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The *Brussels Bulletin* is intended to provide an overview of some of the key events happening across the EU institutions. It is not a verbatim report or readout of proceedings and should not be read as such.

Article 50

UK Prime Minister Theresa May triggers Article 50

On Wednesday 29 March, UK Prime Minister Theresa May formally triggered Article 50, thereby signalling the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Union. The UK Government invoked Article 50 by way of a letter, delivered by UK Permanent Representative to the EU, Sir Tim Barrow, to European Council President Donald Tusk.¹

First reactions: European Council

Tusk gave a press conference shortly after receiving the letter, noting that “there is nothing to win in this process, and I am talking about both sides. In essence, this is about damage control.”² As well as his remarks, the European Council released an official statement on the UK's notification of Article 50, setting out the next steps in the process.³ [*NPO note: the statement noted that, following the triggering of Article 50, the UK Government shall not participate in the discussions of the European Council or in decisions concerning it. Therefore, any reference to European Council in this article should be read as the Heads of State or Government of the EU27, minus the UK.*]

The first of those steps will be the adoption of negotiating guidelines by the European Council, and on Friday 31 March, Donald Tusk sent draft negotiating guidelines to the 27 EU leaders.⁴ In a statement, Tusk set out the main elements and principles of his proposal: agreeing the status of UK and EU citizens; preventing a legal vacuum for EU companies; ensuring that the UK honours all financial commitments and liabilities undertaken as a Member State; seeking “flexible and creative” solutions to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and supporting the peace process. Tusk also noted that these four elements were part of the first phase of the negotiations; only with “sufficient progress” made in withdrawal talks could discussions on the future relationship begin. Starting parallel talks on all issues at the same time was not an option. He concluded by stating that although the talks would be difficult and complex, the EU27 would not pursue a punitive approach. A leaked copy of the guidelines, as sent to Member States, is available online.⁵

On Friday 24 March, EU-focussed organisation *Politico* published a leaked document showing the internal EU27 meetings leading up to the special European Council summit to agree the negotiating guidelines, scheduled for Saturday 29 April.⁶ Following the circulation of draft guidelines, the first “Sherpa” meeting will take place on 11 April, with up to three revisions of the draft guidelines foreseen before the summit at the end of April. Leaders will be asked to adopt the guidelines for the Brexit negotiations by consensus.

¹ The letter is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prime-ministers-letter-to-donald-tusk-triggering-article-50>

² Tusk's remarks are available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/29-tusk-remarks-uk-notification/>

³ See press release at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/29-euco-50-statement-uk-notification/>.

⁴ See European Council press release at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/31-tusk-remarks-meeting-muscat-malta/>

⁵ See <http://g8fip1kplyr33r3krz5b97d1.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FullText.pdf>

⁶ See http://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NewEUBrexitTimetable.jpeg?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=817b945c4b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_03_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-817b945c4b-189993529

First reactions: European Commission

There was no press conference or statement from European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on the day of notification. However, the Commission published an “Article 50” factsheet, setting out additional details on the talks alongside a timeline.⁷ On Wednesday 3 May, four days after the European Council summit, the Commission will come forward with a recommendation to the Council to open the negotiations. The Council will authorise the start of the negotiations by adopting a set of negotiating directives. These must be adopted by strong qualified majority (72% of the 27 Member States, i.e. 20 Member States representing 65% of the population of the EU27). Once these directives have been adopted, the Union negotiator, as designated by the Council, is mandated to begin negotiations with the UK.

The Council is expected to formally endorse Michel Barnier, EU Chief Negotiator for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom and Head of the Commission Task Force for the preparation and conduct of the negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 of the TEU, as the Union negotiator. On Wednesday 29 March, Barnier tweeted that “*Our #Brexit team is ready. We will work for #EU27 member states, EU institutions & citizens; together with all Commission services*”.

First reactions: European Parliament

On Wednesday 29 March, Antonio Tajani, EP President, and Guy Verhofstadt, EP coordinator for the negotiations with the UK, held a joint press conference in the European Parliament. Tajani said that the EP’s political group leaders had agreed on the draft EP Resolution on the negotiations, to be put before all MEPs the subsequent week in Strasbourg. Verhofstadt added that, alongside the initial Resolution, the EP would agree a number of more detailed Resolutions on specific issues, expected from September onwards. [*NPO note: see subsequent article for more on the debate and vote on the EP draft resolution.*]

Other reactions

The day was also marked by a large number of articles, blog posts and news reports from the media, academics, think tanks and politicians. Among them was a letter to the Financial Times written by Commission First Vice-President **Frans Timmermans**.⁸

⁷ See Commission press release at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-17-648_en.htm

⁸ See <https://www.ft.com/content/047fc50c-13d6-11e7-b0c1-37e417ee6c76>

European Parliament Brexit Resolution

EP adopts “red lines” on conditions for UK withdrawal

On Wednesday 5 April, at the EP plenary session in Strasbourg, MEPs adopted a Resolution officially confirming Parliament’s key principles and conditions for its approval of the UK’s withdrawal agreement from the EU.⁹ Members gave their support by 516 votes to 133 votes, with 50 abstentions, and will now see their Resolution feed into over-arching negotiating guidelines that will be agreed upon by EU Heads of State or Government at a European Council meeting in Brussels on 29 April. Once they are in place, formal discussions between the UK Government and EU negotiators will begin. Following the conclusion of these talks, any agreement reached between the two parties will then require sign off from the EP, by simple majority, ahead of the UK’s anticipated departure from the Union on 30th March 2019.

In their Resolution, MEPs:

- stressed the importance of quickly securing fair and equal treatment for EU citizens living in the UK and British citizens living in the EU;
- highlighted that the UK remained a member of the EU until its official departure, with all rights and obligations, including ongoing financial commitments, which may run beyond the final withdrawal date;
- warned against any trade-off between maintaining security and intelligence cooperation and the future EU-UK economic relationship;
- opposed any “cherry-picking” from the UK Government or a piecemeal economic relationship based on sector-specific deals;
- re-iterated the indivisibility of the Union’s four fundamental freedoms of goods, capital, services and people;
- noted that the European Court of Justice (ECJ) should have legal oversight over the process for Britain’s withdrawal;
- stated that only after “substantial progress” has been made in talks on how the UK is to leave the Union, can discussions begin on possible transitional arrangements towards a new partnership; and
- emphasised that these arrangements must not last longer than three years, while an agreement on the future EU-UK relationship can only be concluded after the UK has left the Union.

Ahead of the vote, MEPs held a key debate with representation from the Council, Commission President, **Jean-Claude Juncker**, and the EU’s Chief Brexit Negotiator, **Michel Barnier**. The discussion allowed EP political group leaders to outline their priorities ahead of the negotiations and also provided an opportunity for many UK MEPs to also take part in the debate. Before giving the floor to political group speakers, EP President, **Antonio Tajani** (EPP, Italy) opened the session by stating that Parliament’s vote on the final outcome of conditions for the UK’s withdrawal would be “decisive” and he added that the EP would play a major role in all stages of the Article 50 process.

⁹ The full EP Resolution can be found here - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2017-0102+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

EP political group leaders

Manfred Weber (EPP, Germany) suggested that nine months had been “too long” for the EU to wait before receiving UK Prime Minister Theresa May’s letter which was “only” six pages in length. He said that today, however, was all about an EP that was “ready and united” in how it wanted to see the Article 50 process progress. For Weber, Parliament’s Resolution made it clear that the UK’s withdrawal had to be dealt with first and foremost, before progress on a future EU-UK partnership could be made. Linked to this, Weber emphasised that certain key priorities - namely the acquired rights of UK/EU27 citizens, Northern Ireland, and outstanding financial commitments - had to be resolved as soon as possible and he also sought further clarification from the British Government regarding what it really wanted from leaving the Union. In his view, London wanted to keep the “good bits” of membership while leaving behind the “not so good bits”; a demonstration of “cherry-picking” that simply would not happen. Weber acknowledged Theresa May’s assertion that the UK was withdrawing from the EU while not leaving Europe altogether, but suggested that during the negotiations this distinction might not always be completely clear. After all, the EU27 were strong and united together; a combination that, Weber predicted, could lead to the EU being “tough” in response to UK demands. **Gianni Pittella** (S&D, Italy) said that the UK was in a major state of confusion. He claimed that the “Tories wanted the referendum but now don’t know what to do”, suggested that many who advocated a Leave outcome wanted to take back control “but of what” and went so far as to state that “outright lies” had brought “complete chaos” to the UK. Pittella welcomed the fact that the EP was the first EU institution to “officially respond” to the UK’s triggering of Article 50 and noted that plenty of hard work had been conducted to ensure that Parliament’s “red lines were clear”. Pittella said that the EP’s Resolution fought for the rights of EU citizens and made it clear that a country outwith the Union could not enjoy the same benefits as one that was a Member State. He added that only after “substantial progress” had been made in relation to Britain’s withdrawal, could talks about the EU-UK future relationship take place. Pittella added that the UK Government had to accept this fact and, if it threatened the EU27 into changing their approach, the EP would “stand up for European citizens’ right across the Union”. Pittella also stated that the conclusions of the Article 50 process had to respect political, economic, social and environmental standards, because the EU was more than the sum of its constituent parts. For him, the Union was not just a Single Market, but a community of values; and one which had to use Brexit as a window of opportunity to “build a better future around a common destiny”.

Helga Stevens (ECR, Belgium) took a different approach and suggested that the UK’s triggering of Article 50 should begin the process of building a different, yet ultimately better, future for the people of Europe. In her view, citizens’ jobs, security, prosperity and interests were dependent on this. Stevens referred to the UK as “an island, not a boat that would float away” and one that would remain a close partner of the EU’s for many years to come. She said that there was no need for Britain and the EU to become enemies and, in her opinion, both sides in the upcoming negotiations should be looking to make good on the “deep and special” partnership that UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, had alluded to in her Article 50 invocation letter. For Stevens, it was essential to focus on key issues such as security, trade, research and the environment “right away” and to do so in an “open and transparent” fashion. Doing anything less would, for her, see “history judge us all poorly”. Stevens lamented the fact that, for her, these principles had already been disregarded through the drafting of the EP’s Resolution. She noted that many MEPs - and by consequence, their electorates - had been excluded from the Resolution’s construction and criticised the fact that the EP appeared to be

creating more demands, instead of fulfilling its constitutional role of supporting the EU's lead Negotiator. Stevens closed by outlining her hope that Brexit would help the remaining Members of the EU to pursue a de-centralised, confederal path and build a better future that would "stop other countries leaving" while working for citizens throughout the Union; with or without Britain, a different future was needed. **Guy Verhofstadt** (ALDE, Belgium), the Resolution's rapporteur and EP lead on the Brexit negotiations, began by describing it as a "sad day" when UK Permanent Representative to the EU, Sir Tim Barrow, delivered the UK's Article 50 letter to European Council President, Donald Tusk. He acknowledged that the relationship between Britain and the EU had always been "tricky" and could perhaps be seen as a "marriage of convenience". He provided a brief historical account of how ties between the UK and its European neighbours had evolved over the last 50 years but suggested that, in the end, "perhaps it was never meant to be". Verhofstadt argued, however, that no blame should be attributed to British leaders of the past who had tried to "reach out" to Europe and he made clear his hope that one day there would be "a young man or woman who tries to bring the UK back into the EU family". For him, Brexit was both "sad and regrettable" but he emphasised the importance of remembering what the UK and Europe had done together before going their different ways. For Verhofstadt, now was the time to begin the process of separation and working towards a "new and stable" relationship and a "deep and comprehensive" partnership, but one that would be very different from EU membership. He acknowledged that Brexit was not "an accident" and that it had happened, in part, because Europe had not recovered from recent crises as well as it could have. In light of this, Verhofstadt called on all MEPs to look upon Brexit as having the capacity to "give re-birth" to the Union and to take the necessary steps towards a brighter Union future that remained true to its central values - freedom, justice and peace - values that were still worth fighting for.

Gabriele Zimmer (GUE/NGL, Germany) echoed Verhofstadt's words by saying that the previous week's triggering of Article 50 "really hit home" the fact the EU-UK separation would take place. She lamented the outcome of the British vote, suggested that the time of "irresponsible demagogues, such as Nigel Farage" was over, and called on negotiators on both sides of the Article 50 discussions to deal with one another "responsibly and with respect". For her, the complexities of Brexit highlighted just how deep links between all Member States were and that, as such, the outcome of the negotiations would have a fundamental impact not only on the UK but also on the future of the Union at large. She held "Nigel Farage and others" largely responsible for turning British public opinion, but also acknowledged that the EU had to take "some blame". Zimmer said that these concerns were now secondary, however, and that the priority for "everyone" was to find a "good agreement" that worked for all European citizens. **Philippe Lamberts** (Greens/EFA, Belgium) noted that UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, had inherited a situation she did not cause but, since taking office, had made "bad choices" in relation to pursuing "as hard a Brexit as possible". He accused the British Government of being riddled with contradictions; it wanted a hard Brexit but no border between Northern Ireland and the Republic; it wanted free-flowing trade yet had opted to leave the Single Market; and it was looking to unite the UK together but was not listening to Britain's young people or areas of the UK that had voted to Remain. Lamberts said that history would prove Brexit to have been a mistake. He noted that the EU accounted for 7% of the global population and 2% of the world's land; two statistics that proved no Member State, "even the UK", could tackle alone. **Nigel Farage** (EFDD, UK) said that in 1973 Britain had voted to join a European economic community, not the modern day EU. Had this been the option on that original ballot paper, Farage suggested that the UK would never have joined the European club in the first place. He labelled the EU's reaction to the triggering of Article 50 as "all too predictable" and stated that instead of threatening the UK, it was in the EU's interest to make

Britain an offer that “it couldn’t refuse” so as to ensure a positive future relationship. Farage questioned the logic behind possible assertions that the UK was liable to pay a large divorce settlement and said that Verhofstadt “and his beloved Treaties” could not find any legal basis for preventing the British Government from discussing future relations with countries “around the globe” while it was still an EU Member State. He continued by noting that Donald Tusk had previously intimated that the EU27 would “stand as one” and then questioned why Spain had been allowed “a de facto veto” on the whole withdrawal process in relation to sovereignty of Gibraltar. For Farage, the EU response to Britain’s “perfectly legitimate” desire for Brexit was “vindictive and nasty” and he likened the conduct to that of the Mafia. Farage said that there was a “bigger world out there” beyond the EU and that the UK was primed to embrace it. For him, this was why a “no deal” outcome from the Article 50 process would hurt the EU far more than Britain. Instead of pursuing pragmatism, however, he accused EU leaders of putting the political project “ahead of anything else”. Farage closed with a word of warning; continue doing so and the UK wouldn’t be the last country to trigger Article 50, there would be “many more” to come. Lastly, **Marcel De Graaff** (ENF, the Netherlands) congratulated the UK on regaining her sovereignty, her freedom and her prosperity. He said that already the Brussels bureaucrats were trying to punish, bill and control Britain even as it was leaving the Union but urged the UK Government not to give into these demands. De Graaff said that the EU called Britain “a friend” but wanted to “make the country bleed”. In his view, Britain would be far better outside the EU and, in his own words, “God bless the United Kingdom”.

Council and Commission statements

Representing the Council, **Ian Borg**, Maltese Parliamentary Secretary for EU Funds and 2017 Presidency, called these “historic times” but said that Brexit was a “lose-lose situation” both for the UK and the remaining EU Member States. He noted that the draft Council Guidelines (published on 31 March) had shown unity within EU27 countries and he said that this “strong togetherness” would be maintained throughout the wider Article 50 process. That said, for him, the collective intention was for Union negotiators to work in “sincere cooperation” with UK partners throughout the formal discussions which, he believed, would begin towards the end of the Maltese Presidency in June.

Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the Commission, then took to the floor. He said that there was “no better place” than the EP in which to begin the EU’s formal response to Britain’s withdrawal, given that two years from now, Parliament would have “the final say”. For Juncker, these were “challenging and defining” moments, but he took heart from the fact that there appeared to be cross-party consensus within the EP on the importance of the EU27 remaining “united and un-divided”. Juncker labelled as “one of my best decisions as Commission President” his appointment of Michel Barnier as the EU’s Chief Negotiator and paid tribute to his “extremely good work” to date since taking up office. In Juncker’s view, Barnier would negotiate in “friendship and openness” but would also make it clear that no third country could have the same benefits as an EU Member State. Any attempts by the UK Government to seek such an outcome, would be firmly but fairly rebuffed. Juncker continued by acknowledging that, while the UK had contributed a great deal to the EU and would retain a place of fondness among many Union citizens, now was “the time to negotiate with our heads and not our hearts”. He said that the Article 50 process was not simply a game of “diplomatic ping-pong and protocol”, but far more important than that; the lives of millions of citizens were in play and EU negotiators would be working tirelessly on their behalf. For Juncker, a disorderly Brexit and “no deal” was the worst possible outcome for both sides and he likened

“no deal to having no winners”. In his view, it was important to have a clear structure to the discussions and he welcomed the EP Resolution’s assertion that terms of the UK’s withdrawal had to be dealt with first before constructing the framework for a future EU-UK partnership could take place. Juncker said that the EU27 Heads of State or Government had “come together” during recent meetings in Bratislava, Valletta and Rome, and stated a clear desire on all parts to “act in the present for the generations to come”.

Lastly, **Michel Barnier**, the EU’s Chief Negotiator, welcomed the EP’s Resolution as the first political standpoint in response to the UK’s triggering of Article 50. He suggested that MEPs had “set the tone” for the UK Government, for EU27 leaders and for the citizens of Europe, as well as providing the three key factors that would lead to a successful negotiation: unity among EU27 countries; certainty for the citizens of Europe; and a clear structure for the talks that were to come. Barnier initially turned to the idea of unity and said that maintaining this principle was in the interest of all sides. For the EU, it would make it easier to defend the Union’s interests, principles and values, meanwhile for the UK it was also essential as, at the end of the day, Britain needed consensus among the remaining Member States to agree any hypothetical withdrawal agreement. Barnier noted that he would approach the discussions impassively and objectively, but also suggested that there was a “pedagogical dimension” to the entire Article 50 process which could encourage the remaining Member States to re-discover the achievements they had made together. Regarding the second principle, Barnier said that dispelling uncertainty and providing clarity to EU27 citizens living in the UK and British citizens residing in other Member States was a matter of urgency. For him, it was vital to provide continuity and reciprocity of law until the date of the UK’s withdrawal. Beyond that, however, providing security to European citizens “represented on both sides of the negotiating table” would be a key criteria against which the success of the Article 50 discussions could be judged. Lastly, Barnier suggested that while Theresa May’s letter had sought a rapid agreement on a future EU-UK relationship, the “devil was in the detail”. For him, it was clear that reaching consensus on a single financial settlement had to be found before all parties “could move on”. Barnier said that this should not be viewed as punishment for the UK, but a simple request for the UK to make good on commitments it had already made. He also drew attention to the fact that the UK Government wanted to conduct in parallel discussions relating to the UK’s withdrawal and its future partnership with the EU. For him, this approach was “risky” and, in fact, made it more likely that no agreement was reached within the Article 50 timeframe. In Barnier’s view, working through issues sequentially instead provided the best chance to “improve trust, build bridges and reach an agreement”. For him, the sooner arrangements were in place to facilitate an orderly withdrawal, the sooner “we can talk about the future”; and it was on this note that he closed his address.

Floor debate

After statements from the keynote speakers, a lengthy debate took place on the floor of the House involving MEPs from all of Parliament’s political groups. Among these, there were a number of interventions from British Members representing both sides of the referendum result.

Steven Woolfe (EFDD) suggested that much of the rhetoric he had heard throughout the debate would not “wash” with the UK Government, nor the British people. He pointed out the costs absorbed and sacrifices made by the UK throughout European history and labelled the EP “the chamber of the forgetful”. **Ashley Fox** (ECR) called on all MEPs to see the day as the beginning of a new relationship between the UK and the EU and not the end of the current one. He suggested that focussing on the end and not the means of getting there would help improve the

tone of upcoming negotiations and asked those around the negotiating table to focus on reaching “a good agreement, not a good fight”. Contrastingly, **Catherine Bearder** (ALDE) spoke of the “lies and mistruths” that had led Britain to the point of EU exit. She said that many Brits had “wanted their country back” since the result of the referendum was known and she stressed that the UK electorate should get a final say on whether or not they wished to accept the outcome of any Article 50 deal or instead remain within the EU on current terms. **Martina Anderson** (GUE/NGL) stressed that a special effort had to be made to accommodate the “unique needs” of Northern Ireland in the Article 50 process while **Janice Atkinson** (ENF) simply argued that Brexit had been “a long time coming”.

Paul Nuttall (EFDD) labelled the day’s debate as “an unedifying spectacle of posturing and veiled threats”. He said it was wrong of the EU to bill Britain for Brexit while the UK had been a large net contributor to the Union throughout its years of membership and he questioned the logic of EU negotiators not wanting to talk about a trade deal with Britain “right away”. For him, not doing so would damage many EU businesses and he said that it was yet another example of the EU putting politics over pragmatism. **Diane Dodds** (NI) appreciated the disappointment that many MEPs felt about Brexit, but she labelled the triggering of Article 50 as “a good day for democracy” and called on all negotiators to conduct upcoming discussions with their heads and not their hearts. **Molly Scott Cato** (Greens/EFA) lamented Brexit and praised the work done by the EU in promoting peace and democratic rights throughout Europe. She noted that, without Union law to underpin them, these liberties were actually “rather flimsy” yet something that she hoped the UK Government would seek to maintain throughout Article 50 talks. **Diane James** (NI) accused many of the keynote speakers of “misrepresenting the facts”, “misunderstanding history” and “altogether missing the point”. She said that the time for “project threat” had passed and that it was now time for negotiators on all sides to “get real” and adopt grown up politics in the negotiations to come.

Dame Glenis Willmott (S&D) said that these serious times demanded a serious response. She outlined her belief that many of the main players in the Brexit process lacked answers to the questions that would undoubtedly arise and she suggested that this was unacceptable given the millions of citizens whose lives were “in play”. **Alyn Smith** (Greens/EFA) said that as “a Scottish European” recent events had left him “heartbroken”. He argued that Scotland had a Conservative Government it didn’t want, a referendum result that it didn’t vote for and was being taken down a “hard Brexit path” that was “demonstrably” against Scotland’s interests. For him, the UK Government needed to take a “long, hard look at itself” and stop doing “a bad thing badly”. **James Nicholson** (ECR) said that now was not the time to dwell on the past, but to come together for a better future. He reminded MEPs that Belfast had “long counted” on EU support and would be doing so again in the weeks and months head, while **Jill Evans** (Greens/EFA) also called on devolved interests in Wales to remain at the forefront of the Article 50 process. She said that the Welsh people should have a proper say on the kind of Brexit that they voted for. Lastly, **David Martin** (S&D) pointed out that, after spending over 30 years as an MEP, he was now worried that Brexit would lead to both the UK leaving the EU and Scotland leaving the UK. These were two outcomes that he had campaigned against but believed were more likely than ever given the “inevitable” hard Brexit that was being pursued by the British Government.

Closing remarks

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The debate then closed with short comments from the representatives of the EP political groups once more. **Marcel de Graaff** said that it was a “shame” that the UK was being criticised for leaving the Union and argued that Brexit should be used as an opportunity to “recalibrate” the direction of Europe by giving more responsibility to individual Member States. **Nigel Farage** said that any successful negotiations demanded “give and take” from both sides but argued that, as far as he could see, the EU wanted to do “all of the taking”. He pointed out that between the date of the referendum and that of Britain’s official withdrawal, the UK would have paid a net contribution somewhere in the region of €30 billion; a fee that for Farage, should more than cover any divorce settlement demanded by Brussels. **Philippe Lamberts** argued that there shouldn’t be a trade-off between the security of European citizens and any future economic partnership and he suggested that Prime Minister Theresa May’s Article 50 letter had perhaps sought to do this. Meanwhile **Gabriele Zimmer** simply said that Brexit was an entirely negative construct. For her, she saw the upcoming discussions as a means of “damage control”. **Guy Verhofstadt** said that he would put citizens at the heart of the Brexit process and re-affirmed that a particular effort had to be made to “reach out” to those British who had voted to Remain and wanted to keep their European connection. **Helga Stevens** called for calm. She said it was in everyone’s interest to negotiate with cool heads. **Gianni Pittella** argued that the UK had freely joined the European project and was, of course, free to leave. But he warned the British Government not to impose its “chaos” on the remaining 27 Member States. Lastly, **Manfred Weber** welcomed the day’s debate and suggested that it struck a “good tone”. His final comment was addressed directly to Nigel Farage with Weber suggesting that if Farage was so desperate to leave, given that Article 50 had now been triggered, perhaps there was no need for him to come back to the EP ever again.

Other News

EU27 leaders mark 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome

On Saturday 25 March, leaders of the EU27 Member States met in Rome to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome; the two documents that created the European Economic Community (EEC) (now known as the European Union) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC). Heads of State or Government of the EU27, alongside the leaders of the European Council, European Parliament and European Commission, also adopted and signed the Rome Declaration, setting out a vision for the EU's future.¹⁰

Commission approves new external roles for Lord Hill

On Wednesday 29 March, the Commission approved the appointment of Jonathan Hill, former Commissioner for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, to two positions with law-firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP and The Times Newspapers Ltd.¹¹ The Commission's Code of Conduct for Commissioners specifies a "cooling-off period" of 18 months after leaving office, during which former Commissioners must notify the Commission of any plans to take up a new position. No conditions have been specified for Lord Hill in his new post as one of six Independent National Directors of The Times Newspapers, but the Commission has specified some conditions for his role with Freshfields.

Sixteen countries sign up to EPPO

On Monday 3 April, the Council announced that 16 Member States had signed up to the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO): Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Finland, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.¹² In February, the Council formally registered the absence of unanimity in support of the draft Regulation, meaning that a minimum of nine countries were then free to pursue "enhanced cooperation".¹³ The aim of the Commission proposal is to help tackle crimes against the EU's financial interests by introducing a bespoke Office with competence in the field. Talks will now continue to finalise the text of the draft Regulation. A vote of consent in the European Parliament is required before formal adoption in Council.

EP President to make formal protest to Eurogroup President Dijsselbloem

On Monday 3 April, at the opening of the EP's April plenary session in Strasbourg, EP President Antonio Tajani announced that he would send Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem a formal letter of protest, following the latter's "repeated rejection" of invitations to address the EP.¹⁴ MEPs also criticised recent remarks made by Dijsselbloem about southern eurozone countries, and some called for him to resign or to be declared a "persona non grata" in the EP. Dijsselbloem responded with two letters; on Tuesday 4 April and Wednesday 5 April. In his first reply, he clarified the comments made to the German newspaper *Frankfurter*

¹⁰ The Rome Declaration is available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25-rome-declaration/>

¹¹ See Commission press release at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-783_en.htm

¹² See Council press release at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/04/03-epo/>

¹³ See Brussels Bulletin No. 531

¹⁴ See EP press release at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170329IPR69051/opening-ep-president-to-make-formal-protest-to-eurogroup-president-dijsselbloem>

Allgemeine Zeitung on the importance of solidarity and reciprocity within the EU.¹⁵ In the second letter, he reaffirmed his commitment to discuss the Greek financial situation with MEPs in a plenary session, and suggested the mini-plenary in Brussels at the end of April.¹⁶

German President addresses plenary session

On Tuesday 4 April, German President, **Frank-Walter Steinmeier**, addressed MEPs at Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg. Ahead of the EP voting on its Brexit Resolution the following day, Steinmeier said that all those who believed in Europe should not "give up on its valuable heritage" and he added that defending, preserving and promoting this represented an "historic duty". Steinmeier acknowledged that Europe was a "complicated and demanding project", but he noted that it was worth "all the effort" necessary to make it a success. Furthermore, he had words of warning to those who were deemed "opponents of Europe" and warned them against promoting fear and division for political gain. In his view, no European country was big enough, rich enough or strong enough to make itself heard in the modern world without the EU. He hoped that this in itself would be enough to not only see the European project survive but evolve and flourish in the years ahead.

MEPs pass emissions Recommendations

On Tuesday 4 April, MEPs passed a set of non-binding Recommendations that they hope will improve the regulation and transparency of vehicle emissions testing throughout the EU.¹⁷ The proposals were supported by 585 votes to 77 votes, with 19 abstentions, and will now be referred to Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) Committee ahead of upcoming inter-institutional negotiations on the subject with representatives of the Commission and Council. Tuesday's vote was largely guided by a final report published by the EP's Committee of Inquiry into Emission Measurement in the Automotive Sector (EMIS). In this report, MEPs concluded that although Commission and Council representatives had been aware for many years that vehicle emissions in laboratory tests differed noticeably from those measured on the roads, inadequate action was taken to appropriately protect air quality and public health.

EP adopts medical devices legislation

On Wednesday 5 April, the EP formally adopted two legislative proposals concerning medical devices, following a debate the previous day.¹⁸ The Commission proposed both draft Regulations, on medical devices and on in vitro diagnostic medical devices, in September 2012. The two legislative files cover a broad range of products. The aim of the package is to update the current legislation to ensure that products are safe, can be traced and traded properly across the EU, and that innovative products reach patients in a timely manner. Following several years of discussions within and between institutions, Council and EP representatives reached an informal agreement in May 2016. The Council adopted the new Regulations on 7 March 2017. Following EP adoption on 5 April, the two Regulations will be published in the Official

¹⁵ See Council press release at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/04/04-peg-jd-letter-ep/>

¹⁶ See Council press release at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/04/05-peg-letter-tajani/>

¹⁷ Further information on the EP emissions Recommendations can be found here - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170329IPR69052/car-emissions-meps-urge-eu-commission-and-member-states-to-clean-up-their-act>

¹⁸ See EP press release at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170329IPR69055/medical-devices-more-safety-more-traceability>

Journal. The new rules will come into effect in 2020 as regards medical devices, and in 2022 as regards in vitro diagnostic medical devices.

Parliament grants visa waiver for citizens of Ukraine

On Thursday 6 April, MEPs gave their formal approval to new legislation granting citizens of Ukraine the right to travel freely within the EU without the need for a short-stay visa. Under the new legislation, Ukrainians in possession of a biometric passport will be entitled to enter the EU without a visa for 90 days in any 180-day period under measures that will apply to all Union Member States (except the UK and Ireland), plus the four EFTA countries of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. MEPs passed the draft law by 521 votes to 75 votes, with 26 abstentions, and the legislation will now pass to the Council for formal approval. Following this, the new measures will enter into force 20 days after their publication in the EU Official Journal.

Calendar

Maltese Presidency: forthcoming European Council meetings (January-June 2017)

29 April: **European Council of EU27 to agree Brexit negotiating guidelines**

22-23 June: **European Council**

Maltese Presidency: forthcoming inter-parliamentary meetings in Valletta and Brussels (January-June 2017)

26-28 April: Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

28-30 May: COSAC Plenary Meeting

Forthcoming inter-parliamentary Committee meetings in the European Parliament (January-June 2017)

2 May: ICM: “The implementation of Treaty provisions concerning national Parliaments” (organised by the EP's Constitutional Affairs Committee)

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