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<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2020-12-14>

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Further information

[Draft agenda](#)
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[EP Multimedia Centre](#)
[EP Newshub](#)

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The Belarusian democratic opposition to receive the 2020 Sakharov Prize

The democratic opposition in Belarus will be awarded the 2020 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in a ceremony on Wednesday at 12.00 CET.

The Belarusian opposition, many of whom are either imprisoned or have had to flee the country following this year's protests against authoritarian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka, will be represented at the ceremony by several laureates, including opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. They will receive the prize from [EP President David Sassoli](#), in a ceremony in the plenary chamber on Wednesday, 16 December, at noon.

President Sassoli, Ms Tsikhanouskaya and fellow laureate Veranika Tsapkala are also scheduled to hold a press conference immediately after the award ceremony, starting at 12.40 CET, in Parliament's Anna Politkovskaya press conference room.

You can watch both the ceremony and the press conference live via [EP Live](#) and [EbS+](#).

[Read more about the other nominees shortlisted for the Sakharov Prize this year.](#)

MEPs on the Foreign Affairs and Development committees and on the Subcommittee on Human Rights will hold a discussion with the Belarusian laureates on Monday 14 December from 19.30 – 21.00.

Background information

The [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#), named in honour of Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, is awarded each year by the European Parliament. It was established in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Award Ceremony: Wednesday, 16 December

Press conference: Wednesday 16 December, 12.40 – 13.10 CET

Further information

[Press release: "The 2020 Sakharov Prize awarded to the democratic opposition in Belarus" \(22.10.2020\)](#)

[Infoclip: Sakharov Prize 2020](#)

[Topical Digest: "The democratic opposition in Belarus. 2020 Sakharov Prize laureate for defending democracy" \(December 2020\)](#)
[Sakharov Prize Community](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material - Sakharov Prize 2020](#)

EP ready to vote on future EU financing package and the 2021 budget

Following the European Council's breakthrough on the long-term budget and recovery package, MEPs stand ready to vote on all related legislative files.

Final votes on the regulations for a multiannual financial framework (MFF) and a Rule of Law Mechanism, as well as on the annual budget for 2021, will allow urgently needed support from the EU budget and the recovery fund to get to citizens as of the start of next year.

The MFF (including the accompanying Interinstitutional Agreement, IIA) was informally [agreed with Council on 10 November](#), while the mechanism that enables the EU to stop funding governments that disrespect EU values such as the rule of law was [agreed on 5 November](#) and the annual budget for 2021 [on 4 December](#).

MEPs will also vote on a resolution, wrapping up the final debate on the MFF, Own Resources and the Rule of Law conditionality.

Debates: Monday, 14 December (Budget 2021), Wednesday, 16 December

Votes: Wednesday 16 December (MFF, IIA, Rule of Law, resolution), Friday (Budget 2021)

Further information

[EP Research background briefing on the Political agreement on the 2021-2027 MFF, the Next Generation EU \(NGEU\) recovery instrument and new own resources](#)

[Invitation letter by President Charles Michel to the members of the European Council ahead of their meeting on 10-11 December 2020](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, videos and audio material](#)

Climate, Turkey, vaccines: MEPs to discuss results of December EU summit

Parliament will assess the outcome of the December European Council with Commission and Council Presidents Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel on Wednesday.

In addition to dealing with future EU financing, European leaders in their 10-11 December meeting also assessed the coordinated effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, including vaccines and testing. They returned to the issue of climate change with a view to agreeing an EU emissions reduction target for 2030. Furthermore, they addressed the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

The debate in plenary will also focus on the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and relations with Turkey, which are also on the European Council agenda.

Topics: Interinstitutional, budget,

Procedure code:

Specialists: Andreas, Armin

Debate: Wednesday, 16 December

Procedure: Council and Commission statements in a joint debate on MFF, Rule of Law and Council results

Further information

[EP Press release: "Post-alert after ENVI debate with EMA Executive Director" \(10.12.2020\)](#)
[Press Release on EP debate before the 10-11 December EU summit \(25.11.2020\)](#)

[EP Press Release: Compromise on long-term EU budget \(10.11.2020\)](#)

[EP Press Release on plenary vote on the Climate Law \(11.09.2020\)](#)
[European Council 10-11 December - Agenda highlights](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre](#) :free photos, videos and audio material

EU-UK relations: MEPs to take stock of the negotiations on a future partnership

The latest developments on the EU-UK negotiations on a future partnership after Brexit will be debated on Friday morning, 18 December.

Depending on the outcome of the negotiations, the plenary debate could be wrapped up by a resolution to be put to the vote on the same day.

The European Parliament is closely following the negotiations through its [UK Coordination Group](#) (UKCG).

Debate: Friday, 18 December

Vote: Friday, 18 December

Procedure: statements by the Council and the Commission, followed by a resolution

Further information

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

COVID-19 vaccines: MEPs to discuss a strategy that ensures fair distribution

An EU strategy for COVID-19 vaccinations that addresses challenges inside and outside the EU will be debated on Wednesday with Commissioner Kyriakides.

Developing and deploying an effective and safe vaccine worldwide is likely to be the only way to end the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the Commission has proposed an [EU vaccines strategy for COVID-19](#) and listed [key steps for effective vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment](#).

In Wednesday's debate, MEPs are expected to call for a European approach to ensure access to safe vaccines across Europe once granted EU market authorisation. They are also likely to debate measures to ensure fair distribution and protection of the most vulnerable, as well as reiterate the need for transparency in the process of approving and negotiating access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Global approach to vaccination needed

In its [resolution](#) of 25 November, Parliament welcomed the EU's rejection of vaccine nationalism and said that the EU has a leading role to play in facilitating equal access to vaccines across the world. They also called for the EU and US to strengthen cooperation and solidarity on the basis of a science-oriented approach in the common fight against COVID-19.

Background

The Commission has entered into [advance purchase agreements](#) with several pharmaceutical laboratories in order to create a portfolio of potential vaccines against COVID-19. Any vaccine must be authorised by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in accordance with safety and efficacy standards. The EMA has recently received two applications for conditional marketing authorisation for two COVID-19 vaccines and is expected to conclude its assessments in the coming weeks.

On 22 September, Parliament organised a [public hearing](#) on "How to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens: clinical trials, production and distribution challenges".

Procedure: Council and Commission statements

Debate: Wednesday, 16 December

Further information

[EP press release "COVID-19: MEPs support speedy authorisation of safe vaccines" \(10.12.2020\)](#)

[EP Press release: "COVID-19 vaccines: MEPs seek answers from industry representatives" \(22.09.2020\)](#)

[EP Press release: "COVID-19: MEPs want safe vaccines, full transparency and liability for companies" \(07.09.2020\)](#)

[EP press release: "COVID-19 and foreign policy: EU must defend its interests and values" \(25.11.2020\)](#)

[EP press release: "EU Strategy on COVID-19 vaccines must guarantee safety and accessibility for all" \(22.06.2020\)](#)

[Commission press release: "Coronavirus: Commission lists key steps for effective vaccination strategies and vaccines deployment" \(15.10.2020\)](#)

[Parliament website on COVID-19](#)

[Commission webpage on the EU's response to the coronavirus outbreak](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material related to COVID-19](#)

Final vote to ensure high quality of tap water and cut plastic litter

On Tuesday, MEPs will vote on the drinking water directive and call on member states to comply with existing EU water legislation on Thursday.

New rules designed to offer high quality tap water across the EU are to be voted into law on **Tuesday**, in response to the demands of over 1.8 million Europeans who signed the first-ever successful European Citizens' Initiative, "[Right2Water](#)", in support of improving access to safe drinking water for all Europeans.

To enable and encourage people to drink tap water rather than bottled water, the quality of tap water will be improved by tightening the maximum limits for certain pollutants. To improve access, member states should encourage free provision of water in public buildings or, for free or for a low service fee, for customers in restaurants, canteens, and catering services.

Member states must comply with EU water legislation

MEPs will also vote on **Thursday** a resolution on the implementation of EU water legislation. In the draft, they warn that half of the bodies of water in the EU are still not in good condition and that the objectives of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) have yet to be reached.

Background

According to the European Commission, lower consumption of bottled water could [help EU households save more than €600 million per year](#). If confidence in tap water improves, citizens can also contribute to reducing plastic waste from bottled water, including marine litter. Plastic bottles are one of the most common single use plastic items found on European beaches.

Procedure: Ordinary legislative procedure (drinking water directive); non-legislative resolution

[2017/0332\(COD\)](#) (drinking water directive)

[2020/2613\(RSP\)](#) (resolution)

Debate: Tuesday, 15 December

Votes results: Wednesday, 16 December (Drinking water) and Thursday 17 December (resolution)

Further information

[EP press release: “MEPs approve deal on tap water and demand that EU water legislation be respected” \(1.12.2020\)](#)

[Draft resolution on the EU water legislation](#)

[Provisional agreement on “Quality of water intended for human consumption. Recast”](#)

[Procedure file: Quality of water intended for human consumption. Recast](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material](#)

REACT-EU: Additional resources to address impact of COVID-19 at local level

MEPs are expected to approve a €47.5 billion package (REACT-EU) to mitigate the immediate effects of the COVID-19 crisis across EU regions.

The money will be made available over the next two years through the EU Structural Funds. Operations covered by the package will be eligible as of 1 February 2020, retroactively. EU countries will be allowed to use these additional resources until the end of 2023. The investments will be focused on the sectors most affected by the economic fallout of the pandemic. Details on the political agreement reached by the EU legislators on 18 November are available [here](#).

Background

REACT-EU is a Commission proposal to address the economic impact of the pandemic, in the form of an amendment to the [Common Provisions Regulation](#) governing the 2014-2020 cohesion policy programming period. It follows two earlier proposals relating to cohesion policy, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the Coronavirus Response Initiative Plus (CRII+), which both modified the rules for regional spending in order to facilitate recovery. The REACT-EU additional resources will come from Next Generation EU, the [European Union recovery instrument](#).

Procedure: Ordinary legislative procedure, first reading agreement

[2020/0101\(COD\)](#)

Vote: Tuesday, 15 December

Further information

[Press release following the political agreement \(18.11.2020\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Profile of the co-rapporteur Constanze KREHL \(S&D, DE\)](#)

[Profile of the co-rapporteur Andrey NOVAKOV \(EPP, BG\)](#)

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Climate change: how can the EU prepare and adapt

MEPs want to give impetus to building climate-resilient societies through the upcoming EU adaptation strategy, in a resolution to be put to the vote on Thursday.

As part of the European Green Deal, a new adaptation strategy is expected from the Commission in 2021. On Thursday, Parliament will quiz the Commission on lessons learnt from the current strategy. They are likely to ask whether the new strategy will respond to the latest scientific evidence on the impact of climate change and how it will address desertification and land degradation.

The draft resolution, to be put to the vote on Thursday, calls for renewed focus on adaptation, to minimise the adverse impact of climate change. The EU's climate-related spending target should contribute to both climate mitigation and adaptation, it says, recalling that the cost of inaction would be far greater. The draft resolution also underlines that only climate-proofed infrastructure should receive EU funding.

Background

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has estimated that [weather and climate-related extremes accounted for EUR 426 billion in monetary losses in the period 1980-2017 in EU-28](#).

Adaptation means anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage. Well planned, early adaptation action is proven to save money and lives later. As the ability to adapt differs across populations, economic sectors and regions, the EU can ensure that disadvantaged regions and those most affected by climate change are capable of taking the necessary measures to adapt.

Procedure: Question for oral answer, with resolution

Debate: Thursday, 17 December

Votes results: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[Oral question to the Commission: EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change \(10.09.2020\)](#)

[EP press release: "Climate change: the EU needs to be better prepared so it can better adapt" \(1.12.2020\)](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

Transitional rules for agricultural funding and recovery aid for food producers

MEPs will vote on rules to ensure a smooth transition from the current to the future EU farm policy and to release €8 billion in aid for farmers and rural areas.

The draft EU law, [as agreed by Parliament's and Council's negotiators](#), extends the application of existing Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) rules until the end of 2022. This ensures that payments to farmers and rural development beneficiaries can continue. More information about the CAP transitional rules is available [here](#).

Recently agreed rules on ways that farmers, food producers and rural areas can use the €8 billion in COVID-19 crisis aid to finance their resilient, sustainable and digital recovery in the next two years are also part of the overall deal. More information about the agreed EU recovery package is available [here](#).

Background

The draft regulation is the second of two proposals tabled by the EU Commission to ensure a smooth transition to the post-2022 CAP. The first set of transitional rules was [approved](#) by the Parliament in December 2019.

Negotiations between the Parliament and Council on the final shape of the [post-2022 EU farm policy reform](#) are now ongoing. Both transitional rules and the [CAP reform package](#) are closely linked to the work on the EU's long-term 2021-2027 budget.

Procedure: Ordinary legislative procedure (co-decision), 1st reading agreement

[2019/0254\(COD\)](#)

Debate: Tuesday, 15 December

Vote: Wednesday, 16 December

Further information

[Draft report](#)

[Press release on committee vote \(01.12.2020\)](#)

[Profile of rapporteur Elsi Katainen \(RE, FI\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[EP Research Service: Transitional provisions for the CAP post 2020](#)
[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

EU-UK relations: temporary rules to keep Eurotunnel connection working

MEPs will vote on temporary measures to keep the tunnel railway connection between continental Europe and the UK running after the end of the transition period.

Parliament voted in [October](#) on legislation allowing France to negotiate a new international agreement with the UK regarding the governance of the Channel Tunnel Fixed Link. The Intergovernmental Commission would remain the main safety authority for the tunnel. That agreement has not yet been reached.

To avoid rail traffic being interrupted in the Channel Tunnel Fixed Link as of 1 January 2021, the Parliament is now set to temporarily extend safety licences and certificates to allow France and the UK sufficient time to conclude a bilateral agreement. The licence for the current tunnel infrastructure manager would remain valid for two months after the end of the transition period. The safety certificates and licences issued under EU law to UK companies would be extended for nine months. The Parliament will vote on the proposal under [urgent procedure](#).

Other [contingency measures](#) are being prepared to provisionally maintain cross-border connectivity on roads and by air.

Procedure: Ordinary legislative procedure - urgent procedure

[2020/0347\(COD\)](#)

Vote: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[Procedure file](#)

[Proposal for a regulation \(27.11.2020\)](#)

[Council of the EU press release \(02.12.2020\): "Channel Tunnel rail traffic at the end of the transition period: Coreper agrees mandate to ensure it can continue"](#)

MEPs set to support European Citizens' Initiative promoting diversity

Parliament will discuss on Monday the “Minority Safepack” proposals put forward by more than 1.1 million Europeans, with a resolution to be tabled on Thursday.

The initiative proposes [nine actions that the EU could take](#) to protect people belonging to national and linguistic minorities in the EU, and to strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity.

MEPs are expected to focus on equality and supporting measures in the areas of cohesion policy, EU funding and state aid. They will also examine how minority cultures can be preserved through inclusive linguistic measures, a single digital market, and media-related policies to adapt geoblocking and copyright protection.

Background

European Citizens' Initiatives gives EU citizens a say: if more than one million citizens from at least seven member states support an initiative, the European Commission has to take action. The recent [joint public hearing](#), in which MEPs from various committees discussed the proposals with the organisers of the European Citizens' Initiative, was the first ECI hearing to be held remotely. Parliament was instrumental in 2019 in [reforming ECI rules](#) to strengthen citizens' voices, and again in 2020 in ensuring that the COVID-19 pandemic [will not impede ongoing and future initiatives](#).

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution

[2020/2846\(RSP\)](#)

Debate: Monday, 14 December

Vote: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[Commission's webpage on the Minority Safepack ECI](#)

[Minority Safepack proposals](#)

[EP Thematic Digest: relevant publications by the EP Research Service and the Directorate-General for Internal Policies](#)

[EP Factsheets: European Citizens' Initiative](#)

[ECI Webpage](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

Financial markets: Final vote on more robust management for clearing houses

Central counterparties (CCPs) will have detailed recovery and resolution plans with a harmonised set of tools for restoring finances without taxpayers' help.

On Wednesday, MEPs are set to vote on a harmonised risk management system, designed to enable CCPs in difficulty to continue clearing services while minimising the risk that taxpayers might have to bail them out.

CCPs sit between buyers and sellers of stock, bonds or derivatives and shoulder the risk that a transaction party might default. Due to the growing value and volume of the transactions they handle, CCPs have in recent years become integral to financial systems and are often deemed “too big to fail”.

Reducing risks linked to Brexit

Sound risk management and recovery plans are also crucial, given that the EU currently relies heavily on UK CCPs. EU banks were given an extension until mid-2022 during which they can access financial market infrastructure in the UK and are expected to use this time to become more independent.

Procedure: ordinary legislative procedure, early second reading

[2016/0365\(COD\)](#)

Vote: Wednesday, 16 December

Further information

[Procedure file](#)

[Draft resolution: Framework for the recovery and resolution of central counterparties](#)

[Profile of the rapporteur Marek Belka \(S&D, PL\)](#)

[Profile of the rapporteur Johan van Overtveldt \(ECR, BE\)](#)

Sustainability: the interests of businesses and society must align

Parliament will call for companies to implement sustainable governance and

clearly set out the role that directors will play in making this happen.

On Monday, MEPs will vote on a resolution drafted by the Legal Affairs Committee, which calls for companies to better align their financial interests with their long-term impact on society and the environment. It calls for a harmonised new EU approach to sustainable corporate governance through a series of mandatory measures and incentives to act, so that society does not have to rely solely on companies to voluntarily disclose information.

Rules that clearly identify and strengthen the duties of company boards are also needed, especially to ensure that sustainability is integrated with their company's strategies.

Background information

A recent study on [directors' duties and sustainable corporate governance](#) carried out for the Commission underlines the positive impact of clarifying directors' obligations on sustainability and long-term consequences of their actions. It also highlights the problems associated with short-termism and reiterates the need for companies to take into account their long-term impact in order to help the EU meet its own sustainability commitments. The study points towards the need for EU legislation in this regard.

In its [2018 resolution on sustainable finance](#), Parliament called for the scope of application of the [Non-Financial Reporting Directive \(NFRD\)](#) – which sets out the rules on the disclosure of non-financial information – to be widened. For instance, this relates to how companies operate and manage social and environmental challenges, human rights, anti-corruption and bribery, and diversity on boards.

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

[2020/2137\(INI\)](#)

Vote: Monday, 14 December

Further information

[Draft report on sustainable corporate governance](#)

[Press release on committee vote \(16.11.2020\)](#)

[Profile of rapporteur : Pascal Durand \(Renew, FR\)](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

Protecting Europeans from terrorism and other security threats

On Wednesday afternoon, MEPs are to discuss the overall EU strategy on security issues as well as the new EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda.

MEPs will discuss the Commission's latest counter-terrorism proposals and vote on a [resolution on the EU Security Union Strategy](#), drafted by the Civil Liberties Committee. The resolution stresses the need for a comprehensive approach in the fight against terrorism, including measures on coordination, intensified cooperation and information exchange between authorities. MEPs will call for specific efforts in the area of prevention and education, and the fight against hate speech, racism and intolerance.

On the [proposal to update Europol's mandate](#), the draft resolution notes that it should equip the agency with suitable tools to cooperate more effectively with all partners. MEPs stress that such changes should be supported by greater political accountability as well as enhanced judicial control and parliamentary scrutiny. Transparency and respect for fundamental rights are also essential, say MEPs in the draft resolution that will be put to the vote on Thursday.

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

Debate: Wednesday, 16 December

Vote: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material](#)

Asylum requests and return of migrants: MEPs detect gaps in the current rules

While the legislative work to overhaul the EU's common asylum and migration policy begins, MEPs ask that current legislation is used to full effect.

On Monday, two draft reports prepared by the Civil Liberties Committee will be presented to plenary and put to the vote on Wednesday. The reports concern the [Dublin III Regulation](#), which establishes the member state responsible for dealing with an asylum request, and the [Return Directive](#), which regulates the procedure to return those persons without the right to stay on EU territory.

The first text stresses that the 2013 Dublin III Regulation imposes a “disproportionate responsibility on a minority of member states, in particular when high numbers of arrivals occur”. There must be more solidarity among member states and countries in which many people arrive should receive more financial resources. Family reunification and the well-being of children should be prioritised when dealing with asylum requests.

Regarding returns, the draft resolution calls for more funds to ensure swift and fair procedures, in full respect of fundamental rights. MEPs also endorse voluntary returns as an alternative to forced removals and detention.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolutions

Procedure Code: 2019/2206(INI) Implementation of the Dublin III Regulation and 2019/2208(INI) Implementation report on the Return Directive

Debate: Monday, 14 December

Vote results: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[Procedure file \(Dublin Regulation\)](#)

[Procedure file \(Return directive\)](#)

[EP Research Service: Reform of the Dublin system \(30.09.2020\)](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

Fair transition: a new agenda for a sustainable and inclusive labour market

MEPs are likely to set out how the EU labour market needs to change in order to have a high quality of life and equal opportunities in the digital and green economy.

In the draft resolution, MEPs call on the member states to adopt an ambitious political agenda with clear and mandatory indicators for social sustainability during the May 2021 EU Social Summit in Portugal. The so-called “Porto 2030 Agenda” should include goals and measures on decent work and adequate wages, social justice and equal opportunities, robust social welfare systems and fair mobility. The agenda should also help to implement the principles enshrined in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

To mitigate the social consequences of COVID-19, member states should make full use of the available flexibility on offer for public finances and fiscal policies. Investments under [NextGenerationEU](#) and the Recovery Fund should support social sustainability as much as economic and environmental goals. To this end, member states should submit Social Progress Plans (SPP), alongside the existing National Recovery plans and national Climate and Energy plans, says the [draft resolution](#).

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

[2020/2084\(INI\)](#)

Debate: Monday, 14 December

Vote: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[Draft report on a strong social Europe for just transition](#)

[Profile of co-rapporteur Agnes Jongerius \(S&D, NL\)](#)

[Profile of co-rapporteur Dennis Radtke \(EPP, DE\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

EU must bridge the gap between vocational training and general education

Member states should encourage vocational training and allow for better integration with the general education system, MEPs will stress in a debate on Monday.

MEPs will quiz the European Commission and the Council on their efforts to make the vocational training sector better adapted for the future and to the challenges that have emerged from the COVID-19 crisis. The crisis has accentuated the need to improve digital training opportunities and distance learning, and to provide better tools and technologies for teachers and trainers. The Commission should support this via financial and non-financial means, such as the Erasmus programme and the Quality Framework for Apprenticeships.

MEPS are also likely to demand better quality and tailor-made apprenticeships as an important part of vocational training. Apprentices should be remunerated fairly and receive access to social protection, as stated in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Finally, special measures should be put in place to bring those who drop out back into the vocational education system, for instance by following their progress via a monitoring scheme.

The debate will be followed up by a resolution to be put to the vote on Thursday.

Background

Despite ever-growing demand for vocational professionals, the vocational education and training sector (VET) is less attractive to potential students than the general education system. On November 30, the Council and social partners endorsed the '[Osnabrück declaration](#)', which sets out new policy options for the VET.

Debate: Monday, 14 December

Vote: Thursday, 17 December

Procedure: Oral question to the Commission and the Council with resolution

Further information

[EP Research briefing on Skills for the labour market: EU policies for VET and upskilling](#)
[Question for an oral answer to the Council](#)

[Question for an oral answer to the Commission](#)

[Council recommendations on VET from 24 November 2020:](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material](#)

Parliament wants EU companies to be protected against illegal sanctions

On Wednesday, Parliament will consider how the EU can protect its own trade interests when laws of third countries negatively affect EU traders.

Parliament is due to question the Commission on how better enforcement of existing laws or new legislation will allow the EU to ensure that third country regulations do not unlawfully hinder the engagement of EU operators in lawful international trade.

Current US sanctions on companies installing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline – a project that the US opposes – is an example of this scenario.

At the last plenary, [Parliament asked for](#) “a new legislative proposal [...] against sanctions that substantially infringe upon the territorial sovereignty of member states” ([para24](#)).

Procedure: written question for oral answer with debate (Rule 136)

Debate: Wednesday 16 December

Further information

[Question for oral answer on the trade-related extraterritorial effects of sanctions imposed by third countries](#)

[Rule 136 of the Rules of Procedure](#)

[Resolution on the EU trade policy review \(26.11.2020\)](#)

MEPs to vote on a Polish nominee to the Court of Auditors

MEPs on Monday will vote on whether to endorse a candidate nominated by the Polish government to become a member of the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

After hearing the Polish candidate Mr Marek Opiola on 7 December, the EP Budgetary Control Committee recommended (by 23 votes to 7 against) that the Parliament should not endorse his candidacy.

Mr Opiola is currently Vice President of the Polish Supreme Audit Office – [read his full CV](#).

Background

The ECA candidates (one per member state) are proposed by member states and approved by the Council, after consulting the European Parliament. MEPs can either back the candidate or ask for the nomination to be withdrawn.

The post has been vacant since the former Polish ECA Member, Janusz Wojciechowski, took the post of European Commissioner for Agriculture on 1 December 2019.

Procedure: Consultation (NLE)

[2020/0806\(NLE\)](#)

Vote: Monday, 14 December

Further information

[Draft report on the nomination of Marek Opiola as a Member of the Court of Auditors](#)

[Letter of nomination of Mr Marek OPIOŁA as a candidate for member of the ECA](#)

[EP Research: Information on Nominations for Members of the European Court of Auditors \(December 2020\)](#)

[Profile of Matteo Adinolfi \(ID, IT\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

Post-COVID recovery: MEPs present rescue plan for SMEs

On Monday, MEPs will discuss and vote on a resolution calling for measures to help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) deal with the economic crisis.

MEPs are deeply concerned that sectors largely composed of SMEs have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis. These include tourism, hospitality, transport, trade fairs, events, and cultural and creative industries.

They call for administrative requirements to be simplified and for EU state-aid rules to be temporarily relaxed. To ensure their basic functioning, SMEs immediately need to restore their liquidity. In particular, micro-enterprises, which are more exposed, will depend on swift decision-making and adequate funding. Investments in innovation should prioritise ecosystems that are inclusive of SMEs, says the draft resolution.

Background

The Commission's communication – "An SME strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe" – was published on 10 March 2020, a day before the World Health Organisation issued the COVID-19 pandemic alert. This must be revised in the light of the economic crisis, say MEPs in the draft resolution.

There are 24 million SMEs in the EU-27. They are the backbone of the economy, and generated more than half the EU's GDP while employing about 100 million workers before the beginning of the pandemic.

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

[2020/2131\(INI\)](#)

Debate: Monday, 14 December

Vote: Monday, 14 December

Further information

[Draft report on a new strategy for European SMEs](#)

[Press release on committee vote \(13.11.2020\)](#)

[Profile of rapporteur Paolo Borchia \(ID, IT\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

Human rights and democracy resolutions

Parliament will hold urgent debates on the following human rights, democracy and rule of law topics on Thursday morning, followed by votes later the same day.

- The deteriorating situation of human rights in Egypt, in particular the case of the activists of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR),
- Forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,
- Iran, in particular the case of 2012 Sakharov Prize laureate Nasrin Sotoudeh.

Procedure: non-legislative resolutions

Debate: Thursday, 17 December

Vote: Thursday, 17 December

Further information

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material](#)

Other topics on the agenda

Other topics for debate and vote include the following:

- Cooperation of OLAF and the new European Public Prosecutor's Office (revision of OLAF regulation), Marinescu (*COD*), *debate and final vote Thursday*
- Call for dedicated Council configuration on gender equality, *OQ and resolution (RE)*, *debate and vote Thursday*
- PETI deliberations 2019, Zlotowski (*INI*), *debate and vote Wednesday*
- Eastern Partnership - recent developments , *Debate with VP/HR Tuesday*
- Deterioration of the situation in Mozambique, *debate with VP/HR Tuesday*
- 25 years of Barcelona Process / Southern Neighbourhood, *debate with VP/HR Tuesday*
- European Year of Rail 2021, Deparnay-Grunenberg (*COD*), *vote Monday*
- End of derogations for slaughter establishments, *OQ*, *debate Monday*
- Amendments to the Rules of Procedure to ensure the functioning of Parliament in extraordinary circumstances, *Bischoff (RoP)*, *vote Thursday*