



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2008)1833 final

Brussels, 11 June 2008

MINUTES
of the 1833rd meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 4 June 2008
(morning)

PV(2008)1833 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 4 June 2008 (morning)

The sitting opened at 09.16 hours with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair. Items 12 to 16 were chaired by Ms WALLSTRÖM.

Present

Mr BARROSO	President	Items 1 to 11
Ms WALLSTRÖM	Vice-President	
Mr VERHEUGEN	Vice-President	
Mr BARROT	Vice-President	Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President	
Mr TAJANI	Vice-President	Items 1 to 16 (in part)
Ms REDING		
Mr DIMAS		
Mr ALMUNIA		Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms HÜBNER		Items 10 (in part) to 16
Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ		
Mr POTOČNIK		
Mr FIGEL'		
Mr MICHEL		Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Mr KOVÁCS		
Ms KROES		Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Mr McCREEVY		
Mr ŠPIDLA		Items 10 (in part) to 16
Mr MANDELSON		Items 1 to 10
Mr PIEBALGS		
Ms KUNEVA		Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr ORBAN		
Ms VASSILIOU		Items 10 and 11

Absent

Mr BORG

Mr REHN

Ms FISCHER BOEL

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER

(4 June 2008)

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission:

Mr TABONE	Chef de cabinet to Mr BORG	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr SAAB	A member of Mr BORG's staff	Items 10 (in part) to 16
Ms ÅSENIUS	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr REHN	
Mr WEGENER FRIIS	A member of Ms FISCHER BOEL's staff	
Mr CHILD	Chef de cabinet to Ms FERRERO-WALDNER	Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Ms MARTÍNEZ CARBONELL	A member of Ms FERRERO-WALDNER's staff	Items 11 (in part) to 16

The following also sat in:

Mr VALE DE ALMEIDA	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 11
Ms DURAND	Acting Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr SØRENSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr LAITENBERGER	Commission Spokesman	Items 1 to 10
Ms AHRENKILDE	DG Communication - Spokesman's Service	Items 11 to 16
Mr GASPAR	Acting Director-General, Bureau of European Policy Advisers	Items 1 to 11
Mr THEBAULT	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 11
Ms MARTINHO	Chief adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 11 (in part)
Mr PÉREZ CALDENTEY	A member of Mr ALMUNIA's staff	Items 10 (in part) to 16
Ms CYGAN	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms HÜBNER	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms SCHREIBER	Chef de cabinet to Mr ŠPIDLA	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms BUGNOT	Chef de cabinet to Mr ORBAN	Item 11
Ms QUINTIN	Director-General - DG Education and Culture	Item 11

Secretary: Ms DAY, Secretary-General, assisted by Mr AYET PUIGARNAU, Director in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2008)1833/3; SEC(2008)1962/2)

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings.

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET

(SEC(2008)1833)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 2 June.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1832ND MEETING
(28 MAY)**

(PV(2008)1832; PV(2008)1832, PART II AND /2)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1832nd meeting.

4. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNITY LAW

STATE AID – INDIVIDUAL CASES – RECAPITULATIVE LIST

(SEC(2008)1989; SEC(2008)1988)

The Commission adopted the decisions in the recapitulative list in SEC(2008)1989.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2008)1964 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 26 and 30 May.

5.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2008)1965 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 26 and 30 May.

5.3. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2008)1966 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 26 and 30 May, as archived in e-Greffe.

5.4. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2008)1967 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 2 and 6 June and of the "finalisation" written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on 2 June.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2008)1963/2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2008)79/2)

**6.1. OLAF – INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION
(GRADE AD14/15) AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION (GRADE AD14 -
EU-27) OF VACANCY NOTICES FOR A DIRECTOR POST
(PERS(2008)80)**

On the basis of the proposal from the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr KALLAS, the Commission endorsed the publication, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), 29(1)(b) and 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notices in PERS(2008)80 for the post of Director (Investigations and Operations I), in the European Anti-Fraud Office.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**6.2. OLAF – EXTERNAL PUBLICATION OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN
AD14 (EU-12) CHIEF ADVISER POST
(PERS(2008)81)**

On the basis of the proposal from the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr KALLAS, the Commission endorsed the publication under Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations of the vacancy notice in PERS(2008)81 for the post of AD14 (EU-12) Chief Adviser in the European Anti-Fraud Office.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**6.3. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR
(PERS(2007)14 TO /5)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director (Representations), in DG Communication (PERS(2007)14, /2 and /4).

The Commission took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 19 January and 1 February (PERS(2007)14/3 and /5).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered the applicants' ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms WALLSTRÖM, it then decided to appoint Ms Lieve FRANSEN to the vacant post.

This decision would take effect on 1 July 2008.

**6.4. DG EDUCATION AND CULTURE – AMENDMENT OF THE
ORGANISATION CHART AND APPOINTMENT OF AD15 CHIEF
ADVISER**

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr FIGEL', the Commission decided:

- to create a post of Chief Adviser in DG Education and Culture;
- to fill that post, in accordance with Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, by transferring in the interest of the service Mr David WHITE, AD15 official and currently Director (Lifelong learning: horizontal Lisbon issues and international affairs) in DG Education and Culture, with a view to his fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence for the 2008-2009 academic year (1 September 2008 to 31 July 2009).

These decisions would take effect on 1 September 2008.

**6.5. DG EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
– REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION FROM THE RETIREMENT AGE FOR
AN AD16 OFFICIAL**

The Commission took note of the decision by Mr KALLAS to accept, under the second paragraph of Article 52 of the Staff Regulations, the request for exemption from the retirement age of 65 submitted by Mr Nikolaus VAN DER PAS, AD16 official and currently Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Mr Nikolaus VAN DER PAS' new retirement date was set at 31 May 2009.

**7. COMMISSION DECISION CONCERNING A PROCEEDING UNDER
ARTICLE 8(2) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 139/2004 ON THE
CONTROL OF CONCENTRATIONS BETWEEN UNDERTAKINGS AND
ARTICLE 57 OF THE EEA AGREEMENT (CASE COMP/M.4513 –
ARJOWIGGINS/M-REAL ZANDERS REFLEX)
(C(2008)2382 TO /5)**

The Commission:

- took note of the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Concentrations of 21 May in C(2008)2382/3;
- took note of the final report of the Hearing Officer of 23 May in C(2008)2382/4;
- adopted, in the authentic language (English), the decision set out in C(2008)2382/5, declaring the notified operation compatible with the common market and with operation of the Agreement on the European Economic Area, subject to full compliance with the commitments made, as set out in Annex 4 to document C(2008)2382/5;

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- decided to notify the decision set out in C(2008)2382/5 to the firm concerned, together with the final report of the Hearing Officer and the opinion of the Advisory Committee;
- decided that the most important parts of the decision and the opinion of the Advisory Committee and the report of the Hearing Officer would be published in the official languages in the Official Journal of the European Union (with business secrets removed);
- decided to publish the decision (with business secrets removed) on the Internet.

8. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

8.1. 4TH TOKYO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT (TICAD IV) (YOKOHAMA, 28-30 MAY) (SEC (2008)2007)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr MICHEL in SEC(2008)2007.

8.2. VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN (ASHGABAT, 26 MAY) (SEC (2008)2005)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr PIEBALGS in SEC(2008)2005.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9TH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS BIODIVERSITY CONVENTION (BONN, 19-30 MAY)

(SEC(2008)2008)

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr DIMAS in SEC(2008)2008.

10. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(SEC(2008)1968)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group held on Friday 30 May (SEC(2008)1968).

It paid particular attention to the following:

10.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Codecision procedure

(point 1.2 of the IRG record)

1st reading – Progress report

- Common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (Directive) – WEBER report – 2005/0167 (COD)

The Commission took note of progress in this dossier and authorised Mr BARROT to pursue contacts with Parliament and the Council in order to reach agreement at first reading following the line set out in SI(2008)1095.

- Common rules for the internal market for electricity (Directive) / common rules for the internal market for natural gas (Directive) / setting-up of the

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Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (Regulation) / conditions for access to the network for cross-border exchanges in electricity (Regulation) / conditions for access to the natural gas transmission networks (Regulation) – MORGAN / CHICHESTER / VIDAL-QUADRAS / LA RUSSA / PAPARIZOV reports – 2007/0195 (COD) / 2007/0196 (COD) / 2007/0197 (COD) / 2007/0198 (COD) / 2007/0199 (COD) – Preparation of general policy line for the Council (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) (Luxembourg, 6 June 2008)

The Commission took note of developments in this dossier and of the discussions that might take place in the Council meeting (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) on 6 June and authorised Mr PIEBALGS to support a compromise between the Member States, while reserving its position until Parliament had stated its position, following the line set out in SP(2008)1071/3.

ii) Preparation for June I part-session of Parliament

(point 1.3 of the IRG record)

In accordance with the rules in force, the Commission authorised the Commission Members responsible, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms WALLSTRÖM and any other Members associated, to take a position on Parliament's amendments to its proposals.

It paid particular attention to the following:

Codecision – 1st reading

- Hygiene of foodstuffs (Regulation) – SCHNELLHARDT report – 2007/0037B (COD)

The Commission authorised Mr VERHEUGEN and Ms VASSILIOU to pursue contacts with Parliament and the Council in order to reach agreement at first reading following the line set out in SP(2008)2948/2.

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- Prohibition on the use in stockfarming of certain substances having a hormonal or thyreostatic action and of beta agonists (Directive) – SCHEELE report – 2007/0102 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1829.

**iii) Preparations for the Council meeting (Justice and Home Affairs)
(Luxembourg 5-6 June)**

(point 1.4 of the IRG record)

- Timetable for implementation of the second-generation Schengen Information System (SIS II)

The Commission took note of the timetable set out in SI(2008) 1098 and of its submission to the Council, following the line set out in that note.

- Applicable law in matrimonial matters (Rome III) (Council Regulation) – GEBHARDT report – 2006/0135 (CNS)

The Commission authorised Mr BARROT to support, at the Council meeting (Justice and Home Affairs) on 5 and 6 June, the conclusions of the Council Presidency, following the line set out in SI(2008) 1099.

iv) Preparation of Council meeting (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumers) (Luxembourg, 9 and 10 June)

(point 1.5 of the IRG record)

- Organisation of working time (Directive) – CERCAS ALONSO report – 2004/0209 (COD)
- Working conditions for temporary workers (Directive) – VAN DEN BURG report – 2002/0072 (COD)
- Improving the portability of supplementary pension rights (Directive) – OOMEN-RUIJTEN report – 2005/0214 (COD)

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The Commission approved the line set out in notes SI(2008)1072, SI(2008)1073 and SI(2008)1104, and authorised M. ŠPIDLA, at the Council meeting (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumers) on 9 and 10 June, to support the Council Presidency with a view to reaching political agreement.

10.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL

v) Programming of Council business

(SI(2008)1078)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2008)1078 on the Council meetings between 29 May and 11 June.

vi) Results of the meetings of the Eurogroup and of the Council (Economic and Financial Affairs) (Luxembourg, 2 and 3 June), and preparation of the Council meeting (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) (Luxembourg, 6 June) and the European Council (Brussels, 19 and 20 June)

(SEC(2008)2006/2)

– Rising food and energy prices

The PRESIDENT explained that this matter was being brought before the Commission with a view to preparing its contribution to the debates at the European Council meeting on 19 and 20 June in Brussels. The issue would be discussed again at the next Commission meeting, on the basis of the findings of an interdepartmental group that was currently looking into it.

The PRESIDENT then gave the floor to Mr ALMUNIA, who reported on the meetings of the Eurogroup and of the Council (Economic and Financial Affairs) on 2 and 3 June. He focused in particular on the exchange of views on food and oil prices, which had been based largely on the communication from the Commission presenting policy options to tackle rising food prices. He also mentioned a letter sent to several Members of the Commission by

Ms Christine Lagarde, French Minister for Economic Affairs, Industry and Employment, which had also been discussed in the Council. At the end of its meeting the Council had approved conclusions which would be sent to the President of the European Council to help prepare its meeting on 19 and 20 June.

Mr ALMUNIA noted that the Council and the Eurogroup agreed with the Commission's views regarding structural factors, the short-term consequences of rising prices and the links between the price of food, oil and other basic goods, but also as regards the need for the EU and its Member States to react in a coherent and coordinated fashion.

He was pleased to report that the Council had endorsed the agreement approved in September 2005 at an informal ministerial meeting in Manchester, by which the Finance Ministers had undertaken to coordinate their response to the rise in oil prices and to limit tax adjustments and political intervention that would distort the markets and prevent the necessary adjustments to the economy. He also warned of the serious consequences of overly interventionist measures not just on prices, but also on the operation of markets as a whole.

Nevertheless, he felt it was legitimate to take certain targeted measures aimed at supporting those sections of the population that were hit hardest by the current developments. He also mentioned the debate on a specific tax on windfall profits, which certain Member States were considering, and on the short-term measures taken under the common agricultural policy to cushion the effects of price rises. There had also been discussions on achieving greater transparency as regards European oil stocks; he felt this initiative was a valuable one but should be implemented by the Member States.

Lastly, M. ALMUNIA stressed that it was important for the Commission to explain to the public not only the reasons behind the trend in the prices of certain basic goods and the connection with the rise in food prices, but also the measures it was proposing to cushion the effects of these increases.

Mr PIEBALGS followed up Mr ALMUNIA's presentation, discussing in particular the developments in the energy field and the trend in energy prices. He thought that energy prices would remain at a rather high level in the short and medium term, as the only possible reason for a drop in prices would be a slowdown in the economy, which no one would want. Furthermore, the data available did not appear to rule out the possibility of a further rise in oil prices.

As regards the reasons for rising energy prices, Mr PIEBALGS cited in particular the gap between growing demand for oil and current supply, as certain oil-producing countries were not using - or were not able to use - their full capacity. He also pointed to the indexing of gas prices on the basis of oil prices, which had also contributed to the rising prices on the energy market.

He felt that the EU should pursue its strategy on energy and combating climate change, and in particular the target of a 20% reduction in energy consumption and a 20% increase in the share of renewables by 2020. He stressed the importance of keeping a watchful eye on the oil market, of a level-playing field in that market, of dialogue with oil-producing countries and of energy savings, particularly in the transport sector. Sustainability was of course a central objective of the proposed measures.

He also noted the wide differences in the effects of price increases on different sectors of the economy, as industries with lower energy consumption were naturally less affected than others such as fisheries. He shared the concerns regarding the effects of rising energy prices on people with low purchasing power, but felt that a general cut in certain energy taxes would be counterproductive; any tax relief measures should concentrate instead on specifically reducing the burden on low-income groups.

Finally, he mentioned other issues that had been raised in the debate on price rises, such as tighter surveillance of energy markets or possible links between the refining process and trends in fuel prices. He also touched on the positive contribution of biofuels to energy supply and the stability of energy prices,

while stressing that they played a supporting role alongside oil and natural gas. He agreed with Mr ALMUNIA that there was scope for greater transparency as regards strategic and commercial stocks in the Member States.

M. MICHEL then spoke about the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Conference on Food Security to be held in Rome from 3 to 5 June, in which Ms FISCHER BOEL and himself would take part.

In the present context he felt that the priority should be to mitigate the short-term effects of rising food prices, to boost production and to demonstrate solidarity with the populations most affected. In this connection, the Commission had already mobilised around €280 million in 2008 to finance emergency aid measures.

He stressed the value of the measures taken under the common agricultural policy to mitigate the effects of rising prices. He also drew attention to the predicament of certain African producer countries which had seen a significant drop in their agricultural production capacity, and to the wide differences between the situation of small farmers and that of big agricultural enterprises.

What was most important was for the EU and the Member States to coordinate their response to the challenges posed by rising food prices. That response should be based on a comprehensive analysis of the situation and joint planning, so that support measures could be rendered as effective as possible. He insisted on the need for additional reforms in other areas, in particular farmers' access to seeds and fertilisers, and the organisation of the food production chain, an issue that was closely bound up with questions of regional and local governance.

Finally, Mr MICHEL questioned the justification and usefulness of certain proposals aimed at creating a world food fund. He much preferred further reform of existing instruments for cooperation and development, in particular

international organisations, including the FAO, but also the World Food Programme (WFP). He also pointed out that more emphasis could be placed on trade support in economic partnership agreements.

The Commission then held a detailed discussion during which the following aspects were examined:

- the high public expectations vis-à-vis political leaders at Community level and in the Member States;
- the responsibility of the Commission, which had to provide guidelines for the Member States, but also of the Member States themselves, which had to implement an approved common strategy;
- the importance of a thorough and sound analysis of the phenomenon, of defining a balanced, long-term strategy and of providing comprehensive and targeted information on the measures planned and the instruments proposed to implement them;
- the conviction that the EU's strategy on energy and combating climate change, with its emphasis on sustainability, was the most effective and appropriate response to the problems that had arisen;
- the case for considering the use of Community budget resources to finance among other things food security and food aid measures, within the limits of what was possible and with due regard for the applicable budgetary procedures;
- the global scale of the problems in question, which demanded cooperation at international level in order to find fair and lasting solutions;
- the link between energy price rises and food price rises and the priority to be attached to this point;
- the role of speculation as a contributory factor to the current price rises;

- the importance of making additional efforts on the communication front, in order to explain more effectively the role of biofuels in trends in food and fuel prices as a whole;
- the relevance of the Manchester agreement in the present context;
- doubts as to the usefulness, effectiveness and feasibility of tax cuts or subsidies as instruments to counter rising prices, but also comments on the benefits of a possible specific tax on windfall profits;
- questions regarding the impact of revenue reinvested in Europe by oil-exporting countries through sovereign wealth funds;
- on biofuels, the priority to be given to environmental considerations and in particular sustainability;
- the key importance in the present context of social justice and social cohesion, and the links between price rises and the package of social measures to be laid before the Commission in July;
- the impact of fuel price rises in the transport sector and in particular air transport, given the specific nature of that mode of transport and the restructuring process under way;
- the importance of the operation of - and competition in - the oil market;
- the viewpoint of energy consumers, the issue of enhancing and promoting their rights, and the value of the conference with stakeholders held by the Commission on 6 May;
- the probable increase in global energy demand in the years ahead;
- the need to take account of the particular situation of energy-intensive industries;

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- the effects of rising energy prices on the competitiveness of European industry, on jobs and wages and also on the level of spending on R&D;
- the bright prospects offered by the development of new technologies in the energy field; the importance of encouraging innovation and the development of new technologies to replace fossil fuels;
- a strong desire for greater transparency regarding the stocks in the Member States;
- the case for examining the question of natural gas prices being indexed on oil prices.

The PRESIDENT wound up the debate and thanked the Members of the Commission for their contributions. He stressed the Commission's task, which was to present a credible, balanced, long-term strategy and explain it to the public. He noted that food and energy were key issues for ordinary citizens against a background of ever-increasing world demand.

He stressed the relevance, in the face of current developments, of the EU's strategy on energy and combating climate change, in particular the targets for reducing consumption and diversifying energy sources. He was worried by certain positions that had been adopted recently and pointed out that the European Council had unanimously adopted that strategy in 2007.

Finally, the PRESIDENT asked Commission Members to pass on to Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ, himself, the Secretariat-General and the Directorate-General for the Budget any idea or proposal on instruments for delivering aid to those most affected by the price rises and on how to finance them.

The Commission took note of this information and of the information note from Mr PIELBALGS in SEC(2008)2006/2.

vii) Adoption by the Commission of non-binding instruments at international level

(point 2.3 of the IRG record)

- Memorandum of Understanding on International Tax Dialogue

The Commission authorised M. KOVÁCS to sign on its behalf the Memorandum of Understanding on the Operation of the International Tax Dialogue, as set out in SI(2008) 1100, following the line set out in that note.

10.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

viii) Action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions

(point 3.5.2 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2008)3164 on the action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions adopted at its April I part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

ix) Action taken on Parliament's legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions

(point 3.5.3 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2008)3169 on the action taken on the opinions and resolutions adopted by Parliament at its April I and II part-sessions, for transmission to Parliament.

x) Participation by Members of Parliament in international conferences

(point 3.7 of the IRG record)

- Third meeting of the parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) (Riga, 11-13 June 2008)

The Commission decided to approve the request from Mr PÖTTERING, President of Parliament, to the PRESIDENT, concerning the participation of three Members of the European Parliament at the above meeting.

xi) Internal reform of Parliament

(point 3.8 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)3173 and /2.

**11. POLICY DEBATE ON MULTILINGUALISM
(SEC(2008)2017)**

The PRESIDENT opened the debate by stating that its purpose was to establish guidelines for the new framework strategy on multilingualism, which would be presented in September.

He reminded those present that multilingualism was a priority for the current Commission, thanked Mr FIGEL' for the work carried out in this area from 2004 to 2006 and expressed his satisfaction at having been able, with the arrival of Mr ORBAN, to make multilingualism a full-fledged Commission portfolio, thereby clearly demonstrating its faith in the potential of a multilingualism policy for Europe.

He then evoked the practical and emotional nature of language, which is part of citizens' daily lives and an important component of their identity. The challenge was

to ensure that linguistic diversity, which testifies to the wealth of European culture, would not be seen as an obstacle to intercultural dialogue and competitiveness but would become, on the contrary, an asset for the European Union. Citizens, increasingly faced with multilingual environments, should be helped to overcome linguistic and cultural obstacles, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity.

Today's discussions would not cover the internal language arrangements of the European institutions, but rather how to ensure that language policy contributed to creating a prosperous and integrated Europe.

The PRESIDENT pointed out that the strategy being prepared for September would rest on a wide-ranging consultation with the Member States, the European institutions and the various stakeholders. The working groups set up to address these issues would also be making a significant contribution.

Mr ORBAN thanked the PRESIDENT for his introduction and support for a true European policy on multilingualism.

He also mentioned the excellent work carried out by his predecessor, including the identification by the Member States of language learning as an essential skill and the growing recognition of linguistic diversity as part of Europe's cultural heritage.

He noted that the creation of a portfolio devoted exclusively to multilingualism made it possible to take a broader view of the results that could be achieved by such a policy; but it had also created high expectations. In this regard, the consultation process had made it possible to gain the support of numerous Member States and stakeholders. What was important now was for the entire Commission to translate its commitments into practical measures.

Regarding the Communication that would be presented in September, Mr ORBAN first explained that it was very ambitious and that the intention was to go beyond the mere objective of safeguarding linguistic diversity.

By its nature, multilingualism was a highly political matter. Beyond the simple language question, multilingualism could build bridges and defuse tensions in

society, a message to which Mr ORBAN would accord a central place in the Communication. He also stressed the importance that multilingualism not be reserved for an elite and pointed to the link between language skills and the exercise of democratic rights.

He too confirmed that the contents of the Communication would not cover the institutions' language arrangements, but would establish the framework for a policy of promoting intercultural dialogue, increasing feelings of European citizenship and helping European companies to become more competitive.

Regarding the elements that would be developed in the Communication, Mr ORBAN said that he would appreciate reactions from the Commission Members on the following questions: (i) the usefulness of reaffirming the commitment undertaken in Barcelona in 2002 to promote the learning of two foreign languages and the resources to be deployed to help the Member States achieve this objective, in particular the relevance of the concept of a "personal adoptive language" introduced by one of the working groups; (ii) the benefit of highlighting in the Communication the additional efforts necessary to promote multilingualism of employees and companies; (iii) the advisability of the Communication addressing the linguistic questions related to migration; (iv) the treatment to be given to regional and minority languages; (v) the support to be given to the translation of cultural products; (vi) the way of approaching the external dimension of multilingualism; and (vii) the advisability of a measure incorporating multilingualism into all Community policies and the relevance of strengthening the partnership with the Member States and stakeholders via the open method of coordination.

Mr ORBAN ended his presentation by emphasising multilingualism's cross-cutting dimension and the need for all Members of the Commission to make an investment in this area.

The guiding principles below came out of the ensuing debate:

- broad support for the approach of openness and promotion of diversity and intercultural dialogue recommended by Mr ORBAN in his information note and statement;
- the importance of linguistic diversity being seen as an asset rather than a constraint;
- the recognition of language as an essential component of identity, but also condemnation of certain nationalist movements preaching intolerance disguised as the defence of a particular language; the wish that the September Communication reflect these dangers and clearly state that multilingualism must not be corrupted by nationalist and xenophobic sentiment;
- the vital importance of encouraging migrants to learn the language of their host country, via strong incentives or even an obligation, for the purpose of integration;
- reservations with regard to the possibility of financial support for the learning of the language of the migrants' country of origin, given the risks of increasing fragmentation into separate communities and the tendency to remain within one's own group and of discouraging integration;
- the essentially national character of the question of regional and minority languages and the desire to adopt a prudent approach as regards the EU's contribution in this area;
- in this respect, the exemplary nature of the linguistic rights granted by certain Member States to their linguistic minorities, and the potential benefits of seeking inspiration in those rights;
- the link between the issue of multilingualism within the European institutions and the equal treatment of EU citizens in their contacts with these institutions, in particular in the context of competitions, and the need to take account of the question raised in this regard at the Education, Youth and Culture Council on 21 and 22 May;

- the need to promote the diversity of foreign languages studied across the Union rather than the learning of a dominant language; in this context, concern that the concept of a "personal adoptive language" should not result in promoting the learning of the dominant language;
- the example of certain national school systems that simultaneously encourage the integration of children of migrants and the development of multilingualism;
- the usefulness of promoting the learning of the language of one's "neighbour", particularly in frontier regions;
- the vital importance of improving the linguistic training of primary-school teachers;
- the advisability of a horizontal approach to multilingualism and a convergence of all policies on this objective;
- the significant contributions of the Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus programmes, which combine linguistic and cultural elements;
- the usefulness of continuing the development of tools similar to the PISA survey;
- the role of new technologies and, in particular, the possibilities that they afford in terms of translation tools;
- the advisability of developing a position on the Roma language;
- the advantages of multilingualism in encouraging comprehension between communities, particularly in sensitive political environments;
- questions regarding the external dimension of multilingualism.

Mr ORBAN thanked all the Members of the Commission for their contributions and responded to the various comments.

He explained that the proposal for a "personal adoptive language" would in any event fall under the objective of citizens' learning two foreign languages and that it would not be a question of encouraging, by this proposal, the learning of a dominant language but on the contrary giving students a wide range of choices, with emphasis on knowledge of the language and the related culture, thereby going beyond the learning of a language for the sole purpose of international communication.

He recognised the problem raised by the linguistic training of teachers, emphasising the need to broaden that training to include intercultural skills, an approach that still needed to be developed in most Member States.

He stressed that multilingualism should be a policy that brought people together rather than divided them, while recognising that throughout the world, languages were often used to promote division. The September Communication would take this into account. The contribution of new technologies would also appear in the strategy.

In conclusion, Mr ORBAN pointed out that, although the question of the internal language arrangements did not fall under his future Communication, it was being handled appropriately elsewhere, as part of continuous efforts for improvement.

The PRESIDENT then thanked all those who had taken part in the discussion for their contributions and expressed the view that consideration should be given to some of the practical proposals put forward. He stressed the value of promoting the message that multilingualism was an important part of openness to others. He also recognised the need to encourage linguistic and cultural diversity without exacerbating identity-related sensitivities.

He noted that the Commission supported Mr ORBAN's determination to encourage a more dynamic approach, confirming that multilingualism deserved to be considered a priority.

He said that the relevance of multilingualism both for intercultural dialogue and for the competitiveness of European business should be clearly highlighted, and that

such considerations should be incorporated into all the policy areas concerned; action should be taken in collaboration with the Member States.

The PRESIDENT said that the Commission should play an active role in this area, with due regard for subsidiarity, and in particular should draw up proposals on ways in which it could provide assistance to the Member States.

On the question of regional and minority languages and the languages spoken by migrants, he stressed that the powers lay with the Member States, the Commission could make only a limited contribution and it was essential to ensure that any action was entirely consistent with the other policies involved.

However, he recognised the major role the institution could play in disseminating information on the way in which the challenge of multilingualism had been met at local level, and on the practical steps taken in that regard, and he mentioned that the open method of coordination in the field of education might be an appropriate tool in this context.

He also mentioned the importance of translation as an instrument of communication, stated that the Commission's interpreting and translation skills were without equal anywhere in the world, and said that he had suggested the organisation of a translation congress to Mr ORBAN. He underlines the importance of support to be given for a translation programme.

He highlighted the importance of the external aspect of multilingualism and the way in which the management of Europe's linguistic diversity could be applied in its contacts with non-member countries, stressing the competitive advantage which this diversity could provide.

The PRESIDENT concluded by thanking Mr ORBAN for the work carried out and wished him every possible success subsequently, noting the excellent contribution made by this discussion to the work of preparing the communication.

The Commission took note of the results of the policy debate.

- 12. REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS - SYNTHESIS OF THE COMMISSION'S MANAGEMENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2007**
(COM(2008)338 A /3; SEC(2008)1987)
- 13. ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT TO THE COMMISSION FOR 2007 (ARTICLE 86(3) OF THE FINANCIAL REGULATION)**
(SEC(2008)1990 AND /2; SEC(2008)1987)
- 14. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT PROGRESS COMMITTEE FOR 2007**
(SEC(2008)560; SEC(2008)1987)
- 15. MEETING OF THE AUDIT PROGRESS COMMITTEE ON 11 APRIL 2008**
(SEC(2008)1976; SEC(2008)1987)

Mr KALLAS presented a brief summary of the annual reports dealing with management questions, reminding the meeting of the interinstitutional context of these reports, the way in which they were drafted and the division of responsibilities within the Commission. Regarding the synthesis report, he stressed that it provided a fair and accurate picture of the Commission's achievements, without being complacent.

He also pointed out that the Audit Progress Committee was an internal body which played an important role in the governance of the Commission; its annual report dealt with a large number of subjects, including internal control systems. In this regard, he mentioned the implementation and control of the common fisheries policy, raised at the Progress Committee meeting on 11 April in the light of the European Court of Auditors' Report No 7/2007 on the rules for the management of fish stocks, particularly control, inspection and sanction systems. Finally, he

announced that the Audit Progress Committee intended to devote a large part of its work in 2008 to the way in which the departments had followed the recommendations previously adopted, and to the sectors referred to in the negative Statement of Assurance.

At the end of this presentation, the Commission:

- approved the Report on the synthesis of the Commission's management achievements in 2007, as set out in COM(2008)338/3;
- took note of the Internal Audit Report for 2007, as set out in SEC(2008)1990;
- took note of the Audit Progress Committee's report for 2007 in the document distributed as SEC(2008)560, and the information note on the Audit Progress Committee meeting of 11 April set out in SEC(2008)1976;
- noted that each Commission Member had been informed about the annual activity report and the declarations presented by the Director(s) General and/or Heads of Department for which they were responsible;
- instructed the departments to implement the specific action plans drawn up with a view to remedying the shortcomings highlighted in the annual activity reports and to put into effect the initiatives set out in the summary report for their areas of responsibility;
- noted that each Commission Member was responsible for following up the implementation of the corrective measures to be taken in the departments under his or her supervision;
- instructed the Directors-General who had expressed reservations or who were responsible for budget headings in which the European Court of Auditors had identified shortcomings to provide the Member of the Commission responsible with regular updates on developments and progress, and emphasized that a regular dialogue between Members of the Commission and Directors-General on management issues was an important link in the chain of responsibility;

(4 June 2008)

- instructed the Secretary-General to transmit to the Secretaries-General of Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors the Report on the synthesis of the Commission's management achievements in 2007, as set out in COM(2008)338/3, together with all the Annual Activity Reports and the declarations of the Directors-General and Heads of Service, which were available on the Europa website;
- authorised Mr KALLAS, Member of the Commission with responsibility for administrative affairs, audit and anti-fraud, and Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ, Member of the Commission with responsibility for financial programming and the budget, to present the Report on the synthesis of the Commission's management achievements in 2007 to the relevant Parliament bodies, and in particular to the Committee on Budgetary Control and the Committee on Budgets.

16. TRENDS IN THE MEMBER STATES (SEC(2008)2009)

Mr MCCREEVY, speaking ahead of the referendum to be held in Ireland on 12 June as part of the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty, noted that there were no recent opinion polls giving a clear indication of how public opinion was developing. He reminded the meeting that several Irish politicians and professional organisations had declared their support for a “yes” vote. He also underlined the importance of turnout, which was difficult to judge at this stage.

The Commission took note of this information and of the note from Ms WALLSTRÖM, distributed as SEC(2008)2009.

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The meeting closed at 13.02.