenary session was the sixth conducted with Members participating remotely, using the alternative voting procedure put in place in March by Parliament's Bureau, although a majority were again present in Brussels. As well as the Commission President's traditional State of the Union address, Parliament held a joint debate on the risk of breach of the rule of law and LGBTI-free zones in Poland. Parliament also debated European Commission statements on the preparation of the special European Council focusing on Turkey's actions in the eastern Mediterranean, on the consequences for the single market of EU coordination of sanitary measures in the ongoing pandemic, on combatting sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and on the need for a humanitarian EU response to the situation in the Moria refugee camp. Parliament also debated statements from the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell, on the situation in Belarus, in Lebanon and the poisoning of Alexei Navalny. Parliament also voted on legislative proposals and resolutions, including on arms exports, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU Association Agreement with Georgia, protecting world forests, EU-African security cooperation in the Sahel, type approval of motor vehicles and the importance of urban and green infrastructure.

### State of the Union

The highlight of this session was Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's [State of the Union](#) address – an important moment to take stock of the year's achievements and present the priorities for the coming 12 months. While the coronavirus pandemic has put paid to the Commission's ambition to move away from crisis-management mode, the political priorities outlined in the original [six priorities for its mandate](#) have been recalibrated to deliver on promises to tackle climate change, racism, health threats and migration, while also adjusting to the crisis scenario.

### Opinion on the EU own resources system

Under the consultation procedure, Parliament adopted its [legislative opinion on the EU own resources system](#) proposal, allowing the Council to move ahead with its adoption on the basis of the July 2020 European Council conclusions and for the ratification process to begin in all 27 EU countries, so that the Recovery Plan can be implemented as soon as possible. Parliament's Committee on Budgets (BUDG) has fast-tracked the procedure, treating it separately from the MFF proposals. It upheld its position that new own resource streams must be introduced (from carbon, emissions, plastics, and digital and financial services taxation) to finance at least the entire repayment costs of the recovery instrument, and also insists that they are introduced according to a legally binding calendar. The new own resources decision will empower the Commission to borrow on the markets, and also introduce a first new source of revenue for the EU budget from 1 January 2021: a uniform call rate by weight for non-recycled plastic packaging waste.

### Amending Budget No 8/2020: Covering the financing needs of the Emergency Support Instrument and Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus

Members approved [Draft Amending Budget No 8/2020](#), which sets out €6.2 billion in funding to tackle the coronavirus crisis and speed up Covid-19 vaccine deployment under the Emergency Support Instrument and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus.

### Establishing the Just Transition Fund

Members approved, by a narrow majority, Parliament's position for trilogue negotiations on the proposed establishment of an extension of €17.5 billion to the [Just Transition Fund](#) to help regions that rely on fossil fuel and high-emission industries to invest in clean energy technologies, emissions reduction, site regeneration and reskilling of workers. This decision is subject to conditions. Gas investments will have to be 'sustainable' under European taxonomy rules (with some derogations); must be used as a transition

technology to replace coal, lignite, peat or bituminous shale; and must significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions without hindering the development of renewable energies in the territories concerned.

### Reducing maritime transport CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

Members adopted, by a large majority, an Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) report which sets out Parliament's position for negotiations with the Council on the legislative proposal to [reduce maritime transport CO<sub>2</sub> emissions](#), aimed at reforming data gathering for monitoring purposes. The committee report proposes requiring shipping companies to reduce their annual average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by at least 40 % by 2030, with penalties for non-compliance.

### Supporting a sustainable rail market in view of the coronavirus pandemic

Members approved proposals to support a [sustainable rail market in view of the coronavirus pandemic](#) allowing – temporarily and at least to the end of the year – measures to assist the rail sector face the effects of Covid-19, including lower, waived or deferred track access charges. It also allows Member States to support rail infrastructure managers to cover any financial losses brought about by the new relief measures until the industry can get back to normal operations.

### Opening of trilogue negotiations

Members [confirmed](#) two mandates for negotiations: from the Regional Development (REGI) Committee on exceptional additional resources and implementing arrangements under the 2014-2020 European Regional Development Fund 'Investment for growth and jobs goal', to help foster crisis repair in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and preparing a green, digital and resilient economic recovery (REACT-EU); and from the Fisheries (PECH) Committee on the proposal for a regulation establishing a multiannual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

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](#).

