

Plenary round-up – December 2021

Due to the deteriorating Covid-19 situation, Members were again able to choose to vote remotely during the December plenary session in Strasbourg. Parliament nevertheless held a joint debate on the preparation of the European Council meeting of 16-17 December 2021 and the EU's response to the global resurgence of Covid-19 and new emerging variants. Members debated statements by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Josep Borrell, on the situation in Nicaragua, at the Ukrainian border, and in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. Members also debated a number of Council and European Commission statements, including on: the proposed Council decision on provisional emergency measures on the external border with Belarus; the state of play of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, plans to further undermine fundamental rights in Poland; on the EU response to transport poverty; taking stock of the European Year of Rail; the outcome of the Global Summit on Nutrition for Growth and increased food insecurity in developing countries; and on an EU ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.

In a formal sitting, Parliament heard an address by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana.

Sakharov Prize 2021

A key annual highlight in the European Parliament's continual defence of human rights is the award of the Sakharov Prize in honour of the work of brave human rights defenders. This year, and following an attempt on his life, Parliament awarded the prize to imprisoned Russian opposition leader [Alexey Navalny](#). Parliament has repeatedly expressed concern about Navalny's situation, calling for his immediate release. With this award, Parliament emphasises its position on Russia's systematic silencing of dissident voices, and its failure to uphold its international commitments to human rights. Daria Navalnaya, Navalny's daughter, received the 2021 Sakharov Prize on behalf of her father in a ceremony during the plenary session.

Digital markets act

Parliament debated and adopted its position on an Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO) report on the proposed digital markets act (DMA), which seeks to regulate big digital platforms in the EU. The committee's report proposes to extend the scope of the DMA to include web browsers, virtual assistants and connected televisions, and to increase the threshold for a company to be considered a 'gatekeeper'. It also seeks stronger obligations on companies that act as internet gatekeepers, to ensure messaging and social media is interoperable and to make it easier to unsubscribe, as well as strengthening the rules on advertising and fair access. The European Commission will enforce the terms of the DMA, with fines for non-compliance ranging from 4 to 20 % of a company's total worldwide turnover. The text now constitutes [Parliament's position](#) for the forthcoming negotiations with the Council.

European Year of Youth 2022

The coronavirus pandemic has had terrible consequences for young people, with their lives and education completely disrupted by successive lock-downs. The European Commission has therefore proposed to concentrate efforts to improve their situation, by making 2022 the [European Year of Youth](#). Following calls from Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) for additional efforts to include disadvantaged young people, and its successful negotiation of an additional €8 million funding for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, Parliament adopted an agreement reached between the co-legislators, so that the arrangements can be put in place in time for 1 January 2022.

Health technology assessment

The successful roll-out of coronavirus vaccine programmes in Europe underlined the benefits of swifter assessment of innovative health solutions. While EU countries are responsible for their healthcare policies, introducing EU-wide cooperation on research to assess the value of new health technologies should help make it swifter and easier to introduce new medicines and medical devices. Parliament has insisted that

there be full transparency in the way the proposed coordination groups would work, to ensure that there is no conflict of interest in their consultations with experts, patient representatives and industry stakeholders. Parliament debated and adopted at second reading a new regulation on stronger EU cooperation on [health technology assessment](#), allowing for the final act to be signed on 15 December 2021 and to apply three years after it enters into force.

New orientations for the EU's humanitarian action

Together, the EU and its Member States already contribute more than one third of global humanitarian assistance. Parliament has pushed for a follow up to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which sets out why, how and when the EU acts in response to humanitarian crises. Members therefore debated a Committee on Development (DEVE) own-initiative report on the Commission's proposed [new guidelines for EU humanitarian action](#), voting in favour of seeking swift action supported by more predictable and flexible funding, as well as sanctions for those who commit violations of international humanitarian law.

Cooperation on the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans

Criminal activities, such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling, carried out by transnational organised crime groups in the Western Balkans are detrimental to victims, citizens of the region and the EU alike. Although cooperation with the EU and its agencies is already under way, an own-initiative report by Parliament's Foreign Affairs (AFET) Committee underlines that accelerating reforms in the fight against transnational organised crime in the region, in line with the demands of the EU integration process, would greatly improve the situation, as well as trust in democracy in the region. Parliament debated and adopted a resolution on [cooperation in the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans](#).

Combating gender-based cyber-violence

The issue of cyber-violence has grown increasingly critical with the rise in the use of the internet and social media, exacerbated by the anonymity available to perpetrators. As no EU legislation currently specifically addresses gender-based violence, including cyber-violence, Parliament is keen to see these issues tackled in the European Commission's expected proposal on combating online violence early in 2022. Members debated and adopted a legislative-initiative resolution tabled by Parliament's Committees on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), on combating [gender-based cyber-violence](#). The committees would like to see the new legislation include measures that set out a legal definition of gender-based cyber-violence, EU-wide sanctions and improved support for victims.

European framework for employees' participation rights and the revision of the European Works Council Directive

Members debated and adopted an own-initiative report prepared by the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) Committee proposing to revise the framework of EU laws that supports EU countries' efforts to promote democracy at work. While the current EU laws to promote employee participation and representation rights have proved somewhat contradictory, new social, economic and pandemic-related challenges for workers mean that it is more important than ever that employees themselves have a say in the changes to come. The EMPL committee report therefore underlines the need for a new EU framework on information, consultation and board-level employee representation, including revamped European works councils, to reinforce [employees' rights](#).

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Members [confirmed](#), without a vote, two mandates for negotiations from the Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) Committee on the proposal for an amending directive on digital operational resilience requirements and on the proposal for a directive on digital operational resilience for the financial sector. Members also confirmed a mandate from the Fisheries (PECH) Committee on the proposal for a regulation on management, conservation and control measures applicable in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Area of Competence.

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](#).

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