Consumer rights, long-term budget, Schengen feature on July plenary agenda

In a packed plenary, MEPs approved new clearer rules on food labelling, restrictions on genetically modified crops and the levying of fines for car drivers caught speeding in another member state. On Tuesday European Commission President José Manuel Barroso debated proposals for the EU's long-term budget with MEPs and the temporary reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen area was also under the spotlight.

MEPs discussed the latest developments in Syria, Yemen North Africa with High Representative Catherine Ashton on Wednesday afternoon and on Wednesday morning, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk outlined the priorities for Poland's six months at the helm of the Council to general acclaim. Among other issues on the agenda during the 4-7 July plenary session in Strasbourg were BSE, body scanners at airports and the report by the EP's Crisis Committee.
Clearer food labelling to help consumers choose
Food labels will in future have to spell out a food's energy content as well as fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugar, protein and salt levels, under EU rules set to be approved by MEPs next Wednesday.

MEPs gear up for talks on derivatives, short selling and investor compensation
Three draft EU laws - to regulate derivatives trading, to regulate short selling and to increase guaranteed investor compensation for fraud to €100,000 - come up for votes in Strasbourg next week. The lead MEPs are seeking the full Parliament's backing to strengthen their hand in negotiations with Member States.

GMO cultivation: the right to a red light
Member States would be able to restrict or ban the cultivation of genetically modified crops for various reasons under a proposed change to EU law. Parliament's Environment Committee wants to include environmental grounds, as this could provide such decisions with a firmer legal basis in the context of international trade rules.

Traffic offences: loopholes for foreign drivers to be closed
Car drivers caught speeding, drink-driving or going through red lights in another EU Member State will no longer get off scot-free, thanks to plans for cooperation between European police forces set to be approved by MEPs in Strasbourg.

European elections: EU-wide lists for 25 candidates?
To boost turnout at European Parliament elections starting with the next polls in 2014, voters should get two votes, says a plan that comes before the House on Thursday. One vote would be cast for national candidate lists as at present, and one for EU-wide lists. The EU lists would allow voters to pick an extra 25 MEPs, bringing the total to 776.

Regional funding: a new category of eligible regions?
Regional and local investment funded partly by Brussels has been a great success in boosting economic and social cohesion in the EU, argues a draft resolution on the "Strategy for the post-2013 Cohesion Policy" by the Regional Development Committee. MEPs want the policy to continue but are proposing adjustments to increase transparency as well as the leverage effect of structural funding.

Poland takes over at the helm of the EU from Hungary
On Wednesday morning Prime Minister Donald Tusk will present the priorities of Poland's incoming Council presidency, whose overall objective will be to lead the EU back on track towards faster economic growth and an enhanced political community. The Polish Presidency will focus on three priorities: European integration as the source of growth, Secure Europe and Europe benefiting from openness. Prime Minister Orbán will review the period of the Hungarian administration on Tuesday.

Debate on long-term EU budget
The Commission's proposals for the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020) and a new system of own resources will be debated by leading MEPs with President Barroso and Budgets Commissioner Lewandowski on Tuesday 5 July. The plans were presented to Parliament's Conference of Presidents on 29 June.

Schengen: temporary reintroduction of border controls under the spotlight
Parliament will react to the European Council's call for a safeguard clause in the Schengen rules allowing for the reintroduction of internal border controls in a "truly critical situation", where a Member State facing heavy migratory pressure at EU external borders can no longer comply with its obligations.

Parliament set to back refund of €4.54 billion to Member States
Parliament will vote on a plan to return €4.54 billion to Member States from this year's EU budget, as the result of a surplus from the 2010 financial year. Of the total, €2.72 billion consists of money not spent on EU programmes in 2010. The rest comes from fines, interest on late payments and surpluses due to exchange rate differences. Britain is due to receive €639 million, while €48 million will go to Ireland.

**Passenger data: Commission to be quizzed on talks with Australia, Canada, US**

The Commission will brief MEPs on progress in the negotiations with Australia, Canada and the US on the transfer of air passenger data (Passenger Name Records). MEPs want to know if the talks with the US are continuing and how the EU executive will respond to the opinion of its own legal service, which has queried the legality of a draft accord with the US leaked to the press in May.

**Arab spring: latest developments in Syria, Yemen and North Africa**

The worsening situation in Yemen and Syria and the state of play of other reforms in the Arab world and north Africa will be the key topic for debate with EU Foreign Affairs High Representative Catherine Ashton on Wednesday. Three resolutions will be put to the vote on Thursday. Lady Ashton is also expected to brief MEPs on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

**Other items on the agenda**

"More Europe" needed to counter economic crises

Strict safeguards for body scanning at airports

Parliament eyes CO2 cuts beyond 20%

BSE: Europe must not drop its guard

Women and business: call for quotas

An EU agency for the Schengen area

Danish workers to get EU unemployment aid

Solidarity aid to Slovenia, Czech Republic and Croatia

Dial 112 throughout Europe for police, ambulance and fire brigade

Europe’s energy infrastructure in need of an upgrade

The future of social services in Europe
MEPs home in on financial speculators

Have you ever wondered how it is possible for a small group of speculators to make money while the financial system teeters on the brink of disaster and taxpayers' money is being used to shore it up? By short selling and using financial instruments like derivatives, investors can profit from falling markets, but these practices facilitate excessive risk taking, one of the main causes of the current crisis. That is why MEPs want to rein them in.

On Monday Parliament debated two reports containing measures to increase transparency on financial markets: French Green Pascal Canfin’s report on short selling and credit default swaps (CDS) and German Christian Democrat Werner Langen’s report on derivatives.

Short selling allows an investor to profit from falling prices by for example borrowing shares to sell based on the expectation the price will fall, at which point the investor buys them back and pockets the difference.

CDS are a form of insurance against default. If an owner of company or government bonds is concerned about default, they can buy CDS through which they will be reimbursed in the event of a default. If there is no default the investor simply loses the cost of the CDS.

Why the Parliament wants to ban naked short selling, naked CDS

Naked short selling is the sale of shares you don't actually own. The Canfin report would allow such transactions only in cases where the short seller is able to reliably demonstrate by the end of the trading day that they can come up with the shares.

Investors sometimes buy CDS even if they don't own the underlying bonds. That means they get paid, if a government defaults, even if they don't own the government bonds. This has been likened to taking out insurance on your neighbour's house and then hoping it burns down so you can collect the insurance. MEPs think this destabilizes the markets and want to ban the practice for EU member state bonds.

Over the counter (OTC) derivatives to be forced on central clearing

The Langen report deals with derivatives, i.e. financial instruments that allow investors to profit from movements in stock and bond prices, interest rates and currency exchange rates. Derivatives can be thought of as contracts between two counterparties: when prices move, one of them has to pay the other, depending on which of the counterparties placed the right bet.

Usually these contracts are entered into over-the-counter (OTC): counterparties agree between themselves how to structure the derivative. There is very little transparency. If things go wrong, nobody knows exactly how much risk there is in the system, which can lead to panic and instability that can seriously damage the functioning of financial system.

The Langen report calls for OTC derivatives be cleared centrally via central clearing parties, CCPs - financial institutions that step in between the counterparties and make sure derivatives contracts are settled. Data about the trades would be communicated to trade repositories so that regulators can gauge the amount of risk in derivatives market and react accordingly.

Negotiations on these issues are still going on with member states.
GMOs - more power to member states

MEPs voted Tuesday on a proposal to allow EU countries to ban or restrict the use of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) on environmental grounds, giving them better legal protection in the event of challenges from trading partners opposed to a ban. "Our proposal offers states a solid, legal basis," said French Liberal Corinne Lepage, Parliament's draftswoman for the rules.

"This vote is a clear signal from the Parliament to the Council and Commission: the EU authorisation system should be maintained but it should be acknowledged that some agricultural and environmental effects, as well as the socio-economic impact linked to contamination, can be cited by Member States to justify a ban or restriction on GMO cultivation," she said after a vote in Committee.

What will change?

Member states will be able to restrict or ban GMO cultivation on agro-environmental grounds, for example pesticide resistance, the invasiveness of certain crops and a threat to biodiversity. This was not supported by the European Commission, which wanted to allow the ban only on socio-economic, ethical and moral grounds.

Member states will not be able to ban them on health grounds. This is already part of the current EU authorisation process.

MEPs expect the inclusion of a ban specifically on environmental grounds to give member states better legal protection in the event of challenges to the GMO ban via the World Trade Organisation.

The changes won't alter the safety approval procedure for GM crops, which is carried out by the European Commission on the basis of an independent risk assessment from the European Food Safety Authority.

More on GMOs

- GMOs authorised for consumption in EU: cotton, maize, bacterial protein, yeast strains, oilseed rape, potato, soybean, sugar beet
- GMOs authorised for cultivation: 1 variety each of potato, maize
- Countries using "safe-guard" clause to ban GMOs: Austria, France, Greece, Hungary, Germany, Luxembourg
- GM food makes 61% Europeans uneasy; 21% think it is safe; 53% think GMOs can be harmful (Eurobarometer/October 2010)
- Most popular in the US - 93% of soybeans 86% of maize (USDA)
Social services of general interest: the name says it all

Social services of general interest are the kind of services to citizens we think of when speaking of the modern welfare state. Parliament is about to examine proposals for a general upgrade of the regulatory framework governing them. But, what exactly are these services?

Services of general interest benefit society as a whole and can only be provided by the government, directly or indirectly so fall into two distinct categories:

- those "bought" by the citizen-consumer, like power or water
- Those that are more intangible but have become an essential part of any modern society. These "social" services of general interest (SSGI) include health, social security, employment and training, social housing, child care and long-term care.

According to the report prepared by Irish Socialist Proinsias De Rossa these services account for up to 26% of EU GDP and employ around 64 million. Normally provided by the state, they can also be subcontracted to private companies, in which case they fall under EU internal market and competition rules like other services such as power or water.

The crisis has had "enormous economic and social costs", including "the socialisation of private bank debt", which has put "enormous strain on funding of SSGI" at a time of generalised fiscal consolidation, according to the report. However, "access to high quality SSGI is a citizen's right".

The report proposes updating the legal framework to better differentiate SSGI from other services of general interest and improve funding, especially given the restrictions imposed by state aid and procurement rules in the internal market. It proposes the setting up of an EU-wide working group or "High Level Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce" co-chaired by the EP and Commission and including the Council, social partners and other interested parties, to develop and implement measures to safeguard these services.

_The non legislative resolution was adopted in plenary on Tuesday 5 July._
Opening of session: Polish presidency, Moroccan poll, Belarus demonstrations

The start of Poland's six-month presidency of the European Union on 1 July was welcomed by Parliament's President Jerzy Buzek at the opening of this week's Strasbourg plenary session. Mr Buzek also commented on the recent referendum in Morocco, the demonstrations in Belarus during which some protesters were arrested and the deaths of two prominent MEPs.

Last Friday in Warsaw, the first-ever Polish presidency of the European Union was launched. The prime minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, will present his government's programme for the coming six months to MEPs on Wednesday morning. "We expect this presidency to be as friendly towards the European Parliament as the Hungarian presidency was", said Mr Buzek.

Turning to events in the EU's neighbouring countries, Mr Buzek spoke first of the referendum in Morocco. "The citizens of Morocco have accepted constitutional change", he said, "but the reforms need to go further to meet the aspirations of the people".

In Belarus, "hundreds of people were arrested yesterday and will be put on trial today", said the President, adding "the European Parliament supports them and calls for them to be released immediately and unconditionally".

Tributes to Otto von Habsburg and Jan Kulakowski

The President then paid tribute to two eminent Members of the European Parliament who had died recently, Otto von Habsburg and Jan Kulakowski.

Otto von Habsburg was "one of the first champions of European integration", a president of the International Paneuropean Union, for two decades a member of the European People's Party and "a great advocate of enlargement of the European Union to central and eastern Europe", said Mr Buzek.

Jan Kulakowski, who passed away on 21 June, was an émigré in Belgium during the period of the Polish communist regime, worked for various trade union bodies, was one of the principal architects of Poland's accession to the European Union and became a member of the ALDE group in the European Parliament. "Jan Kulakowski contributed greatly to the fact that Poland has taken on the presidency of the European Union today", said Mr Buzek.

The House observed a minute's silence in respect to these two former Members.

Other announcements

On Tuesday the House will elect two new vice-presidents of the European Parliament, to replace Silvana Koch-Mehrin (ALDE, DE) and Stavros Lambrinidis (S&D, EL).

Portuguese MEP Rui Tavares has left the GUE/NGL group to join the Greens/EFA.

French MEP Dominique Baudis has been replaced by Franck Proust for the EPP group.
Member States to pay €4.54 billion less into EU budget

EU Member States' contributions to this year's budget will be cut by a total of €4.54 billion, following a vote by the European Parliament on Tuesday. This decision was made possible because of a surplus from the 2010 financial year.

Of the total, €2.72 billion consists of money not spent on EU programmes in 2010. The rest comes from fines, interest on late payments and surpluses due to exchange rate differences.

The result of today's vote was 625 in favour, 14 against and 29 abstentions.

Britain will benefit to the tune of €639 million, while Ireland will pay €48 million less. For an overview of the exact sum that each Member State may deduct from its contribution for 2011, please see table below.

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Procedure: Budgetary
Parliament decides stance on derivatives, short selling, investor compensation

Three proposals making derivatives trading less fragile, reducing speculative practices linked to short selling and reducing the time for the setting up of investor compensation schemes received Parliament's backing on Tuesday ahead of negotiations with Member States.

With very significant differences expected between the position of the EP and, once adopted, that of Member States for the directive on investor compensation schemes, MEPs chose to close the first reading procedure today. In the case of the two texts on derivatives and short selling, however, the plenary vote was only used to collect significant majorities which should strengthen the hand of MEP negotiators in their ongoing talks with Member States.

The report on investor compensation schemes was adopted by 566 votes to 17 with 88 abstentions. The reports on derivatives and short selling were both adopted by a show of hands and the respective final votes were postponed. For all three texts, the EP shares co-decision powers with Member States.

Compensation schemes capitalised faster and "bad advice" also grounds for a claim

On the compensation schemes legislation, Parliament voted to add protection to private investors against fraudulent and defaulting investment firms, particularly by adding "bad advice" as a case for claiming compensation. The rules would also halve the time allowed for fully capitalising national compensation schemes (5 years instead of 10) and enable local authorities and NGOs, as well as private individuals, to file compensation claims. The adopted text also imposes more EU-level harmonisation for the design of the schemes and imposes larger financial contributions on investment firms taking the biggest risks. However, MEPs did not follow the Economic Affairs Committee's suggestion of increasing the guaranteed minimum compensation to €100,000.

"I believe in the free market and the right to choose. But there must also be the right to protection. The ordinary man-in-the-street investor needs to know he is protected", rapporteur Olle Schmidt (ALDE, SV) told the House.

Clamping down on naked short selling and credit default swap trading

The report on short selling contains two major innovations. Firstly, it requires traders to settle their uncovered short positions by the end of each trading day. Secondly, it restricts purchases of credit default swap (CDS) contracts to owners of related government bonds or stakes whose performance is dependent on these bonds: for example, Greek bank bonds have a strong correlation to Greek sovereign bonds. MEPs also inserted a requirement that short sale transactions be reported less often. However, they beefed up the rules to ensure that fines are dissuasive.

The Greek situation shows us how urgent and necessary legislation in this field is. Traders dealing in Greek CDS are throwing oil on the fire, with their only goal being that of making money", said rapporteur Pascal Canfin (Greens/EFA, FR).

Safety, stability and transparency in OTC-derivatives market

The report on over-the-counter derivatives (OTCs), central clearing parties (CCPs) and trade repositories aims to bring greater safety, transparency and stability to the OTC derivatives market, which was valued at around €425 trillion in 2009. Information on OTC derivative contracts would have to be reported to 'trade repositories' and be accessible to supervisory authorities. OTC derivative contracts would need to be cleared through central counterparties (CCPs), thus reducing counterparty credit risk, i.e. the risk that one party to the contract defaults. A key supervisory role is also envisaged for the new European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA).
“This is a topic of great importance, especially because OTC derivatives trading is not subject to any legislation other than that between the contracting parties”, stressed rapporteur Werner Langen (EPP, DE).

Procedure: Co-decision, 1st reading
GMOs: Parliament backs national right to cultivation bans

EU Member States should have the flexibility to ban or restrict the cultivation of genetically modified crops and should be able to cite environmental motives for doing so, according to MEPs voting on draft legislation on Tuesday.

The draft amendment to existing legislation - adopted with 548 votes in favour, 84 against and 31 abstentions - will now go to the Council for further discussion. Parliament’s rapporteur Corinne Lepage (ALDE, FR) commented: "I am pleased that the Parliament has reached an agreement on the difficult issue of GMOs, which has been an issue of public concern for years. If the Council manages to find a common position, this balanced agreement will allow countries and regions the right to not grow GMOs if they so choose."

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Grounds to ban

The Commission had proposed to grant EU Member States the right to ban crops on all but health or environmental grounds, which were to be solely assessed by the European Food Safety Authority. Committed to ensuring a firmer legal basis in the context of international trade rules, Parliament insisted that Member States should not be prevented from stating additional environmental grounds. These could include pesticide resistance, biodiversity preservation or a lack of data on potential negative consequences to the environment.

Parliament also considered that socioeconomic impacts could provide legitimate grounds for a ban, e.g. where contamination risks to conventional or organic agriculture cannot practically be managed.

The cost of contamination

MEPs say all Member States must take measures to prevent contamination of conventional or organic farming by GM crops, and ensure those responsible for such incidents can be held financially liable.

Updating EU safety checks

An EU-level safety check and authorisation will continue to be a precondition to a green light for growing GMOs. While the proposal does not affect this process, MEPs reminded the Commission that the guidelines need updating.

Only one strain of GM maize and one modified potato are currently authorised for cultivation in the EU and most Member States do not currently grow either crop commercially. Austria, France, Greece, Hungary, Germany and Luxembourg have activated a "safeguard clause" in the current (2001) EU Directive to expressly prohibit cultivation of certain GMOs.
MEPs mixed on proposals for long-term EU budget

In a lively debate, the European Commission's proposals for the long-term budget for 2014-2020 attracted many criticisms but some kudos from MEPs. Opening the debate Tuesday, EP President Jerzy Buzek said the multi-annual financial framework (MFF) would be one of the most important issues dealt with in the EP over coming months.

Commission President José Manuel Barroso said the budget won't cost more but will be more effective by focusing on shared goals aimed at bringing growth and employment and directly linked to the EU's 2020 growth strategy. "Without growth we can't get back on the path to prosperity." By linking policies and seeking synergies "a euro spent at EU level can mean savings at member state level," he said.

The next MFF is "the most important and most challenging task of the Polish presidency" Secretary of State for European affairs and economic policy Mikołaj Dowgielewicz said, promising that "the EP is going to be briefed and debriefed on every debate". The Polish presidency has invited EP representatives to participate in an informal meeting for European Affairs ministers in July in Poland, he added.

Salvador Garriga Polledo, for the EPP, regretted the freezing of the budget. The failure to include the 5% increase as demanded by MEPs "will leave us without any margin for negotiating with the Council if it finally rejects the proposal of the Commission and reduces the resources," he said.

Green group leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit also criticised the budget freeze and backed a financial transaction tax to increase the EU's own resources. "If you take 1% of all financial transactions you would have €20-30 billion. It would be a new tax and it would not be for the ordinary man to pay, but for the financial institutions that profit massively from the EU."

Martin Schulz, leader of the S&D group, accused many EU governments of a schizophrenic approach to budget negotiations. "Many member states want the EU to fulfil more European tasks with less money - that will not work!" He called on Parliament to back the Commission with a huge majority to fend off countries who want to cut the budget. "This debate will be decisive for the future of Europe," he said.

Miguel Portas for the GUE/NGL group said Europe needs a real budget to solve its problems and stressed the importance of a financial transaction tax, wondering why it took the Commission so long to back the idea.

Liberal leader Guy Verhofstadt was much more positive, saying that Mr Barroso had fulfilled his promise of a bold and radical MFF based on own-resources. Now the main task will be to win public support in the face of "wrong arguments" from those against own resources, Mr Verhofstadt said. Own resources are not extra taxes, but a way for the public to have direct control over the EU budget, he said, a claim disputed by Martin Callanan of the ECR, who said, "nobody believes you when you say that more European taxes will result in less contributions from Member States."

"This MFF proposal is yet another wish list by a European elite that every day becomes more and more distant from the concerns of ordinary people," Mr Callanan said. A budget freeze is the right way to go at a time of austerity across Europe, he added.

Marta Andreasen, for the EFD, was even more critical. The MFF is "an effective increase of 11%", she said, criticising the proposals as misleading and lacking in transparency. "The previous MFF was supposed to make the EU the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world and look what happened with that...is this supposed to get us out of the current crisis."
"Europe is the answer": Donald Tusk presents Polish EU priorities

"The answer to the crisis is more Europe," Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said, presenting his country's Presidency programme to the EP on Wednesday. In a speech centred on Europe's common values and future, Mr Tusk strongly defended European integration and solidarity "within and between member states". The Polish Presidency of the EU Council runs from 1 July to the end of December.

"What is the answer to the crisis? Going away from Europe or sticking to something that was working well for many years? The answer to the crisis is more Europe," he said. "With our presidency we will add a lot of Polish optimism, enthusiasm and energy: because we believe in Europe."

More Europe means "more freedom, wealth, security, solidarity" and it needs strong institutions to achieve it, he said. Commenting on the Schengen crisis, he said, "We can't protect our community by creating more barriers inside the community."

"Poland will have the full support of the Commission" in seeking "an agreement on the economic governance package", European Commission President José Manuel Barroso said. Turning to Schengen and internal border controls, he said "security and freedom of movement are not incompatible (while) undermining free movement is jeopardizing the internal market and solidarity between Europeans".

"The economic crisis will only be overcome if the member states understand that acting as 27 costs less, and is more productive, than acting in isolation," EPP leader Joseph Daul said. He welcomed Poland's move to strengthen external borders and, called on the EU to speak out clearly on Denmark's new border controls.

Socialist leader Martin Schulz lauded Mr Tusk's speech. In Donald Tusk "we have a president who says Europe is part of the solution, not the problem," he said. "Europe is suffering. (Governments) believe that national measures can resolve the problems" and insist on "blaming the institutions even though it is the governments that take the decisions", which shows "the gap between reality and political rhetoric", he added.

Liberal leader Guy Verhofstadt said that the Polish presidency comes at a crucial time in the crisis, and agreed with the prime minister that "we need more European integration". He reminded everyone, "that this continent without the EU is a land of dispute, war and genocide."

The Polish presidency presents a "glimmer of hope" at a time when there "is no great sense of euro-enthusiasm", Lothar Bisky of the GUE/NGL group said. He warmly welcomed the Polish priority of more openness towards Europe's Eastern neighbours.

Ryszard Antoni Legutko of the ECR group raised concerns about "rumours" that in Poland criticising the Presidency will be considered as criticising the EU. He attacked the "political arrogance" of those defending a "federal post-national Europe" and of the "largest countries, France and Germany, which believe that power belongs to them".

"Your speech shows we…stand a better chance to resolve issues" as a "green new deal" is needed. "You cannot forget about global warming, Fukushima cannot be swept under the carpet", Green leader Rebecca Harms said.

EFD leader Nigel Farage struck a more negative note. "We all want European cooperation for the future but this is not the model." The Council of Europe is, he suggested, calling for the European Commission, Parliament and Court of Justice to be abolished.
Women in business: Parliament calls for quotas

Women should make up 30% of top management in the largest listed EU companies by 2015 and 40% by 2020, believe MEPs. If voluntary measures fail to boost the number of women in senior positions, EU legislation must be used.

Women currently make up 10% of directors and only 3% of CEOs at the largest listed EU companies. As the number of women in corporate boards is currently increasing by only half a percentage point per year, it will take another fifty years before boardrooms have at least 40% women, says a non-binding resolution on Women and Business Leadership adopted by MEPs on Wednesday.

"Europe cannot afford to leave talent untapped! Empowering the role of women on management boards of companies is not only about ethics and equality, it is also essential for economic growth and a competitive internal market. With the adoption of the report on Women and Business Leadership, the European Parliament has sent a strong message to governments, social partners and enterprises in Europe", said EP Vice-President Rodi Kratasa-Tsagaropoulou (EPP, EL), who drafted the resolution adopted today by 534 votes to 109 with 29 abstentions.

Binding legislation…

MEPs urge the Commission to "propose legislation including quotas by 2012 for increasing female representation in corporate management bodies of enterprises to 30% by 2015 and to 40% by 2020", if voluntary measures do not manage to increase the proportion of women.

Norway's quota legislation is seen as a good example and Parliament also welcomes decisions by France, the Netherlands and Spain to set thresholds. But MEPs say other companies, not only the biggest ones, should also have a balanced gender representation and to this end the Commission should devise a roadmap.

… plus skills training, mentoring and work-life balance

Studies have shown that companies with a higher percentage of women tend to perform better commercially and financially. Recruitment for positions in corporate management bodies should nevertheless be based on skills, qualifications and experience of the candidate, stresses Parliament.

To help more women assume management posts, the Commission and Member States should implement new policies, for example by developing women's individual capabilities in-house through further training courses and other forms of professional support, such as mentoring and networking.

At the same time, Member States should introduce special arrangements, such as childcare, care for the elderly and fiscal incentives for companies or other ways to help women and men in business to balance family and work commitments.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution
Traffic offences abroad: no hiding place

EU states will soon be swapping car registration details regularly to track down drivers who have committed serious traffic offences while in another EU country, after Parliament gave its backing to the plans on Wednesday.

The new directive will improve road safety and make all offenders equal before the law, including those living outside the country where they commit an offence.

"After more than three years of debate, this agreement is a first, very important step towards ending the sense of impunity by some drivers and reducing the number of casualties on our roads", said rapporteur Inés Ayala Sender (S&D, ES).

Rules in a nutshell

EU Member States will have to provide details of the driver or holder of the vehicle registration certificate to the authorities of the country where the offence took place. These will then send the offender a strictly private registered letter informing him/her of the offence committed as well as any punishment due, appeal procedures and legal consequences. Any fine and payment method will be based on the law of the state where the offence occurred.

Parliament backed its Transport Committee’s proposal for tighter data privacy and for files on offenders to be compulsorily deleted once a case is closed.

Target of the directive: the most dangerous road offences

The offences covered by the new rules are speeding, driving under the influence of drink or drugs, not wearing seatbelts, going through a red light, not wearing crash helmets, using bus lanes and other banned thoroughfares and illegal use of mobile phones or other communication equipment while driving.

Next steps

The directive now needs to be unanimously approved by the Council of Ministers. Member States will then have 24 months to apply the new rules, except for Ireland, the UK and Denmark, which are remaining outside the system for now.

Procedure: Co-decision (2nd reading)
Food labels: clearer information for consumers

Food shoppers will be able to make better informed, healthier choices as the result of new EU food labelling rules approved by MEPs on Wednesday. Labels will have to spell out a food's energy content as well as fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugar, protein and salt levels, in a way that makes them easy for consumers to read.

MEP Renate Sommer (EPP, DE), who led Parliament's team in successful negotiations with the Council, said in the debate ahead of the vote: "Despite political and ideological differences in the EP, despite national ideological convictions, we have come up with a good compromise. The new rules are supposed to provide more and better information to consumers so they can make informed choices when buying. But is more than that: the food industry should benefit too. There should be more legal certainty, less bureaucracy and better legislation in general. (...) this is very important for SMEs (...) more than 80% of the European food sector is SMEs."

{} Nutrition values compulsory

Under the new rules, the energy content and amounts of fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, sugars, protein and salt must all be stated in a legible tabular form on the packaging, together and in the same field of vision. All this information has to be expressed per 100g or per 100ml. It may also, in addition, be expressed per portion.

Allergens

Currently all ingredients - including allergenic substances - must be indicated on the labels of pre-packed foods. In future it will be easier for consumers to see if a product contains allergenic substances, as they will have to be highlighted in the ingredient list. Shoppers will thus be able to see information on allergens at a glance.

The new rules also state that information on allergens must be given for non-packaged foods, for example on food sold in restaurants or canteens. Member States may themselves decide how the information is to be made available to consumers.

Country of origin

Under existing EU rules, the origin of certain foods - such as beef, honey, olive oil and fresh fruit and vegetables - already has to be shown on the label. This also applies where the failure to do so would mislead the consumer. This rule will now be extended to fresh meat from pigs, sheep, goat and poultry, at Parliament's request. The Commission will have to introduce implementing rules for this purpose within two years of the regulation's entry into force.

Country of origin labelling could in future be extended to other categories of food (such as meat when used as an ingredient, milk or unprocessed foods) but the Commission must first do impact assessments to weigh up the feasibility and potential costs of doing this.

Shoppers must not be misled

The new rules will also ensure that consumers are not misled by the appearance, description or pictorial presentation of food packaging.

In addition, it will be easy to spot "imitation foods" - foods that look similar to other foods but are made of different ingredients, such as "cheese-like" foods made with vegetable products. Where an ingredient that would normally be expected has been replaced, this will have to be clearly stated on the front of the pack in a prominent font size and next to the brand name.

Meat consisting of combined meat parts must be labelled "formed meat". The same will apply to "formed fish".

When will the new rules apply?
Parliament adopted Renate Sommer's report by 606 votes to 46, with 26 abstentions. Once the legislation is published in the EU Official Journal, food companies will have three years to adapt to most of the rules, but five years for the rules on nutrition values.

Procedure: Codecision, 2nd reading
MEPs back body scanners but want strict safeguards

Body scanners should be allowed at EU airports only if the health, dignity and privacy of passengers are protected, says the European Parliament in a resolution passed by a show of hands on Wednesday.

Parliament's vote comes just ahead of an expected decision by the Commission to allow Member States to use body scanners at airports. Parliament will have the power to overturn that decision within three months.
MEPs accept that body scanners would enhance aviation security, but ask Member States "to deploy technology which is the least harmful for human health" and addresses privacy concerns. Due to health risks "scanners using ionising radiation should be prohibited in the EU".

No discrimination
Selection for scanning should be random, without any discriminatory criteria, say MEPs, stressing that "any form of profiling based on, for example, sex, race, colour, ethnicity, genetic features, language, religion or belief is unacceptable". Particular attention should be paid to the welfare of pregnant women, children, the elderly and the disabled, they add.

Right to opt for alternative screening
Passengers should have the right to refuse body scanning and opt for alternative screening methods that guarantee the same level of effectiveness while respecting their rights and dignity. "Such a refusal should not give rise to any suspicion of the passenger", MEPs add. Parliament also asks Member States to supplement checkpoints and security staff, to ensure that passengers are not kept waiting.

No body images, no storage
To protect human dignity, privacy and intimacy, "only stick figures should be used" and "no body images may be produced", stress MEPs. Moreover, the data "must be destroyed right after the person has passed through the security control and may not be stored", and "the technology used must not have the capabilities to store or save data".

Liquid ban should be lifted in 2013
The carry-on liquids ban must end in 2013, say MEPs, who urge Member States and airports to "ensure that adequate technology is available in good time" so that this does not undermine security.

Stricter checks on air cargo
The resolution also calls for better checks on air cargo, especially from non-EU countries, particularly when carried on passenger planes. Pointing out that "100% scanning of cargo is not practicable", they ask the Commission to lay down criteria for determining "high-risk" cargo.

Financing aviation security
Security charges should be transparent and only cover security costs. Member States that impose more stringent measures should bear the resulting additional costs, says the resolution, which also recommends that every passenger's ticket should show the cost of security measures. MEPs also call for mutual recognition of security measures and one-stop security checks, so that passengers, luggage and cargo at EU airports are screened only once.
MEPs debate whether more Europe is an answer to the crisis

Financial markets have not shed their bad habits. EU governments are being downgraded on a regular basis by credit rating agencies, while calls for a financial transaction tax are going unheeded. That's how French Socialist Pervenche Berès summed up the situation in the EU just before her report demanding a stronger role for Europe in solving the economic crisis was adopted by the EP. The report calls for a 5% increase in the long-term budget for 2014-2020, from the current level.

"We do need more Europe," Austrian Christian Democrat Othmar Karas said, agreeing with Economics Commissioner Olli Rehn's diagnosis that a convincing response to the crisis will have to be stronger and broader coordination of policies on the EU level.

European bonds and financial transactions tax

Apart from the introduction of European bonds to help ward off speculators and the imposition of a tax on financial transaction to bring in more revenue, the report also calls for the EU budget to be increased in such a way as to be able to accommodate the euro in a sustainable way, while citing studies that suggest the volume of the EU budget should be between 2.5-10% of the EU's GDP.

Europe adding value in a number of areas

A European "New Deal" should foster innovation, job creation and investment into research, so as to give an urgently-needed boost to European competitiveness and ensure sustainable, green growth, says the report.

The EU must either deepen its integration or risk drifting apart and falling into an era of populism and nationalism, it says. MEPs urge in particular, stronger co-operation in cross-border policy areas such as energy, transport and foreign policy, where it says the EU added value can be high.
Parliament against reintroduction of border controls

Parliament strongly opposes the reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen area. The influx of migrants and asylum seekers cannot justify them, say MEPs in a resolution on the planned changes to Schengen rules.

The Schengen system has recently come under pressure, with some Member States considering the reintroduction of national border controls in the face of the sudden influx of migrants from North Africa. On 24 June, the European Council asked the Commission to present a proposal in September on a safeguard mechanism to deal with "exceptional circumstances" of this kind.

In the resolution, adopted on Thursday by a large majority, Parliament is critical of moves by several Member States to reintroduce border controls. It underlines its "firm opposition to any new Schengen mechanism with objectives other than those of enhancing freedom of movement and reinforcing EU governance of the Schengen area".

The current Schengen Borders Code provides for the possibility of reintroducing internal border controls "only where there is a serious threat to public policy or internal security", points out the resolution.

The Commission is asked to present an initiative aimed at defining the "strict application" of the current rules by the Member States. MEPs insist that any new additional exemptions, such as new grounds for reintroducing border controls, "would definitely not reinforce the Schengen system".

The recent problems with Schengen, argue MEPs, "are rooted in a reluctance to implement common European policies in other fields", most crucially a common European asylum and migration system. They call for progress to be made in these areas (the deadline for establishing a common European asylum system has been set for 2012).

An EU-based Schengen evaluation mechanism needed

Under the current system, any decision to reintroduce border controls is taken unilaterally by Member States. MEPs want the new Schengen evaluation mechanism to be made into an EU system.

"The new Schengen evaluation system should be more Community-oriented, based on a European approach and with the involvement of the EU institutions, as opposed to a purely intergovernmental one", said Carlos Coelho (EPP, PT), the EP rapporteur on the mechanism.

The new Schengen evaluation mechanism currently being discussed within Parliament will be part of the answer for these problems, insofar as it "ensures effective monitoring of any attempt to introduce illegal internal border controls and reinforces mutual trust". MEPs also mention that the effectiveness of the evaluation mechanism lies in the possibility of sanctions in the event that deficiencies persist and jeopardise the overall security of the Schengen area.

Solidarity

The new Schengen evaluation system will also make it possible to request and obtain support for Member States in the event of exceptional pressure on the EU's external borders.

The creation of the Schengen area defined a common external border, "which the EU has a joint responsibility to manage" under the Treaties, MEPs insist. Nevertheless, the EU "has not yet fully complied with this requirement".

The EP firmly stresses the need for greater solidarity towards those Member States in order to help them deal with extraordinary situations of this nature.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution
Presidencies, food, traffic, new VPs in July Strasbourg plenary session

There was a change of guard at the helm of the EU this week as Hungary passed the baton to Poland. Outlining the priorities for Poland's six-month presidency of the Council of the EU, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Europe needs to be strengthened to overcome the crisis. Consumers will find clearer information on food, allowing them to make informed choices, thanks to rules adopted Wednesday, while MEPS agreed to increased cooperation to crack down on those who driver recklessly when abroad.

The Parliament launched the mobile version of its website this week, allowing smart phone users to get news, on holiday on the beach, even in the metro. Explanations about the Parliament's work, meetings, agendas and an easy-to-use MEP search engine are now available on your mobile phone.

Among the big news items during the July plenary, Prime Minster Viktor Orbán evaluated the Hungarian Presidency Tuesday. He won praise for the conclusion of Croatia's EU accession negotiations, the Roma strategy and progress on the economic governance package but some group leaders said controversy over the Hungarian media law and the new constitution had overshadowed the results. In a resolution adopted on Tuesday, MEPS called for more explicit protection of fundamental rights in the new Hungarian constitution.

MEPs could literally taste the Polish Presidency on Wednesday when Mr Tusk presented the priorities and his team distributed Polish strawberries. He said Warsaw wants to focus on economic issues and strengthening the political community. He sees the answer to the crisis as "more Europe".

There was lots of fruit around this week. On Tuesday apples were handed out to focus attention on two important pieces of legislation - a vote Tuesday on GMOs, allowing countries to ban or restrict their cultivation and new food labelling rules to help consumers make more conscious, healthy and informed choices, adopted Wednesday.

On Tuesday MEPs elected Greek Socialist Anni Podimata and British Conservative Giles Chichester as vice-presidents for 6 months until the mid-term re-election of senior EP posts. They replaced Greek and German vice-presidents

All drivers are equal under the law, no matter where they may be in Europe thanks to new rules on cross-border traffic offences. The new rules make it easier for countries to exchange information about drivers and vehicles meaning drivers who commit offences in an EU country other than their own will no longer be able to avoid penalties.

MEPs gave the green light Wednesday to the use of body scanners in airports. However, they said such devices should be used only if they don't pose risks to health and don't breach passengers' legal rights.

Mad cows were in the chamber Wednesday as MEPs warned that the sharp fall in cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) must not lead to a slackening of surveillance. However, they said the ban on feeding animal protein to non-ruminants, like pigs, could gradually be lifted if further safeguards are put in place.

A vote on EP election reform was postponed Thursday and the report referred back to the committee. The main proposal is the creation of transnational lists from which citizens could choose 25 MEPs.

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