

This week in plenary: safe food, melting ice caps and a prejudice that won't go away

Modern threats and ancient prejudices dominated Parliament's March 2017 plenary session. The need to ensure that our food is safe was debated as were the threats and opportunities of melting polar ice. At the same time, the inequality still facing women in the workplace was underlined and an MEP who berated women punished, while most MEPs called on Europe to step in and replace the funds the United States is withdrawing from NGOs offering abortions in developing countries.

Close to three quarters of all [waste](#) should be recycled by 2030, Parliament said in a resolution setting out its position on limiting landfilling and incineration of rubbish. This comes ahead of negotiations with the member states on EU legislation aiming to reduce the environmental impact of waste.

Much remains to be done in Europe before true [gender equality](#) is achieved, Parliament said on Tuesday, underlining amongst others the persistent male-female worker pay-gap. In a separate decision, Polish MEP Janusz Korwin-Mikke was severely [sanctioned](#) by Parliament for derogatory comments towards women during the previous plenary session.

[Shareholders](#) will be given a greater say in how company directors are paid, following new rules approved by Parliament on Tuesday. The aim is to help give firms a longer term outlook. The real owners and shareholders will also be easier to identify.

The newly re-imposed US "[gag rule](#)" cutting public funding to NGOs providing abortions and other family planning services in developing countries was debated in plenary on Tuesday. Most MEPs wanted member states to step in and fill the gap in funding while others said that the EU should respect the US government's decision.

Horsemeat sold as beef grabbed the headlines in 2013 but the need to better control the long and convoluted supply chains bringing food to our plates has not gone away. On Wednesday, members voted to bring more clarity and [accountability](#) to the system and strengthen Europe's already high [food standards](#).

98% of farmed rabbits are raised in [battery cages](#) and improving their welfare can only help prevent diseases and reduce the need for antibiotics that are passed on to humans, says a resolution voted on on Tuesday calling for healthier yet affordable alternatives. In a separate resolution MEPs asked for better protection of abandoned horses and donkeys.

MEPs approved new rules that will free up the 700 MHz band currently used for digital TV, but also wireless microphones, for [super-fast 5G](#) mobile internet by mid-2020.

Common European developments in [defence](#) require the political will of EU countries as legal provisions are already present in the Lisbon Treaty, MEPs said on Thursday, also calling for better cooperation between Europe's militaries and adding that the current fragmentation of defence [procurement](#) costs member states billions of euro.

In a debate on Wednesday to [commemorate](#) the victims of the Brussels terrorist attacks of 22 March 2016, members stressed that European countries need to share information more efficiently and improve the interoperability of EU databases, as well as prevent radicalisation and help victims of terrorism.

On Thursday, Parliament approved [EU rules to stop the financing of armed groups and human rights abuses](#) through the trade in minerals such as tin, tungsten, tantalum and gold.

Climate change is raising geopolitical tensions in the Arctic. While the melting of Arctic ice is unlocking new opportunities in the form of shipping routes and oil and gas stocks, it is also [increasing tensions](#) and creating risks for the environment. On Thursday, members adopted a [resolution](#) insisting that the Arctic remain a low-tension area. Highlighting its vulnerable ecosystem, they also called for a ban on Arctic oil and gas extraction.

Tighter rules to better control [blank-firing and inadequately deactivated weapons](#) were approved on Tuesday in legislation first proposed in the aftermath of the 2015 Paris attacks. Member states will also have to better monitor firearm possession licences and exchange information.

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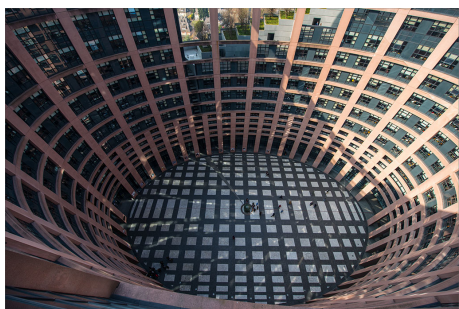
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