

Plenary highlights: State of the EU, Afghanistan, health



September's plenary session

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MEPs discussed the state of the EU and the situation in Afghanistan and approved the EU Blue Card reform and a fund to help with the impact of Brexit during September's plenary session.

State of the European Union

On Wednesday, Parliament held the European Commission to account and addressed Europeans' concerns during the annual [State of the European Union debate](#) in Strasbourg. In her speech, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen outlined the path to recovery from the biggest global health crisis for a century, the deepest global economic crisis for decades and the gravest planetary crisis of all time.

Afghanistan

Tuesday saw an animated debate on the [EU's response to the crisis in Afghanistan](#). In a resolution adopted on Thursday, MEPs called for [more humanitarian aid and a special visa programme](#) for Afghan women seeking protection from the Taliban.

Disease prevention through better cooperation

As part of the broader European Health Union, [MEPs adopted proposals](#) to strengthen the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and to improve EU coordination against health threats.

European Blue Card

MEPs approved the [reform of the EU's Blue Card system](#) to make it easier to attract highly qualified workers from outside Europe on Wednesday. More flexible criteria include a lower salary threshold and shorter contract requirement. The new rules also aim to make it easier for beneficiaries to move within the EU and reunite with their family.

Brexit Adjustment Reserve

Also on Wednesday, Parliament approved the €5 billion [Brexit Adjustment Reserve](#), meant to mitigate the impact of the UK's departure from the EU on people, companies and countries.

Media freedom and rule of law in Poland

MEPs [criticised proposed new broadcasting legislation in Poland](#), which may threaten media pluralism, as well as the latest Polish legal challenge to EU rules and values in the country.

LGBTIQ

On Tuesday Parliament called for [same-sex marriages and partnerships to be recognised across the EU](#). MEPs said basic rights such as freedom of movement and rights of families should apply fully to all citizens everywhere in the EU.

Russia

Parliament rejected aggressive Russian policies in a [resolution](#) adopted on Thursday, but called for a new EU strategy to promote pro-democratic tendencies in the country.

China

A [report on EU-China relations](#) adopted on Thursday says the EU should continue talking to China about global challenges like climate change and health crises, while condemning systemic human rights violations and disinformation.

Animal testing

While Parliament recognises that animal testing has contributed to research and medical advances, as well as vaccines, it is [calling for an EU-wide action plan](#) to phase out the use of animals in research and testing.

Gender-based violence as a new area of crime

Members are calling on the European Commission to [include gender-based violence as a new area of crime under EU law](#), in order to better address all forms of violence and discrimination based on gender.

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