Plenary round-up – Brussels, April 2020

For the second time since the introduction of strict coronavirus containment measures, the European Parliament conducted its April plenary session with the majority of Members participating remotely, and used the alternative voting procedure put in place by Parliament’s Bureau for the March II session. This temporary voting procedure is available for use until 31 July 2020, unless extended by Bureau decision.

As in March, the session focused on a number of urgent legislative proposals as well as amendments to the EU’s 2020 budget to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. Members also heard from the Presidents of the European Council and Commission on the coordination of the European response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Parliament then adopted a resolution setting out its position on the response to the pandemic and its consequences, ahead of the next video-conference meeting of EU Heads of State or Government, on 23 April. In this resolution, Members called for a massive economic recovery package, greater coordination on cross-border health threats, and condemned national emergency measures that restrict civil liberties.

Amending Budget No 1/2020: Support for Greece on migration pressure, measures to fight coronavirus and reconstruction assistance for Albania

Members approved draft Amending Budget No 1/2020 (DAB1), which will provide additional funds of more than half a billion euros to help address the needs arising from the increased migration pressures in Greece, to assist Member States to limit the impact of the coronavirus outbreak through meeting equipment and medical product needs, and to contribute to Albania’s post-earthquake reconstruction.

Amending Budget No 2/2020: Emergency support for the healthcare sector

Prior to the vote on draft Amending Budget No 2/2020 (DAB2), Parliament gave its consent to the Council to modify the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, in an amendment lifting restrictions on the scope of heading 3, ‘Security and citizenship’. Members then approved DAB2, which enables the use of three flexibility and last resort mechanisms (the Global Margin for commitments, the Flexibility Instrument and the Contingency Margin) and releases €2.7 billion in emergency support for the healthcare sector, to be used for development, production, procurement and distribution of medicines and medical equipment, including for testing. In addition, €300 million will be used to reinforce the reserves of emergency medical kit established by the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (rescEU).

Specific flexibility measures for ESI funds in response to the coronavirus outbreak

Members approved, by a large majority, specific flexibility measures for European structural and investment (ESI) funds to counter the coronavirus crisis, proposed by the European Commission as part of the second Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII+). This will temporarily allow programmes dealing with the impact of the crisis to be financed up to 100 % from the EU budget between July 2020 and June 2021, as well as greater simplification and flexibility in the rules on funding allocation.

Support for the fishing and aquaculture sectors

Members approved, again by large majority, measures supplementing those already agreed under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to support the hard-hit fisheries and aquaculture sector. These additional measures include support for a temporary end to fishing activities, including for aquaculture farmers, for storage costs, and for greater flexibility and simplified procedures in allocating the funding.

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 ‘EU legislation in progress’ briefings, and the plenary minutes.