

Plenary round-up – February 2021

The main debates held during the February 2021 plenary session concerned the state of play of the EU's Covid-19 vaccination strategy and the de facto abortion ban in Poland. Members also debated democratic scrutiny of social media platforms and the protection of fundamental rights, including the challenges ahead for women's rights more than 25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The impact of coronavirus on young people and sport, relief measures for the transport sector, homologation and distribution of transparent masks and the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia were also discussed. Members debated statements by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Josep Borell, on his visit to Russia in the light of the recent crackdown on protesters and the opposition, on the humanitarian and political situation in Yemen, and on the situation in Myanmar.

Recovery and Resilience Facility

Members debated a joint report by the Committees on Budgets (BUDG) and on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), and voted to adopt the text agreed with the Council in trilogue, thereby giving the green light for the EU [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (RRF) to go ahead. The RRF is designed to raise funding to revive the post-coronavirus economy with a major focus on climate action. It is also the main element of the Next Generation EU package. Under the agreement, Member States will be able to submit recovery and resilience plans that earmark at least 37 % of their budget to climate and 20 % to digital measures, with up to 13 % pre-financing available upon approval. Parliament will follow progress closely, through a recovery and resilience scoreboard.

Capital markets recovery package

Following a joint debate, Parliament adopted by a narrow majority, provisional agreements on two proposals, resulting from interinstitutional negotiations on the [capital markets recovery package](#) (Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID) and EU recovery prospectus). The proposals revise the legal framework on investment services, in a package of targeted amendments to the Prospectus Regulation, MiFID II and securitisation rules. The amendments aim at reducing the administrative burden for experienced investors, while preserving protection for retail investors and maintaining requirements for transparency.

European Central Bank – Annual report

ECB President Christine Lagarde was present for the debate on the ECON committee own-initiative report on the [European Central Bank's 2019 annual report](#), following which Parliament adopted its resolution by a large majority. The ECON report considers ECB monetary policy in the context of the coronavirus crisis, financial stability measures, and actions against climate change. In response to a projected decrease of 7.3 % in real GDP for the euro area, and increased unemployment to 8.0 % in 2020, the ECB has implemented monetary stimulus, non-standard monetary policy measures, and temporary capital and operational relief to increase banks' lending capacity. The ECON committee report considers that the ECB has acted decisively to mitigate the impact of the crisis. However, it also calls for accompanying reforms to strengthen competitiveness and social cohesion, and underlines the need to tackle climate change-related risks.

New circular economy action plan

It is clear that current use of the earth's resources is unsustainable, leading to biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions that threaten the natural world and accelerate climate change. Parliament has already called for an ambitious circular economy action plan to tackle the lack of re-use in the EU (the share of recycled materials in the economy was only 12 % in 2019). Members debated an own-initiative report and adopted a resolution on the European Commission's proposed [new circular economy action plan](#), by a

large majority. The Environment, Public Health & Food Safety (ENVI) Committee report proposes more robust and binding targets for reducing the use of primary raw materials, and highlights the opportunities inherent in optimising the use of products over a longer lifecycle.

Visit of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) to Russia

Members debated several statements made in plenary by the HR/VP, Josep Borrell. Members' reactions were mixed regarding the HR/VP's controversial visit to Russia and his meeting with Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, on Friday 5 February 2021. The meeting took place against the backdrop of the Russian authorities' crackdown on large-scale demonstrations in response to the arrest and jailing of opposition leader [Alexei Navalny](#).

EU Association Agreement with Ukraine

Members debated and approved by a large majority an own-initiative resolution on the [implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine](#), which commends the country's efforts in implementing its commitments under the Agreement. The wide-ranging Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) report recommends that Ukrainian authorities focus on a limited number of priorities and suggests completion of reforms now, to secure the advances made on the rule of law, governance and combating corruption.

Implementation of the Anti-Trafficking Directive

A grave violation of fundamental rights with a strongly gendered impact, which not only causes long-term harm to its victims (largely women), but also significant economic, social and human costs to society, Parliament debated and voted on an own-initiative resolution on [preventing and combating trafficking in human beings](#). The joint report prepared by the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) committees, recommends several measures to identify victims and improve prevention and prosecution of those who profit from trafficking in human beings.

Democratic scrutiny of social media and the protection of fundamental rights

Members also debated Council and European Commission statements on [democratic scrutiny of social media platforms and protection of fundamental rights](#), in particular on freedom of expression. Social media platforms have become a major source of information for many people, but also amplify mis- and disinformation. Their role and power in moderating online content has attracted increasing criticism, particularly in light of recent events around the elections in the United States. While the EU has favoured self-regulation to date, in 2020, Parliament stressed that the responsibility for law enforcement in digital services must remain with public authorities in the EU, not with private commercial entities, and called for adequate oversight and judicial redress mechanisms.

25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Members adopted a resolution, by a large majority, to mark [25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), following a debate with the Council and Commission on their statements on the challenges ahead for women's rights in the current difficult climate. While the coronavirus pandemic has delayed review of this initiative by a year, it also has a heavy impact on gender equality in a number of areas. Furthermore, the European Institute for Gender Equality reports that substantial gender inequalities persist across all twelve areas of concern identified for action. Parliament has already called for EU Member States to do more to ensure gender equality, and recently adopted three resolutions on the subject.

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](#).

