

Plenary round-up – April 2021

The April 2021 plenary session featured a debate on the outcome of EU-UK negotiations and the vote on the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Members also debated the conclusions of the 25 and 26 March 2021 European Council meeting and the outcome of the 6 April 2021 high-level EU-Turkey meeting. Members debated ways to save the summer tourism season and provide EU support to the hospitality sector, and underlined the need for affordable Covid-19 testing. Parliament also debated statements by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Josep Borell, on Russia, Alexei Navalny, the military build-up on Ukraine's border and the Russian attack on an arms depot in Czechia, on Chinese counter-sanctions, and on the fifth anniversary of the Peace Agreement in Colombia. Parliament also voted on a mandatory transparency register for outside interests meeting with the three institutions.

EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement

Parliament debated and approved, by a very large majority (660 votes to 5 with 32 abstentions), a decision to grant consent to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed by the [EU with the United Kingdom](#) and adopted a resolution on the subject. The Council completed the final adoption of the [agreement](#) on 29 April 2021, bringing the Brexit process to an end.

EU Covid-19 certificates

Parliament debated and adopted a mandate under the urgent legislative procedure to begin negotiations with the Council on the proposed [digital green certificate](#). Parliament agrees with the Council and Commission that the proposed 'certificate' should facilitate free movement for Europeans when safe to do so. To avoid confusion, Parliament proposes to rename the initiative the 'EU Covid-19 certificate'.

2019 EU budget discharge

An important tool used by Parliament to ensure correct use of EU funding, Members debated and granted discharge for the [European Commission and other agencies'](#) implementation of the 2019 budget. Parliament also granted discharge for the [EU institutions other than the European Commission](#), except for the European Council and the Council, due to Council's continued lack of cooperation. Finally, Parliament granted discharge for 31 of the 32 [decentralised EU agencies subject to discharge](#). A decision to postpone discharge for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), until financial and human resource management issues are clarified, was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

Rail passengers' rights and obligations

Parliament adopted at second reading the legislation on [rail passengers' rights and obligations](#), which strengthens passenger rights while reducing burdens on rail companies.

Dissemination of terrorist content online

As existing self-regulatory measures appear to have failed, Members debated and approved an early second-reading agreement on a new regulation addressing the [dissemination of terrorist content online](#). The ambitious proposal seeks quick and smooth removal of content that seeks to radicalise, recruit or incite to violence. However, Parliament has also insisted on the need to protect freedom of speech.

Joint debate on research and innovation

Members held a joint debate on research and innovation in the EU. They approved the new [Horizon Europe programme](#), which will allocate €95.5 billion to research and innovation that addresses the Union's key challenges, including climate change and digitalisation. Members voted on the agreed text of the programme itself as well as on the specific implementing programme, which sets out more detailed provisions. Members also voted on the final text of two proposals concerning the [European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#) (EIT) in Budapest, a key part of Horizon Europe.

European Defence Fund

Parliament adopted at second reading the proposal to establish the [European Defence Fund](#). This first-ever multiannual financial programme supporting defence research and technology will aim at reducing costly duplication of military procurement, with a budget of €7 billion.

Digital Europe programme

Members approved (without a vote) the early second-reading agreement on a proposal aimed at ensuring that the EU does not fall behind in the crucial strategic area of digital capacity. The [Digital Europe programme](#) will now fund investment in large-scale digital capacities in five key areas (advanced computing and data, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills), with a focus on technology such as supercomputers that would otherwise be too expensive for single Member States.

Union anti-fraud programme

Reinforcing efficient protection of the EU budget, Members adopted an early second-reading agreement on the [Union anti-fraud programme](#), for which Parliament negotiated a budget of €181.2 million.

LIFE programme

Members approved an early second-reading agreement (without a vote) on the new [LIFE programme](#). Although, given the EU's current 'green' priorities, Parliament initially called for €7 billion, the final proposal nevertheless allocates €5.45 billion for environmental initiatives.

Union Civil Protection Mechanism

Parliament debated and approved a final agreement on the financing for the [Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#), ensuring that civil protection, prevention, preparedness and disaster response are prioritised.

Justice and citizens, equality, rights and values programmes

Parliament debated and approved funding for a new [justice programme](#), aimed at upholding EU values. Parliament is a keen defender of core EU values and has fought hard for adequate funding, set at €305 million, for the measures. These include further development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law, mutual recognition and mutual trust, promoting justice for all and in particular gender equality and LGBTQI rights – issues that have not met with universal approval among the Member States. Members also approved an agreement on a new [citizens, equality, rights and values programme](#), within the justice programme and aimed at funding the fight against inequality and discrimination in the EU.

European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

Parliament approved (without a vote) an early second-reading agreement on a proposal widening eligibility for [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#) intervention to include victims of restructuring and the Covid-19 crisis and speeding up allocation of funds. With a maximum annual allocation of €186 million (outside the MFF), the fund will be renamed the European Fund for Transition.

Single market, competitiveness of enterprises and European statistics programme

Members approved (without a vote) an early second-reading agreement on the proposed [single market, competitiveness of enterprises and European statistics programme](#), aimed at tackling existing and new barriers to competition and boosting consumer protection. The programme allocates a €4.2 billion budget to improvements to EU law, market surveillance, sustainability and access to quality European statistics.

Opening of trilogue negotiations

Members [confirmed](#) the mandate for negotiations from the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) Committee on the proposal for amending Directive 2004/37/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work.

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](#).

