

Plenary round-up – April I 2024

Approaching the end of the mandate, a number of debates on important legislative proposals took place during the April I 2024 plenary session: on the migration and asylum package, reform of the EU electricity market, and the pharmaceutical package. Members also debated Russia's undemocratic elections, and in particular their extension to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, allegations of Russian interference in the European Parliament, Chinese police activity in Europe, the rule of law in Hungary, and the rule of law and media freedom in Slovakia. His Majesty King Philippe, King of the Belgians, addressed the Parliament to mark his country's presidency of the Council. Finally, President Roberta Metsola made a statement for International Roma Day.

Migration and asylum

Members debated the comprehensive revision of the EU laws that make up the migration and asylum package, piloted by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), and adopted interinstitutional agreements reached in December 2023 on 10 files:

- A revised [Asylum and Migration Management Regulation](#) to replace the 'Dublin' Regulation, establishing a harmonised and swifter EU procedure for asylum requests.
- A new [crisis and force majeure regulation](#) to better equip EU countries to face future migrant crises, with a separate solidarity mechanism.
- New [screening of third-country nationals at the EU's external borders](#), so those who do not fulfil the conditions to enter the EU may be refused entry as a result.
- A revised [common procedure for asylum](#) to speed up and harmonise the procedure across the EU, and introduce shorter deadlines for rejecting inadmissible claims.
- Changes to the [Eurodac Regulation](#) to add facial images to fingerprints and maintain records on those who pose a security threat, to identify irregular migrants to the EU more effectively.
- Amended [rules on use of law-enforcement databases](#) and the interoperability regulations, where Parliament's negotiators succeeded in limiting the purpose of security checks.
- New EU-wide standards for legal recognition of people applying for international protection and their rights under a revised [Qualification Directive](#), based on EU Asylum Agency assessment of countries of origin.
- A separate [return border procedure](#) to set EU-wide standards for treatment of applicants.
- A revised [Reception Conditions Directive](#) setting out measures to help ensure asylum-seekers receive the same treatment wherever they arrive in the EU.
- A new [EU resettlement framework](#) creating a voluntary scheme for EU countries to offer resettlement to vulnerable refugees hosted by non-EU countries, and providing a legal, organised and safe way for refugees to obtain a long-term solution to their situation.

Energy market

Hydrogen and decarbonised gas market

In a joint debate, Members debated and adopted two agreed texts endorsed by the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), on the [hydrogen and decarbonised gas market package](#). The agreement on the Gas Directive should increase consumer protection, by preventing disconnection and creating new rules providing for a supplier of last resort. It would also allow targeted price regulation in the event of a gas price crisis. The agreement on the Gas Regulation would allow pipeline gas from Russia and Belarus to be restricted, to protect EU security interests. Parliament introduced a voluntary mechanism to help develop the hydrogen market, to be implemented by the European Hydrogen Bank.

EU electricity market design

Members also debated and adopted provisional agreements on two texts to [improve EU electricity market design](#). To reduce price volatility for consumers and improve low-carbon energy investment, the ITRE



committee endorsed revisions aimed at strengthening consumer protection. Special provisions for vulnerable consumers would apply, in line with Parliament's position.

EU certification framework for carbon removals

To help deliver climate neutrality by 2050, the EU is working on an [EU certification framework for carbon removals](#) – a voluntary tool to certify three types of carbon removal activity. Members adopted a provisional agreement that extends the scope of the Commission's proposal, specifies additional minimum requirements and adds elements to increase environmental integrity.

CO₂ standards for heavy duty vehicles

Members adopted [stricter CO₂ standards for heavy-duty vehicles](#). The text agreed between the co-legislators extends the scope of the regulation to almost all new heavy-duty vehicles from July 2025, includes vocational vehicles from 2035, and requires all new urban buses to be zero-emission by that date.

Soil monitoring and resilience

Healthy soil is essential for growing food and regulating our water, carbon and nutrient cycles. Members adopted at first reading a report from the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) on a Commission proposal aimed at establishing the first-ever EU-wide common framework on [soil monitoring and resilience](#). The committee proposes a more nuanced, five-level classification of soil ecological status, and adds more flexible sustainable soil management requirements.

Discharge 2022

Members debated a large number of reports concerning the discharge procedure for the EU's 2022 budget, and in each case followed the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) recommendation. Parliament thus granted discharge to the [European Commission](#), (including spending under the Recovery and Resilience Facility), all six executive agencies and the European Development Funds, for the implementation of the 2022 budget. CONT nevertheless highlighted 'deterioration in the rule of law in some Member States', and urged a consistent approach across financing instruments, as well as highlighting the low absorption rate in some Member States and a high level of error in 2022 expenditure. Once again, in the light of the continued institutional differences between Parliament and the European Council and the Council, the Parliament postponed the decision on discharge of their 2022 budget, as has been the case each financial year since 2009. In contrast, Parliament granted discharge to the [other EU institutions and bodies](#), although CONT again made observations on opportunities to improve budgetary management. Parliament also granted discharge to all [33 EU decentralised agencies and 9 joint undertakings](#), with CONT welcoming their corrective actions following previous observations.

Pharmaceutical package

Members debated and adopted at first reading two ENVI committee reports on Commission proposals to revise [EU pharmaceutical legislation](#). These aim to ensure medicines are more available, accessible and affordable across EU countries than is currently the case. Parliament has consistently called for a more coherent policy on pharmaceuticals that takes both public health interests and industry's needs into account. The ENVI committee emphasised the need to support EU research and market attractiveness, calling for minimum regulatory data protection for new medicines, and two years' market protection following market authorisation.

Cross-border processing of personal data

Shortcomings have been flagged in the enforcement of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) since it became applicable in 2018, particularly regarding [cross-border processing of personal data](#). Members adopted a LIBE committee report on new rules that could address differences in the procedures employed by national data protection authorities, and sent it back to the committee for future trilogue negotiations.

New EU standards for equality bodies

Members adopted one proposal under the ordinary legislative procedure and gave consent to another, on [new EU standards for equality bodies](#) to strengthen national bodies and their mandate to fight discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. The Committees on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) had endorsed a political agreement with the Council that stipulates equality bodies should have sufficient resources and independence, and apply impartial staff selection procedures.

Accidents in the maritime transport sector

Members adopted a provisional agreement reached on updating the EU principles governing the investigation of [maritime accidents](#). While the EU directive has largely been successful, Parliament agreed to the obligation to inform maritime security authorities if an accident investigation body suspects an offence has been committed, and to remove the mandatory quality management system entailing significant additional workload with limited added value.

Preparing for the next term

Finally, Members adopted a range of [amendments to Parliament's Rules of Procedure](#), to implement recommendations made by the 'Parliament 2024' working group, to apply from the start of the next legislative term. The reforms, set out in a Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) report, will facilitate the legislative procedure, with among other things: expedited attribution of files to committees, improved procedures on overlapping committee competences, limits on use of the urgent procedure in plenary and stronger assessment of the budgetary implications of new proposals. A new format for 'special scrutiny hearings' is introduced and the rules for Commissioner hearings (renamed 'confirmation hearings') are simplified and clarified, in time to apply for the nominees to the next Commission.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

One decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations from the LIBE/FEMM committees on rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and two decisions from the ECON committee on packaged retail and insurance-based investment products (PRIIPs) and on retail investor protection rules [were announced](#).

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](#).