

## Plenary round-up – December 2020

The December 2020 plenary session focused on the agreement on EU finances for the coming years, as well as the conclusions of the 10-11 December European Council meeting. Members debated future relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom, and adopted first-reading positions on temporary contingency measures on air and road connectivity, fisheries and aviation safety, to come into force should no agreement be reached with the UK by the end of this year. Members also discussed the preparation of an EU strategy on Covid-19 vaccination, including its external dimension, an EU Security Union strategy and a dedicated Council configuration on gender equality. Members discussed the European Citizens' Initiative, Minority Safepack, seeking to protect minority languages and cultures. Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell made statements on recent developments in the Eastern Partnership, on the situation in Mozambique and on the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process and the Southern Neighbourhood.

### Sakharov Prize

In a formal ceremony, Parliament awarded the [2021 Sakharov Prize](#) to the democratic opposition in Belarus, represented by the Coordination Council, for its peaceful role in opposing the falsification of the August 2020 elections.

### Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027

Following agreement at the European Council meeting of 10-11 December, Parliament approved, by large majority, the EU's [2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework](#) (MFF). An Interinstitutional Agreement on budgetary matters, setting out a timetable for the introduction of new own resources, was also approved. Adopted by the Council the following day, the MFF Regulation enters into force on 1 January 2021. The overall ceiling for the MFF is €1074.3 billion (2018 prices), which will be complemented by the €750 billion recovery plan (€390 billion in grants). Financing of the Next Generation EU recovery plan will be made possible by an unprecedented own resources decision authorising the Commission to borrow on markets.

### EU general budget 2021

The fruit of the agreement found on 4 December during the budgetary conciliation between Parliament and the Council on the first draft budget for 2021, Members adopted the EU [general budget for 2021](#), voting on the Council's position (adopted without amendment) on the second draft EU general budget for 2021. Commitment appropriations for 2021 will amount to €164.2 billion and payments to €166.1 billion. The annual budgetary negotiations this year were both complex and delayed, due to the late agreement on the 2021-2027 MFF, as well as the coronavirus crisis.

Parliament also voted on [Draft Amending Budget No 10/2020](#), to increase EU payment appropriations in 2020, in line with updated forecasts of expenditure and other adjustments to expenditure and revenue. The limited expenditure adjustments proposed allow increased payment appropriations of €1 569.3 million for the European Agriculture Guarantee Fund and certain decentralised agencies.

### Transitional rules for support from the common agricultural policy (CAP)

Based on a Parliament proposal and in view of the lengthy negotiations on the EU budget and agricultural policy post-2020, the European Commission put forward rules aimed at ensuring continuity of EU support for farmers and rural areas. Parliament therefore debated and voted on [transitional rules for support from the common agricultural policy](#) (CAP), extending current EU farm policy until the new CAP framework is in place at the end of 2022 and allowing greater focus on environment and climate measures.

### REACT-EU

Confirming the compromise agreement reached on the MFF and the considerable funding measures already agreed to combat the coronavirus crisis, Members adopted, by an overwhelming majority, the

regulation establishing [REACT-EU](#). This is intended to mobilise €47.5 billion, offering Member States the flexibility to use EU funds to address the challenges faced by the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, such as health care, tourism and culture. The funding should support social cohesion and climate objectives.

### European Commission implementing powers

Following repeated difficulties and controversy over authorisation of pesticides and genetically modified organisms, the Commission proposed changes to the procedures involved, to encourage Member States to take greater responsibility for decisions in such cases. Members voted on a revised Regulation on the Commission's implementing powers ([Comitology Regulation](#)), aimed at eliminating 'no-opinion' deadlock situations in the appeal committee and increasing the transparency of the procedure.

### Water legislation

In a joint debate, Members discussed the legislation that ensures that Europeans have access to [safe drinking water](#) (particularly on tap, rather than in bottles). Following this debate, Parliament adopted the revised Drinking Water Directive and an associated resolution, changes that come as a direct result of the European citizens' initiative 'Right2Water'. The updated rules address concerns about endocrine disruptors, pharmaceuticals and microplastics by introducing a watch-list mechanism, to begin within one year. However, Parliament remains keen to see water quality further improved through other related policies.

### European Public Prosecutor's Office and European Anti-fraud Office

Members debated and voted on the early second-reading agreement reached in trilogue negotiations on the revised Regulation on the [European Anti-fraud Office \(OLAF\)](#), to provide for cooperation with the new European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). The EPPO will provide an independent and decentralised EU office to investigate, prosecute and bring crimes to judgment. However, this means that the relationship between the EPPO and OLAF needs to be carefully codified in the rules of both organisations, based on principles of close cooperation, information exchange, complementarity and non-duplication.

### Nomination to the Court of Auditors

In a secret vote, Members issued a negative opinion on the [nomination of Marek Opiola](#) as the Polish member of the Court of Auditors, to replace Janusz Wojciechowski, now EU Commissioner for agriculture. While Parliament's decision is not legally binding on the Council, the Budgetary Control Committee nevertheless examines each candidate on their ability to perform their duties in complete independence and in the general interest of the EU. The publicity surrounding these hearings and the questionnaire answered by the candidates therefore makes it difficult (but not impossible) for the Council to over-ride any negative opinion delivered by Parliament.

### European Year of Rail

Members voted on a provisional agreement on a proposal to designate 2021 as the [European Year of Rail](#), reflecting the EU's climate ambition, as rail is a highly energy-efficient transport mode, and helping to boost passenger and goods traffic.

### Opening of trilogue negotiations

Members [confirmed](#) five mandates for negotiations from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee: on the proposal for a regulation on European Production and Preservation Orders for electronic evidence in criminal matters; on the proposal for a regulation establishing the conditions for accessing the other EU information systems; on the proposal for a regulation establishing the conditions for accessing other EU information systems for ETIAS purposes; on a proposal for a regulation laying down harmonised rules on the appointment of legal representatives for purpose of gathering evidence in criminal proceedings; and on a proposal for a regulation on a temporary derogation from certain provisions on the use of technologies by number-independent interpersonal communications service providers for the processing of personal and other data for the purpose of combating child abuse online.

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](#).

