



Focus

February Brussels Plenary - EU summit, Iran, Russia

The financial crisis continued to dominate as MEPs gave their feedback on the fiscal union summit that took place 30 January. They also discussed the sanctions against Iran approved by Council on 23 January in question time with High Representative Catherine Ashton as well as other foreign policy issues.

Also on the agenda when they met in plenary in Brussels on Wednesday and Thursday were a debate on funding the **Daphne** programme fighting violence against women and children, EU-wide measures to tackle violence in **sport**, doping and match fixing and improving **waste** treatment practices.

Newsletter - 1-2 February 2012 - Brussels plenary session

Parliament to react to EU summit decisions

MEPs will state their views on key issues at the 30 January informal European Council, including any decision on fiscal union, in a debate on Wednesday. They will also set out a way forward to boost growth and employment, in a resolution to be voted on Thursday.

Debate with Catherine Ashton on Iran and Russia

The sanctions against Iran approved by the Council on 23 January and Russia's December 2011 legislative elections will be debated with EU foreign policy High Representative Catherine Ashton on Wednesday, after the question hour.

Repressive regimes: no EU stash for ill-gotten cash

EU Member States should consolidate and harmonise their measures to prevent repressive regimes from stashing cash, owning property, doing business or travelling in the EU, Parliament will say in a resolution to be voted on Thursday.

MEPs set to criticize EU humanitarian aid management

Parliament is set to ask some tough questions about how the EU manages its humanitarian aid budget and how EU aid is channelled through the UN. The critical draft resolution to be put to a vote on Thursday was unanimously approved by the Budgetary Control Committee.

Daphne: funding to fight violence against women and children

Funding for the next Daphne programme must be kept at a level comparable to that of the previous ones, says a resolution to be voted Thursday.

Proper waste treatment costs less

Managing waste badly is expensive, but exporting it costs even more, says a resolution to be voted on Thursday. Environmental, health and economic factors all militate in favour of good waste treatment practices, say MEPs, stressing that Europe's recycling industry has the potential to generate up to half a million jobs.

Sport: zero tolerance of hooliganism and cheating

For the first time, Parliament will debate ideas for EU-wide measures to tackle violence in sports stadiums, doping, match-fixing and illegal betting. It is expected to call, in a resolution to be voted on Thursday, for tough penalties on sports-related tax fraud and new rules to govern sports agents.

An improved treaty but more needed on growth

The newly-agreed governance treaty was largely unnecessary to emerge from the crisis. It must be made consistent with the economic governance "six pack", and backed by immediate measures to address the Eurozone's short-term constraints, said Parliament in a resolution passed on Thursday. MEPs were nonetheless pleased that the new treaty includes many of the proposals made by their representatives.

The resolution spelling out the EP's priorities was passed with 443 votes in favour, 124 against and 75 abstentions. It followed Wednesday's debate with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and Commission President José Manuel Barroso on the informal summit outcome, a debate dominated by calls from across most of the political spectrum for action to restore growth and reduce unemployment.

Better, but still a pity

The resolution says that the final treaty text agreed by heads of state is a significant improvement on earlier versions and that it takes account MEPs' insistence on the need to focus more on growth as well as fiscal restraint and to work within the normal EU system wherever possible. The resolution also welcomes that the risk of a two speed EU was lessened and that there will be more parliamentary oversight than initially envisioned.

Nonetheless, it would have been better to have reached an agreement under normal EU law, stresses the resolution, reiterating an argument constantly aired by MEPs since the idea of a separate treaty was first mooted.

Rapid action needed

The resolution insists that economic recovery requires specific measures to promote solidarity, employment and growth. A first measure would be rapidly to establish a redemption fund based on the proposal by the economic advisers to the German government. Others would be to introduce project bonds, and prepare rapidly to introduce stability bonds and a financial transaction tax at European level.

Background

The European Parliament has been fully involved in the treaty drafting working group through its four representatives, Elmar Brok (EPP, DE), Roberto Gualtieri (S&D, IT), Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, BE) and Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Greens/EFA, FR).

The working group worked through December and January to present the heads of state with a draft treaty text at the 30 January summit. The text, as agreed by the heads of state, will now go through the normal ratification processes in the Member States having signed up to it.

MEPs support new sanctions on Iran and warn against further escalation

Members backed the tough new EU sanctions imposed on Iran in an effort to bring it to the negotiating table, while calling for them to have as little impact as possible on the civilian population, in a resolution adopted on Thursday. The House demands that Iran halt its clandestine nuclear programme and condemns its threat to close the Strait of Hormuz. MEPs discussed Iran with High Representative Catherine Ashton on Wednesday.

Parliament notes that the new sanctions, which include a phased ban on imports of Iranian crude oil to the EU, could help bring the Iranian government to respect UN resolutions avoiding further escalation. However, it wants to ensure that the sanctions target only the accountable elites and that ordinary people, especially the most vulnerable, are not hit by them. At the same time, it is concerned at the impact of the oil ban on various EU Member States and asks the Council to decide on measures to offset this.

MEPs believe that blockading the Strait of Hormuz could lead to a regional conflict and trigger retaliation by the international community and they urge the Iranian authorities not to do so.

Importance of diplomatic solution

Parliament supports the Council's commitment to work for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue and the EU's goal of achieving a comprehensive, long-term settlement. It states that issues with Iran over its nuclear programme must be solved peacefully and that there is no military solution to the conflict.

MEPs recognise that dialogue and cooperation with Turkey can be important with a view to reaching a settlement.

They regret the ongoing refusal of China and Russia in the UN Security Council to support sanctions against Iran and call on Russia to cease providing assistance for Iran's nuclear development until Iran has fully complied with its obligations under UN resolutions.

Background

EU Foreign Ministers agreed on additional restrictive measures against Iran on 23 January, including a phased ban on imports of Iranian crude oil to the EU from 1 July. The Union currently buys about 20% of Iran's oil exports.

Greece is most dependent on Iran, from which it buys about one-third of its oil. Italy and Spain each buy a little over 10% of their oil from Iran.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution

"Women should play a more prominent role in peace negotiations"

EU support in peace processes should be made conditional on women participating in negotiations. That is one of the conclusions of a report on women's situation in war by Romanian Liberal Norica Nicolai approved on Thursday. The report proposes several measures to help reinforce the position of women in war-torn countries and to reduce sexual violence against them.

It calls for the EU and member states to actively increase the number of women in military and civilian peace-keeping operations, especially in leadership positions. In addition there should be sufficient EU funding to support women taking part and contributing at all levels of decision making related to conflict resolution and peace negotiations.

"Women at the negotiating table provide an invaluable gender equality perspective, allowing for the elaboration of women and family-friendly policies. Furthermore, women soldiers, patrolling on equal terms with men, create a strong empowering image for local women and they also interact better at the grass-roots level," Nicolai said

She is also pushing for the creation of a **Special EU Representative on Women, Peace and Security** within the European External Action Service. "This post is extremely necessary in order to establish a firm position and plan of action within the EU institutions to combat sexual violence against women."

The report emphasises that the **effects of wartime sexual violence**, both physical and psychological, are devastating for the victims. Nicolai added: "I wrote this report bearing in mind the necessity for the European Union to speak with a strong voice condemning the sexual violence against women which is still presently used as a weapon of war in world conflicts."

The causes often lie in women's limited access to education and the labour market. That is why the report concludes that **women's equal economic participation is a necessary precondition** for combating gender specific violence in armed conflicts. It also calls on the Commission to examine the possibility of establishing rapid-response units made up of trained personnel (such as doctors, psychologists, sociologists and legal advisors) to give immediate support to victims of gender crimes on location.

Cracking down on doping, violence in sports stadia

While promoting sports is mainly up to individual countries, the EU should initiate measures against doping, match-fixing and violence in sports stadia, Spanish Christian Democrat Santiago Fisas Ayxela says in a report, adopted in plenary on Thursday.

The Lisbon Treaty gives the EU new competence in sports. This report is the first one on the subject by the EP. It proposes measures to crack down on sports-related violence and calls for new means to support mass participation sports.

Fair play on and off the pitch

Among the other proposals, the report calls for:

- trafficking in doping substances, match-fixing, illegal betting, and money laundering related to professional sports to be made criminal offences
- the creation of an EU database listing people banned from stadia to help crack down on violence
- better exchange of information on hooligans between member states to prevent their attending international matches
- revenues from audiovisual rights be distributed fairly between elite and mass participation sport
- betting operators should contribute to funding mass participation sport, as their commercial activity is linked to sports

In addition, the report says major sport events should not be broadcast on an exclusive basis. "Audiovisual rights should be obtained by the corresponding leagues and not directly by the clubs," Mr Fisas Ayxela said. "Sports event organisers should be able to sell audiovisual rights at a different price in the different member states."

The report also wants to **strengthen the European identity** in sport by:

- organising a European day of sports each year
- designating a European capital of sports each year
- setting up a European mobility programme for young athletes

Europeans and sports*

- 40% of EU citizens say they play sport at least once a week (43% of men, 37% of women)
- Most active: Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands
- Least active: Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal
- *Eurobarometer 2009

EU urged to step up its efforts to eradicate violence against women and the young

The EP is calling on the Commission and member states to do more to tackle violence against women and young people. Up to a quarter of women and young people in Europe are estimated to have experienced physical violence. Today the EP voted in favour of a report arguing for more action and for more support for the Daphne programme, the only EU programme seeking to combat violence against children, young people and women.

Rapporteur Regina Bastos said the costs of domestic violence to society are extremely high, with conjugal violence alone costing society €16 billion each year. The Portuguese Christian Democrat said there are also the psychological consequences to consider, which is why initiatives such as the Daphne programme are so important.

Tell us about the programme

The Daphne programme was launched in 1997. It is a European programme aimed at tackling violence towards women, children and teenagers.

It has been really successful, both in terms of the number of people involved as the impact that projects financed through the programme have had.

Why is it so important?

The Daphne programme is the only European programme of its kind. The battle against violence continues to be a priority, especially when it comes to new types of violence such as the abuse of the elderly, violence in crèches, and the use of social media for harassment.

Will the programme continue? How can it be improved?

Over 2014-2020 the Daphne programme will be integrated into the new rights and citizenship programme.

It's true that we would have preferred the programme to continue under the same name, but as this is not possible, it is vital that the new rights and citizenship programme includes the goals of the Daphne programme, that it will continue to be financed at a comparable level and that its visibility will be enhanced.

It will also be important to improve the distribution of programmes between the different member states and to simplify administrative procedures and the application process for subsidies so that small NGOs, which are essential on the ground, can continue to remain involved in partnerships with other organisations.

In addition it will be vital to do more to raise awareness of the issue among schools, the media, the health sector, the police and the judicial system.

The report was approved in plenary on Thursday.