

## 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.