



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2363 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 17 February 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2363rd meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Tuesday 19 January 2021

(afternoon)

PV(2021) 2363 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Tuesday 19 January 2021 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.11 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms GABRIEL	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	Items 8 (in part) and 9

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Attended by videoconference:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Ms FERREIRA	Member	

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr VANDENBERGHE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 7 and 8
Ms MICELI	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 9
Mr HAGER	Chef de cabinet to Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Items 1 to 8
Ms WEBBER	Chef de cabinet to Ms JOHANSSON	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Mr POWER	Chef de cabinet to Ms McGUINNESS	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, assisted by Ms DEPREZ, Director in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2021) 2363/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2363/FINAL)

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(2021) 2363)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 January 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2359TH, 2360TH, 2361ST AND 2362ND MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (2, 9, 15/24 DECEMBER 2020, AND 14 JANVIER 2021)

(PV(2020) 2359; PV(2020) 2360; PV(2020) 2360, 2ND PART)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2359th and 2360th meetings and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2361st and 2362nd meetings for a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 2)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 15 January 2021 (RCC(2021) 2).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

4.1. HORIZONTAL ITEMS

i) 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework – Trilogues

(point 1.1.1 of the IRG record)

- Justice programme (Regulation) – BARLEY & HAUTALA report – 2018/0208 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 9/2.

- Rights and Values programme (Regulation) – KUHNKE report – 2018/0207 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 10/2.

- Public sector loan facility under the Just Transition Mechanism (Regulation) – HAHN & VAN OVERTVELDT report – 2020/0100 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 12/2.

ii) 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework – European Parliament dossiers – January 2021 part-session

(point 1.1.2 of the IRG record)

Ordinary legislative procedure – First reading

- Technical Support Instrument (Regulation) – KARAS, PÎSLARU & GEESE report – 2020/0103 (COD)

The Commission took note of the compromise text in SP(2021) 16, further to note SI(2021) 1, which it had already approved on 12 January 2021.

4.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

iii) Council dossiers

(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

- Amendment of Directive 2006/112/EC as regards rates of value added tax (Council Directive) – SZANYI report – 2018/0005(CNS)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 13.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

iv) Action to be taken on Parliament's legislative resolutions and other resolutions of a legal nature

(SP(2021) 682 and /2)

The Commission decided to empower the Members of the Commission responsible for the sectors in question, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and, if necessary, with the other Members concerned, to adopt the amended proposals for transmission to Parliament and the Council, as set out in SP(2021) 682/2, drawn up following the December 2020 part-session of Parliament, the contents of which were noted.

v) Action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its October II 2020 part-session

(point 5.6.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2021) 9/3 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its October II 2020 part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2021) 11)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 11 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference on Thursday 14 January 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2020) 421 ET SEQ.; SEC(2021) 36 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 14 December 2020 and 15 January 2021.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2020) 422 ET SEQ.; SEC(2021) 37 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 14 December 2020 and 15 January 2021.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2020) 423 ET SEQ.; SEC(2021) 38 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 14 December 2020 and 17 January 2021 archived in Decide.

**6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2021) 39 AND /2)**

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 18 and 22 January 2021.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2021) 40 AND /2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2021) 1 AND /2)

Mr HAHN announced that 14 decisions were submitted to the College for approval that day and drew particular attention to three of them.

First, he referred to the decision put before the Commission not to require the resignation of officials who no longer fulfilled the condition of being a national of one of the Member States as a result of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. He stressed the importance of the decision for Commission staff of British nationality and welcomed the fact that it was now official.

Second, he announced that on 1 February Mr Michel BARNIER would be appointed special adviser to the PRESIDENT to oversee the ratification process of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which was currently being provisionally applied.

Third, Mr HAHN informed the College of the PRESIDENT's decision to appoint Mr ŠEFČOVIČ as co-chair for the EU side of the Partnership Council set up under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The PRESIDENT pointed out that Mr BARNIER would act as special adviser until the end of the ratification process for the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation agreement, of which he had been the chief negotiator. She was profoundly grateful to him and highlighted his diligence throughout the tough discussions in keeping the Member

States and the European Parliament regularly informed, which had made it possible to maintain the unity of the 27 in this sensitive matter.

She also took the opportunity to thank Mr ŠEFČOVIČ very warmly for his outstanding work in the Joint Committee responsible for implementing the UK Withdrawal Agreement.

The Partnership Council, which he would now co-chair, would have its work cut out in monitoring proper implementation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, once it had been ratified. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ was entrusted with an onerous responsibility.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ thanked the PRESIDENT for her trust and Mr BARNIER for the excellent cooperation he had enjoyed with him in recent years on the UK's withdrawal. It was an honour for him to be entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring all aspects of the new relationship emerging between the EU and the UK. He vowed to represent the EU and defend its interests in the Partnership Council.

A brief discussion ensued, during which the Commission welcomed the appointment of Mr BARNIER and congratulated Mr ŠEFČOVIČ on his new responsibilities as the UK withdrawal was becoming a reality. He would have the difficult task of steering the EU's new relationship with that third country; a relationship which would require particular vigilance in view of the stakes.

7.1. DG ENERGY – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR

(PERS(2021) 2 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the Nuclear Energy, Safety and ITER Directorate in DG Energy (PERS(2021) 2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 16 and 17 December 2020 (PERS(2021) 2/2 and /3).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms SIMSON, it then decided to appoint Mr Jan PANEK to the post.

This decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

**7.2. OFFICE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION AND PAYMENT OF
INDIVIDUAL ENTITLEMENTS – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15
DIRECTOR
(PERS(2019) 92 TO /3)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the Office for the Administration and Payment of Individual Entitlements (PERS(2019) 92).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 13 and 24 September 2019 (PERS(2019) 92/2 and /3).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Alexander GEMBERG-WIESIKE to the post.

This decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

**7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF
AD14/15 PRINCIPAL ADVISER
(PERS(2020) 103 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Adviser responsible for the

Diversity and Inclusion Office (HR.DIO) in DG Human Resources and Security (PERS(2020) 103 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 6 and 7 January 2021 (PERS(2020) 103/3 and /4).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Ms Géraldine DUFORT to the post.

This decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

7.4. EUROSTAT – CLOSURE OF A SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR, AND APPOINTMENT OF AD14 DIRECTOR

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr GENTILONI, the Commission decided:

- to close, with immediate effect, internal selection procedure COM/2020/730 for the post of Director of the Resources Directorate in Eurostat, without making an appointment;
- to fill the post by transferring in the interest of the service under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Emanuele BALDACCI, an AD14 official and currently Director of the Digital Services Directorate in DG Informatics.

Unless otherwise indicated, these decisions would take effect on a date to be determined.

7.5. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF AD15 DIRECTOR

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms JOHANSSON and Mr LENARČIČ, the Commission decided

to fill the post of Director of the Migration and Security Funds; Financial Resources Directorate in DG Migration and Home Affairs by transferring in the interest of the service under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations Ms Chiara GARIAZZO, an AD15 official and currently Director of the General Affairs Directorate in DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

This decision would take effect on 16 February 2021.

7.6. DG EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION – LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS (EUROFOUND), AT GRADE AD14 (PERS(2021) 3 TO /3)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr SCHMIT, the Commission decided:

- to approve the list of three candidates, presented in alphabetical order, set out in point 5 of PERS(2021) 1, for the post of Executive Director of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (*Eurofound*) in Dublin, and to consider this list as the Commission proposal;
- to ask the Commissioner responsible, Mr SCHMIT, to inform the Management Board of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (*Eurofound*) of this decision.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.7. DG ENERGY – PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR THE POST OF DIRECTOR OF THE ENERGY COMMUNITY SECRETARIAT (PERS(2021) 4)

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On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to accept the publication of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2021) 4 for the post of Director of the Energy Community Secretariat in Vienna.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**7.8. JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE – INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION (AT GRADE AD14/15), AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION (AT GRADE AD14) OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR A DIRECTOR POST
(PERS(2021) 5)**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2021) 5 for the post of Director of the ‘Nuclear Decommissioning and Waste Management’ Directorate in the Joint Research Centre.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**7.9. EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE – INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION (AT GRADE AD14/15), AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION (AT GRADE AD14) OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR A DIRECTOR POST
(PERS(2021) 6)**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2021) 6 for the post of Director of the ‘Expenditure – Operations and Investigations’ Directorate in the European Anti-Fraud Office.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**7.10. DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY / DG COMMUNICATION NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY / DG INTERNAL MARKET, INDUSTRY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMES / DG RESEARCH AND INNOVATION – AMENDMENT OF ORGANISATION CHARTS
(PERS(2021) 7)**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms KYRIAKIDES, Mr BRETON and Ms GABRIEL, the Commission decided:

- to withdraw, for this specific case, the delegation giving the Directors-General concerned the power to adopt amendments to the organisation charts by simplified procedure and, consequently, to allow the Commission itself to exercise the power regarding these amendments to the organisation charts;
- to create a temporary entity attached to the Director-General of each of the DGs which were to be the future parent DGs of the Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) in order to host in these entities temporarily the mirror management posts destined for secondment to HaDEA, and to create within these temporary entities:
 - a temporary Principal Adviser post and four temporary Seconded Head of Unit posts in DG Health and Food Safety;
 - a temporary Seconded Head of Unit post in DG Communication Networks, Content and Technology;
 - a temporary Seconded Head of Unit post in DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs;

- two temporary Seconded Head of Unit posts in DG Research and Innovation;
- that these posts would be abolished upon the adoption of the legislative package for the creation of the HaDEA in the context of the delegation of implementation tasks to Executive Agencies for the 2021-2027 EU programmes since the new organisation charts of the parent DGs in the legislative package would include the permanent management posts for secondment to HaDEA;
- to approve the internal publication of the newly created temporary Principal Adviser post in DG Health and Food Safety, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.11. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – DECISION OF THE COMMISSION NOT TO REQUEST THE RESIGNATION OF OFFICIALS NO LONGER MEETING THE CONDITION OF BEING NATIONALS OF A MEMBER STATE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DUE TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE END OF THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The Commission took note of the information in point 3 of PERS(2021) 1/2 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to remove, in this specific case, the delegation conferring upon the Director-General of Human Resources and Security the power to adopt decisions under Article 49 of the Staff Regulations, and, consequently, to exercise itself the power to adopt decisions under Article 49 of the Staff Regulations;

- not to use the discretionary power conferred upon it by Article 49 of the Staff Regulations to dismiss officials who no longer met the statutory condition of being a national of one of the Member States of the European Union due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.12. SECRETARIAT GENERAL – TASK FORCE FOR RELATIONS WITH
THE UNITED KINGDOM
(SEC(2021) 44 FINAL)**

The Commission took note of the information in point 4 of PERS(2021) 1/2 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to suppress the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom (UKTF);
- to create in the Secretariat-General a ‘Service for the EU-UK Agreements’ Directorate (SG.UKS), attached to the Deputy Secretary-General in charge of interinstitutional and external relations. The mandate and duration of this service would be reviewed on a continuous basis. The Service would be led by a Head of Service at Director level and made up of two units:
 - Unit ‘EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement’ (SG.UKS.1), in charge of the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, including citizens’ rights, the separation provisions and the financial provisions, as well as the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Protocol on Cyprus and the Protocol on Gibraltar, and the governance arrangements, including the Joint Committee, the Specialised Committees and Dispute Resolution;

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- Unit ‘EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement’ (SG.UKS.2), in charge of coordinating the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, in particular the dispute settlement mechanism, governance arrangements, the secretariat of the partnership Council and coordination of the specialised committees, and legal and institutional matters;
- to delegate, with immediate effect, to Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, any other matter related to the suppression of the UKTF, notably transfer of the remaining staff and posts;
- to approve the new organisation chart set out in SEC(2021) 44 final, with effect from 1 March 2021.

Following this reorganisation, the total number of directorates in the Secretariat-General would increase from 10 to 11 and the number of units would increase from 37 to 39.

Unless indicated otherwise, these decisions would take effect on 1 March 2021.

7.13. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL ADVISER TO THE COMMISSION
(PERS(2021) 8)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided:

- to appoint Mr Michel BARNIER as a Special Adviser to the PRESIDENT;
- to authorise Mr HAHN, the Member of the Commission in charge of the Budget and Human Resources, by derogation from the second paragraph of Point 6 of Commission Decision C(2007) 6655, to amend

Mr Michel BARNIER's contract in the event of duly justified and urgent needs, subject to the availability of sufficient budgetary appropriations;

- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement this decision by signing the contract on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.14. COMMISSION DECISION ON POST TERM-OF-OFFICE ACTIVITIES OF A FORMER MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION (C(2021) 9000)

The Commission adopted the Decision set out in C(2021) 9000.

The Commission decided that the professional activities envisaged by Ms Violeta BULC after leaving office as a Member of the Commission were compatible with Article 245(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and with the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, subject to certain specific conditions and obligations.

7.15. DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON THE APPOINTMENT OF A CO-CHAIR REPRESENTING THE UNION WITHIN THE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL ESTABLISHED UNDER THE TRADE AND COOPERATION AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EUROPEAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMUNITY, OF THE ONE PART, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND, OF THE OTHER PART (P(2021) 1)

The Commission took note of the decision of the PRESIDENT set out in P(2021) 1.

**8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL – A UNITED FRONT TO BEAT COVID-19
(COM(2021) 35 TO/ 3; RCC(2021) 6)**

The PRESIDENT opened the discussion on the Communication submitted to the College for approval that day which would contribute to the debate that the Heads of State or Government of the EU would have by video conference on Thursday 21 January 2021 on continuing a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She thanked the cabinets and departments which had stepped up to draft this Communication in the space of just a few days with a view to clarifying certain points while taking account of the rapidly changing public health conditions in the EU.

The general context was difficult. The situation looked set to improve steadily following the start of vaccination at European level on 27 December, but the threat of a rapid deterioration remained as a result of the emergence of variants of COVID-19.

She therefore welcomed the quality of the Communication, the four priorities of which enabled the challenges of the coming few weeks to be clearly identified with a view to concentrating and coordinating the efforts of the Member States on the most important aspects.

First, the aim was to speed up the deployment of vaccination throughout the EU by encouraging the Member States to ensure that their management arrangements reflected the scale of the task at hand. To assist with these efforts, the Commission was working with the Member States to draw up a vaccination certificate.

Second, the emergence of variants which might prove not only more contagious, but also more aggressive, or even resistant to the vaccines developed to date, required the Member States to step up screening and intensify work on genome sequencing

to bring the situation under control.

Third, it was important to preserve the Single Market and free movement to the extent permitted by the public health situation, as restated in the Communication.

Fourth and last, the EU had to demonstrate international solidarity. The fight against this global pandemic could be effective only if the EU gave third countries access right away to the vaccines already authorised on its territory. She called on the College to support Member States facing incomprehension on the part of their citizens who wanted to be vaccinated but could not yet get the jab.

Mr SCHINAS added that the measures planned around the four priorities referred to by the PRESIDENT reflected the EU's determination to speak with one voice and to act in a coordinated fashion, with the utmost vigilance.

He drew the College's attention to the proposed balance between the need to preserve the Single Market and the fundamental principle of freedom of movement on the one hand and the need for mitigation measures to bring the public health situation under control on the other.

He noted with satisfaction that many Member States now recognised the added value and facilitating role of the Commission in the management of this crisis. It was working unstintingly up to the limits imposed by its remit. However, the emergence of new variants of the virus and sharp increases in the number of infections left no room for complacency.

Stressing in her turn the urgent need for a coordinated approach to the current complex situation, Ms KYRIAKIDES outlined in greater detail the specific measures proposed in each of the four areas examined by the Communication.

First, with regard to the acceleration of vaccination throughout the EU, she said that the Communication set quantitative targets while not disregarding the differences between the Member States. By March 2021, 80% of over-80s and health and social care professionals should be vaccinated in every Member State. By the end of

summer 2021, the Member States should have vaccinated 70% of the adult population.

The conditional marketing authorisation for two safe and effective vaccines in the space of just a few months represented an undeniable success. Subject to the outcome of the evaluations carried out by the European Medicines Agency, two further vaccines might be added. The less complex logistical arrangements for those vaccines would facilitate faster deployment of vaccination.

As the PRESIDENT had mentioned, harmonised vaccination certificates across the EU could also be useful for purely medical reasons at this stage.

Second, with the emergence of variants of COVID-19, she explained that the Member States would need to adapt their testing strategies to break transmission chains and slow the spread of the virus, whether or not it mutated.

Likewise, with a view to containing the risks of a deterioration in the public health situation, the Communication called on the Member States to increase genome sequencing significantly with the help of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), whose role should be made more visible.

Ms KYRIAKIDES regretted that at present many Member States were not sequencing above 1% of positive samples. The Communication had set a quantified target in that area too with a view to observing the progression of variants effectively or detecting new ones. The Member States should therefore, as a matter of urgency, increase genome sequencing to at least 5% and preferably 10% of positive samples.

Third, Ms KYRIAKIDES said that it was necessary to protect the integrity of the Single Market and freedom of movement, an objective which, by its very nature, could only be achieved by a common approach at EU level. Restrictions on this cornerstone of European integration should be limited to what was strictly necessary to avoid any deterioration in the epidemiological situation.

She drew the College's attention to an innovation set out in the Communication – the definition of common incidence thresholds based on a set of EU-wide indicators. Once these thresholds had been reached, restrictions on free movement could be relaxed. The resulting credibility, predictability and legal certainty would foster public confidence and also stimulate economic recovery.

Fourth, for public health, humanitarian, political and even geopolitical reasons, it was crucial that the EU should lead at international level.

To ensure early access to vaccines, the Commission would set up a Team Europe mechanism to structure the provision of vaccines shared by Member States with partner countries.

With regard to international solidarity, Ms KYRIAKIDES also mentioned the EU's commitment to COVAX, the global initiative designed to ensure fair and equitable access to safe and effective vaccines, and the new prospects for cooperation with the United States following the inauguration of the new US President, Mr Joe BIDEN.

Lastly, at the request of the PRESIDENT, she informed the College of the debate on the vaccination strategy held that morning at the part-session of Parliament. Overall, a very positive discussion had taken place. It had been dominated by two topics which would continue to be of concern to the Commission.

One concerned the transparency of advance purchase agreements negotiated by the Commission with pharmaceutical laboratories on behalf of the Member States. Those agreements could be disclosed only with the agreement of the companies concerned. The Commission was working with them to that end.

The other concerned the speed of vaccine supplies and the number of doses that would be delivered.

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ briefed the College on the main points of the discussion held the previous day in the General Affairs Council in preparation for the video conference of European leaders on 21 January.

He noted with satisfaction that more and more Member States welcomed the Commission's contribution to the management of this crisis and appreciated the work that had been done. Some saw it as a major European success story. In accordance with the principle of solidarity and mutual trust, ministers were opposed to bilateral agreements being concluded individually by certain Member States, which would nullify European coordination efforts.

On the issue of vaccination, the Member States at the General Affairs Council on 18 January had called on the Commission to continue its efforts to rapidly deploy vaccines and speed up their production in order to increase vaccine availability in the first quarter of 2021.

He underlined the reassuring effect of the PRESIDENT's immediate intervention on 15 January after BioNTech/Pfizer had announced delivery delays for its vaccine, when she had stated that BioNTech/Pfizer had confirmed that it would honour its contractual commitments and deliver the agreed number of doses for the first quarter of 2021.

Moreover, it was useful to start work now on the development of interoperable vaccination certificates, though it was too early to address the issue of the possible use of these certificates for other than purely health purposes.

He also supported the idea of raising Member States' awareness of the importance of genome sequencing in the response to COVID-19 and its variants.

The General Affairs Council had also addressed the issue of freedom of movement for workers.

Lastly, he welcomed the fact that during the discussion many Member States had emphasised the need to facilitate access by non-EU partner countries to vaccines approved in Europe without waiting for COVAX's support.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ concluded by expressing the wish of the Member States to have detailed figures on the number of doses actually ordered of the two vaccines with

marketing authorisation in Europe. He reiterated that it was up to the Member States whether or not to request the number of doses proposed. Some Member States regretted that complex formulas had led them to take a chance on vaccines covered by the Advance Purchase Agreements concluded by the Commission but still awaiting authorisation.

In the course of the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- the considerable progress made by the EU, at the Commission’s initiative, since the outbreak of the pandemic; the Commission, after a tough battle over several months, could take pride today in the successful development of the first effective and safe vaccines among a wide range of options, the first conditional marketing authorisations, and the launch of vaccination campaigns throughout the EU;
- the major scientific and technological advances that had made these achievements possible;
- the balanced approach and timeliness of today’s Communication, which proposed the continuation of a common approach by the 27 Member States in order to move forward in a coordinated manner in the next stages of the EU strategy’s implementation;
- the value of this Communication, which clearly outlined the steps to be taken at this stage of the launch of vaccinations in order to allow EU leaders to have an informed discussion at their videoconference on 21 January;
- the merits of quantified vaccination targets;
- the call, however, not to raise expectations too highly and for a degree of caution in view of the current delays in the production and delivery to the Member States of the doses of vaccines ordered;

- the usefulness therefore of contributing to the efforts undertaken to speed up the production of the vaccines with marketing authorisations, in parallel with increased vaccination on a large scale;
- a reminder that the Commission had negotiated the agreements for the advanced purchase of vaccines for the EU, but the Member States owned the doses purchased;
- in any event, the recognition that vaccination alone would not be enough to ensure a rapid return to a ‘new normality’;
- a reminder that, on the one hand, the entire European population would not be vaccinated or could not be vaccinated in the next few months, which was why strategies had to be determined to take account of this reality;
- the need therefore to invest massively and without delay in the scientific research efforts vital for developing rapid antigen tests, which could be used for example at airports, and to determine standards for these tools;
- on the other hand, reference to the all too many unknowns that still remained with regard to the vaccines themselves, in particular the duration of guaranteed immunity and the lack of scientific evidence at this stage as to whether vaccinated persons could transmit the virus;
- the need therefore to continue work on infection mechanisms, update national screening strategies, and also ramp up genome sequencing in order to tackle head on the risks inherent to the new variants of the virus;
- to this end, the call to use ECDC capacities and existing funding opportunities at EU level;
- a question about the possibility of authorising vaccines in the EU developed by, for example, China or Russia;

- the diversity of situations in the Member States regarding the implementation of vaccination campaigns and the administration of available doses;
- the desire for the Commission to explain in its communication activities that although the European Medicines Agency took longer than its US or UK counterparts, for example, to provide its scientific assessments with a view to authorising vaccines, this was because these non-EU agencies had chosen to circumvent certain stages of the procedure, whereas in the EU they had all been followed without sacrificing safety for the sake of speed;
- with regard to the vaccination certificate proposed for health purposes, the need to produce a system at European level which respected European values, in particular the protection of personal data, and a reminder of the precondition for mutual recognition between the Member States of the information it would contain;
- the observation that it was too soon to consider, as of today, uses other than health-related ones for the certificate in question when not all persons wishing to be vaccinated could yet be vaccinated and it had not been scientifically proven that a vaccinated person could not transmit the virus to others;
- for that reason, the importance of the term ‘certificate’ used by the Commission and a warning against the idea of making this certificate a condition for being allowed to travel, which would make vaccination compulsory, raise ethical problems and compromise the freedom of choice offered to all citizens;
- the need therefore to maintain the current measures of screening tests and compliance with quarantine periods for travellers, in addition to the precautions that were now established practice with regard to social distancing and the wearing of masks;
- as a result of the current production and delivery difficulties, the vital need to prevent certain parties from obtaining privileged access to the few doses

available, thus depriving priority persons, which would jeopardise the successful implementation of the strategy and fuel a feeling of injustice;

- the sensitivity, in some Member States, of the issue of compulsory vaccination against COVID-19 in order to travel outside the EU; however, the comment that a similar international obligation already existed to combat certain other diseases;
- the need to depoliticise the general issue of vaccination;
- recognition, however, of the gradual erosion of resistance to vaccination in the Member States, a trend which should continue as the campaigns progressed;
- the suggestion whereby the possibility of holding regular meetings with the heads of national vaccination campaigns could be examined in order to contribute to communication on this subject;
- the aim, for as long as the pandemic continued, of allowing the greatest degree of freedom of movement possible within the Single Market without worsening the health situation, and a reminder of the fact that restrictions on this fundamental freedom must be proportionate and non-discriminatory;
- the considerable barrier to travel, including essential journeys, that current testing capacities represented;
- the argument whereby the health situation could justify non-essential travel being strongly discouraged, as was currently the case due to the appearance of more rapidly transmissible variants, pending a substantial improvement in the epidemiological situation;
- the clear interest in having reserved lanes for the transport of goods (green lanes) and in the rules established at the beginning of the pandemic to allow workers in the sector to ensure the cross-border movement of goods;

- the recognition that Member States had been tempted to impose new restrictions in the field of transport;
- the example of the testing requirements recently imposed by a Member State on drivers of heavy goods vehicles arriving from the United Kingdom and the infection rate of only 0.3% recorded on that occasion, calling into question their proportionality;
- as regards the external dimension, highlighting of the strategic interest for the EU of tangible solidarity with third countries, through access to vaccines authorised in Europe, and the donations Member States could allocate to them from a proportion of the doses intended for themselves, given that the EU would not be protected from COVID-19 until its neighbours and the rest of the world were also protected;
- the need for the Commission and the Member States to continue to support COVAX;
- the hope that Member States would heed the Commission's call to immediately begin sharing a proportion of the vaccine doses allocated to them under the European scheme with low- or middle-income third countries;
- for some, the case for the possibility of a positive international dynamic that would give rise to tangible solidarity as regards the poorest countries; for others, the probability that Member States would not make donations at this stage, given the supply difficulties encountered at the beginning of their own national vaccination campaigns;
- moreover, the probability that Member States, as the owners of the vaccine doses, would choose to make donations to those third countries with whom they had close ties;

- the sensitivity of the definition of the criteria used to identify donation recipients;
- the recommendation that these donations be made simultaneously, where possible;
- the setting up of a mechanism within the ‘Team Europe’ framework designed to structure the provision of vaccines to be shared by Member States with partner countries from the 2.3 billion doses obtained under the EU Vaccines Strategy, particularly those in the Western Balkans, the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood and Africa;
- the argument that vaccine donations to the EU’s neighbouring countries would be most useful today rather than in a few months’ time;
- the desirability of the EU strengthening its narrative around solidarity and its diplomacy, by emphasising the idea that it had always maintained that vaccines should be considered global public goods, even though the EU itself did not yet have the total quantity of vaccine it had secured under its contracts with the pharmaceutical industry;
- the intermediary role to be played by EU delegations in this regard.

Ms KYRIAKIDES first of all stressed that the fight against COVID-19 was a long-term task, and that she was proud of the progress that had already been made in a few months, thanks to the strategy proposed by the Commission.

She then responded to some of the comments made during the discussion.

As regards the suggestion to hold regular meetings with the national heads of vaccination programmes, she was in favour of examining this possibility, provided that such meetings did not duplicate the work of the existing epidemiologist platform.

She also observed that she had invited the Member States to share information with the ECDC on the numbers of people vaccinated and on their sequencing activities, but only ten of them had responded to her request.

She confirmed that genome sequencing was of crucial importance, as was pharmacovigilance. She recommended that the attention of EU leaders be drawn to this issue and to the need to report to the European Medicines Agency any difficulties that might arise following the vaccinations, in the interest of safety. She underlined that this represented a fundamental and essential dimension of the marketing authorisations granted to the vaccines currently being used in the EU.

Mr SCHINAS welcomed the College's support for that day's Communication and stressed that, in these exceptional times, exceptional measures going beyond political divides should be proposed. He underlined the extreme sensitivity of the current situation, which called for vigilance, unity and creativity.

He was certain that the issue of vaccination certificates would give rise to a European public debate, which would also have international significance.

The PRESIDENT also returned to certain aspects of the discussion.

She first recognised that, while the Commission was sometimes criticised for its actions to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, ever greater numbers of EU citizens nonetheless supported the principle of joint European action to overcome the current crisis, as had been confirmed by polls.

She then pointed out that, on the issue of transparency, the European Parliament had wanted to know the content of the contracts concluded by the Commission with vaccine manufacturers, and that only CureVac had so far agreed to the MEPs having access to this information; the others had been very reluctant. She added that Member States for their part were in possession of all of this contractual information.

Nonetheless, she suggested differentiating between transparency relating to the quantities of vaccine provided to the Member States, which were figures that national governments could make public, and transparency relating to the numbers of people vaccinated, which the ECDC should have.

Finally, she concluded by returning to the distribution mechanism provided for in the Advance Purchase Agreements concluded by the Commission. She explained that the vaccine manufacturers concerned provided Member States with an initial stock of doses calculated pro-rata on the basis of their population, and that the Commission could order additional stock for them if national governments so wished. Additional, unused stock could then be redistributed to interested Member States pro-rata on the basis of their population.

She thanked Mr SCHINAS and Ms KYRIAKIDES for their excellent work.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2021) 35/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council and, for information, to the national parliaments.

9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL SYSTEM: FOSTERING OPENNESS, STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE
(COM(2021) 32 TO /3; RCC(2021) 5)

The PRESIDENT asked Mr DOMBROVSKIS, Mr GENTILONI, Ms SIMSON and Ms McGUINNESS to present to the College the Communication entitled ‘The European economic and financial system: fostering openness, strength and resilience’.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS pointed out that this Communication followed on from the 2018 Communication on the international role of the euro, which had recommended reinforcing and deepening Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) given that the EMU's resilience was the key to monetary stability. Since then, geopolitical tensions had increased, the UK had left the EU and the COVID-19 pandemic had triggered an unprecedented economic crisis.

The aim of the proposed strategy was to foster the openness, strength and resilience of the EU's economic and financial system in the coming years and strengthen the Union's capacity to play a leading role in global economic governance while protecting itself from unfair and abusive practices. This strategy went hand in hand with the EU's commitment to a more resilient and open global economy, well-functioning international financial markets and the rules-based multilateral system.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that three main lines of action were proposed to achieve this end, namely (i) promoting the international role of the euro, (ii) strengthening EU financial market infrastructures and increasing their resilience, and (iii) improving the implementation and enforcement of the EU's sanction regimes, and introducing a policy to tackle more effectively the unlawful extra-territorial application of unilateral sanctions by third countries.

As regards the international role of the euro, the Commission proposed a targeted plan to promote the use of the euro and its status as an international reference currency by reaching out to third-country partners in the trade, energy and commodities sectors. It also proposed working with the ECB to review the possibility of introducing a digital euro, and the difficulties that might need to be overcome.

As regards financial market infrastructures, the guiding principle of the proposed measures was to further develop and strengthen the resilience of the companies that constituted these infrastructures, including with regard to the extra-territorial effects

of unlawful sanctions by third parties. At the same time, measures were proposed to ensure the application of EU sanctions and analyse possible options for counteracting unlawful unilateral sanctions by third countries.

Mr GENTILONI said that the share of the euro in global holdings of foreign exchange reserves currently stood at around 20% and had changed little in the last 20 years. In the same period, on the other hand, the share of the dollar in global holdings of foreign exchange reserves had fallen from 70% to around 60%, to the benefit of other currencies. He considered that multilateralism led naturally to the use of different currencies at international level. He also emphasised that this Communication was being approved at an exceptional time, when the EU was being pushed to strengthen its financial framework as a result of the UK's withdrawal, and was preparing to pay the Member States the funds under the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE).

Ms SIMSON pointed out that the EU was a major importer of energy. It imported 90% of its oil consumption and 70% of its gas consumption, representing EUR 274 billion in total each year for the 27 Member States. Most of the import transactions and contracts were denominated in dollars. Europe should therefore use its economic weight to increase its open strategic autonomy and economic resilience, reduce the vulnerability that came from reliance on the dollar and consider providing new economic opportunities for market operators.

The previous Commission had already started work on the international role of the euro in trade in energy commodities and had adopted an important recommendation addressed to the Member States and private companies to encourage the use of the euro in energy contracts.

Ms SIMSON said that while it was difficult to change patterns in established markets, such as oil, there was now a window of opportunity to create the conditions for euro-denominated trade in new nascent markets, such as hydrogen.

Ms McGUINNESS stressed that one important aspect in encouraging use of the

euro was to make it fit for the digital age. The objective was therefore to analyse, in cooperation with the European Central Bank, the various policy questions raised by the possible introduction of a digital euro.

The Communication also proposed increasing the resilience of financial market infrastructure. As global players, the financial markets were exposed to the risks of unlawful extra-territorial application of sanctions by third countries. For this reason, ways of improving this resilience should be explored. The fact that a large proportion of euro-denominated contracts were cleared outside the EU was a vulnerability for central counterparties (CCPs). Financial entities in the Union should therefore reduce their exposure to UK CCPs, and CCPs within the EU should build capacity.

Ms McGUINNESS added that the EU must also focus on reducing its reliance on foreign investment banks and funding in foreign currencies, since US investment banks were dominant in the EU and EU banks were still largely funded in US dollars.

Furthermore, capital flows and financial services with third countries must be better secured. The unlawful extra-territorial application of sanctions could compromise legitimate trade and investment with third countries. A systematic analysis should therefore be made of ways to ensure uninterrupted trade and payments with partners which were subject to unlawful extra-territorial application of sanctions. In this context, cooperation on sanctions with allies and partners, notably with the G7 countries, would be strengthened, and policy options would be explored to deter the unlawful extra-territorial application of sanctions, including amending the Blocking Statute.

In the course of the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- strong support for the Communication, which was described as timely, balanced and appropriate to strengthen the EU’s economic and financial system, financial resilience and strategic autonomy;
- concern about the risks associated with the banking sector and its reliance on foreign hedge funds and US rating agencies;
- satisfaction that the Communication made explicit reference to humanitarian aid and recognised the structural problems faced by the EU’s operations in this area with reliable international partners in the event of the application of European sanctions; hence the need for certain exceptions in order to ensure that humanitarian partners could continue their work in these situations;
- the suggestion that more visibility be given to the success of Eurobond issues as safe assets;
- a reminder that bonds issued under the SURE scheme gave the EU significant influence and had been very well received by the financial markets, while supporting the Member States in their national bond issues, contrary to the fears initially expressed by some of them;
- a commitment to increase the euro’s share of world holdings of foreign exchange reserves to above the current 20%;
- a call to develop a digital euro under the auspices of and in cooperation with the European Central Bank;
- the support of European leaders for electronic payment and the need to further develop blockchain initiatives so as to facilitate cross-border activities, in particular by private companies;
- the observation that the entry into office of the new US administration offered the opportunity to resume work on reciprocity.

Winding up the discussion, Ms McGUINNESS said that that day's Communication was an important step in enabling the Union to control and protect its financial market infrastructures.

On the subject of humanitarian aid and sanctions, she stressed the importance of protecting the EU's humanitarian action in a transparent and responsible way. She felt that the Communication proposed a good balance from this point of view.

She praised the Commission's efforts to foster the introduction of global standards and thereby enable the EU to play a central role in the upcoming discussions on revisions of the applicable rules.

Lastly, Ms McGUINNESS welcomed the College's support for the use of the digital euro in close cooperation with the European Central Bank.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2021) 32/3 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the national parliaments.

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The meeting closed at 15.18.