

## Things we learned in plenary: Paris attacks, GMOs, rotating presidencies

**The Parliament paid tribute to the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris on Monday at the start of the January plenary. On the legislative side, MEPs approved a proposal to give member states more flexibility to restrict or ban GMOs on their territory, while they also debated the programme of the new Latvian presidency of the Council as well as the outcome of the Italian presidency that ended in December.**

The plenary started with a minute of silence for the victims of last week's attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine and a Jewish supermarket in Paris.

EU countries will enjoy greater powers to restrict or ban GMOs on their territory under new rules adopted by MEPs on Tuesday. The legislation will still have to be approved by the Council before it can enter into force.

"We should invest in success and in the future for our children," Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said, during Tuesday's debate on the end of his country's presidency of the Council. He pleaded in favour of focussing on investment rather than austerity to revive Europe's economy.

On Wednesday Latvian Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma presented a vision of "a competitive, digital and globally strong Europe" and said her country will work to increase security, boost growth and jobs and establish a digital single market while at the helm of the Council.

MEPs discussed security issues and the Juncker investment plan with the newly elected president of the European Council Donald Tusk on Tuesday. Tusk also promised to step up the fight against tax evasion.

MEPs debated the difficult political situation in Egypt and Libya four years after the Arab Spring with the EU's foreign chief Federica Mogherini. They also called attention to Nigeria, where terrorist group Boko Haram has been held responsible for the slaughter of thousands in recent days.

The Parliament adopted a resolution speaking out against the breaches of media freedom in Turkey. MEPs insisted that the country must respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

MEPs called for more efforts to tackle smuggling of migrants in Tuesday's debate with Dimitris Avramopoulos, the commissioner responsible for migration, focusing on recent incidents where migrants were abandoned on the high seas by the crews of the cargo ships transporting them.

The Parliament approved the European ombudsman Emily O'Reilly's 2013 annual report on Thursday. MEPs welcomed a number of investigations that she launched, such as an inquiry on the transparency of the EU-US free trade negotiations.

This month it has been 70 years since Nazi death camp Auschwitz Birkenau was liberated. About 1.1 million people were killed there, most of them Jews. "Jews in Europe still fear for their safety today. That is something that must frighten us and we need to resist that fear," said EP President Martin Schulz on the anniversary on Tuesday in plenary.

## Further information

[Plenary press releases](#)

[Photo gallery on Flickr](#)

[Photos: Parliament pays tribute to victims of Charlie Hebdo attack](#)

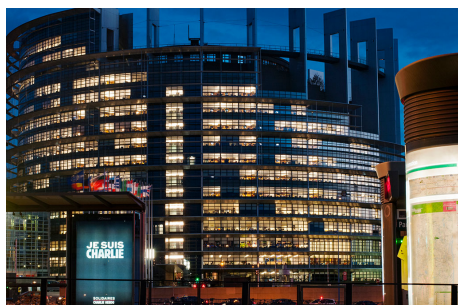
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