



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2015) 2118 final

- English language version of the French text which is authentic -

Brussels, 18 March 2015

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2118th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 4 March 2015

(morning)

PV(2015) 2118 final

- English language version of the French text which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 4 March 2015 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.52 with Mr JUNCKER, President, in the chair.

Present:

Mr JUNCKER	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	First Vice-President	
Ms MOGHERINI	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms GEORGIEVA	Vice-President	
Mr ANSIP	Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Vice-President	
Mr KATAINEN	Vice-President	
Mr OETTINGER	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr HAHN	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms MALMSTRÖM	Member	
Mr MIMICA	Member	
Mr ARIAS CAÑETE	Member	
Mr VELLA	Member	
Mr ANDRIUKAITIS	Member	
Mr AVRAMOPOULOS	Member	
Ms THYSSEN	Member	
Mr MOSCOVICI	Member	
Mr STYLIANIDES	Member	
Mr HOGAN	Member	
Lord HILL	Member	
Ms BULC	Member	
Ms BIENKOWSKA	Member	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Member	
Mr NAVRACSICS	Member	

Ms CREȚU

Member

Ms VESTAGER

Member

Mr MOEDAS

Member

The following also sat in:

Mr SELMAYR	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr PESONEN	Deputy Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr SCHINAS	Head of the Spokesperson Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms METTLER	Head of the European Political Strategy Centre	
Ms MARTÍNEZ ALBEROLA	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr DELVAUX	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Items 1 to 9
Mr ZADRA	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 10
Ms ARKI	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 10
Mr SMULDERS	Chef de cabinet to Mr TIMMERMANS	
Ms SCHMITT	Chef de cabinet to Mr AVRAMOPOULOS	
Mr RUETE	Director-General, DG Migration and Home Affairs	

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2015) 2118/FINAL; SEC(2015) 112/2)

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

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET

(RCC(2015) 2118)

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

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF THE 2116TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION (18 FEBRUARY) AND THE MINUTES OF THE 2117TH MEETING (25 FEBRUARY)

(PV(2015) 2116 AND /2; PV(2015) 2116, PART II)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2116th meeting and decided to hold over for one week approval of the minutes of its 2117th meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2015) 20)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 27 February (RCC(2015) 20).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

4.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) European Parliament dossiers

(point 3.2 of the IRG record)

Ordinary legislative procedure – Second reading

- Amendment of Directive 96/53/EC of 25 July 1996 laying down for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community the maximum authorised dimensions in national and international traffic and the maximum authorised weights in international traffic (Directive) – LEICHTFRIED report – 2013/0105 (COD)

The Commission took note of the compromise text in SP(2015) 99, further to Communication COM(2015) 7, which it had already approved on 12 January.

Empowerment

- Amendment of Directive 96/53/EC of 25 July 1996 laying down for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community the maximum authorised dimensions in national and international traffic and the

maximum authorised weights in international traffic (Directive) –
LEICHTFRIED report – 2013/0105 (COD)

Under Article 13 of its Rules of Procedure, the Commission empowered Ms BULC, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr ŠEFČOVIČ and any other members associated, to adopt its opinion on the amendments together with any amended proposals, on the basis of the line set out in COM(2015) 7 as approved by the Commission on 12 January, once Parliament had given its opinion, and transmit them to the Council in accordance with Article 294(7)(c) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Ordinary legislative procedure – First reading

- Interchange fees for card-based payment transactions (Regulation) –
ZALBA BIDEgain report – 2013/0265 (COD)

The Commission took note of the compromise text in SP(2015) 100, further to notes SI(2014) 495 and SI(2015) 7, which it had approved on 16 December 2014 and 21 January 2015 respectively.

ii) Council dossiers

(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

- Protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data (Regulation) – ALBRECHT report –
2012/0011 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 67.

- Establishment of measures concerning the European single market for electronic communications and to achieve a Connected Continent, and amending Directives 2002/20/EC, 2002/21/EC and 2002/22/EC and

Regulations (EC) 1211/2009 and (EU) 531/2012 (Regulation) – DEL
CASTILLO VERA report – 2013/0309 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 56/3.

4.2. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

iii) Programming of Council business

(SI(2015) 71)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2015) 71 on the Council meetings between 5 and 18 March.

iv) Latest developments in the Council

(point 4.4 of the IRG record)

- Regulatory procedure with scrutiny (PRAC) – Commission Regulation establishing a network code on interoperability and data exchange rules
- Gas odorization

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 72.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

v) Results of the February II part-session of Parliament

(SP(2015) 109)

The Commission took note of the information on the proceedings of the part-session of Parliament held in Brussels on 25 February, as set out in SP(2015) 109.

vi) Participation of Members of Parliament in international conferences
(point 5.7 of the IRG record)

- Third world conference on disaster risk reduction (Sendai, 14-18 March 2015)

The Commission agreed to the request to the PRESIDENT from Mr Martin Schulz, President of Parliament, concerning the attendance of two Members of the European Parliament at the above-mentioned meeting as observers in the EU delegation, with a reminder about the procedure to be followed, in accordance with document SP(2015) 103.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2015) 113 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 23 and 27 February.

5.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2015) 114 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 23 and 27 February.

5.3. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2015) 115 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 23 and 27 February, as archived in Decide.

5.4. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2015) 116)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 2 and 6 March.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2015) 117)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2015) 21)

**DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – SPECIAL ADVISERS TO
COMMISSION MEMBERS FOR 2015 – FIRST LIST**

(PERS(2015) 24)

The Commission took note of the information in PERS(2015) 21 and, on a proposal from Ms GEORGIEVA, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to adopt the list of special advisers to Commission Members set out in PERS(2015) 24;
- to empower Ms GEORGIEVA, member of the Commission in charge of the budget and human resources, by way of derogation from point 6(2) of the

Commission Decision of 19 December 2007 (C(2007) 6655), to amend the existing contracts, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, should urgent, unforeseen and duly justified needs arise between the first and second wave of appointments of special advisers, provided sufficient budgetary resources were available;

- to authorise the Director-General for Human Resources and Security to implement that decision by signing contracts of employment on behalf of the Authority Empowered to Conclude Contracts of Employment (AECC)

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7. DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT ON THE CREATION OF A COMMISSIONERS' GROUP ON THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES
(C(2015) 1379)**

The Commission took note of the decision of the PRESIDENT in C(2015) 1379.

**8. JOINT CONSULTATION PAPER OF THE COMMISSION AND THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY – TOWARDS A NEW EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY
(JOIN(2015) 6 AND /2; RCC(2015) 21)**

The Commission approved the joint consultation paper in JOIN(2015) 6/2 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the

national parliaments.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

COMMISSION DECISION OF 30 OCTOBER 2014 REQUESTING AN OPINION OF THE COURT OF JUSTICE PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 218(11) OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE COMPETENCE OF THE UNION TO SIGN AND CONCLUDE A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH SINGAPORE (C(2014) 8218 FINAL)

Ms MALMSTRÖM explained that, in accordance with the wish of the PRESIDENT, the College had to give its opinion that day on the decision adopted by the previous Commission on 30 October 2014 requesting an opinion of the Court of Justice pursuant to Article 218(11) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on the Free Trade Agreement negotiated with Singapore. Although the decision had been adopted, the matter had not yet actually been referred to the Court. She was in favour of the Commission discussing this important question. Having weighed up the arguments for and against, she took the considered view that the Commission should confirm that it was maintaining the decision of 30 October 2014 and let the procedure follow its course.

She explained the request to the Court, which consisted in legally clarifying the respective competences of the Union and of the Member States in the fields covered by the agreement in question. She considered that there was a need to clarify (i) the provisions which fell within the Union's exclusive competences, (ii) the provisions which fell within shared competences and (iii), where applicable, the provisions which could fall within the exclusive competences of the Member States, thereby qualifying the Free Trade Agreement as a mixed agreement.

She pointed out the effect that the answers to these questions could have, in particular on the decision to grant the negotiating mandate or on the arrangements for negotiating and ratifying trade agreements, not to mention the legal uncertainty sometimes facing the Union's negotiating partners, all factors which could hamper the smooth operation of the common commercial policy. She added that the Commission had regularly consulted the Court of Justice to ask it to clarify the scope of commercial competences, for example in the context of the conclusion of the agreement establishing the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The request for an opinion was also related to the entry into force of the TFEU, which had amended a number of institutional mechanisms and powers in the Union, hence the need to clarify certain aspects.

To those who might judge it unwise to refer this request to the Court in the middle of the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States, she countered that the two were quite separate, bearing in mind in any event that the TTIP agreement would most probably be a mixed agreement, given its scope.

Furthermore, Ms MALMSTRÖM pointed out that the Commission action was in no way targeted at Singapore itself and that the Commission's objective in consulting the Court was neither to challenge a Council decision nor to claim additional competences to the detriment of the Member States. She stressed that it was a matter of requesting an opinion before submitting a free-trade agreement for ratification which, as was the case in this sole instance, covered trade areas about which the Commission and the Council did not always share the same views in relation to the respective competences of the Union and its Member States, in particular in the fields associated with investment, transport services, intellectual property rights, transparency and administrative procedures, and even sustainable development.

In contrast, she referred to the specific consequences if the College were to adopt a decision repealing the decision of 30 October 2014, in particular the need to adopt,

first, a formal decision, cautioning against how that message might be interpreted by the Council and Parliament, and, second, a recommendation for a Council decision on the signature and the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement with Singapore, stressing the difficulties that might arise in Parliament during the ratification process.

She ended her presentation by expressing her conviction of the merits of implementing the decision taken by the previous Commission in order to enable the Union's common commercial policy to operate more smoothly and more effectively in the long term.

Mr TIMMERMANS emphasised that the choice before the Commission that day concerned first and foremost a legal question, i.e. the question of clarification of competences, which remained open and would inevitably be raised again sooner or later in the management of the Union's trade agreements. He, too, was in favour of allowing the Commission decision of 30 October 2014 to run its course and of waiting for the opinion of the Court which, in a few months, should provide useful clarification to resolve the difficulties and delays that could be generated by legal uncertainty about the Union's competences in complex policy dossiers.

During the brief discussion which followed, the Commission referred in particular to the support of its Members for the approach proposed by Mr TIMMERMANS and Ms MALMSTRÖM and the suggestion to take care to explain clearly and without delay to the Singaporean authorities why this matter was being referred to the Court.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr TIMMERMANS and Ms MALMSTRÖM for their presentations and noted the agreement of the College to the proposed approach.

The Commission therefore maintained its decision of 30 October 2014 set out in C(2014) 8218.

10. POLICY DEBATE ON MIGRATION

(SEC(2015) 134; RCC(2015) 22)

Introducing the debate on migration, Mr TIMMERMANS emphasised the central role played by this issue among the ten priorities set by the PRESIDENT in his policy guidelines. The purpose of the debate was to guide the work he was carrying out together with Ms MOGHERINI and Mr AVRAMOPOULOS, in particular, with a view to submitting a comprehensive European agenda on migration by the summer.

He outlined the aspects the Commission intended to include in this new agenda. In the first place he stressed, above all, the humanitarian imperative, in view of the geopolitical upheavals of recent years in the Union's immediate neighbourhood and the number of refugees and displaced persons in Europe, which was unprecedented since the Second World War. He then mentioned the skills shortages in some sectors of the European economy and the significant contribution of migration to improving the European age pyramid. Thirdly, he stressed the importance of the security of the Union's external borders, with due regard to fundamental rights, and the fight against irregular migration and people-trafficking in particular.

Over the last few years the Union had put in place a set of legislative measures and mechanisms to address these general objectives. He referred in particular to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and a number of mechanisms for applying visa policy, as well as the common border code and the support in applying it provided by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex). He was in favour of an approach based on these measures and mechanisms, designed above all to implement them more rigorously and uniformly within the Union.

It made sense to work together in new ways rather than developing new mechanisms, in order to provide rapid responses based on true solidarity and better sharing of responsibilities. He referred to the distribution of competences between the Member States and the Union in these fields and underlined the need for each level to assume its responsibilities fully. He also mooted the possibility of drawing inspiration from governance models applied in other policy areas in which competence was shared between the national, European and international levels, for example in the area of development aid policy.

As regards the four pillars on which the comprehensive agenda could be constructed, as suggested by the background note circulated before the meeting, Mr TIMMERMANS paid particular attention to the first, namely the response to the unprecedented flow of asylum seekers in Europe. He called for a more uniform application of the CEAS, pointing out that at present 90 % of applications for asylum made in the Union were concentrated in ten or so Member States. Given the numbers involved, this was no longer sustainable. He underscored the need to consider a true transition towards a fairer system whereby responsibilities were shared among the 28 Member States, for example through increased use of intra-EU relocation. He also emphasised the need, in an area without internal borders, to provide the same conditions of protection and reception in each of the Member States and to develop a common approach, as regards both procedures and relations with non-EU countries and agreements on reception and readmission.

Turning to the other pillars of the proposed future programme, he spoke of the importance of charting the course for legal migration, attracting the talents required for the EU to be competitive on the world stage and filling vacancies on the labour market. He regretted that the implementation of the 'Blue Card' scheme adopted by the Union in 2009, which set the conditions of entry and residence for non-EU nationals for the purpose of filling highly-qualified jobs, had been no more than partial, since this scheme could be of particular interest in the current context.

With regard to the third pillar, the fight against irregular migration, including people-trafficking, he reviewed the areas where further work was needed. These included better cooperation with third countries, more effective implementation of readmission agreements and maintaining dialogue through the Mobility Partnerships. He highlighted the importance of interaction between migration policy and the external policy of the Union and of its Member States. It was particularly important to step up cooperation with non-member countries in order to tackle the root causes of migration.

Turning to the fourth pillar, the security of the EU's external borders, he said that this was a prerequisite for the effective implementation of common migration and asylum policies. Since border management was a shared responsibility between the Union and the Member States, he signalled the need to consider ways of increasing the budget of the Frontex agency.

In conclusion, Mr TIMMERMANS highlighted the importance of raising public awareness in the EU of the challenges of migration and of providing a political response which was as comprehensive as possible.

Pointing to the paradoxical nature of migration policy, Mr AVRAMOPOULOS said that it was a divisive issue fuelled more often by perceptions than by objective data. He therefore welcomed the launching of a new European Agenda on Migration which would not only help Europe address the challenges facing it but would also enable it to establish a sound framework for future discussions on this matter. He went on to stress the importance of restoring confidence between Member States and in the ability of the European institutions to take action when their intervention provided added value.

He agreed with Mr TIMMERMANS that a European migration policy should be based on a broad approach combining solidarity, a fair distribution of responsibilities, reliability and a new governance pact between the various political

levels guided by the keywords protection, safeguarding and growth. All available tools and support by all Member States should be marshalled to pursue this policy, in a bid to better manage migration flows. He also advocated establishing positive links between the migration policy and key areas of political action such as foreign policy, development policy, and employment and education policies.

In the short term, he too considered that it would be worthwhile stepping up efforts to implement the existing instruments and legislation aimed at boosting cooperation between Member States and with Union agencies, the Commission playing a coordinating role. Mr AVRAMOPOULOS cited the example of the asylum system obliging Europe to protect vulnerable migrants, which could only be guaranteed by a broad approach based on a more solid link between external and internal policies. A common approach to asylum applications and a fairer redistribution of refugees through resettlement and relocation could help restore confidence and pave the way for more effective solidarity between Member States.

Mr AVRAMOPOULOS also underscored the need to tackle illegal immigration more vigorously and to secure the Union's borders. In order to assist Member States more in their border control operations, the Union should strengthen its capacity to deploy immediate operational assistance for those under pressure in terms of migration, for instance by adapting Frontex's competences and resources. The same applied to combating the criminal gangs engaged in people-smuggling and human trafficking. In this respect, Mr AVRAMOPOULOS referred to the possibility of appointing liaison officers in non-EU countries to ensure closer cooperation between the Union and neighbouring countries, as well as the option of using the cooperation processes established with the countries in the Horn of Africa.

Lastly, in his view, a new policy on legal immigration could contribute to economic growth by attracting fresh talent to Europe, thereby helping to remedy the skills shortage caused by a decline in the population.

In this respect, he felt that the Commission should first review the EU Blue Card Directive, given that it had not been fully implemented, by organising a public consultation on the attraction Europe held for workers and on the contents of the Directive itself.

He ended by underlining the fact that this day's policy debate was just the first step in a process that would culminate in the Commission drafting the future European migration policy with the political support of each one of its Members as well as the necessary resources and financing.

Ms MOGHERINI then took the floor, emphasising the relevance of this debate against the tragic background of shipwrecked migrants, which was virtually a daily occurrence in the Mediterranean. She endorsed the political approach which the Commission proposed following in terms of reviewing Union policy on migration. She congratulated the Commission Members on their excellent teamwork in preparing the policy debate, the results of which would be conveyed to the Member States at the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 March.

Turning again to the question of reinforcing Frontex and ensuring a fairer and more inclusive redistribution of efforts with regard to protection and reception of asylum seekers and persons in distress, she referred in particular to a better and more flexible implementation of the Dublin Regulation (in particular Article 17 on family reunification and the sovereignty clause) mentioned by Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr AVRAMOPOULOS as a core element of the future migration policy. She pointed out that the instruments were in place but were often used only partly and that their effective implementation should therefore be ensured. She added that the project team of Commissioners working on external policy issues would meet that afternoon to review aspects related to the external dimension of the future migration policy.

Ms MOGHERINI illustrated the direct link between international policy and

migration phenomena by referring to the specific case of Libya, which had become one of the main transit regions for illegal migrants heading for the Union. She recalled that Mr Bernardino León, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Libya, was engaged in ground-breaking work to promote dialogue between the different factions and parties in Libya with the objective of facilitating the formation of a national unity government in the country. Nevertheless, she considered that the Union should first and foremost direct its efforts towards helping to put an end to the conflict which was ravaging Libya by leveraging all the political tools at its disposal – including development policy, the new neighbourhood policy, defence policy, humanitarian policy and cooperation with strategic partners in the region and international and humanitarian organisations on the ground – to enable restoration of the country's civil structures once the core of the national unity government was in place. In addition, Ms MOGHERINI relayed that the migratory routes and people-trafficking through Libya, from which local criminal gangs were currently benefitting, were at risk of falling under the control of criminal and terrorist networks. She concluded that it was necessary to focus on the root causes of illegal migration which, in the case of Libya, required recourse to all existing foreign policy instruments.

Ms MOGHERINI confirmed her readiness to continue the work in progress with a view to ensuring adoption of the migration strategy as a matter of urgency. She considered that the strategy should be adopted preferably before the summer, given the increase in migratory flows and the urgent nature of the crises unfolding beyond the Union's borders. The external dimension of the strategy should (i) focus on irregular migration, in particular by stepping up the fight against criminal networks of human traffickers and smugglers, by promoting an effective return policy and by consolidating the Rabat process (migration flows from West and Central Africa), and the Khartoum process (migration routes from the Horn of Africa); (ii) ensure the protection of persons over the whole length of the migratory routes used, and in countries in the region which had received a high number of refugees, by means of

more credible and robust programmes for resettlement and regional protection (with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) ; and (iii) define an approach to legal migration focussing more efficiently on visa policy, in dialogue with the Union's strategic partners in particular. She also suggested considering new mobility partnerships to stimulate growth and development by working with third countries of origin on the role of remittances and cross-acceptance of academic and professional qualifications. The role of diasporas for indigenous communities could also be explored in this connection as a vector for development and growth with the Union's partners.

The Commission held a discussion in which the following main points were made:

- the worldwide trend of a sharp increase in migration in general, and in the number of refugees and displaced persons in particular, was a matter of great concern; the different dimensions of migration had to be analysed if its root causes were to be tackled;
- the urgent political imperative for the EU to act in accordance with its values, such as protection of fundamental rights and solidarity, to prevent tragedies like illegal migrants being shipwrecked off the European coasts while also meeting EU citizens' expectations in terms of securing the external borders and relieving the extreme pressure on some EU host countries; recognition of the considerable efforts undertaken by the most directly affected Member States to save lives, for instance in the Mediterranean;
- support for producing, in the near future, a European migration agenda which was comprehensive, ambitious, balanced and adequately funded; this programme should incorporate all aspects of migration policy, namely protection of refugees and asylum seekers, measures to combat irregular migration and human trafficking and the economic and social dimension, *inter alia* of legal

immigration;

- the complexity of the aspects to be taken into account; hence the need to mobilise all Members and departments responsible for education, social affairs and inclusion, justice, home affairs, health, development and transport policy around lead players within the Commission; an invitation to work closely with the EU bodies responsible for implementing those policies on the ground, in particular Frontex and Eurojust;
- the absolute necessity of greater solidarity within the EU and a fairer sharing of responsibilities between the Member States, for example in the areas of border security and measures to combat trafficking, but also resettlement and integration of migrants; the need to take greater account of the political, economic and social consequences of migration for host countries in Europe;
- support for the principle not of completely recasting migration policy, but of improving it so that the existing structures worked more effectively; adopted arrangements should be made to work in practice and existing instruments at EU and Member State level should be pooled; against that background, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) should be implemented in full; in addition, decisions to repatriate illegal migrants should be enforced; a reference to the varied capacity of Member States to host and integrate migrants;
- the need to explain and demonstrate that, in contrast to the prevailing perception in Europe, it was in the interests of the EU to welcome migrants so as to attract qualifications, entrepreneurs, brains and talents which would contribute to growth, economic competitiveness and innovation in Europe and compensate for its ageing population;
- a new strategic direction was needed for legal migration; priority should be given to improving the legal framework for third-country nationals who needed

protection, and also for attracting talent and overcoming qualified manpower shortages in some sectors of the European economy;

- against that background, there was general support for the idea of reviewing and extending the ‘Blue Card’ legislation; equally, visa arrangements for scientists should be extended to enable them to move freely around the EU over a longer period of time than the 12 months applicable at present;
- strong backing was given to increased funding for the efforts of Frontex to secure the EU's external borders and extended competences for the agency;
- attention was drawn to the national, regional and local programmes already in place, for example to help reduce poverty among migrants, to provide them with an education or to encourage them to set up businesses; the announcement of initiatives aimed at migrant women; the suggestion that illegal migrants in the Union be allowed immediate access to health care;
- it was suggested that European development strategies for migrants’ countries of origin should focus on the most fragile States; the resources which the Union could provide for this purpose, for example aid to build up capacity or assistance for return; the proposal to review European legislation to make it cheaper for migrants to send funds back to their country of origin; the need to help non-EU transit countries deal with the social, health and humanitarian consequences of having an influx of migrants on their territory;
- the suggestion that, over and above migration issues, a general EU political strategy be defined in relation to Africa in particular to tackle the roots of under-development in migrants’ countries of origin, including measures focusing on food security, training and access to markets for agricultural products;
- the new phenomenon of terrorism that was emerging alongside the problems of

security in the countries of origin and the trafficking caused by conflict and instability in certain countries, in particular Libya; the resulting confusion and false assumptions in the public's perception of the migration issue and the exploitation of this for political ends by certain populist movements.

Replying to these comments, Mr TIMMERMANS acknowledged that there was an increasing tendency to blur the lines between migration, security and the terrorist threat. He noted the need to reject wholeheartedly these misleading generalisations and to take these aspects into account in future work.

On the question of burden-sharing, he said that, although it was conceivable to step up EU support for Member States faced with a particularly high influx of refugees, it was nevertheless up to the Member States themselves to shoulder their responsibilities fully in areas of national sovereignty. All the Member States must contribute to the joint effort in order to ensure a fair distribution of the burden caused by migration throughout the Union, as this was a matter of European solidarity.

He thanked the Members of the Commission for their contributions to the policy debate, which complemented the comprehensive approach presented in the background note. He promised to take all these factors into account when preparing the agenda that would be laid before the Commission for scrutiny within a few months.

Mr AVRAMOPOULOS then spoke about the question of funding and, more specifically, the use of the Structural Funds in connection with migration policy. He also welcomed the fact that migration was on the agenda of the next meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 March in view of the significant nature of the external dimension and cooperation with third countries.

The debate had flagged up the relevance of numerous aspects of internal policy in areas such as social inclusion, health, transport, regional policy and agriculture. He also underlined the importance of reviewing the European Blue Card Directive, in

particular to meet the need for skills in certain industries, including to attract and retain entrepreneurs and their job-creating potential.

Ms MOGHERINI warned that the European public was increasingly uneasy about the EU's powerlessness to stem the tide of illegal migration. She again stressed that the priority was to take immediate and coordinated action to address the root causes of migration and in particular the crises on Europe's borders.

She noted that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had been active in Syria but could not play a similar role in Libya as that country had not signed a convention allowing it to work there.

Finally, she stressed that it was important always to make a distinction between terrorism and migration, despite the role played by trafficking networks in funding terrorist organisations.

Winding up the policy debate, the PRESIDENT highlighted the urgent need to mobilise solidarity in the Union at a time when more and more human tragedies were unfolding on its doorstep. Since humanitarian disasters were by definition unpredictable, the argument for solidarity was that no Member State could respond on its own to the many different basic needs created by such disasters.

He ended by expressing his deep regret at the previous day's announcement of an accident in the Mediterranean that had cost the lives of ten or so illegal migrants. He also noted that in the space of two days some 950 people had been saved from makeshift boats off the south of Italy.

He asked Mr TIMMERMANS, Ms MOGHERINI and Mr AVRAMOPOULOS to take all these factors into account in preparing the Agenda on Migration and suggested bringing forward the date on which the final document would be presented to the College of Commissioners so as to speed up implementation of the practical measures proposed.

The Commission took note of the results of this debate and of the background note distributed under the authority of Mr TIMMERMANS, Ms MOGHERINI and Mr AVRAMOPOULOS as SEC(2015) 134.

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The meeting closed at 11.51.