

## Article – Plenary highlights: EU budget, Sakharov Prize, water



### **EU budget**

Parliament [gave its consent](#) to the EU's next [seven-year budget](#) on Wednesday. In the negotiations with Council, MEPs had secured additional €15 billion for key EU programmes in areas such as health, research, investment and young people.

Several related files were also approved, including an agreement on the introduction of new sources of EU revenue that would cover the repayment of debt to be issued for the €750 billion [Covid-19 recovery plan](#).

Parliament also endorsed the EU's 2021 EU budget on Friday.

### **Rule of law mechanism**

For the first time, EU governments' access to EU funds will be made conditional on their [respect for the rule of law](#). MEPs [approved on Wednesday](#) the establishment of a mechanism allowing the suspension of payments to countries that violate the rule of law or EU values. The regulation will [apply from 1 January 2021](#), MEPs stressed.

## React-EU

EU regions will receive an additional €47.5 billion to fight the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic following Parliament's [approval of the React-EU package](#). The money will be disbursed through the EU structural funds, with most of it to be made available in 2021.

## Sakharov Prize

On Wednesday Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Veranika Tsapkala received Parliament's [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) on behalf of the democratic opposition in Belarus that has been holding peaceful protests for democracy and fair elections in the country.

## Water

Parliament [adopted an update of its drinking water legislation](#) on Wednesday to further [improve access to drinking water and tap water quality](#). The new rules also aim to cut plastic waste from bottled water. In a separate resolution adopted on Thursday, MEPs called on member states to fully comply with the EU's rules on the protection of ground and surface waters by 2027 at the latest.

## Vaccines

In a [debate](#) on Wednesday, MEPs welcomed the European Commission's readiness to formally approve the first vaccine on 23 December, but also highlighted the importance of safety and a very thorough and independent authorisation process to reinforce trust.

## EU-UK relations

MEPs discussed [progress in the negotiations for an agreement on future EU-UK relations](#) on Friday. Parliament is [ready to hold an extraordinary plenary session](#) before the end of December to examine and vote on an agreement if a deal is reached by midnight on Sunday 20 December.

Parliament adopted some contingency measures on Friday to maintain cross-border connectivity between the UK and the EU on roads and by air after the end of the transition period that expires on 31 December.

## Support for small businesses

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) should get EU support to survive through the Covid-19 crisis and deal with the challenges of digitalisation and decarbonisation, MEPs said in response to a Commission communication on a

[SME strategy](#).

## **Return of migrants**

The EU's policy on returning non-EU nationals who do not have the right to stay in the EU [suffers from gaps and shortcomings](#) that need to be addressed, MEPs said on Wednesday. They suggest that voluntary departures should be facilitated and the fundamental rights of migrants should be respected.

## **Transitional support for farmers**

Delays in negotiating the EU's farm policy reforms [will not affect farmers' incomes](#). MEPs approved on Wednesday [provisions to ensure a smooth transition](#) from the EU's current Common Agricultural Policy to the future one and €8 billion in aid for food producers and rural areas.