Plenary highlights: EU long-term budget, trade with Vietnam, EU-UK relations

MEPs demanded an ambitious EU long-term budget, approved free trade deals with Vietnam and set out their position on future EU-UK relations during this week’s plenary session.

During a plenary debate on Wednesday with the European Commission and the Council, MEPs insisted that the EU’s 2021-2027 budget should get adequate funding. The EU should be able to deal with new challenges, such as digitalisation and the transition to a green economy as well as maintain support for farmers, regions and cities, young people, researchers and entrepreneurs, said MEPs ahead of an EU summit dedicated to the next long-term budget on 20 February.

Parliament approved on Wednesday a free trade agreement and an investment protection agreement between the EU and Vietnam. The aim is to remove nearly all tariffs, stimulate business ties and create new jobs. Check out our interview with Belgian ECR member Geert Bourgeois, the MEP in charge of steering the deals through Parliament.

Future EU-UK relations should ensure companies on both sides of the Channel face largely equivalent rules on social and environmental matters, taxation, competition and state aid, MEPs underlined on Wednesday in a resolution setting out Parliament’s position on the upcoming negotiations.
The European Central Bank (ECB) should continue to pursue a monetary policy that boosts growth, but EU countries should also do their part, Parliament said on Wednesday in a resolution on the work of the bank following a plenary debate with ECB president Christine Lagarde the previous day.

Automated decision-making based on artificial intelligence may be fast and efficient but lacks the human touch and may lead to problems for consumers. In a resolution on Wednesday, MEPs called for protection of consumer rights and making sure that data sets on which automated decisions are based are not biased.

MEPs debated on Wednesday the measures the EU should take the coming years to ensure equality between men and women in the EU. In a resolution adopted on Thursday ahead of a UN meeting on women’s rights, they called for a stronger EU commitment to empowering women. Parliament also adopted on Wednesday a resolution calling for an end to female genital mutilation.

In a debate on Wednesday night, MEPs discussed the coronavirus outbreak and the need for collective EU-wide efforts to control the spread of the disease.

Parliament called on Wednesday for a mandatory EU system to register cats and dogs and other measures aimed at preventing illegal trade in companion animals across the EU.
On Monday, Parliament discussed the new Commission proposals for making the EU accession process more effective and credible.

The plenary session was the first one for MEPs whose mandate started on 1 February following Brexit. The UK withdrawing from the EU has resulted in changes in the distribution of seats in the European Parliament and the composition of its committees.

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