



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2388 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 13 October 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2388th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 8 September 2021

(morning)

PV(2021) 2388 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	4-6
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2021) 2388/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2388/FINAL)	7
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET (RCC(2021) 2388)	7
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2385 TH , 2386 TH AND 2387 TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (30 JUNE, 6 AND 14 JULY 2021) (PV(2021) 2385)	7
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2021) 169)	7
5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 37).....	9
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	10
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2021) 290 ET SEQ.).....	10
6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2021) 291 ET SEQ.)	10
6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2021) 292 ET SEQ.)	10
6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2021) 293 AND /2)	10
6.5. GRANTING OF A GENERAL EMPOWERMENT RELATING TO THE ADOPTION OF CERTAIN MEASURES UNDER REGULATION (EU) 2021/523 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING THE INVESTEU PROGRAMME (C(2021) 6599).....	11
7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2021) 294).....	11
7.1. DG EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO) – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR (PERS(2021) 75 TO /3)	11
7.2. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR (PERS(2021) 76 TO /3)	12

7.3. DG EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO) – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND SECONDMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE SERVICE, UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS, OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL	12
7.4. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – AUTHORISATION FOR THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION AT GRADE AD14, OF A PRINCIPAL ADVISER POST (PERS(2021) 77)	13
7.5. DG COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY – APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN CYBERSECURITY INDUSTRIAL, TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH COMPETENCE CENTRE AND THE NETWORK OF NATIONAL COORDINATION CENTRES	14
8. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN	14
9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL – 2021 STRATEGIC FORESIGHT REPORT – THE EU’S CAPACITY AND FREEDOM TO ACT (COM(2021) 750 TO /3; RCC(2021) 170)	15
10. OTHER BUSINESS.....	18
10.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INITIATIVE ENTITLED ‘ENSURING COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY CONFORMITY WITH EU TREATIES AND COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW’ PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL (C(2021) 6607)	19
10.2. ISSUANCE OF GREEN BONDS UNDER THE EU RECOVERY PLAN	21
10.3. GRADUAL RETURN TO THE OFFICE FOR COMMISSION STAFF	22
10.4. UPDATE ON COVID-19 VACCINATION AND LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATION TO THE PANDEMIC	22

Single sitting: Wednesday 8 September 2021 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.11 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 9 (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 FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	

Absent:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice President
Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Ms VĂLEAN	Member

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

Mr CAINZOS	Member of Ms VESTAGER's Office	
Mr BRIENS	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr BORRELL	
Ms WEBBER	Chef de cabinet to Ms JOHANSSON	Items 1to 9 (in part)
Mr GOETZ	Chef de cabinet to Ms VĂLEAN	Items 1 to 9

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 FLOSDORFF	Executive Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8
Mr ANDRESEN GUIMARĂES	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8
Ms SCHULTZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr SMITH	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8 (in part)

(8 September 2021)

Ms DEWANDRE	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Mr SAMPEDRO MARCOS	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 9 (in part) and 10.1
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms BUKA	Secretariat-General	

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, assisted by Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC, Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2021) 2388/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2388/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) 2388)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 6 September 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2385TH, 2386TH AND 2387TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (30 JUNE, 6 AND 14 JULY 2021)
(PV(2021) 2385)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2385th meeting, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2386th and 2387th meetings until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 169)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 3 September 2021 (RCC(2021) 169).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – Participation of the Union in the European Partnership on Metrology jointly undertaken by several Member States (Decision) – CARVALHO report – 2021/0049 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 565/2.

- **Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 and Council Regulations (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1005/2008, and Regulation (EU) 2016/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control (Regulation) – AGUILERA report – 2018/0193 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 257.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 as regards official controls on animals and products of animal origin exported from third countries to the Union to ensure compliance with the prohibition of certain uses of antimicrobials (Regulation) – CANFIN report – 2021/0055 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 260.

- **Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (Council decision) – ĎURIŠ NICHOLSONOVÁ report – 2021/0137 (NLE)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 563.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Establishment of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (Regulation) – ARIMONT report – 2020/0380 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2021) 528, further to note SI(2021) 211, which the Commission had already approved on 30 June 2021.

- **Conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly skilled employment (Directive) – MORENO SÁNCHEZ report – 2016/0176 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2021) 562, further to note SI(2021) 154, which the Commission had already approved on 2 June 2021.

The Commission approved the lines set out for the following points, for transmission to Parliament:

- **Commission follow-up to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its part-session of May 2021 (Part III)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 538/2.

- **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its part-session of June II 2021 (Part I)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 557/3.

- **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its part-session of July 2021 (Part I)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 558/2.

- **Commission follow-up to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its part-session of April 2021 (Part III)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 567.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 37)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 37 of the

meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference on Wednesday 1 September 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2021) 290 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 19 July and 3 September 2021.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2021) 291 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 19 July and 3 September 2021.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2021) 292 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 19 July and 3 September 2021 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2021) 293 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 6 and 10 September 2021 and of the finalisation written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on Monday 6 September 2021.

6.5. GRANTING OF A GENERAL EMPOWERMENT RELATING TO THE ADOPTION OF CERTAIN MEASURES UNDER REGULATION (EU) 2021/523 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING THE INVESTEU PROGRAMME (C(2021) 6599)

The Commission adopted the Decision in C(2021) 6599.

The Commission decided to grant an empowerment to the Member of the Commission with responsibility for Economy to adopt, on behalf of the Commission and under its responsibility, decisions, following the policy check referred to in Article 23(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/523, as to whether financing and investment operations proposed by the implementing partners comply with Union law and policies, under the conditions laid down in Articles 2 to 6 of the Decision.

**7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2021) 294)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2021) 74)**

7.1. DG EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO) – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR (PERS(2021) 75 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 ‘General Affairs’ Directorate in DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) (PERS(2021) 75).

The Commission took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 19 May and 1 July 2021 (PERS(2021) 75/2 and /3).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr LENARČIČ, it then decided to appoint Ms Bernadette FREDERICK to the post.

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

**7.2. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR
(PERS(2021) 76 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 'International and Horizontal Affairs' Directorate in DG Migration and Home Affairs (PERS(2021) 76).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 19 and 27 May 2021 (PERS(2021) 76/2 and /3).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms JOHANSSON, it then decided to appoint Mr Henrik NIELSEN to the post.

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

7.3. DG EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO) – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND SECONDMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE SERVICE, UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS, OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL

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

- to create a temporary Principal Adviser post in DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO); this post would be abolished upon departure of the jobholder;
- to transfer to this new post, in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Ilka SALMI, an AD14 official and currently Director of the ‘Disaster Preparedness and Prevention’ Directorate in DG ECHO;
- to second Mr Ilka SALMI, in the interests of the service, under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, to the European Council for a period of five years. For the duration of the secondment, all costs would be borne by the European Council.

These decisions would take effect on 1 October 2021.

**7.4. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – AUTHORISATION FOR THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION AT GRADE AD14, OF A PRINCIPAL ADVISER POST
(PERS(2021) 77)**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms JOHANSSON, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional (at grade AD14/15) and external (at grade AD14) publication of the vacancy notice in PERS(2021) 77 for the post of Principal Adviser ‘Return Coordinator’ in DG Migration and Home Affairs, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.5. DG COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY – APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN CYBERSECURITY INDUSTRIAL, TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH COMPETENCE CENTRE AND THE NETWORK OF NATIONAL COORDINATION CENTRES

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr BRETON, the Commission decided to appoint Mr Miguel GONZÁLEZ-SANCHO, currently Head of the ‘Cybersecurity Technology and Capacity Building’ Unit in DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology, to the post of interim Executive Director of the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and of the Network of National Coordination Centres; he would perform these duties in addition to his current duties until the Executive Director appointed took up the post.

This decision would take effect immediately.

8. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

The PRESIDENT opened the discussion on developments in Afghanistan by taking stock of the events of recent weeks.

The College then had an exchange of views on the current situation as regards humanitarian and development assistance, on first lessons learned and on the next steps to be addressed.

Following this exchange, the PRESIDENT concluded that the College would soon return to the different issues discussed.

The Commission took note of this information.

9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL – 2021 STRATEGIC FORESIGHT REPORT – THE EU’S CAPACITY AND FREEDOM TO ACT (COM(2021) 750 TO /3; RCC(2021) 170)

The PRESIDENT asked Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to present to the College the 2021 Strategic Foresight Report entitled ‘The EU’s capacity and freedom to act’.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ began by pointing out that, from the policy-making point of view, the previous year’s report had focused on resilience and had highlighted the lessons learned from the pandemic in terms of the EU’s green, digital, social, economic and geopolitical resilience.

This year’s report was mainly concerned with the geopolitical dimension of resilience, with particular emphasis given to the EU’s open strategic autonomy and its global leadership in an increasingly multipolar global order.

The 2021 report linked together the many recent Commission initiatives on open strategic autonomy and proposed a multidisciplinary and long-term vision of what would influence this autonomy, both in terms of the megatrends that would affect the EU and the world in the coming years and decades and the related policy implications. The work highlighted the need to ensure consistency across time horizons and between the EU’s domestic and external policy agendas, in 10 priority areas.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ referred firstly to the four structural megatrends that would have a major impact on the EU on its path towards 2050. These were (i) climate change and other environmental challenges, (ii) digital hyper-connectivity and technological transformation, (iii) pressures on democracy and values, and, lastly, (iv) shifts in the global order and demography.

For example, global warming was set to exceed 2°C by mid-century, aggravating

extreme events such as floods and forest fires, and would add to the pressure on water and food security worldwide.

These megatrends would have the associated effects of spreading conflict, increasing population displacement and adding to migratory pressure. The repression of freedoms, lack of democratic reforms and continued instability in the countries and regions of the EU's near and further neighbourhood, such as Afghanistan and Syria, would continue to fuel migratory pressure.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ pointed out that changes in the global order would be primarily linked to demographic trends. The EU was expected to account for only 4% of a rapidly growing world population by 2050. The EU population would also be older.

In parallel, the world was becoming more multipolar, with its economic centre of gravity shifting eastwards. As a proportion of the GDP of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the United States), the combined nominal GDP of the seven emerging countries (Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia and Turkey) would rise from the current 66% to 150% within a few decades. However, GDP growth did not necessarily mean better quality of life for citizens.

On the basis of these megatrends, the report identified 10 areas where EU action could enhance its open strategic autonomy and global leadership, giving it the best possible chance of achieving its long-term strategic objectives, such as climate neutrality.

The first five of these areas were (i) sustainable health and food systems, (ii) low-carbon and affordable energy, (iii) capacities in data management, artificial intelligence and cutting-edge technologies, (iv) the supply of critical raw materials, and (v) ensuring a first-mover global position in setting standards.

On the last point, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ noted that the EU was facing competition from other players to be the first to set standards, for example in emerging technologies such as blockchain and cryptocurrencies. In this area, the EU had to strike the right

balance between openness and autonomy. On the one hand, its trading position was a key driver of its regulatory and standard-setting power, including in future key markets and technologies. On the other hand, the EU needed to be aware that its trading partners were now more assertive in standard setting, where it had a leading position.

The ‘Brussels effect’, whereby multinationals complied with European rules, was crucial for Europe’s influence in the world and its leadership on climate change, sustainability and the protection of fundamental rights. The EU would therefore actively cooperate to ensure that it had a leading role in international standard-setting organisations.

The other five areas for action were (i) future-proof economic and financial systems, (ii) skills and talents that matched the EU’s long-term ambitions, (iii) enhancing the EU’s security, defence and space capabilities, (iv) global partnerships, and (v) the resilience of public institutions.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said that the 2022 Strategic Foresight Report would focus on better understanding how emerging technologies could help the EU in its twin green and digital transitions.

He concluded by stressing that strategic foresight had secured a firm place in policy-making and that the other institutions and the Member States were developing their own capacities in this area.

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

- the College’s support for the report, which stimulated policy thinking;
- satisfaction that demography was one of the four global megatrends identified, as it constituted a major challenge for societies, particularly in terms of healthcare and pension systems;

- a reference to strong population growth in Africa over the coming decades and its young population;
- the importance of education and the need to keep young people in the EU through well-paid quality jobs and attract talent and skilled workers from the rest of the world;
- the legitimate claims of citizens who wanted their voices to be heard more in democratic policy-making processes, beyond exercising the right to vote in elections; the welcome reference, in that context, to the Conference on the Future of Europe;
- a reference to the importance of geography and the local dimension in the trends to be considered, including the risk of an innovation divide;
- concerns about the viability of a successful green and digital transition for economic and financial systems;
- the importance of the EU's connectivity strategy.

The PRESIDENT noted that the issue of demographic change seemed to worry the eastern part of the EU more than the western part. She called for demographic decline and its potential adverse effects not to be regarded as a foregone conclusion. If women could better reconcile work and family, birth rates could increase.

She concluded the discussion by thanking Mr ŠEFČOVIČ for his excellent work.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2021) 750/3 for transmission to Parliament and the Council and, for information, to the European Economic and Social Committee and to the national parliaments.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'ENSURING COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY CONFORMITY WITH EU TREATIES AND COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW' PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL (C(2021) 6607)

Ms JOUROVÁ presented a draft decision being tabled for approval by the College concerning the registration of a European citizens' initiative entitled, in the authentic language (English), 'Ensuring common commercial policy conformity with EU treaties and compliance with international law'.

This proposal in substance called on the Commission to propose legal acts based on the common trade policy to prevent EU legal entities from both importing products originating in illegal settlements in occupied territories and exporting to such territories, in order to preserve the integrity of the internal market and to not aid or assist the maintenance of such unlawful situations.

Ms JOUROVÁ said that the organisers had first submitted a European citizens' initiative to the Commission in 2019. The Commission had rejected the application to register that initiative, a decision which was challenged before the General Court. The General Court had annulled the Commission Decision on the ground that the Commission had failed to comply with its obligation to provide sufficient justification for its decision. The organisers were now submitting a new application to register the initiative, having taken account of the Commission's request to slightly amend the initial citizens' initiative.

She pointed out that the College's task that day was to decide only on the

registration of the proposal and not at that stage to analyse its substance or political advisability.

She explained that the conditions for registering European citizens' initiatives were set out in Article 6(3) of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative, which had repealed and replaced Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 with effect from 1 January 2020. One of those conditions was the requirement that no part of the citizens' initiative should manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for an EU legal act for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

She noted that the request made by the promoters of the initiative 'Ensuring common commercial policy conformity with EU treaties and compliance with international law' fell within the Commission's powers to propose legal acts for the purpose of implementing the Treaties under Article 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Ms JOUROVÁ underlined that if, within a period of twelve months, the proposal gathered the minimum support required, in other words at least one million signatures from citizens of at least a quarter of the Member States, the Commission would then analyse the substance of the proposal.

In accordance with the new Regulation (EU) 2019/788, proposed initiatives registered now benefited from more user-friendly arrangements for organisers to gather support and easier access for European citizens. The Commission would have a period of six months to submit its reasoned decision whether or not to take any action.

During the brief discussion that followed, one member of the Commission warned of the long-term consequences, for the institution and for the EU, of the content of the European citizens' initiative in question.

Following this presentation, the Commission confirmed that the European

citizens' initiative entitled 'Ensuring common commercial policy conformity with EU treaties and compliance with international law' met the conditions for registration. It therefore decided:

- to adopt the decision in C(2021) 6607;
- to authorise Ms JOUROVÁ to sign the decision on its behalf and to notify it, in the authentic language (English), to the organisers of the initiative;
- to transmit it, for information, to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments;
- to publish it, for information, in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

10.2. ISSUANCE OF GREEN BONDS UNDER THE EU RECOVERY PLAN

The PRESIDENT asked Mr HAHN to brief the College on the issuance of green bonds under the EU recovery plan.

Mr HAHN explained that a framework on green bonds, which had been subject to an independent review, had been adopted by the Commission the previous day (7 September). This was the first step towards issuing green bonds in the context of the national recovery and resilience plans; up to EUR 250 billion in green bonds could be issued by 2026, which would account for 30% of the total issuance under NextGenerationEU.

If market conditions allowed, the Commission would begin issuing the first green bonds in October. This would make the EU the largest issuer of green bonds in the world, illustrating its commitment to sustainable development and its desire to make sustainable finance a central feature of its recovery efforts.

Furthermore, the Commission intended to issue long-term bonds worth some EUR 80 billion in 2021, as well as short-term EU bills worth tens of billions of euro and with a maturity of three to six months.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.3. GRADUAL RETURN TO THE OFFICE FOR COMMISSION STAFF

Mr HAHN wished to brief the College on the arrangements for Commission staff to begin a gradual return to the office under phase three of the Commission's strategy, starting on 20 September. These arrangements were fully in line with the host countries' national guidelines, which stipulated that teleworking was still highly recommended, but that regular presence in the office was permitted.

Given the high rate of vaccination at the Commission (around 90%), and on the proviso that the safety measures currently in force would remain in place, the next phase would see staff return to the office for at least one day a week, with a 50% ceiling for staff presence in each Directorate-General or entity. This would allow for a high degree of flexibility, as presence in the office would be voluntary for most of the week. The DGs would be required to organise themselves in such a way as to ensure that staff presence in the office was spread throughout the week, thus allowing the DGs to operate effectively. The current weekly figures showed that 20% of staff were present in Commission buildings in Brussels, while the figure stood at 7% in Luxembourg.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.4. UPDATE ON COVID-19 VACCINATION AND LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATION TO THE PANDEMIC

The PRESIDENT invited Ms KYRIAKIDES to give an update on the

epidemiological situation and the question of administering third doses as a booster vaccination against COVID-19 in the EU.

Ms KYRIAKIDES noted that the number of cases of infection in the EU had remained stable for the last six weeks and the number of hospitalisations had fallen the previous week, though the number of deaths caused by COVID-19 had increased slightly over the last four weeks.

The Delta variant was dominant in all Member States, as it was present in 99% of positive cases. She noted that, as things stood, the Mu variant, which the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) had been monitoring closely since May, had not become widespread.

Thus, the key message to be stressed was that vaccines were effective at preventing serious forms of COVID-19 and death.

She said that, based on current scientific evidence, the priority was to ensure that as many people as possible were fully vaccinated in the EU. She welcomed the fact that, as things stood, 75% of European citizens had already received at least one vaccine dose, although there were significant variations between Member States in terms of vaccine coverage. In parallel to these efforts, it was important to help increase vaccination rates worldwide.

With regard to the possibility of administering third doses as a booster, she referred to the conclusion of the ECDC report published on 1 September, which stated that ‘Based on current evidence, there is no urgent need for the administration of booster doses of vaccines to fully vaccinated individuals in the general population’. Nevertheless, booster vaccinations could be considered for the elderly and the most vulnerable. Two studies carried out in Israel showed that the immunity provided by vaccines was reduced over time. Ms KYRIAKIDES noted, however, that if some Member States wished to offer booster vaccinations, the EU would have enough doses to meet demand.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The Commission's other discussions on certain agenda items are recorded in the special minutes.

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The meeting closed at 12.12.