

## Plenary round-up – October II 2020

During the second October 2020 plenary session – the first at which Members were able to speak remotely, and not only vote, from the Member States – the European Commission presented its 2021 work programme, which Members largely welcomed. Members also discussed the conclusions of the 15-16 October 2020 European Council meeting, EU measures to mitigate the social and economic impact of Covid-19, police brutality within the EU, the sale of EU passports and visas to criminals, the State of the Energy Union and aligning the Energy Charter Treaty with the European Green Deal. Parliament announced that its 2020 Sakharov Prize will be awarded on 16 December to the Belarusian opposition, in particular the Coordinating Council, for 'an initiative launched by courageous women'.

### Joint debate on the common agricultural policy

Members conducted an important joint debate on the Commission's package of three legislative proposals to overhaul the common agricultural policy (CAP) for 2021-2027. While Parliament supports the modernisation of the CAP, it warns against moves to introduce budget cuts, particularly in view of the challenges of restructuring this vital sector to help farmers protect the environment, and distribute funds more fairly. The proposals seek to establish a new delivery model by combining interventions under the two pillars of the CAP in [strategic plans](#) drawn up by Member States; [improving financial management](#), with Member States allocated greater responsibility for conformity and control of agricultural support spending; and introducing amendments to five regulations, including on the [common market organisation](#) (CMO) in agricultural products (including controversial issues concerning, for instance, authorised wine grape varieties and the labelling of plant and dairy-based meat substitutes). Parliament adopted its position for negotiations with the Council following votes on a series of amendments to all three Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) Committee reports. However, some Members and stakeholders felt that the final compromise does not go far enough towards protecting the European Green Deal's ambitions and climate goals.

### Joint debate on digital services

Following important debates on the need to regulate digital services and artificial intelligence to ensure that they maximise benefits to people in the EU while also minimising the risks, Members adopted three own-initiative resolutions, of which two are legislative. Parliament has long called for revision of the outdated EU online services framework, particularly in the light of large discrepancies in application of the rules between EU countries. In advance of the expected Commission proposal on a [Digital Services Act](#) package, Parliament adopted its initial position on the revision, set out in three committee reports. Members approved an Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) Committee legislative-initiative report calling on the Commission to amend its proposals to ensure that the rules apply to all goods and services providers, wherever they are located, and better protect EU consumers against fraud, targeted advertising, and automated decisions. Members also approved the parallel Legal Affairs (JURI) Committee legislative-initiative report recommending standards to which platforms should be held and the application of different approaches to 'legal' and 'illegal' online content. The report seeks to balance protection of both users' rights and their right to freedom of speech. Finally, Members approved, by a large majority, a Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committee own-initiative report echoing the same concerns and calling for improved cooperation between service providers and national supervisory authorities, as well as the creation of an independent EU body with the power to place sanctions on online operators.

### Joint debate on artificial intelligence

During the same debate, Members also considered the implications – both positive and negative – of harnessing the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, for the lives of people in the EU. In advance of the Commission proposal expected in 2021, Parliament voted with large majorities on three reports from the Legal Affairs (JURI) Committee, on ethics, civil liability, and intellectual property in [artificial intelligence](#),

setting out Parliament's positions. The first legislative-initiative report deals with the requirements for a framework of ethical principles for the development, deployment and use of AI, robotics and related technologies, which will be vital to ensuring innovation also protects people's rights. The second legislative-initiative report sets out recommendations for a legal framework for civil liability that identifies a hierarchy of risks, and measures to compensate for harm caused by the technology. A third own-initiative report highlights the need to foster the free flow, access, use and sharing of data, while also protecting intellectual property rights and trade secrets.

### Discharge decisions

Members voted by a large majority to refuse to [discharge the 2018 EU general budget](#) for the European Council and Council, and for the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), following Budgetary Control (CONT) Committee re-examination of the files. Parliament has refused to grant discharge to the European Council and Council since 2009, due to a lack of cooperation on accountability and transparency. Parliament's decision also reflects a lack of accountability, budgetary control and good governance of human resources at the EESC in relation to serious misconduct by one of its senior members.

### European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

Parliament approved, by an overwhelming majority, the decision to mobilise €2 054 400 from the [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#) to support workers who have lost their jobs as a result of financial difficulties at two shipyards in Galicia (Spain).

### Implementation and governance of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

In view of the strategic review of PESCO taking place this year, Members adopted, by a large majority, a Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) report on the implementation and governance of [Permanent Structured Cooperation](#) (PESCO), the EU's Treaty-based military and defence cooperation mechanism. Under PESCO's binding commitments, participating Member States aim at achieving a competitive European defence industry through collaborative projects. While Parliament has long supported the creation of PESCO, it is critical of certain shortcomings, including project coherence and strategic justification. Parliament also calls for increased scrutiny powers, including for national parliaments.

### Relations with Belarus

Parliament endorsed AFET committee recommendations on [relations with Belarus](#), calling for an end to the violence and fresh elections. While endorsing the overall EU stance towards Belarus following the disputed August 2020 elections, Parliament calls for solidarity, support for the population and sanctions against the regime. Parliament declines to recognise Lukashenka as the legitimate president of Belarus, recognises the Coordination Council, and calls for a peaceful resolution to the standoff.

### Global deforestation

Members voted by an overwhelming majority in favour of imposing mandatory EU rules to fight [global deforestation](#). Parliament calls on the European Commission to take regulatory action, following the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee legislative-initiative report proposing to prevent products associated with deforestation or forest degradation from entering the EU market. The ENVI committee proposes a new EU framework to protect forests worldwide, guaranteeing that commodities imported into the EU are legal and sustainable.

### Opening of trilogue negotiations

Members [confirmed](#) two mandates for negotiations: from the Transport and Tourism (TRAN) Committee on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Rail (2021); and jointly from the Budgets (BUDG) and Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) Committees on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the public-sector loan facility under the Just Transition Mechanism.

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](#).

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