Environment, climate change and energy
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Tackling climate change and pollution
The European Parliament has been at the forefront of the global response to climate change, passing new legislation that will help curb greenhouse gas emissions and steer the EU towards a low-carbon economy less dependent on costly fossil fuel imports.

MEPs have been closely involved in overhauling the transport and energy sectors to ensure that the EU produces more fuel-efficient cars, vans and motorbikes and invests in alternative fuels that will not cost the planet.

Parliament's watchwords have been "safety first" and "prevention is better than cure" in helping to further limit exposure to environmental hazards and in fighting successfully for cleaner air, soil and water.

1. Fighting climate change and promoting cleaner energy
Climate change – perhaps the greatest environmental challenge of our time – remains a key focus for the European Parliament as it builds on EU landmark legislation and urges forward-thinking climate policy at EU and international levels. Participating in United Nations climate summits, MEPs have consistently called on the EU and international partners to show more ambition as the world works towards a globally binding climate treaty to be agreed by 2015.

After setting key Following landmark EU targets set for 2020 – for example to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20% and to source 20% of energy from renewable sources – Parliament has turned its attention to vital further measures. These include plans to freeze the auctioning of some CO2 permits from the European Emissions Trading System scheme in order to restore the incentive effect of the scheme and encourage firms to invest in low-carbon innovation. MEPs are also working to set new fighting for, more ambitious climate targets for the period 2020- to 2030.

Clean and efficient sources of energy
New energy efficiency legislation will help consumers to cut their energy bills and the EU as a whole to hit its climate change target of using 20% less energy by 2020. The approved compulsory energy-saving measures – including renovating public buildings, energy-saving schemes for utilities and energy audits for all large firms – could save €50 billion per year and create many thousands of new "green" jobs.

Building codes in the member states will require all new buildings to have near-zero energy consumption, and impose regular inspections of boilers and air-conditioning systems.

Mandatory energy labelling for household appliances will help consumers to assess running costs. Parliament also pushed successfully for stricter eco-design requirements – or tougher standards – for fluorinated gases in air-conditioning and fridges to help ensure that consumers can make informed and climate-friendly choices.

Under the current review of biofuels, legislation, Parliament supported the development of cleaner,
second-generation products, taking into account the impact of biofuels on land-use change. It has also kept a close eye on shale gas, calling on member states to ensure robust rules on "fracking", while pressing for a comprehensive EU review of chemicals and water legislation to ensure that it keeps up with the emergence of this energy source.

Secure gas supplies
European households need no longer fear having their gas cut off in any future gas supply crisis, thanks to Parliament's approval of EU-wide co-ordination and interconnection arrangements in legislation.

The new rules are intended to reduce vulnerability to future disruption and boost infrastructure development at national and EU level. Market mechanisms remain the first course of action, but households will be protected first during a crisis.

Transport: ensuring better fuel-efficiency
The EP pushed for laws to drive forward innovation and reduce carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from new cars and vans by 2020. This will cut the EU's climate impact from road transport while offering motorists better fuel efficiency. Road transport is the second-biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the EU, after power generation. It contributes about a fifth of the EU's total CO2 emissions.

New rules to make motorbikes greener – and also safer – were put in place. MEPs set up a common system of type approval for powered two-wheel vehicles ranging from mopeds to heavy motorcycles.

Road toll prices for the haulage industry were originally intended to cover only infrastructure costs. They will now reflect the cost of noise and air pollution as well. Parliament adopted rules designed to strike a balance between the economic interests of the countries on the EU's periphery and environmental needs.

MEPs successfully fought for cleaner shipping fuels and are also exerting pressure for global agreements to ensure cuts in shipping and aviation emissions.

2. Protecting the environment

Industrial pollution
Over 50,000 industrial installations ranging from power stations to pig farms will need to meet tougher rules aimed at protecting against air, soil and water pollution. The law covers harmful pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides.

MEPs also passed legislation to end the scrapping of old EU-registered ships on non-EU beaches and ensure that they are recycled at EU-approved facilities worldwide.

In addition, Parliament backed plans for reducing the use of the most common and most polluting plastic bags by at least 80% by 2019. Plastic carrier bag litter is a major environmental problem, known to pollute water bodies and aquatic eco-systems in particular.

E-waste
Parliament backed laws to tackle the EU's e-waste mountain. EU Member States will be obliged to collect and recycle more discarded fridges, phones and other e-waste. MEPs succeeded in making it easier for consumers to return small products and harder for unscrupulous operators to ship e-waste illegally out of the EU.

Oil spills and hazardous chemicals – polluter must pay
Parliament backed legislation that ensures that oil and gas firms will be held liable for the costs of any potential environmental damage – and must have the means to pay – or else be denied licences to drill in EU waters.

MEPs updated chemicals legislation to reduce risks to ecosystems and public health. New rules on pest-control products, for example, ban the most hazardous substances and require alternatives to be found to other problematic chemicals that are still in use.

Parliament also tightened up the rules on inspections of dangerous chemical sites and ensured that the public has a right to know about installations in their local area, in the wake of the red mud disaster in Hungary.