

Article – Plenary highlights: vaccines, new US president, right to disconnect



Covid-19 vaccines

During a plenary debate on Tuesday, most MEPs expressed support for the EU's common approach towards vaccination. However, [they called for more solidarity](#) and transparency regarding the contracts with pharmaceutical companies.

EU-US relations

On Wednesday, [MEPs discussed](#) the political situation in the US and welcomed the inauguration of the new president. This is an opportunity for the EU and US to [further strengthen relations](#) and tackle common challenges, MEPs said.

Alexei Navalny

MEPs criticised the arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and demanded additional EU sanctions on Russia in a [plenary debate on Tuesday](#) and a [resolution approved on Thursday](#).

Right to disconnect

Workers should not be obliged to answer work-related calls, emails or messages outside of working hours, [MEPs said on Thursday](#). The resolution calls on the European Commission to propose legislation protecting the right to disconnect.

Portuguese presidency

[Portugal took over the rotating Council Presidency](#) at the start of the year. [Prime Minister António Costa told MEPs on Wednesday](#) that his country's presidency will strive to make progress with the vaccination campaign against Covid-19 and with the economic and social recovery from the pandemic.

Affordable housing

[Affordable and decent housing](#) should be a fundamental right for all, enforceable through legislation, according to a resolution adopted on Thursday. Decent homes should have access to clean and high-quality drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, as well as connection to sewage and water networks, [the text specifies](#).

Fighting poverty

Parliament approved on Thursday the use of additional post Covid-19 funds for food and other basic assistance [for those most in need](#). The adapted rules for the [Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived \(FEAD\)](#) ensure that support will continue in 2021 and 2022.

Artificial intelligence

Parliament adopted [guidelines on the military and civil use of Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) on Wednesday, following the recent [adoption of proposals on the regulation of AI](#) with regard to ethics, liability and intellectual property. MEPs believe that AI should be subject to human control and that lethal autonomous weapon systems should be prohibited.

Gender equality

MEPs called for new measures to [combat violence against women and close the gender pay gap](#), eliminate [gender-based inequalities related to the Covid-19 crisis](#), and improve the integration of women in the digital sector on Thursday.

The EU's foreign and security policy

The EU must be able to defend its interests and values, and promote a rules-based international order that guarantees multilateralism, democracy and human rights, MEPs said in their [annual review of the EU foreign and security policy](#). In a separate report, they expressed concern that authoritarian regimes around the world [had used the Covid-19 pandemic to repress human rights](#).

Tax havens

The EU's blacklist of tax havens is ineffective and confusing and does not live up to its full potential, MEPs said in a resolution [proposing improvements to the system](#) on Thursday.