

Oireachtas Digest on Europe

Week: 20 to 26 February 2023 | Ref: 7-23



European Parliament

No parliamentary meetings are scheduled in Brussels; the week is set aside for committee delegations conducting visits linked to topics falling under their responsibility.

Coming Week Highlights

President's diary. A video message by EP President Roberta Metsola will be shown at the opening of the 10th Ordinary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, on Monday.

War in Ukraine/Euronest. The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, comprised of 60 MEPs and 10 members from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, will meet in Chişinău, Moldova, for its 10th Ordinary Session. They will discuss the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Eastern Partnership (Sunday 19 to Tuesday 21 February). A press conference is foreseen on Tuesday at 11.30.

Use of spyware/Hungary. The Inquiry Committee on the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware will go to Budapest to learn more about allegations of spyware abuse targeting journalists, the opposition and civil society. MEPs will meet with the leadership of the Hungarian National Assembly's Committee on National Security, the President of the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, as well as journalists and NGOs (Monday and Tuesday).

Security/Bosnia and Herzegovina. A Security and Defence Subcommittee delegation will go to Bosnia and Herzegovina to assess the EU's military operation Althea and the security situation in the country. MEPs will meet with members of the Tripartite Presidency and the new government, parliamentarians and representatives of the international and think tank community (Monday to Thursday).

Budget control/Spain. A delegation of the Budgetary Control Committee will travel to Madrid to look into how the EU's recovery and resilience funding is being spent. Meetings are scheduled with members of government, regional authorities, employer and workers' associations, the business community and investigative press (Monday to Wednesday). A press conference will take place on Wednesday at 12.00.

Migration/Belgium, France and Holland. A Civil Liberties Committee delegation will go to Brussels (Belgium), Calais (France) and Ter Apel (Netherlands) to look into irregular crossings to the UK and the implications for reception facilities. MEPs will meet with government officials and agencies in charge of migration policy as well as NGO representative, and they will visit reception facilities. (Monday to Wednesday).

Women's Rights/Spain. A delegation of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee will be in Madrid to gather information on the sexual consent law, care and dependence law and the fight against trafficking and sexual exploitation. They will meet with representatives of the judiciary, NGOs, trade unions, ministers, members of parliament, academics and will visit a women's shelter (Monday to Wednesday). There will be a press point on Wednesday at 14.00.

COVID-19/South Africa and Ethiopia. A delegation of the special committee on the COVID-19 pandemic will be in Cape Town to discuss with representatives from the South African ministry of health and parliamentarians dealing with health, trade and international relations. MEPs will also visit the Biovac pharmaceutical company, manufacturing and distributing vaccines in Africa (Monday to Wednesday). The delegation will then travel to Addis Ababa to meet with representatives from the African Union, the Africa

Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the WHO and the Red Cross (Thursday and Friday).

Link to full weekly Agenda here

European Commission

Coming Week Highlights

Wednesday	College Meeting
Weekly Agenda <u>here</u>	

European Council and Council of the European Union Coming Week Highlights

20 February	<u>Foreign Affairs Council</u> Agenda: Exchange views on the Russian aggression against Ukraine: Afghanistan: Exchange views on climate and energy diplomacy; Exchange with the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova Nicu Popescu
21 February	General Affairs Council Agenda: The Council will start preparations for the European Council meeting on 23-24 March 2023 by discussing an annotated draft agenda.



European Parliament. Highlights Week 13 to 19 February 2023

Parliament sets up new Public Health subcommittee

On Tuesday, MEPs agreed to create a new permanent subcommittee for public health matters.

Plenary set out the responsibilities and numerical strength of the new Public Health subcommittee, established under the umbrella of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI).

The subcommittee will comprise 30 members. It will deal with programmes and specific actions in the field of public health, pharmaceutical and cosmetic products, health aspects of bioterrorism, the European Medicines Agency, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The ENVI committee remains responsible for examining and voting on legislative proposals.

The list of members will be announced in a subsequent plenary session.

Link to EP report here

Fit for 55: zero CO2 emissions for new cars and vans in 2035

On Tuesday, Parliament approved the new CO2 emissions reduction targets for new passenger cars and light commercial vehicles, part of the "Fit for 55" package.

With 340 votes in favour, 279 against and 21 abstentions, MEPs endorsed the deal reached with the Council on revised CO2 emission performance standards for new cars and vans in line with the EU's increased climate ambition.

The new legislation sets the path towards zero CO2 emissions for new passenger cars and light commercial vehicles in 2035 (an EU fleet-wide target to reduce CO2 emissions produced by new cars and vans by 100% compared to 2021). Intermediate emissions reduction targets for 2030 are set at 55% for cars and 50% for vans.

Link to EP report here

Special committee on foreign interference to deal with corruption allegations

Parliament endorsed on Tuesday an update to the title and the responsibilities of the existing Special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (ING2).

To protect the Parliament from corruption cases such as those currently under investigation, the special committee will be tasked with identifying the shortcomings in Parliament's rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption. ING2 will also have to propose measures for the medium- and longer-term and issue recommendations for reforms. Its work will build on the European Parliament's resolutions and the best practices of other parliaments and institutions, in close cooperation with the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, states the text of the Decision.

ING2's new name will be the 'special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the

European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament.

Further steps

The special committee is expected to present its final report, focusing on its new tasks, for adoption in plenary by July 2023 at the latest.

Link to EP report here

REPowerEU: Energy measures to be added to national recovery plans

MEPs approved including REPowerEU measures in national plans to be more independent from Russian fossil fuels, speed up the green transition and tackle energy poverty.

Plenary confirmed with 535 votes to 63 and 53 abstentions a deal reached with the Council in December 2022. Under the agreement, member states applying to receive additional funds through an amended recovery and resilience plan will be required to include measures to save energy, produce clean energy and diversify energy supplies, as foreseen in the EU's REPowerEU plan.

Link to EP report here

Participating in elections must be easier for Europeans from another EU country

MEPs backed on Tuesday proposals to improve the situation for EU citizens who live in another member state and wish to vote or stand in European and local elections.

Parliament adopted two sets of closely aligned proposals on the electoral rights of EU citizens residing in another member state, in relation to European and municipal elections. The former report by Damian Boeselager (Greens/EFA, DE) was adopted with 500 votes in favour, 143 against, and nine abstentions. The latter one by Joachim Brudziński (ECR, PL) was adopted with 504 votes for, 79 against, and 69 abstentions.

Parliament asks for the so-called "derogation" provisions, which allow a member state to restrict the electoral rights of nationals of other EU countries when they represent more than 20% of all EU citizens residing in its territory, to be scrapped. The possibility of reserving top local government positions for their own nationals should also be removed, MEPS say.

Link to EP report here

MEPs back deploying new EU satellites to protect government communications

A new network of European IRIS² telecommunication satellites will be active from 2024, following the green light by Parliament on Tuesday.

A €2.4 billion budget will enable the EU to set up the new Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS²); Europe's first multi-orbital satellite constellation. The new satellites will provide a secure communications infrastructure for EU government bodies and agencies, emergency services and European delegations around the world.

The scheme will ensure the EU's strategic autonomy in the field of secure government communications, in a context where cyber security threats are becoming increasingly important, especially following Russia's war against Ukraine.

In negotiations with EU ministers, MEPs made sure to strengthen the system's environmental provisions and sustainability, preventing space debris proliferation, light pollution, and providing carbon footprint compensation to offset the emissions from its operation.

Next steps

Following Parliament's endorsement with 603 votes to 6 and 39 abstentions, the text will have to be formally adopted by the Council before it is signed and published in the Official Journal.



Latvian President to MEPs: Europe must be on the right side of history

On Tuesday, Latvian President Egils Levits called on Europe to find the political will to try Russia for its crimes and give Ukraine a future in Europe.

In a formal address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, Mr Levits echoed Parliament's demand to establish a special tribunal on Russia's aggression against Ukraine. "None of us want to live in a world where aggressive war is the norm", he said, urging the international community to "find the political will" to set up a tribunal, not only for the sake of justice for Ukraine but to "not undermine the standard of international law that has been achieved since the Second World War."

He criticised Europe for the "enormous mistake and naivety of moving purposefully towards dependence on Russian energy sources...despite our warnings."

President Levits backed the request by MEPs for Europe to use frozen Russian assets for the reconstruction of Ukraine, and not only the assets of the oligarchs close to the regime but also the assets of the Central Bank of Russia. "Although complicated, it is legally possible. What is needed is political will", he said.

Link to EP Report here

Parliament urges Georgia to pardon and release ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili

In a resolution adopted on Wednesday, Parliament expresses its grave concerns about the deteriorating health of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who has been detained in his home country since October 2021. While noting reports of his dramatic weight loss and suggestions that he might have suffered from heavy metal poisoning while in detention, MEPs call on the Georgian authorities to release Mr Saakashvili and allow him to receive proper medical treatment abroad. They urge current President Salome Zourabichvili to use her constitutional right to pardon him. This would also reduce the political polarisation in the country.

Link to EP report here

Violence against women: MEPs demand the EU ratify the Istanbul Convention

The European Union should ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, in line with a 2021 Court of Justice opinion, MEPs insist.

The text, adopted by 469 in favour, 104 against and 55 abstentions, says the Istanbul Convention remains the international standard and a key tool in eradicating gender-based violence, including domestic violence. MEPs strongly condemn attempts in some member states to revoke measures already taken in applying the Istanbul Convention and call on them to implement it fully.

Link to EP report here

Semiconductors: MEPs ready to start talks on new law to boost EU chips industry

Parliament set its negotiating position on two draft bills: one on the "Chips Act", which aims to bolster technological capacity and innovation in EU Chips, and a second one on the Chips Joint Undertaking to increase investments for developing this type of European presence.

Link to EP report here

Human rights breaches in Russia, Equatorial Guinea and Eswatini

On Thursday, the European Parliament adopted three resolutions on the respect for human rights in Russia, EMEPs call for the release of a 2021 Sakharov Prize laureate Alexey Navalny and all other brave political

prisoners in Russia fighting for Russian democracy.

Until their release, the conditions of detention of political prisoners such as Navalny, who has been subject to ill treatment including torture and risks a new prison sentence of up to 25 years, have to comply with Russia's international obligations. In particular, Navalny needs access to doctors of his choice and to his lawyers, and communication with his family quatorial Guinea and Eswatini.

The resolution was adopted by 497 votes in favour, 17 against and 33 abstentions. For more details, full text will be available here. (19.01.2023)

Link to EP report here

Military Aid for Ukraine

MEPs call for serious consideration to be given to delivering fighter jets, helicopters, appropriate missile systems and a substantial increase in munitions to Ukraine.

In a resolution marking one year of Russia's war against Ukraine, MEPs strongly condemn Moscow's aggression and reiterate their unwavering solidarity with the people and leadership of Ukraine.

They reaffirm their support for providing military assistance to Ukraine for as long as is necessary and call for serious consideration to be given to delivering Western fighter jets and helicopters, appropriate missile systems and substantial increases in munitions delivery to Kyiv. Ukraine must not only be able to defend itself, but also to regain full control of its entire internationally recognised territory.

Link to EP report here

Green Deal Industrial Plan:

In a resolution adopted on Thursday - in response to the Commission's "Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age" - MEPs call on the Commission to work on plans to redeploy, relocate and re-shore industries in Europe. They stress the importance of enhancing the EU's manufacturing strength in strategic technologies like solar and wind energy, heat pumps, and batteries.

They demand the scaling-up, and improved commercialisation of, strategic technologies to bridge the gap between innovation and market deployment. Fast and predictable permitting procedures to set up new projects to deploy renewable energy sources as quickly as possible are also needed, according to MEPs.

The overall objective of EU policy must be to secure European leadership in clean energy technologies and improving Europe's existing industrial base while assisting in its transformation to produce high quality jobs and economic growth to reach the goals of the Green Deal. To achieve this, MEPs say, the EU must take measures to accelerate production capacities for affordable, secure and clean energy intended for use by industry and to increase energy savings and energy efficiency measures.

MEPs also highlight the importance of secure access to critical raw materials to achieve the EU's ecological and digital transformations. Strategic European projects need faster and more transparent permitting, according to MEPs.

Link to EP report here

Fertilisers

In a resolution approved on Thursday by show of hands, MEPs call for a long-term EU fertiliser strategy and a long-term EU soil nutrient strategy by June 2023. They note that Russian gas, used in the production of fertilisers, contributes to financing the war in Ukraine and call, therefore, "for sufficient resources to be allocated as soon as possible to end dependence on this gas".

MEPs also acknowledge that being self-sufficient on mineral fertilisers "is not realistic" in the medium term

and that raw materials used to produce fertilisers often come from autocratic regimes. The EU should "not replace one dependency with another" and must increase its strategic autonomy in fertilisers.

As a short-term measure to increase the availability of fertilisers for farmers and stabilise prices, MEPs propose using part of the agricultural 2023 budget to provide immediate assistance to farmers and to extend the temporary suspension of import duties to all mineral fertilisers apart from those coming from Russia and Belarus. They also call on the Commission to look into a joint purchase mechanism for fertilisers at EU level and how bottlenecks in the market for fertilisers can be reduced. In the long-term, MEPs recommend accelerating the decarbonising process and using fossil-free and recycled nutrients to produce fertilisers. Link to EP Report here

Corruption allegations: MEPs push for ambitious changes and quick progress

On Thursday, Parliament adopted two resolutions on the issue of transparency and integrity in EU decision-making.

MEPs are asking for more reforms, building on the ones announced by the Conference of Presidents, and demand an EU's independent ethics body be set up swiftly.

Link to EP report here

European Commission. Highlights Week 13 to 19 February 2023

Commission sets out rules for renewable hydrogen

On Monday, the Commission proposed detailed rules to define what constitutes renewable hydrogen in the EU, with the adoption of two Delegated Acts required under the Renewable Energy Directive. These Acts are part of a broad EU regulatory framework for hydrogen which includes energy infrastructure investments and state aid rules, and legislative targets for renewable hydrogen for the industry and transport sectors. They will ensure that all renewable fuels of non-biological origin (also known as RFNBOs) are produced from renewable electricity. The two Acts are inter-related and both necessary for the fuels to be counted towards Member States' renewable energy target. They will provide regulatory certainty to investors as the EU aims to reach 10 million tonnes of domestic renewable hydrogen production and 10 million tonnes of imported renewable hydrogen in line with the REPowerEU Plan.

Link to Commission statement here

State Aid

France: The Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €2.08 billion <u>French measure</u> to support offshore wind electricity production in France. The measure will contribute to achieving France's energy and environmental targets, as well as the objectives relating to the EU's Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy and the European Green Deal.

Denmark: The Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €170 million <u>Danish scheme</u> to support the production of renewable hydrogen through Power-to-X ('PtX') technologies. The measure aims to contribute to the development of renewable hydrogen in line with the objectives of the EU Hydrogen Strategy and the European Green Deal. The scheme will also contribute to the objectives of the REPowerEU Plan to end dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the green transition.

Romania: The Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €259 million <u>Romanian scheme</u>, made available in part through the Recovery and Resilience Facility ('RRF'), to support investments in the

production, assembly and recycling of batteries, of photovoltaic cells and of panels. The scheme aims at supporting Romania's regional development and fostering the EU's strategic objectives relating to the green deal.

France: The Commission has found a <u>French support</u> measure of up to $\in 1.4$ billion in favour of Air France to be in line with EU State aid rules. The measure aims at compensating the airline for the damage suffered between 17 March and 30 June 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic and the travel restrictions in place to limit the spread of the virus.ransition.

Germany: The Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €55 million <u>German measure</u> to support ArcelorMittal Hamburg GmbH ('ArcelorMittal') in building a demonstration plant for the production of green steel using renewable hydrogen.

Spain: The Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €460 million <u>Spanish measure</u> to support ArcelorMittal España ('ArcelorMittal') in partially decarbonising its steel production processes. The measure will contribute to the achievement of the EU Hydrogen Strategy and the European Green Deal targets, while helping to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the green transition in line with the REPowerEU Plan.

Winter 2023 Economic Forecast: EU economy set to avoid recession, but headwinds persist

Almost one year after Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU economy entered 2023 on a better footing than projected in autumn. The Winter interim Forecast lifts the growth outlook for this year to 0.8% in the EU and 0.9% in the euro area. Both areas are now set to narrowly avoid the technical recession that was anticipated for the turn of the year. The forecast also slightly lowers the projections for inflation for both 2023 and 2024.

Link to Commission statement here

European Green Deal: Commission proposes 2030 zero-emissions target for new city buses and 90% emissions reductions for new trucks by 2040

On Tuesday, the European Commission proposed ambitious new CO2 emissions targets for new heavy-duty vehicles (HDVs) from 2030 onwards. These targets will help to reduce CO2 emissions in the transport sector - trucks, city buses, and long-distance buses are responsible for over 6% of total EU greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and more than 25% of GHG emissions from road transport. These strengthened emissions standards would ensure that this segment of the road transport sector contributes to the shift to zero-emissions mobility and the EU's climate and zero pollution objectives.

Link to Commission statement here

A further step towards a long-term 'Roam like at home' agreement with Ukraine

Ukraine is one step closer to the EU's free roaming area as the Commission adopted a proposal to incorporate roaming into the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Once in place, Ukrainian visitors will no longer have to pay any additional charges to use their mobile phones when travelling in the EU, while travellers from the EU will benefit from the same rights when visiting Ukraine.

Link to Commission report here

February infringements package: key decisions

In its regular package of infringement decisions, the European Commission pursues legal action against Member States for failing to comply with their obligations under EU law. These decisions, covering various sectors and EU policy areas, aim to ensure the proper application of EU law for the benefit of citizens and



The key decisions taken by the Commission are viewable through this <u>link</u> and grouped by policy area. The Commission is also closing 93 cases in which the issues with the Member States concerned have been solved without the Commission needing to pursue the procedure further.

Ireland is cited under: Water Management;

Statement by President von der Leyen on the 10th package of sanctions against Russia

Link to Commission statement here

Commission presents EU-New Zealand trade agreement for ratification

The EU-New Zealand trade agreement have taken a big step towards ratification, with the Commission sending it to Council for signature. Sending the draft decisions to the Council on the signature and conclusion of the agreement is a major step: once the Council gives its green light, the EU and New Zealand can sign the agreement and it can be sent to the European Parliament for its consent. Following approval, the deal can enter into force.

The agreement is expected to deliver major gains for the EU. Bilateral trade is expected to grow by up to 30% thanks to this deal, with EU annual exports potentially growing by up to €4.5 billion. EU investment into New Zealand has a potential to grow by up to 80%. The deal can cut some €140 million a year in duties for EU companies from the first year of application.

Open trade is one of the four pillars of the EU's Green Deal Industrial Plan announced by President von der Leyen on 1 February 2023, and this agreement will make a contribution. Once in force, it will help make the EU economy greener, more competitive and more resilient.

Link to Commission statement here

European Council and Council of the European Union Highlights Week 13 to 19 February 2023

Eurogroup, 13 February

Recent developments in the energy markets

The Eurogroup discussed recent developments in the energy markets, after hearing a presentation by the director of the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) on recent energy market developments. The exchange will provide input for the assessment of fiscal policy challenges going forward.

Thematic discussion - Euro area labour markets: recent developments and challenges ahead

Based on a note from the Commission services, the Eurogroup exchanged views on developments in the euro area labour markets in recent years. Ministers also discussed policy challenges in the current context of high inflation and longer-term changes linked to demographics and the green and digital transitions.

Macroeconomic and financial developments, and policy coordination in the euro area

Against the backdrop of the two previous discussions, the Eurogroup took stock of macroeconomic and financial developments and prospects, taking into account the Commission's winter forecast. In view of the in-depth discussion on fiscal policy orientations coming up in March, ministers reflected on the implications for policy coordination in the euro area going forward.



Economic and Financial Affairs Council, 14 February

Financial services

The Presidency presented the state of play as regards current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Link to Council report here

European Court of Auditors Highlights Week 13 to 19 February 2023

Special report 04/2023: Global Climate Change Alliance (+) – Proposed action not achieved

The ECA issued Special report <u>04/2023</u>: <u>Global Climate Change Alliance (+)</u> –

Inter-parliamentary meetings and conferences during the Parliamentary Dimension of the Swedish Presidency (1st semester 2023)

Date	Meeting	Host	Location
20 February	Inter-parliamentary Conference on the European Green Deal with a focus on a circular bio-economy	SE Presidency	Remote

Inter-parliamentary meetings and conferences during the Parliamentary Dimension of the Swedish Presidency (1st semester 2023)

27-28 February	 European Parliamentary Week -IPC on SECG Conference on the European Semester. The Inter-parliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union (Conference under Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union) 	SE Presidency EP: BUDG; ECON; EMPL	EP Brussels
2-3 March	22nd Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (IPC for CFSP/CSDP)	SE Presidency	Stockholm
9 March	ICM FEMM on the occasion of International Women's Day	EP: FEMM	EP Brussels
26-27 March	The 12th Meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol (JPSG on Europol) pursuant to Article 88 TFEU and the EUROPOL Regulation EU (2016)/749	SE Presidency	Stockholm
23-24 April	Inter-parliamentary Conference on Challenges and Opportunities for the EU's Future Energy Supply	SE Presidency	Stockholm
24-25 April	Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments	CZ Presidency Senate	Prague
27 April	Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting on the European Pariament's position for a new European electoral act and the role of national parliaments in this this procedure (exact title TBC)	AFCO	EP Brussels
14-16 May	The LXIX Conference of the Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union COSAC (LXIX COSAC)	SE Presidency	Stockholm
23 May	ICM DROI on the Coordination of EU Delegations and EU MS's Embassies on Human Rights in third countries	EP: DROI	EP Brussels
25 May	ICM on Reaching the transport objectives of Fit for 55 at national level - opportunities and challenges	TRAN	EP: Brussels

Inter-parliamentary meetings and conferences during the Parliamentary Dimension of the Swedish Presidency (1st semester 2023)

26 June	ICM on the Role of national parliaments in overseeing the spending of EU funds and the Next Generation EU plan	CONT	EP Brussels
27 June	ICM on the current EU foreign and security policy challenges	AFET	EP Brussels
28 June	ICM EMPL with National Parliaments to celebrate two years of the Child Guarantee	EMPL	EP Brussels
18-19 June	Inter-parliamentary Conference on Democracy in Europe	SE Presidency	Stockholm

Sources: Websites of: European Parliament European Commission, European Council and Council of the European Union Council, European Court of Auditors and European Ombudsman.