

[This is the third time that the Government have lost in the courts on the issue of air quality – Sue Hayman](#)

Responding

to the Government losing its court bid to delay publication of its air quality plan, Sue Hayman MP Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said:

“Labour welcome the High Court decision today.

“This is the third time that the Government have lost in the courts on the issue of air quality. They must now publish their air quality plan without further delay.

“A Labour government would bring forward a new Clean Air Act, setting out how we would tackle air pollution that NHS experts say contributes to 40,000 premature deaths every year.

“While the Conservatives shirk responsibility, Labour will deal with the dirty air damaging the lives of millions of British people.”

[News story: Armed Forces Minister attends EU meeting](#)

Minister of State for the Armed Forces Mike Penning has attended an EU informal meeting in Malta, alongside Defence Ministers from across the EU.

Ministers from the 28 EU countries discussed the EU’s operational engagement in the Mediterranean and Libya, including Operation Sophia, the mission to tackle the Mediterranean migration crisis.

The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) and European Defence Fund were also due to be discussed at the meeting.

[Press release – EP urges Venezuela to restore democratic order and free all political prisoners](#)

Venezuela's government must ensure the full restoration of the democratic order and immediately release all political prisoners, urged Parliament on Thursday.

In a resolution adopted by 450 votes to 35, with 100 abstentions, Parliament strongly condemns the "brutal repression" exercised by the Venezuelan security forces, as well as irregular armed groups, against the peaceful protests, as a result of which more than 20 people have died and many wounded.

MEPs denounce the continuing unconstitutional violation of the democratic order in Venezuela and the lack of separation of powers and independence of the branches of government. They object to the Supreme Court's recent decision to suspend the powers of the National Assembly (controlled by the opposition), which they consider to be an undemocratic act that violates the Constitution.

The text backs mediation efforts by many countries in the region and calls on the EU's High Representative for foreign policy to explore actively with international and regional organisations "other measures that would enable the EU to restore full democracy to Venezuela".

Release political prisoners and allow free elections

The European Parliament stresses that "there can be no durable peaceful solution for Venezuela in the long term if there are political prisoners". It urges the government to present an electoral calendar allowing free and transparent electoral processes and to stop side-lining opposition leaders by depriving them of their political rights.

Humanitarian crisis

MEPs also ask the authorities to allow humanitarian aid into the country, and calls on the international community, and particularly EU countries, to consider the humanitarian crisis that may arise as a result of the large numbers of Venezuelans leaving the country.

Procedure: Non-legislative resolution

[Press release – Textile imports: MEPs push for EU rules to curb worker exploitation](#)

EU rules are needed to oblige textile and clothing suppliers to respect workers' rights, say MEPs in a resolution adopted on Thursday.

Textile workers around the world, many of whom are young women and children, suffer long working hours, low wages, uncertainty, violence and hazardous conditions. These practices also harm the EU industry, as they result in social dumping, MEPs note in a non-binding resolution.

In an effort to push the “flagship initiative” aimed at preventing tragedies like the April 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh, MEPs suggest a series of measures:

- **due diligence obligations:** the EU Commission should table a binding legislative proposal for a due diligence system, based on [OECD guidelines](#) and similar to those for the so-called blood minerals, that covers the whole supply chain,
- **conditional trade preferences:** the EU should ensure that textile exporting countries with preferential access to the EU market comply with obligations and produce sustainable textiles, while member states should promote workers' rights in their relations with partner countries,

Quote by lead MEP

“We cannot turn a blind eye, if our clothes are made at the cost of vast human suffering. Only binding rules could guarantee that products sold on European markets do not violate the dignity and the rights of millions of workers. The EU has the means to act and we ask the Commission to do so.” said rapporteur Lola Sánchez Caldentey (GUE/NGL, ES).

The resolution was adopted by 505 votes against 49 with 57 abstentions.

Background

According to the World Trade Organisation, more than 70% of EU textiles and clothing imports come from Asia, with China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia as the largest producers. Most buyers are global brands looking for low prices and tight production timeframes and the

consequences usually fall upon factory workers. After the Rana Plaza tragedy, in which over 1,100 people died when a factory building collapsed in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the EU Commission promised to bring forward an EU wide flagship initiative, but has so far failed to do so. Parliament wants to encourage the Commission to table this package of proposals.

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

Press release – EU spending for 2015 approved

The Commission managed the 2015 EU budget funds according to the rules, so MEPs granted it a “discharge” approval for that year, in a resolution voted on Thursday.

Parliament’s management of its own budget in 2015 was approved as well. By contrast, Parliament postponed approving spending by the Council of Ministers and the European Council.

Error rate down...

The payments error rate fell from 4.4% in 2014 to 3.8% in 2015, which remains above the 2% threshold beneath which the European Court of Auditors could classify payments as “error-free”, MEPs note.

...but a new payment crisis looms

Parliament deplores substantial backlogs in the use of 2007-2013 European structural and investment (ESI) funds. By the end of 2015, payment of 10% of the €446.2 billion allocated was still outstanding, MEPs note. They stress that “this situation may indeed pose a significant challenge and undermine the effectiveness of ESI Funds” in a number of member states.

The ongoing payments backlog, as well as global economic recession, could mean that “delays in budget execution for the 2014-2020 programming period will be greater than those experienced for the 2007-2013”, MEPs regret.

Climate spending shortfall and budget fragmentation

MEPs deplore the fact that climate-related spending accounted for only 17.3% in 2015, even though the objective was to reach at least, 20% over the financial period – a target which may not be met any more without more effort to tackle climate change.

Parliament also criticizes the fragmentation of the EU budget, which is implemented through “different tools and combinations between them as for

example programmes, structural and investment funds, trust funds, strategic investment fund, guarantee funds, facilities, financial instruments, macro-financial assistance instruments". These "various shadow budgets" undermine the credibility of the EU budget, warn MEPs, who demand that funding arrangements be made "clearer, simpler, more coherent."

Council discharge postponed

For the seventh consecutive year, the Budgetary Control Committee had recommended that Parliament postpone granting discharge to the [Council of Ministers](#) and the [European Council](#) (heads of state or government) due to their failure to cooperate with Parliament by supplying the figures it needs to assess spending.

Background

The EU Commission is legally responsible for the biggest chunk of the funds, amounting to €145.2 billion in 2015, but around 80% of all EU funding is in fact managed locally, by EU member states.

The EU budget is always balanced, which means no single euro is spent on debt.

The decision on whether to grant discharge for the execution of the EU budget is made by the European Parliament, acting on a non-binding recommendation by the [Council](#), the other arm of the EU budgetary authority. Another key institution is the [European Court of Auditors](#), the EU's independent external auditor, whose reports are a fundamental part of the procedure. The discharge procedure has proved to be a powerful tool, which has had an impact on the evolution of the EU's budgetary system, while helping to increase Parliament's political leverage.