



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2011)1953 final

Brussels, 30 March 2011

MINUTES
of the 1953rd meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 23 March 2011
(morning)

PV(2011)1953 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 23 March 2011 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.07 with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair.

Present:

Mr BARROSO	President	
Baroness ASHTON	High Representative/Vice- President	
Ms REDING	Vice-President	Item 8 (in part)
Mr ALMUNIA	Vice-President	
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President	
Ms KROES	Vice-President	
Mr TAJANI	Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Mr POTOČNIK	Member	
Mr REHN	Member	
Mr PIEBALGS	Member	
Ms VASSILIOU	Member	
Mr ŠEMETA	Member	
Mr DE GUCHT	Member	
Mr DALLI	Member	
Ms GEOGHEGAN-QUINN	Member	
Mr LEWANDOWSKI	Member	
Ms DAMANAKI	Member	
Ms GEORGIEVA	Member	
Mr OETTINGER	Member	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms HEDEGAARD	Member	
Mr FÜLE	Member	
Mr ANDOR	Member	Item 8 (in part)

Absent:

Mr BARNIER

Member

Ms MALMSTRÖM

Member

Mr CIOLOŞ

Member

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

Mr GUERSENT	Chef de cabinet to Mr BARNIER
Mr HAEUSLER	Chef de cabinet to Mr CIOLOŞ

The following also sat in:

Mr LAITENBERGER	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr SØRENSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Commission Spokeswoman	
Mr SCHINAS	Bureau of European Policy Advisers	
Mr CABRAL	Adviser <i>hors classe</i> in the PRESIDENT's office	Item 8 (in part)
Mr SOBRAL	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 8 (in part)
Ms SUTTON	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 8 (in part)
Mr MORRISON	Chef de cabinet to Baroness ASHTON	
Mr NOCIAR	Chef de cabinet to Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Item 8 (in part)
Mr PESONEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr REHN	Item 8 (in part)

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2011)1953/3; SEC(2011)344/2)

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(2011)1953)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 21 March.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1952ND MEETING
(16 MARCH)**

(PV(2011)1952; PV(2011)1952, PART II)

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 1952nd meeting for the following week.

4. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF EUROPEAN UNION LAW

4.1. STATE AID – INDIVIDUAL CASES

(SEC(2011)364; SEC(2011)365)

The Commission adopted the decisions in SEC(2011)364.

4.2. STATE AID – HORIZONTAL DOSSIER

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the

Committee of the Regions – Reform of the EU state aid rules on services of general economic interest

(COM(2011)146 to /3; SEC(2011)365)

The Commission approved the communication in COM(2011)146/3 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the national parliaments.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2011)345 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 14 and 18 March.

5.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2011)346 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 14 and 18 March.

5.3. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2011)347 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 14 and 18 March, as archived in e-Greffe.

5.4. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2011)348 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 21 and 25 March and of the ‘finalisation’ written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on 21 March.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2011)349)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2011)33)

6.1. DG HOME AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF AD15 DIRECTOR

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms MALMSTRÖM, the Commission decided to fill the post of Director (Migration and Borders) in DG Home Affairs by transferring in the interest of the service under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations Ms Belinda PYKE, an AD15 official and currently Director (Equality) in DG Justice.

This decision would take effect on 1 April 2011.

6.2. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – TERMINATION OF THE SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR POST

(PERS(2010)75 TO /3)

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to terminate – without making any appointment – internal and interinstitutional selection procedure COM/2010/1335 for the post of Director (Relations with the European Parliament, the European Ombudsman, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and National Parliaments) in the Secretariat-General.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**6.3. DG BUDGET – INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION OF
VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR POST (EU15)
(PERS(2011)34)**

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr LEWANDOWSKI, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) and 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2011) 34 for the post of Director (Budget Execution (General Budget and EDF)) in DG Budget.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**7. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE
AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – CONSULAR PROTECTION
FOR EU CITIZENS IN THIRD COUNTRIES: STATE OF PLAY AND WAY
FORWARD
(COM(2011)149 AND /2; SEC(2010)1241; SEC(2010)1256)**

The Commission approved the communication in COM(2011)149/2 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the national parliaments.

**8. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(SEC(2011)352)**

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group held on Friday 18 March (SEC(2011)352).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

8.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Ordinary legislative procedure

(point 1.2 of the IRG record)

Dossiers at first reading

- Establishment of an Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice (Regulation) – COELHO report – 2009/0089 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2011)78/2.

- European Union action for the European Heritage Label (Decision) – PALIADELI report – 2010/0044 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2011)81.

Conciliation procedure

- Novel foods (Regulation) – LIOTARD report – 2008/0002 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SPI(2011)14.

ii) Preparation for the March II part-session of Parliament

(point 1.3 of the IRG record)

Ordinary legislative procedure – Codecision – 1st reading

- Application of a scheme of generalised tariff preferences for the period from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2011 – Extension of the validity of the scheme until 31 December 2013 (Regulation) – SCHOLZ report – 2010/0140 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2011)2246.

- European statistics on tourism (Regulation) – SIMPSON report – 2010/0063 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2011)2247.

Non-legislative procedure

- Conclusion of the Protocol to amend the Air Transport Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the United States of America, of the other part (Council Decision) – ZASADA report – 2010/0112 (NLE)
- Signature, provisional application and conclusion of the Agreement on Air Transport between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Canada, of the other part (Council Decisions) – ȚICĂU report – 2009/0018 (NLE)
- Signature, provisional application and conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on certain aspects of air services (Council Decisions) – RIQUET report – 2007/0082 (NLE)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2011)2248.

- Amendment of Article 136 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union with regard to a stability mechanism for Member States whose currency is the euro (European Council decision) – BROK and GUALTIERI report – 2010/0821 (NLE)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2011)2249.

8.2. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

iii) Programming of Council business

(SI(2011)86)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2011)86 on the Council meetings between 24 March and 9 April 2011.

iv) Preparation for European Council (Brussels, 24 and 25 March)

Global response to the economic crisis and European economic governance

The PRESIDENT reported on the main economic matters to be discussed by the European Council at its spring meeting on 24-25 March, pointing out the important work achieved by the Union so far in the global response to the crisis.

He reviewed in detail the issues raising most expectations – the pact for the euro, the conclusion of the first phase of the European semester, the Commission's six legislative proposals on economic governance and the European stability mechanism.

With regard to the pact for the euro, he noted the significant progress made on 11 March at the meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the euro area. He welcomed the fact that this pact was inclusive and open while also being based closely on the Treaty rules and the European framework for economic governance, which meant a key role for the Commission.

He was pleased that the Community method had prevailed, pointing out that most of the Member States, if not all during the most recent discussions, as well as the European Parliament, had agreed with the Commission on the need to continue to use this method.

Turning next to economic governance, he said that the European Council should implement the European semester and validate the priority actions identified by the Commission in January in its annual growth survey.

The successful conclusion of this new stage would enable the Member States to draw up their stability or convergence programmes and also their national reform programmes, which should also include the additional commitments set out in the pact for the euro. He reminded the meeting that the Commission would have to evaluate these programmes and draw up specific recommendations for each Member State next spring, between mid-April and the beginning of June.

With regard to the Commission's six legislative proposals, the agreement obtained at the Council was fully satisfactory and the Commission must now help the European Parliament and the Council to work together constructively to ensure the proposals were finally adopted in June 2011.

Lastly, he said that the European Council would have to ratify the decisions taken at the summit of the euro area countries on the European Financial Stability Facility and to decide on the basic elements of the future European stability mechanism, on which Mr REHN would speak next. He underlined the importance for Europe of setting up a permanent stability mechanism, given that during recent crises the architecture of the euro area had been shown to be incomplete. Failing agreement on a more ambitious mechanism, the Commission had reason for satisfaction with what had been agreed on. He himself would fully support this solution at the European Council.

The PRESIDENT felt that the Commission's contribution on all these matters had been decisive and he was proud of what had been achieved thanks to this contribution.

In addition to economic governance, the Commission was also continuing to work on the single market with the adoption next April of the Single Market Act, which would offer the opportunity to secure a commitment on the adoption by 2012 of several proposals aimed at boosting growth. Reforms would also be necessary in the European financial sector to ensure stability and transparency, and here again the Commission had a key role in the reform of bank regulation and supervision.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT said that the European Council would probably consider the stress tests to be conducted in the future. These tests must be both rigorous and credible so that informed decisions could be taken on the next steps and the private and public measures to be implemented to make the European banking system more secure.

Mr REHN reported on the Eurogroup meeting on Monday and the discussions held, which had been difficult at times, on the various elements of the global European response to the crisis and preparations for the next European Council.

He said that the Commission had been working on this dossier for many months and that it would have been desirable for the appropriate decisions to have been taken earlier in the year, particularly those relating to the current economic and political situation. However, he welcomed the fact that the determination to safeguard financial stability and a firm European commitment had won the day. Thanks to these good results, he trusted that the European Council would be able to reach positive conclusions. Following the spring Council, it would be up to the Member States to translate the political priorities agreed on into concrete action at home, including those relating to the pact for the euro.

He said that the work on the Commission's six legislative proposals was well on the way to finalisation at the European Parliament and the Council, and that the measures to enhance and strengthen economic governance should be adopted before the summer.

Turning to the future European stability mechanism, Mr REHN said that it would be operational in June 2013, with a lending capacity of €500 billion. With regard to the capital structure, the mechanism would have the status of an international financial institution, with mixed governance – intergovernmental for certain matters, through its board of governors and management board, and Community for others, in accordance with European supervisory rules, with a key role for the Commission.

He added that, in accordance with Article 136 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Commission would in due course propose a regulation specifying the subsequent procedural steps in order to integrate the elements of conditionality in Council decisions and ensure consistency with the Union's multilateral supervisory framework. Against this background, the unanimous vote on Tuesday in the European Parliament Committee on the amendment of the Treaty was highly positive.

Turning to the situation of the world economy, he noted that many uncertainties remained owing to recent events in North Africa and Japan, which were affecting stocks and the price of certain raw materials. This situation had also led the G7 finance ministers to decide on Thursday on concerted action on the currency markets in response to the recent fluctuations of the yen exchange rate as a result of the tragic events in Japan.

Winding up, he reviewed the prospects of recovery for the real economy and employment. In view of the current major uncertainties world-wide, he urged all the Members to exercise caution in their comments and judgements on the situation. His cabinet, together with that of the PRESIDENT and the Spokesman's Service, was drawing up a note on communication aspects relating to these dossiers for the Commission Members.

The Commission then had a brief discussion, during which it touched on the political and economic situation in certain Member States.

The PRESIDENT informed Members of the political situation in Portugal. In reply to a question from the floor, he said he thought it unlikely that the European Council would discuss the issues involved in coordinating taxation policy beyond what was currently contained in the draft conclusions. These referred to the conclusions of the recent summit of the euro area countries on this matter.

He again underlined the significance of the decisions the European Council was to take that week, which would constitute a major change and far-

reaching reform of European economic governance, and he welcomed the progress achieved and the fact that the Commission had been very much the driving force behind these changes.

Finally he welcomed what he considered to be a victory over the prevailing mood of pessimism and expressed his faith in Europe's capacity to reform itself and restore confidence.

The Commission took note of this information and these conclusions.

Situation in Libya and the other southern Mediterranean countries and the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council (Brussels, 21 March 2011)

The PRESIDENT started the discussion by noting the rapid development of the situation in Libya and throughout the region and also the political initiatives taken the previous week, in particular with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 and the international conference held in Paris under the aegis of the G8, which had initiated the implementation of this resolution, especially the application of the no-fly zone, and in which Baroness ASHTON had taken part. He stressed the key role he wished to see Europe play in the fields of humanitarian aid, the reinforcement of sanctions imposed on the Libyan regime, and long-term support for the democratic transition process in the region.

Since these issues had been discussed by the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 March, the PRESIDENT invited Baroness ASHTON to present the main conclusions, and also invited Ms GEORGIEVA to update the Commission on the humanitarian situation in Libya.

Notwithstanding the differences in approach between Member States, the PRESIDENT stressed the need to maintain a united European position with the common objective of protecting the lives of the civilian population in Libya and enabling it to assert its legitimate aspirations to democracy. He was concerned about the recent friction between Member States regarding the operational management of the no-fly zone over Libya and hoped that this

would be rapidly resolved.

He also emphasised that it was important to maintain European involvement with the Arab League and the African Union whose political support for the operation was indispensable, just as it had been decisive in the adoption of the UN resolution.

Lastly, the PRESIDENT pointed to the long-term possibility which had to be borne in mind of a transformation of the region. He referred to the positive reception given by the European Council to the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity proposed by the Commission, which he hoped would be launched as soon as possible so that measures already taken could be presented to the European Council. Recalling that it was essential for the Commission to decide to promote this partnership and to win the support of the Member States for its implementation, he was pleased to note the effective work done by the Commission services, which he invited Mr FÜLE to set out.

Baroness ASHTON summarised the situation in Libya, pointing to the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting held on 11 March which had been devoted to Libya, the exchanges which the European Union had had with the Arab League and the African Union since then, the role played by certain international partners, the adoption of the UN resolution and the outcome of the G8 conference in Paris, which had taken a decision on the rules for its application. It was now a matter of deciding on possibly transferring part of the military operation, especially the management of the no-fly zone, to NATO.

Regarding the European Union, she recalled Europe's position with regard to humanitarian action and military operations. On humanitarian action, which Ms GEORGIEVA would set out in detail, she mentioned ongoing studies of the long-term options and planning in so far as the Union would have a role to play in the region for many years. As for the military aspects, she explained that the Foreign Affairs Council of 21 March had agreed on the steps to be followed and on the principle whereby the European Union was ready to

support humanitarian operations by providing, if necessary, support for air operations within the framework of the Common European Security and Defence Policy.

Lastly, Baroness ASHTON reported on the political situation in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain.

Mr FÜLE in turn outlined the follow-up to the Communication on a Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the southern Mediterranean countries, which the Commission had approved on 8 March. He was pleased that the Commission had thus been able to propose part of an ambitious initial response to the historical events unfolding in this region. It was now necessary in his view to show that the European Union was prepared to live up to its commitments in the form of concrete and visible action.

He pinpointed four main ways of achieving this: first, the follow-up to be given to the communication, which covered practically all the Commission's areas of competence and would therefore require mobilisation of all the necessary departments and resources in order to implement the planned measures.

Second, he referred to the financing needs and, in this context, the possibility of refocusing EU aid by reviewing all the national programmes funded under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, as well as the possibility of reallocating to the neighbourhood policy funds that had been earmarked for other regions of the world. In that case he said he was ready to meet the expectations of these countries once they expressed willingness to initiate key reforms and support the poorest and most isolated regions.

Third, Mr FÜLE referred to the work still to be carried out to complete the communication on the European neighbourhood policy which would follow the communication on the southern Mediterranean and would explain in concrete terms the differences of approach depending on the country and the lessons which our Eastern partners might learn from the events in the southern

Mediterranean. He added that it was important to ensure equal efforts were invested in these two regional blocks and to support all those who embarked on reforms, regardless of their geographical position.

Last he emphasised the need for good coordination both in operational terms, between the Commission Secretariat-General and the European External Action Service, and in strategic terms, in order to put forward a global vision and prepare implementation of the neighbourhood policy, which the Commission intended to present in May.

Turning to Libya, Ms GEORGIEVA pointed out first that the political decisions taken by the international community in recent days had made it possible to avoid the considerable loss of life which had seemed inevitable beforehand. Since the no-fly zone had been imposed, the number of refugees from Libya flooding into the border areas with Egypt and Tunisia had fallen, and some people were even returning to Libya.

There were several important challenges to be taken up, including the repatriation of third-country nationals, which could become very cumbersome should the fighting intensify. It was difficult to provide humanitarian assistance given the problems of access to and limited contact with the Benghazi region of eastern Libya, where the main international humanitarian organisations were starting to return and where the United Nations was trying to set up an office.

There was considerable pressure on certain neighbouring countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, where the living conditions in the refugee camps would need to be improved. Lastly, another major challenge in the country concerned the need for compliance with international legal obligations in situations of armed conflict.

The Commission then held an exchange of views during which the following main points were raised:

- the importance of the Commission's role given the different positions adopted by Member States and the need to convey a strong message to promote a common European foreign policy or defence policy;
- the call to strengthen the EU's ties with Africa;
- the need to create favourable conditions for humanitarian actions in tandem with the military operations and to take account of the public's response to this, in particular in relation to the decision on who would take command of these operations;
- some concern about population movements and the importance of a coherent response by the EU on immigration policy in order to deal with the challenges confronting certain Member States in terms of the influx of migrants and refugees.

Baroness ASHTON replied to these comments and to several questions about developments in other countries in the region, in particular Syria. She explained that the financial support and civil protection measures which the EU was able to provide to these countries, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, was particularly important since the Member States did not yet have a shared vision of the political response to be made in relation to these events. She reiterated the EU's commitment to continuing this support in the coming weeks.

Ms GEORGIEVA underlined the importance of pursuing humanitarian aid efforts by garnering support from all the stakeholders in the region.

The PRESIDENT agreed with the Commission that it would be desirable to have a common vision of EU foreign policy, while acknowledging the diversity of Member States' positions. It was, however, thanks to the EU's initiative that the UN Security Council resolution had been adopted. When divisions emerged, it was advisable to focus the EU's approach on what was possible, as in the case of the proposal on a Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity, which had been produced by the Commission in record

time. He also pointed out that a policy debate on immigration was scheduled for 20 April which would concentrate on distinguishing between migrants and refugees and how to share the burden of population movements affecting various Member States.

The Commission took note of this information.

Situation in Japan in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami on 11 March, and the results of the Extraordinary Energy Council (Brussels, 21 March)

The PRESIDENT touched firstly on the difficult situation in Japan and the humanitarian aid effort under way. He recalled that Ms GEORGIEVA was coordinating the EU's assistance via the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) of the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection, through which 17 Member States had so far offered in-kind or financial assistance following Japan's official request. A plane transporting 70 tonnes of supplies was heading for Tokyo that day and a team of 15 European experts in humanitarian aid and civil protection had been on the ground since Friday.

The situation at the Fukushima nuclear plant was of particular concern. Mr OETTINGER and his departments were following developments closely and were in contact with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The PRESIDENT had spoken the previous day to the IAEA Director-General, who confirmed that the situation was serious but had improved over the preceding two days. So far Japan had not requested any assistance in dealing with the nuclear emergency, but the Union should be ready to act if necessary.

He mentioned the extraordinary meeting of Energy Ministers on 21 March and discussions on the same subject at the General Affairs Council.

While progress had been made on the principle of an in-depth review of the safety of nuclear plants, the Commission needed to play a leading role by drawing up guidelines for the review, together with nuclear regulators, so as

to ensure that the interests of the whole of the EU in terms of safety were taken into account.

The PRESIDENT also highlighted the need to monitor the impact of the crisis, particularly with regard to contamination of food, via the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

The consequences for the world economy had also been examined and measures had been taken to prevent the yen from falling.

Steps had also been taken by Baroness ASHTON and the European External Action Service, through the delegation in Tokyo, to coordinate the consular protection measures introduced by the Member States.

It was important for the Union to continue to send a consistent message, while expressing its full support to the Japanese authorities and its trust in the work being done to deal with the situation.

Mr OETTINGER reported on developments at the Fukushima nuclear plant, damaged by the earthquake and tsunami, and alluded to the impact of the disaster on health in Japan and on Japanese food exports. He also mentioned the growing debate in the EU on nuclear safety and noted that Member States had very clear-cut positions, which were based in particular on their energy production and supply structures.

There was agreement on the need to ensure that nuclear facilities were safe and a willingness to carry out stress tests on all 143 nuclear reactors in Europe and to involve as many neighbouring countries as possible. These tests should take into account possible natural disasters, technical issues relating to plant design and operation, and emergency measures.

Since it was impossible to eliminate all risks and the Union would depend on nuclear energy over the coming decades, common high safety standards were required, which should also influence the approach taken by neighbouring countries.

Effective coordination was therefore essential and the Commission needed to play the leading role if public confidence in nuclear power was to be restored. In the light of events in Japan, it was appropriate to bring forward the report on the implementation of the 2009 Directive on a common framework for nuclear safety scheduled for 2014 and to speed up adoption of the proposal for a directive on nuclear waste.

Ms GEORGIEVA referred to the assistance provided by the Union and especially by the Commission in this context. She noted that the Japanese authorities were extremely well prepared and stressed the need to show solidarity towards the Japanese people. She also highlighted the size of the task ahead given that it was the worst natural disaster in the Pacific region in recent history.

Mr REHN reported on the economic impact of the disaster in Japan, estimated by the Japanese authorities to be close to EUR 220 billion or between 3% and 5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The effect on GDP growth this year and next year would depend on confidence and the speed of reconstruction. The same factors would affect growth in Europe.

During a brief discussion, the Commission also touched on the following points:

- the need to obtain the most precise information possible on the situation in Fukushima;
- the existing possibilities of building nuclear reactors capable of withstanding the impact of a plane crash;
- the importance of carrying out stress tests on nuclear plants to ensure common safety standards in Europe, particularly since many plants had been built in border areas;

- the need to press neighbouring countries to take similar measures so that existing or planned nuclear plants close to the Union's borders did not pose an increased risk to Member States;
- the concerns in certain Member States about the state of some nuclear installations close to their borders and about some of the plans to build new reactors in border areas, including in earthquake zones;
- the need for careful communication on this sensitive issue, in particular to reassure European citizens about the condition of nuclear plants in Europe;
- the high cost of ensuring that nuclear plants were safe and secure, to be compared with the cost of renewable energies;
- the size of the anti-nuclear movement in Europe, especially in some Member States, thanks to its use of new media, and the importance of a response that highlights the measures taken to make nuclear sites safe;
- the uncertainty about the outcome of stress tests for some plants, the measures to be taken subsequently and the financing of refits;
- the possibility of suspending authorisations for the construction of nuclear installations in coastal areas and/or earthquake zones.

Mr OETTINGER drew attention to the objectives set by the EU for renewable energies, which should be taken into account in work on the roadmap for 2050.

By way of conclusion, the PRESIDENT pointed out, in connection with certain requests he had received since the disaster in Japan, that, under Article 194 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Member States were free to choose their energy mix. He acknowledged that the nuclear issue was more sensitive in some Member States than in others and could potentially cause divisions. However, no matter what personal

opinions were held, the principle of subsidiarity applied fully in this case and prevented the Commission from taking a decision.

The Commission took note of this information.

8.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

v) Action taken on legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its February I and II part-sessions (point 3.5.3 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2011)2217 on the action taken on the legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its February I and II part-sessions, for transmission to Parliament.

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The meeting closed at 11.21.