

Courtesy translation

Statement of the Committee on Foreign Affairs 2020/21:UU5 Commission Work Programme 2021

In the statement, the Committee on Foreign Affairs presents its examination of the Commission Work Programme for 2021. In connection with the examination of the Work Programme, comments have been submitted by the Committee on the Constitution, the Committee on Taxation, the Committee on Justice, the Committee on Civil Affairs, the Committee on Defence, the Committee on Social Insurance, the Committee on Health and Welfare, the Committee on Environment and Agriculture and the Committee on the Labour Market. A summary of the comments and the parties' dissenting opinions is contained in the appendix.

The position of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

The Committee on Foreign Affairs would like to begin by emphasising the value of the presentation provided by the Commission in the Work Programme of the general approach and individual initiatives in its work for the coming year. The Work Programme contributes to openness and predictability in EU matters and thus provides valuable background material to assist the member states and in particular the national parliaments to plan their work with EU matters. At the same time, the Committee notes that the Commission, like the EU as a whole and the member states, has given evidence of an ability to act with flexibility during the last year. The Work Programme states that the Commission has undertaken more than 800 unplanned measures when dealing with the corona crisis. Yet this has not caused everything else to be set aside. In parallel, the Commission has implemented central parts of its original Work Programme for 2020 and also openly reported the reprioritisations that the situation has demanded by means of revising the current Work Programme. Overall, this means that the main aspects of development in various areas has been presented in different strategy documents, a number of which have been the object of examination by the Riksdag, and that there is now a basis from which it is possible to act. The Committee welcomes this.

The other committees have been given the opportunity to comment in the examination of the Work Programme. The Committee believes this to be an appropriate approach given the great range of issues covered by the Work Programme. For the comments, the Committee has asked five guiding questions in order to obtain the points of view of the committees concerning the general approach and individual initiatives in each of their particular areas. The Committee's intention is not to make a general assessment or in any other way take a position on what is put forward in the comments. Instead, the Committee wishes to see its statement as a way for the Riksdag committees to jointly convey their contributions and the political differences of opinion expressed in them. The contributions do not primarily aim to influence the current programming process. The Riksdag's examination has come too late in the process for that. An opportunity to influence the current programming process is instead provided through contacts with the Government in the form of information, deliberation and consultation in accordance with the provisions available for the committees and the Committee on EU Affairs. The purpose of the examination is rather both to present views valuable for the implementation of the Work Programme, that is for preparation of the individual initiatives, and to present views valuable for the next Work Programme that is to be presented in the autumn of 2021. In this way, the examination of the current Work Programme can still be forward-looking for the committees and help highlight issues at an early stage of the EU's decision-making process.

When it comes to providing some comments on the implementation of the previous Work Programme, the Committee wishes to pay particular attention to the fact that at the end of September the Commission presented the first Rule of Law Report, COM(2020) 580, which summarises the first annual cycle in the EU's new rule of law mechanism. The Committee encourages the Commission to continue this work since respect for the rule of law and human rights are fundamental in a democracy and are preconditions for the internal market, legal cooperation and an otherwise smoothly functioning union. The Committee welcomes the connection the Commission makes in the report to the EU's global role as a defender of human rights, democracy and the principle of the rule of law. The Chamber has referred the report for examination to the Committee on the Constitution which will report on its conclusions in a statement.

Regarding the matter of dealing with the corona crisis, there is reason to discuss whether the right measures have been taken at the right time and how the work should be continued in order to deal with the current crisis and also strengthen our ability to resist and deal with future crises. It is a complicated discussion, as, for example, it must be carried on in the light of the EU's and the member states' various powers. The Committee realises that it can be unavoidable that questions concerning which levels should decide on what will come up for discussion in the forthcoming conference on the future of the EU. However, the Committee maintains the view that the focus of the conference should be on encouraging participation and broad support from citizens at the national level. In the opinion of the Committee, the conference should not be a forum for an institutional tug-of-war and discussions on the division of competences (statement 2019/20:UU5). In this context, the Committee notes that several committees, among them the Committee on Taxation and the Committee on the Labour Market, within their particular areas stress the importance of maintaining the division of competences between the member states and the EU.

In light of the present Work Programme, on a more general level the Committee wishes once again to emphasise the importance of the Commission's work with improved legislation, from preparation of proposals to implementation, application and compliance with adopted legal instruments. This is as the Commission points out of central importance for the smooth functioning of the internal market and to safeguard civil rights. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission is now proceeding with its commitment in line with the "one in, one out" principle to compensate for new administrative burdens by easing existing burdens in the same area to the same extent. According to the Committee, the ambition, however, should be to reduce administrative burdens as a whole and the Committee therefore welcomes the Commission's continued work on evaluating the appropriateness and results of current legislation within the framework of the REFIT Programme. The Committee further wishes to recall how important it is that new proposals are based on well-founded impact assessments and that all work is permeated with a gender quality perspective.

As regards work on better legislation, the Committee notes the Commission's new approach to strategic foresight in order to establish a forward-looking culture in the formation of policy and preparation of new initiatives. The Committee shares the view of the need to analyse long-term trends as a way of making the EU more proactive and is looking forward to following the development of these efforts. However, the Committee would like to stress the fact that formulations on strategic autonomy must not be in conflict with endeavours to achieve free and fair foreign trade. As the Government states in explanatory memorandum 2019/20:FPM46, the EU must be a strong voice for multilateralism and free trade globally, without protectionism but with a clear connection between trade and the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The Committee therefore notes with satisfaction that in the Work Programme the Commission highlights world trade and its integrated value chains as an important engine for growth and a key to real global recovery. This is in line with what the Committee previously expressed in connection with common trade policy (Committee report 2019/20:UU10)

The Committee wishes to add that free and fair world trade requires active commitment on the part of the Commission, not least in order to maintain respect for the WTO's regulatory framework. The Committee considers this to be an important factor in securing the EU's long-term competitiveness. Another factor in ensuring this is investments in education and research as a foundation for a dynamic business sector and internationally competitive companies. One sector of particular strategic importance that the Committee wishes to highlight in this regard is artificial intelligence (AI). In the opinion of the Committee, it is crucial that the EU takes a leading role in the development of AI and its various applications in order to be able to steer the focus of what may be predicted to be a basis of tomorrow's economy, in accordance with the approach expressed in the Committee on Education's examination of the Commission's White Paper on Artificial Intelligence (Statement 2019/20:UbU20). In summary, the Committee welcomes the Commission's ambition to use the recovery to transition society and the economy to the requirements of the future. Even if it is natural for the Work Programme for next year to focus on the current situation, it is also important to deal with the Union's more long-term challenges.

As regards the contents of the Work Programme within the Committee's own area, it is primarily the initiatives mentioned under the heading A stronger Europe in the World that are in focus. Like the Commission, the Committee considers that the EU should be a strong global actor and that the EU as such has an important task in defending a rules- and values-based multilateral international order. The Committee therefore looks forward to the Communication on the EU's contribution to this work, which is due to be presented in the second quarter of 2021.

Regarding bilateral and regional relations, the Committee welcomes the Commission's intention to continue to prioritise the Western Balkans and the eastern neighbourhood. The Committee perceives this, together with the mention of the enlargement process in the introduction of the Work Programme where the Commission highlights areas where important progress has been made during the past year, as a commitment to maintaining the dynamics in the EU's continued enlargement. In the opinion of the Committee, the enlargement process is an important instrument in promoting stability and development in the EU's immediate neighbourhood. In this context, the Committee notes the

Commission's annual communication on enlargement policy, COM(2020) 660, and the criticism raised therein on developments in Turkey and that the assessment remains that the country's membership negotiations cannot be moved forward. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs provided information about the enlargement process at the Committee's meeting on 5 November 2020.

As regards the eastern neighbourhood, the Committee refers to its examination last spring of the Communication on Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020 (Statement 2019/20:UU16). Since then, however, the situation in Belarus has changed, and renewed fighting has broken out between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This requires the attention of the EU and the member states, for example, through support to the processes offered through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which Sweden will be chairing in 2021.

As regards Belarus, the Committee welcomes the fact that the EU was able to promptly join together in condemning how the presidential election in early August was conducted, as well as the attacks of the illegitimate regime on civilians. The Committee also welcomes the tougher criticism of and the clearer demands on the Belarusian regime that were included in the Swedish position ahead of the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 September 2020, after the preparatory discussion on the position which was held in connection with the Government's information to the Committee ahead of the Council meeting at a meeting on 17 September 2020. However, the Committee can but regret the fact that the first round of new sanctions listings, through which the EU's words of condemnation are put into action, could not be put in place until a protracted process, which had long been obstructed by a single member state, had come to an end. The risk is that this circumstance may damage trust in the EU, and this raises the question of the decision-making procedures for the common foreign and security policy. The Committee wishes to recall that a majority consisting of the Social Democratic Party, the Moderate Party, the Centre Party and the Green Party, at deliberations with the Government on 28 January 2020, considered that the Government should explore the possibility, under certain conditions and in certain areas, of a shift from the requirement for unanimous decisions to decisions by qualified majority. The Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party considered that the Government should act to promote such a change. The Sweden Democrats and the Left Party rejected this position. In the opinion of the Committee, it is positive that the EU, after the first obstruction, was able more promptly to agree on a further list of sanctions that also include Alexander Lukashenko.

In connection with this, the Committee also wishes to highlight the proposals to introduce a regulation on sanctions against serious human rights abuses and violations that the High Representative and the Commission adopted at the same time as the Work Programme. The proposals were the subject of information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at the Committee's meeting on 12 November 2020. In the opinion of the Committee, the presented proposals should receive high priority in the Council's decision-making process, and the Committee recalls that the Riksdag, following a proposal from the Committee, called on the Government by way of an announcement on 11 June 2020 asking that Sweden cooperate with other EU member states to bring about EU legislation imposing global EU sanctions legislation for human rights – Magnitsky sanctions (Committee report 2019/20:UU10, Communication from the Riksdag 2019/20:326).

In the opinion of the Committee, priority should also be given to a continued focus on the Southern Neighbourhood and Africa. Prior to the communication on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood which is to be presented during the first quarter of 2021, the Committee wishes to repeat some – still – relevant conclusions from the examination of the 2015 communication on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (Statement 2015/16:UU5). In the opinion of the Committee, the neighbourhood policy should be based on the universal values upon which EU cooperation is based, and serve as a deep and broad partnership, in which security-related matters and migration are two of many important components. As before, the Committee stresses the importance of a stabilisation in the neighbourhood, and that this can only be achieved with a foundation of respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. Furthermore, the Committee expects the work to be characterised by a clear gender equality perspective. The neighbourhood policy has attracted the Committee's interest for a long time and has also been the subject of examinations on two previous occasions (Statements 2014/15:UU18 and 2011/12:UU5). At its meeting on 9 July 2020, the Committee received information from the Government about the work with a new strategy for relations between the EU and Africa.

The Arctic is undergoing rapid change on account of global warming, and an increased geopolitical interest, with environmental, economic and security policy consequences. In view of this, the Committee considers it vital that the EU updates its approach to the Arctic region, and it therefore looks forward to the communication that is planned for the last quarter of 2021. The Committee recalls its examinations of the previous communication on the EU and the Arctic (Statements 2016/17:UU6 and 2009/10:UU4). The Committee will get back to this matter early next year in its consideration of the communication that the Government has submitted to the Riksdag on a new national strategy for the Arctic region (Communication 2020/21:7).

The Committee sees no grounds at present to comment on the other initiatives presented under the heading concerning

- disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants
- a global strategy for research, innovation, education and youth affairs
- the EU's humanitarian aid in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic
- a review of EU rules on consular protection.

The Committee notes that there are also other initiatives under other headings in the Work Programme that concern the Committee's areas of responsibility. These particularly concern the proposal on the EU's general system of preferences that is due to be presented in the second quarter next year. The general system of preferences regulates the EU's unilateral trade benefits for developing countries, which aim to promote sustainable development through trade, taking into account universal values such as human rights, central labour standards, environmental protection and good governance.

The list of REFIT initiatives in Annex II of the Work Programme and the list of withdrawals in Annex IV do not contain any initiatives within the Committee's areas of responsibility.

However, Annex III with priority pending proposals contains two proposals in areas in which the Committee is responsible. One concerns the extension of exceptional trade measures for countries and territories participating in or linked to the European Union's stabilisation and association process, COM(2020) 135. The trade measures aim to achieve asymmetrical trade liberalisation to the benefit of countries in the Western Balkans. The existing regulations expire on 31 December 2020. The Committee shares the opinion that the proposal should be prioritised, and notes in this context the Commission's communication on an economic and investment plan for the Western Balkans, COM(2020) 641.

The other priority proposal in the annex concerns a recast of the "PDA regulation" setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, transfer, brokering, technical assistance and transit of dual-use items, COM(2016) 616. On 20 October 2020, the Committee received written information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the results of the negotiations. The Committee, which has no objections to the proposal being prioritised, has monitored the issue since the proposal was presented and intends to continue to do so. In this connection, the Committee also notes the proposal from the Commission, COM(2020) 692 to amend the PDA regulation in order to limit the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the Union when the transition period expires at the end of 2020.

With regard to what has been stated above, the Committee proposes that the Riksdag file the statement.

Reservation from the Sweden Democrats

The representatives of the Sweden Democrats highlight the need to thoroughly consider whether the EU should be an observer in the Arctic Council in a reservation. If there is sufficient reason for the EU to be represented in the Arctic Council, it should be ensured, according to the party representatives, that there is no duplication between the EU and the member states that are also represented in the Arctic Council.

The party representatives are furthermore positive to deeper development cooperation with countries in Africa, but do not consider that this should be linked to measures to curb irregular migration to the EU, as there is a risk that the EU may be then exposed to extortion, as experience from Turkey clearly shows. Nor should development cooperation be regarded as a tool to reduce incentives for migration in itself. However, a clear connection should be made to the countries' cooperating to readmit their citizens.

Reservation from the Left Party

The representative of the Left Party emphasises in a reservation that Sweden needs to be able to pursue an independent foreign policy. Effective decision-making processes are admittedly important, but this should not limit the member states' influence. The party representative does not consider that, in view of the existing documentation, it is possible to assess what constitutional consequences a transition to decision-making by qualified majority in the common foreign and security policy would have, or what matters would be determined by majority decisions. The party representative highlights weaknesses in decisions that require unanimity, but considers that the solution to this would instead be to return foreign policy to the national level.

Finally, the party representative expresses a concern that the proposals on EU sanctions legislation for human rights – Magnitsky sanctions – does not contain sufficient guarantees for compliance with the rule of law.

APPENDIX

Summary of comments from other Riksdag committees

The comments by the Committee on the Constitution

The Committee on the Constitution is concerned about the increase in threats and violence with anti-Semitic motives and therefore welcomes the Commission's intention to draw up a strategy against anti-Semitism. The Committee on the Constitution also welcomes measures to improve the resilience of democracy against external influence. Among these are measures aimed at counteracting disinformation and the threat of external involvement in the elections to the European Parliament, as well as supporting free and independent media. At the same time, the Committee finds it difficult to evaluate the proposals as information on them in the Work Programme is rather scant. In conclusion, the Committee on the Constitution would like to recall previous objections to proposals on "spitzenkandidaten" and joint constituencies in elections to the European Parliament (see statement 2015/16:KU27 and record 2017/18:27, section 4).

Dissenting opinion Liberal Party

The representative of the Liberal Party states in a dissenting opinion that a strengthened role for the European Parliament is part of a desirable improvement and democratisation of European cooperation. The party representative therefore objects to the part of the Committee's standpoint that concerned "spitzenkandidaten" and joint constituencies in elections to the European Parliament.

The comments of the Committee on Taxation

The Committee on Taxation takes a positive view of the work in the EU to improve and simplify common regulatory frameworks and developments in work on corporate taxation making use of the potential in the internal market and making it easier to combat tax fraud and tax evasion. However, as was the case previously, the Committee on Taxation is opposed to a system of taxation that is based on a common consolidated corporate tax base. The Committee has great doubts about proposals that would mean a departure from the basis for the calculation of income which is traditionally used for income taxation of corporate profits. The Committee on Taxation emphasises the importance of the fact that the interests of small, open and export-dependent economies are taken into account when new regulations are being discussed. In the opinion of the Committee on Taxation, this also applies to new initiatives concerning for example a digital tax, and the Committee maintains its resistance in principle to powers in the area of taxation being moved from the member states to EU level, particularly in the case of direct taxes.

The comments of the Committee on Justice

The Committee on Justice has repeated its standpoint that the Commission should attach greater importance to analysing the current legislation when new legislation is being prepared and in particular that new penal law at EU level should only be developed if it provides significant added value.

The Committee on Justice has highlighted a number of initiatives that it believes should be included in the Work Programme. One of these concerns a revision of the API Directive, which concerns the obligation of carriers to provide advance information on passengers to the competent national authorities in order to improve border controls and combat illegal immigration. The Directive is also part of the fight against terrorism.

The Committee further believes that the initiative should be taken to improve the possibilities to transfer legal proceedings, and highlights in this connection the need for a review of the framework decision on the enforcement of custodial sentences.

The Committee on Justice also wishes there were proposals to safeguard and improve access to information and electronic evidence for crime-fighting, for example by means of a balanced system of regulation regarding data storage, encryption and effective cross-border access to electronic evidence.

A review is also called for of the PNR Directive, concerning the use of passenger name record data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime.

Finally, the Committee on Justice believes that a proposal should be produced to introduce compulsory biometric controls at external borders of people who enjoy free movement, in the same way as for third-country nationals.

The comments of the Committee on Civil Affairs

The Committee on Civil Affairs has limited its comments to the Commission's intention to prioritise the proposal for a directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges. The Committee continues to oppose this. In the Committee's comments, reference is made to the fact that the Riksdag considers that the proposal is in conflict with the principle of subsidiarity (statement 2012/13:U14, Parliamentary communication 2012/13:138) and has submitted an announcement to the Government that the Government should work towards national self-determination in the EU concerning the gender balance in boards of directors of Swedish companies (committee report 2016/17:CU6, Riksdag Communication 2016/17:133). The reasons given for the announcement included the fact that the rules that apply for how owners appoint board members should remain a matter for each member state to decide and that efforts to strengthen gender equality in the business sector should be at national level.

Dissenting opinion from the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party

The representatives of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party have in a dissenting opinion expressed their support for the Commission's prioritisation of the proposal on a more even gender distribution in listed companies. The motivation given includes the fact that the measures of individual member states are obviously not sufficient to utilise the opportunities for competitiveness and growth that follow from making good use of available competence, including that of women, in company boards. Because of its scope, the question can therefore better be dealt with if all member states act together.

Dissenting opinion from the Moderate Party

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives of the Moderate Party have called for certain proposals in the area of travel in order to strengthen consumer protection in the case of cancelled travel and the insolvency of tour operators in the light of the current crisis and similar situations in future.

Furthermore, it is stated that the proposal announced in the Work Programme concerning sustainable corporate governance should not be presented because further regulation of corporate sustainability work at EU level would run the risk of increasing the regulatory burden for companies in a way that is not in proportion to the benefits it may have.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives of the Sweden Democrats consider that the Commission should not present any proposal on sustainable corporate governance. The reason given is that there is no need for further regulation at EU level as regards sustainability work in Swedish companies and that Swedish companies themselves can determine how sustainability issues should be dealt with in their own business.

Separate statement of opinion from the Left Party

In a separate statement of opinion, the representative of the Left Party stresses the importance of a more even gender distribution regarding participation in decision-making in financial matters. However, it should be the task for each member state to take the initiative to achieve a more even gender distribution in company boards, the representative of the party believes, who therefore shares the Committee's view that the EU proposal on this should not be given priority.

The comments of the Committee on Defence

The Committee on Defence wishes to begin by stressing the fact that the EU has a unique position in Swedish foreign and defence policy. The Committee considers it of great value that the EU is developing within the areas of security and defence, while at the same time it is important to safeguard the competence of the member states in this area.

The Committee on Defence wishes to further highlight the importance of EU work on enhancing cybersecurity, and therefore takes a positive view that the Commission is prioritising the proposal to establish a European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and national coordination centres. The Committee on Defence is also looking forward to the announced action plan achieving synergies between civil, military and space industries.

The comments of the Committee on Social Insurance

The Committee on Social Insurance does not consider there to lack any proposal in the Commission's Work Programme or that any proposal in the Work Programme should not be presented.

As far as the Commission's priorities and overall direction are concerned, the Committee notes that the proposals in the new migration and asylum pact will continue to be given priority during 2021. The Committee takes a positive view of the Commission's ambition to remove the obstacles that existed previously regarding negotiations of certain proposals concerning a Common European Asylum System. The Committee considers that it is crucial that this work should progress, but the Committee maintains that the proposals are complex and that impact assessments need to be made.

The Committee on Social Insurance further notes that the provisions concerning coordination of social security systems, as in the Commission's list of priorities, are a precondition for ensuring that free movement will function in the EU. It is necessary for the provisions to be developed and modernised in pace with developments in society and in order to suit different types of social security systems, the Committee believes, and recalls that the needs to implement changes differ between different types of benefits. The Committee still considers that an agreement between the institutions should make use of the parts of the Commission's proposal which in their entirety aim to improve coordination while at the same time respecting national self-determination. In the opinion of the Committee, the proposal must not entail a restriction of the member states' national competence and should neither imply that more benefits are covered by the coordination provisions nor that more benefits are paid out in connection with taking up residence in another member state.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

The representatives of the Sweden Democrats state in a dissenting opinion that several of the Commission's proposals restrict the rights of member states and must therefore be discouraged, or at least reworked. The proposal on a Union Resettlement Framework should be retracted, the party representatives believe, as the member states themselves should determine whether they wish to receive people who are to be resettled and how many.

Regarding a renewed partnership with the southern neighbourhood, the party representatives wish to point out that all cooperation must be conditional on the fact that third countries cooperate fully in order to stop illegal migration and readmit their citizens.

As far as the announced initiatives concerning smuggling of human beings and the return of migrants are concerned, it is stated that the Commission's priorities should be to protect the EU's borders and stop illegal and irregular migration. The party representatives would further like to point out the need, as part of the reform of Schengen, to phase out the constraints on member states' self-determination in connection with being able to introduce various forms of restrictions at border crossing points.

As regards European systems for cooperation on data on migration, the party representatives believe that the Commission should prioritise all initiatives that improve the opportunity to share information on the entry and exit of aliens and potential risks to the EU and Sweden. As regards the proposal for a new directive for returning third-country nationals, the party representatives also believe that all attempts to restrict the opportunities for member states to implement detention or other control measures should be counteracted while at the same time opportunities for cooperation in order to enforce expulsion should be expanded.

In general, the party representatives believe that the Commission's priorities regarding the European Pact on Asylum and Migration should be to improve security in Europe and increase the defence of the EU's external border. The Commission should not present proposals that would entail limitations of member states' self-determination, or proposals that would mean coercive measures for member states.

In conclusion, the party representatives would like to point out that while they support the basic idea of coordinating social security and the EU's social pillar, the preservation of national competence must be emphasised and remain in focus also in the case of social matters.

The comments of the Committee on Health and Welfare

The Committee on Health and Welfare concentrates its comments on the question of the distribution of powers in the area of social policy. The Committee considers the Commission's ambitions to work for better public health and social justice to be commendable, but the Committee would like to emphasise the importance of respecting national powers. The distribution of competences between the EU and the member states established in the treaties applies regardless of external events or crises. The measures the Commission are taking to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and limit the spread of infection must therefore be kept within the framework of the EU's powers, the Committee points out. The

committee will be examining legislative proposals from the EU thoroughly and working to ensure that the treaty-based distribution of competences between the EU and the member states is respected.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a dissenting opinion, the members from the Sweden Democrats emphasise the importance of budgetary discipline at EU level and that forthcoming proposals should not affect the Swedish EU membership fee.

The comments of the Committee on Environment and Agriculture

In its comments, the Committee on Environment and Agriculture points out that it would welcome a review of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive as they are relatively old and the circumstances have changed for most of the species and habitats regulated by the directives.

The Committee stresses that the basic preconditions for the strategies for biological diversity and for European forests must be equal, where biological diversity is an issue regulated by EU law, while forestry policy comes under the category of national competence and national self-determination. The implementation of the strategy for biological diversity must not limit national self-determination in forestry issues and for the same reason, the coming forestry strategy should be kept at a general level, states the Committee.

In the light of the UK's secession from the EU, the Committee on Environment and Agriculture raises the subject of preconditions for fisheries and the processing industry as well as common responsibility for common fish stocks, in which the Committee would like to see legal clarity and predictability as regards proposals from the EU.

The Committee on Environment and Agriculture also points out that it is important to include infectious animal diseases in efforts to strengthen the EU's framework for discovering and reacting to serious cross-border health threats. The Committee also believes that the directives on the release of GMO and on GMO in food and animal feedstuffs should be evaluated, as modern plant breeding technology has developed so rapidly.

Furthermore, the Committee calls for a review of state aid rules for biofuels in order to create a long-term approach in the formulation of policy and regulatory frameworks. In addition to this, the Committee would like the Commission to look more closely at the question of a common regulatory framework for capturing and storing carbon dioxide.

In the announced follow-up of the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Committee on Environment and Agriculture notes that the Commission intends to promote organic production. Because of this, the Committee points out how important it is that the follow-up should focus on promoting an increase in sustainable food production.

The Committee also believes that the border adjustment mechanism for carbon dioxide that the Commission is to propose must not be developed into a conventional import duty and it is therefore crucial that the effects on trade and competitiveness are analysed thoroughly, including compatibility with the WTO regulatory framework, in work on formulating the proposal.

In conclusion, the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture would like to draw attention to its examination of the communication on the Green Deal (statement 2019/20: MJU17), in which the Committee develops its opinion on several of the issues included in the Commission's Work Programme.

Dissenting opinion from the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party point out that the EU's forestry strategy should be coordinated, coherent and equal with and of the same relevance as the EU's strategy for biological diversity, and that these are the basic preconditions for both strategies.

Dissenting opinion from the Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats.

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives of the Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats add that the review of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive that the Committee recommends should also include the appendices to the directives.

In connection with the announced review of the directive on renewable energy, the party representatives state that nuclear power is a precondition for climate adaptation in the same way as renewable energy. The focus for the Commission's coming work should, they believe, thus be to achieve a fossil-free energy system in a cost-effective way, and not to weigh up different fossil-free energy types against each other.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives of the Sweden Democrats add that a more strict approach to the EU goals for carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 should apply equally to all countries and that the decision should be preceded by an account of how each country has reduced its emissions up until 31 December 2019.

Furthermore, the party representatives have a number of proposals concerning nature conservation and forestry. These include the goal for protected land areas in the EU, the possibility for forest owners to voluntarily protect forest and receive compensation for doing so and the need to safeguard national competence for the protection of virgin forest and above all old-growth forest. The party representatives also call to attention how important it is that a change to the incorporation of the Århus Convention must not result in the activities of smaller companies being blocked in long processes.

In conclusion, it is stated that the EU should, as far as possible, avoid detailed control and that various non-fossil energy sources must be dealt with in a way that does not distort competition.

Dissenting opinion from the Left Party

In a dissenting opinion, the representative from the Left Party points out that the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive are necessary for biological diversity and that we should not open up to a deterioration of protection through a review of the directives.

The EU's strategies for forests and biological diversity should, in the opinion of the party representative, be formulated within the framework of sustainable ecosystems and international undertakings. Sweden should also continue to have national disposition to formulate its forestry policy in accordance with these frameworks. The party representative also states that the Commission needs to work for sustainable fishing and that the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle should be applied in the case of GMO.

In conclusion, the importance of promoting an increase in organic production is emphasised in connection with the follow-up of the “farm to fork” strategy.

Dissenting opinion from the Liberal Party

In a dissenting opinion, the representative from the Liberal Party considers that the follow-up of the strategy for biological diversity should be welcomed and not only noted.

The party representative would also like the Committee in its statement on the border adjustment mechanism for carbon dioxide to add that the Committee is looking forward to continuing working with this and that it sees a great need for the EU to put a price on a larger share of its emissions.

The comments of the Committee on the Labour Market

In its comments, the Committee on the Labour Market welcomes the action plan for the implementation of the European pillar for social rights (the social pillar) that is announced in the Work Programme. The Committee on the Labour Market considers that the social pillar contains the priorities needed to meet the challenges posed by the economic downturn in the wake of the pandemic.

The Committee emphasises that a central starting point for EU cooperation must be that the distribution of powers between the EU and the member states in the areas of social policy is respected, particularly in the area of labour law. The Swedish labour market model must be vigorously safeguarded in EU cooperation, the Committee believes, and stresses the fact that the social pillar has not changed the division of competences as a result of the EU treaties, but it encourages the member states to act themselves in the areas where it is necessary to do so.

The social pillar at EU level should, in the opinion of the Committee on the Labour Market, primarily be implemented by means of existing tools and processes for employment and social policy within the framework of the European Semester. The primary responsibility rests on the member states while at the same time coordination at EU level can help bring about positive results in the member states.

In conclusion, the Committee on the Labour Market recalls that it has criticised a number of proposals in the area of labour law, but that these proposals have not been presented to implement the social pillar.

Dissenting opinion from the Moderate Party, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats.

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives from the Moderate Party, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats state that the action plan for the implementation of the social pillar should not be a prioritised part of the Commission's Work Programme. The representatives of these parties believe that the Commission needs to take a step back in the

area of social policy and instead focus on economic recovery after the corona crisis. The social reforms that some countries need to implement are a national responsibility and nothing that the EU should use its resources to push forward. Unlike the Committee, the representatives of these parties believe that the social pillar would result in more supra-national authority in the area of social policy and they deeply regret that a long series of binding rules in the area of social policy, particularly in the area of labour law, have been presented with reference to the social pillar.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a dissenting opinion, the representatives of the Sweden Democrats point out that every member state should be responsible for social policy without the involvement of the EU. The party representatives stress that they have been opposed to the social pillar from the start because they fear that it results in the EU having increased powers in the area of social policy. According to the dissenting opinion, the EU must address itself to issues where there is clear added value for all member states, as for example for trade and the fight against terrorism. In the light of this, the party representatives consider that the Commission should back off completely in the case of the social issues in the Work Programme, which instead should focus on a small number of areas where the EU can do some good, and social policy is not among these areas.