

Plenary round-up – March I 2022

As the March I 2022 plenary session in Strasbourg took place just two weeks after Russia launched its war on Ukraine, security and economic issues were high on the agenda. Members held a debate with Kaja Kallas, Prime Minister of Estonia, on the EU's role in a changing world and the security situation in Europe, and debated Council and Commission statements on the deterioration of the situation of refugees fleeing Ukraine. Celebrating International Women's Day, Members heard an address by Ukrainian author, Oksana Zabuzhko. Members also debated a number of other Commission statements: on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina; on transparency and standards in public access requests; on the need for EU action on sustainable textiles and on chronic kidney disease. Members approved the establishment of three temporary committees: a special committee on Covid-19; an inquiry committee on the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware; and the continuation for a second one-year term of the work of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the EU, including Disinformation (INGE). Several debates and votes on legislative files took place, inter alia on the European Semester, batteries and battery waste and the general Union environment action programme to 2030.

Batteries and waste batteries

Members debated an Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee report on a European Commission proposal for a regulation on [batteries and waste batteries](#). The ENVI committee's report calls for even higher ambition, with a wider scope to include e-bike and other light transport batteries, and greater diligence throughout the battery lifecycle, from manufacture to recycling. Members adopted Parliament's first-reading position, setting Parliament's negotiating position and opening the way for interinstitutional negotiations to begin.

General Union environment programme to 2030

Members debated the EU's climate ambitions and the [eighth environment action programme](#) – the framework for EU environmental policy to 2030. Parliament adopted the provisional agreement reached between the co-legislators, setting the priorities for EU objectives targeting a sustainable economy. The aim is to accelerate the transition to a climate-neutral economy, whilst ensuring that environmental measures do not perpetuate social and gender inequalities, and to phase out fossil fuel and other harmful subsidies.

Regional economic accounts for agriculture

Members considered, and adopted at first reading, the agreed text on the proposed overhaul of the regulation on [economic accounts for agriculture](#), formalising regional agricultural data reporting. During the negotiations, Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) underlined the need to ensure cost-efficient agricultural data collection and avoid redundancy in data reporting.

Citizenship and residence by investment schemes

A considerable number of EU countries have offered citizenship and residence by investment schemes to those (estimated at over 132 000 people between 2011 and 2019) who are wealthy enough to pay. While investment received is estimated at €21.4 billion, the schemes bear obvious risks to sincere cooperation between EU Member States, and commodify EU rights, as well as posing security, corruption, money laundering, and tax avoidance risks. Parliament has expressed concern regarding these schemes since 2014, and Members returned to the issue to consider and adopt a legislative-initiative report from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE). The committee report demands that the Commission come up with proposals to phase out [citizenship by investment schemes](#) completely, and propose new laws to harmonise and govern the rules on residence by investment schemes.

Foreign interference in democratic processes in the EU

Parliament has criticised countries who attempt to influence elections and other democratic processes in EU countries. Russia and China are among the best-known sources of foreign interference, but over 80 countries spread disinformation. Members heard the conclusions of the report on external attempts to influence elections and other democratic processes in EU countries from Parliament's Special Committee on Foreign Interference (INGE). Parliament adopted a resolution based on the committee's report, which summarises the EU's main vulnerabilities to [foreign interference](#), witnessed in several recent elections, and recommends a comprehensive EU strategy to develop resilience. Greater awareness of the problem should be encouraged through media literacy, by closing loopholes that allow foreign financing of political parties, and through stronger sanctions for foreign actors who interfere with our democracies. Parliament later voted to continue this work in a new special committee mandate for the coming year.

Shrinking space for civil society in Europe

A political, economic, social and cultural life in which freedom of expression and of association are respected is one guarantee of a resilient civil society. Parliament is concerned that the EU civic space has deteriorated, particularly since the pandemic, with some governments hindering civil society organisations' participation in democratic life. Members debated and adopted a LIBE committee own-initiative report, advocating new measures, including a specific EU strategy, to protect and boost [civil society organisations](#) in the EU. The report underlines that the strategy should align with EU action in other fields, including on racism.

Role of culture, education, media and sport in the fight against racism

Members also considered and adopted a Culture and Education Committee own-initiative report on the role of culture, education, media and sport in the [fight against racism](#). Considering the 2020 EU action plan on racism, the committee underlines the action still needed to combat stereotypes, develop inclusive education, raise awareness of the history of racism and ensure fair representation of ethnic minorities in the media. The committee insists that adequate resources be made available to ensure that the ambitions can be realised, and calls for the Commission to act on discrimination in sport. The committee also urges EU countries to take effective measures to prevent the media from spreading hate speech and false narratives about particular ethnic groups.

EU gender action plan III

Parliament debated elements driving gender parity in EU external policy. Members considered and adopted a report prepared by the Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and the Development (DEVE) Committees, on the [third EU gender action plan](#), which seeks to mainstream gender equality in external policy. The report welcomes integration of the EU action plan on women, peace and security into GAP III, as well as the inclusion of climate change considerations, among other things. However, regretting the Council's failure to endorse GAP III, it also criticises the omission of issues including women's access to natural resources; sexual exploitation and violence; and the inclusion of women in mediation processes. Finally, it calls for more EU action to counter the effects of the pandemic on women, and greater focus on gender equality in trade and investment policy.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Members [confirmed](#), without vote, a mandate for negotiation from the Fisheries (PECH) Committee on the proposal for a regulation laying down conservation and management measures applicable in the Western and Central Pacific Convention Area.

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](#).

