

Plenary round-up – Strasbourg, October I 2017

The adoption of Parliament's resolution on the state of play of the Brexit negotiations was one of the main points of the October I plenary session, as was a debate on the constitution, rule of law and fundamental rights in Spain. Other subjects debated during the week included the cancellation of flights by Ryanair, the forthcoming COP23 climate change conference in Bonn, the situation in Moldova and breaches of human rights in Africa, Ukraine and the Maldives.

As for legislative procedures, Members voted, inter alia, on proposals for three directives related to the safety of passenger ships and on the incorporation of recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) into EU law. Parliament also gave its consent to establishing the European Public Prosecutor's Office, following a procedure introduced under enhanced cooperation between 20 Member States. The Office is intended to cooperate closely with Eurojust in order to investigate and prosecute crimes against financial interests of the Union.

State of play of negotiations with the United Kingdom

Parliament adopted (by 557 votes to 92, with 29 abstentions), its resolution on the [state of play of the Brexit negotiations](#) to date, calling on the European Council, when it meets later in October, to postpone its decision on opening the second phase of negotiations on post-Brexit relations between the EU and the UK. Parliament states that progress in the three key areas – citizens' rights, the financial settlement and Ireland – is not sufficient. European Parliament consent is required to conclude an eventual agreement with the United Kingdom on the conditions for the country's withdrawal from the European Union (as well as subsequent agreements with the UK as a third country). Parliament's priority concerns are that citizens' rights are protected, that all financial commitments made by the EU-28 are met by all 28 Member States in full, and that the issues surrounding the border between the UK and Ireland are satisfactorily settled. Parliament's resolution has been adopted just days before the next round of negotiations, due to begin on 9 October, the last scheduled before the European Council meets on 19 October.

Constitution, rule of law and fundamental rights in Spain in the light of events in Catalonia

A [statement](#) by the European Commission's First Vice-President, Frans Timmermans, on the constitution, rule of law and fundamental rights in Spain, stressed the importance of the respect of the rule of law in all Member States, given that 'our Union is not a state but a community based on law'. In the Commission's view, the situation in Catalonia following the referendum is 'an internal matter for Spain that has to be dealt with in line with the constitutional order of Spain', on the basis of dialogue and not confrontation. Timmermans underlined that 'the real answers can only come from all those concerned. Those directly concerned are all 46 million Europeans who are Spanish citizens'. The Commission statement was followed by a contribution from each of the political groups.

Cancellation of flights by Ryanair and air passenger rights

Members debated a statement by the European Commission on the recent cancellations of thousands of flights by Ryanair, with a focus on the enforcement of the air passenger rights prevailing in the European Union, as set out in Regulation (EC) 261/2004. The Commission reiterated that Ryanair must fully comply with EU law, underlining that this case demonstrates the need for a comprehensive framework for passenger rights, the [revision](#) of which was launched in 2013, but on which the Council's position is still awaited.



Management, conservation and control measures applicable in the ICCAT

Convention area

The EU has exclusive competence in external fisheries management (barring some exceptions), and is thus a party to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The Commission proposed to [incorporate ICCAT's binding recommendations](#) fully into EU law. Parliament wants the rules to level the playing field between EU and third-country fleets, and thus adopted the text agreed in trilogue on the ICCAT recommendations. The new provisions could come into force by the end of this year.

Safety of passenger ships

After a joint debate on safety of passenger ships, Parliament adopted its first-reading positions on three proposed directives on the issue, on the basis of trilogue agreements reached with the Council. The proposed [Safety rules and standards](#) directive clarifies and harmonises EU rules, extending them to cover aluminium vessels, and will make the rules easier to manage and enforce. The plenary also approved new rules on [registering the number of people present on board passenger ships](#) – information that is vital to emergency services in the case of an accident. Parliament is keen to ensure that the passenger data recorded gives enough detail to be able to help victims of accidents at sea, and that this personal data is treated in accordance with data protection standards. Parliament is also concerned that passenger shipping that operates almost continually, such as [ro-ro \(roll-on–roll-off\) ferries and other high-speed passenger vessels](#), undergo frequent safety inspections due to their intensive use. The third proposal approved in plenary seeks to harmonise the rules, making four to eight-monthly inspections a priority, and with a view to ensuring a decent working environment for ferry crews.

Enhanced cooperation: European Public Prosecutor's Office

An enhanced cooperation agreement between 20 EU Member States aims at establishing a [European Public Prosecutor's Office](#), which will take over the criminal investigation and prosecution of those who commit fraud against the EU budget – until now a task for Member States. Defrauding EU funds is a crime against all EU citizens, and Parliament is keen to support the fight against such theft. This is particularly important in the case of cross-border crime such as VAT fraud, where protection of EU finances suffers from uneven levels of protection. The Office will have a decentralised structure, with an independent European Public Prosecutor supervising European Delegated Prosecutors in the Member States. Parliament voted to give its consent to the proposed arrangements.

UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany (COP 23)

With much change in the international environment and the current drift towards protectionist moves, Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety is calling for European leadership in defence of the Paris Agreement, following the USA's announced intention to withdraw. Parliament debated the forthcoming [COP 23 climate change conference](#), to be held in Bonn, Germany (6-17 November). This followed on from oral questions about the measures that the Council and Commission plan to take to ensure that climate-related measures are sufficiently financed, that EU industry is protected against third countries with less ambition, and to prepare a zero-emissions strategy for the EU.

Commission implementing acts and measures – Rule 106

Parliament voted against an implementing measure put forward by the Commission on scientific criteria for the determination of endocrine-disrupting properties, as well implementing decisions on two different types of genetically modified soybean. Parliament thus calls on the Commission to amend these draft implementing acts.

This 'at a glance' note is intended to review some of the highlights of the plenary part-session, and notably to follow up on key dossiers identified by EPRS. It does not aim to be exhaustive. For more detailed information on specific files, please see other EPRS products, notably our 'legislation in progress' briefings, as well as the plenary [minutes](#).