



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2396 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 1 December 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2396th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 10 November 2021

(morning)

PV(2021) 2396 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

EN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	4-6
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2021) 2396/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2396/FINAL)	7
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET (RCC(2021) 2396)	7
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES	7
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2021) 201)	7
5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 45).....	10
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	10
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2021) 365 ET SEQ.).....	10
6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2021) 366 ET SEQ.)	11
6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2021) 367 ET SEQ.)	11
6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2021) 368 AND /2)	11
7. OTHER BUSINESS.....	11
7.1. PROTOCOL ON IRELAND / NORTHERN IRELAND.....	11
7.2. PRESENTATION OF THE 2021 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN FISCAL BOARD	15
8. PRESENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATION ON THE ‘STRATEGIC COMPASS FOR SECURITY AND DEFENCE’	19

9. OTHER BUSINESS (CONTINUED).....	23
9.1. <i>LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS</i>	23
9.2. <i>EVOLUTION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC</i>	25

Single sitting: Wednesday 10 November 2021 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.36 with Ms VESTAGER in the chair.

Present:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	Items 1 to 8
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	Items 1 to 8
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms GABRIEL	Member	Items 1 to 7
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	Items 1 to 8
Mr BRETON	Member	Items 7.1 to 9 (in part)
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	Items 1 to 8
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 1 to 8
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	Items 1 to 7.1 (in part)

Absent:

Ms von der LEYEN	President
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member
Ms FERREIRA	Member

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

Ms NELEN	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr TIMMERMANS	
Ms ROUCH	Chef de cabinet to Ms GABRIEL	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Mr PINTO ANTUNES	Member of Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI's staff	
Ms CAUDET	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr BRETON	Items 1 to 7.1
Mr SOBRAL	Chef de cabinet to Ms FERREIRA	
Mr LAHTI	Chef de cabinet to Ms URPILAINEN	Items 8 (in part) and 9
Mr POWER	Chef de cabinet to Ms McGUINNESS	Items 7.1 (in part) to 9

The following also sat in:

Ms RISO	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr THYGESEN	Chairman, European Fiscal Board	Item 7.2
Mr LARCH	Secretariat-General	Item 7.2

Mr VALERO

Secretariat-General

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) 2396/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2396/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) 2396)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 8 November 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2393rd, 2394th and 2395th meetings of 13, 19 and 27 October 2021 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 201)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 5 November 2021 (RCC(2021) 201).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 138/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards regional economic accounts for agriculture (Regulation) – KOKKALIS report – 2021/0031 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 313/2.

- **Reinforced role for the European Medicines Agency in crisis preparedness and management for medicinal products and medical devices (Regulation) – GONZÁLEZ CASARES report – 2020/0321 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 322.

- **Serious cross-border threats to health and repeal of Decision No 1082/2013/EU (Regulation)– TRILLET-LENOIR report – 2020/0322 (COD)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 686.

- **European Year of Youth 2022 (Decision) – VERHEYEN report – 2021/0328 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 319/2.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1091 on integrated farm statistics as regards the financial framework for the period 2021-2027 (Regulation) – TERRAS report – 2021/0270 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 315.

- **Amendment of Directive 2006/1/EC on the use of vehicles hired without drivers for the carriage of goods by road (Directive) – MONTEIRO DE AGUIAR report – 2017/0113 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 317.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 1286/2014 as regards the extension of the transitional arrangement for management companies, investment companies and persons advising on, or selling, units of undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) and non-UCITS (Regulation) – FERNÁNDEZ report – 2021/0215 (COD)**

- **Amendment of Directive 2009/65/EC as regards the use of key information documents by management companies of undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) (Directive) – FERNÁNDEZ report – 2021/0219 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 323.

- **Adoption of Council Conclusions on the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030**

Line set out in SI(2021) 324/2.

- **Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry of the Parliament of Wallonia on the floods of July 2021 – Questions addressed to the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS)**

Line set out in SNP(2021) 11.

The Commission approved the line set out for the following point, for transmission to Parliament:

- **Commission replies to non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its June I 2021 part-session (fifth and last part)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 683/2.

The Commission took note of 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)**

Compromise text in SP(2021) 684, further to note SI(2021) 277/2, which the Commission had already approved on 5 October 2021.

- **Amendment of Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of income tax information by certain undertakings and branches (Directive) – REGNER & GARCÍA DEL BLANCO report – 2016/0107 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2021) 685, further to note COM(2021) 617, which the Commission had already approved on 1 October 2021.

- **Contestable and fair markets in the digital sector (Digital Markets Act) (Regulation) – SCHWAB report – 2020/0374 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2021) 314.

The Commission approved the line set out for the following point, for transmission to the Committee of the Regions:

- **Follow-up to opinions of the Committee of the Regions – Plenary session of May 2021**

Line set out in SR(2021) 24/2.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 45)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 45 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Thursday 4 November 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2021) 365 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 25 October and 5 November 2021.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2021) 366 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 25 October and 5 November 2021.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2021) 367 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 25 October and 7 November 2021 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2021) 368 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 8 and 12 November 2021 and of the finalisation of the written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on Monday 8 November 2021.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

7.1. PROTOCOL ON IRELAND / NORTHERN IRELAND

Ms VESTAGER asked Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to provide an update on the negotiations currently under way with the United Kingdom on the application of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland under the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ pointed out that the two parties had been engaged in intensive talks for the past three weeks, at both a technical and political level, in order to find practical solutions to simplify the procedures for the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland under the Protocol and thus facilitate as far as possible daily life for the citizens and businesses of Northern Ireland.

He explained that the EU was focusing the discussions on the significant simplification measures put forward by the Commission on 13 October. These measures, which would reduce sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) checks by around 80% and reduce the amount of paperwork required for the movement of goods by 50%, represented an important gesture from the EU side.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ was disappointed to note, however, that the UK government seemed reluctant to negotiate possible technical solutions with the Commission or find a compromise, meaning that the talks had made no progress. The UK was still sticking to its Command Paper of July that year, the provisions of which would amount to a renegotiation of the Protocol, which was unacceptable to the EU. He underlined, however, that the stakeholders in Northern Ireland were increasingly supportive of the constructive proposals put forward by the EU.

He would next meet David FROST, the British minister responsible for the UK's withdrawal from the EU, on 12 November in London. Whatever the outcome of this meeting and the technical discussions that would follow – and it was to be hoped that an agreement could still be reached – he considered that the EU should now prepare for all eventualities. The Commission had started work internally to this end.

He also drew attention the commitment made by the EU to propose long-term arrangements that would allow Northern Ireland to receive an uninterrupted supply of medicines. The Commission could put forward a specific legislative

proposal in this connection in the next weeks. He added that, as a measure of its goodwill, the EU was ready to change its own rules in this regard.

On the political front, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ expected the UK to put the unity of the EU's 27 Member States to the test in the very near future. For that reason, in the next few hours, he intended to issue a new call to the European Parliament and the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) for unity and solidarity with Ireland.

He pointed out that the European Council had decided that the negotiations with the UK should be in two phases to ensure the UK's orderly withdrawal from the EU: first, the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, and only afterwards the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

He reiterated that, if the UK triggered Article 16 of the Protocol, which would suspend its application unilaterally, this would have serious consequences not only for Northern Ireland, where it would lead to instability, but also for the bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

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

- the College's unconditional support for Mr ŠEFČOVIČ's work;
- the need for the EU to prepare for all eventualities, given the way the talks with the UK on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland were going;
- the College's regret that the UK government had appeared not to give due consideration to the ambitious proposals put forward by the Commission in October to facilitate application of the Protocol;
- the potential risks for Northern Ireland internally should no agreement be reached on the procedure for implementation of the Protocol or should the

Protocol be suspended by the UK;

- confirmation that the Commission's constructive proposals were supported by the parties concerned in Northern Ireland;
- a call to ensure the unity of the 27 Member States while steering clear of British attempts to sow division;
- the need for a clear and firm EU response should the UK invoke Article 16 of the Protocol;
- an invitation to reflect seriously on the implications of such a decision from the perspective of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement;
- the priority placed by the EU on the access that Northern Ireland had to have to medicine supplies and the complexity of the solutions that this entailed;
- in the financial sector, the Commission's forthcoming announcement to extend equivalence for central counterparties established in the UK, which was in the EU's interest.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ stated that the Commission also intended to continue its information and communication activities aimed at public opinion, the business community, political leaders and the media in Northern Ireland.

Ms VESTAGER concluded by reiterating that the College was fully behind Mr ŠEFČOVIČ and that he could count on the support of the Members of the Commission, their cabinets and their departments to assist him in his work.

The Commission took note of this information.

7.2. PRESENTATION OF THE 2021 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN FISCAL BOARD

Ms VESTAGER invited Mr Niels THYGESEN, Chair of the European Fiscal Board, to present the conclusions of the fifth Annual Report of this independent advisory body.

The 2021 report focused on three main aspects: (i) the national fiscal policy approaches followed before the COVID-19 pandemic, (ii) the efforts made during the pandemic to alleviate the effects of the crisis and ensure economic stability, and (iii) the potential pathways for fiscal policy after the pandemic, all of which were very useful sources of reflection for the Commission as part of the review of the EU's economic governance.

Mr THYGESEN introduced the report by emphasising that it was a chance to join the dots between the experience acquired in the implementation of the EU's economic governance framework and the prospects for improving the situation in the future. He referred to the relative leniency with which the application of fiscal rules had been viewed before the pandemic, the scale of the shock caused by the crisis, which had had a profound impact on the economic context, and the current situation, which was characterised by a strong recovery on the one hand and the application of the severe economic downturn clause until 31 December 2022, on the other. The report took into account practices applied before the pandemic and the bold economic policy measures deployed since 2020.

On the macroeconomic developments since 2020, Mr THYGESEN pointed out that the shock caused by the pandemic had been symmetrical but had had an asymmetrical impact on the Member States. On the back of large expenditure increases by the Member States, the EU's overall public deficit had increased by around 6.5% and debt by approximately 13% of GDP. Countries with fiscal space had been able to put it to good use in 2020. At the

same time, high-debt countries recorded further debt increases, mainly due to a sharper drop in GDP. Overall, the application of the severe economic downturn clause provided fiscal policies with exceptional flexibility but gave rise to diverging interpretations and uncertainties. The political decision was taken not to open excessive deficit procedures, instead of spreading adjustment paths over several years. Considering the wide diversity of national situations in terms of debt levels, Mr THYGESEN stressed the importance of preserving the sustainability of fiscal policies in the medium- and long-term and of viewing this principle as a compass.

He then referred to the current debate on the future of the EU's economic governance framework and the risks to the sustainability of public finances, which needed to be taken into account in this context. In its report, the European Fiscal Board welcomed both the relaunch of the review and the declared ambition to build consensus well in time for 2023. According to the Board, reforming the European fiscal framework remained a superior approach to new discretionary and hard-to-predict tweaks in the implementation of the existing rule book. Such a reform would serve the interests both of Member States keen to avoid further erosion of a rules-based system and of those willing to exploit the flexibility of the existing system. Otherwise, in a context of less predictable fiscal policies, the financial markets would be likely to reassess the risks relating to the sustainability of public finances.

Mr THYGESEN explained that, although the risks seemed remote for the time being, EU countries with very high debt should formulate debt reduction strategies, both to preserve their ability to respond in future crises and to protect the EU as a whole against potential risks of financial contagion.

Based on these considerations, he presented the Board's recommendations in relation to the reform of fiscal rules. These recommendations, formulated by the European Fiscal Board since 2018, now seemed even more relevant since

they would make it possible to underpin fiscal sustainability, update and simplify the Stability and Growth Pact and return to appropriate ambition levels in the fiscal adjustment process. Their aims were to (i) set numerical targets for debt reduction in very high debt countries, at a moderate and differentiated pace, (ii) use a public expenditure benchmark as a single, observable indicator, and (iii) provide an escape clause which may be invoked on the basis of an independent economic analysis. Moreover, the European Fiscal Board believed that the 3% threshold for the headline deficit should be maintained as a backstop in containing debt dynamics and as a trigger for the excessive debt procedure. It also recommended, as part of economic governance, creating (i) a central fiscal capacity inspired by the European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE), which would have a stabilising effect, and (ii) a targeted allocation in the EU budget to ensure the provision of EU public goods. The Board felt that the latter solution would be preferable to the option of granting greater flexibility in the implementation of fiscal rules.

In conclusion, Mr THYGESEN stressed the need for synergy between domestic and EU economic policies, for example via independent fiscal institutions created at national level. These institutions, which had already played a useful role by fostering greater fiscal transparency and improving Member States' macroeconomic forecasts, could widen their scope of activity, for example by contributing to assessments of fiscal sustainability. However, the European Fiscal Board believed that the process of reforming economic governance could not be based on a significant decentralisation in the monitoring of compliance with EU fiscal rules and that the role of the Commission and the Council in macroeconomic and fiscal monitoring could not be delegated.

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

- the quality of the report issued by the European Fiscal Board and the presentation given by Mr THYGESEN, which provided an overview of recent developments in fiscal policy and a useful contribution to the debate on the review of the EU's economic governance framework;
- the observation that the current economic recovery was moving faster than forecast and, at the same time, that the pandemic-related crisis had further highlighted some of the challenges facing the European economy, such as high levels of public debt and deficit, as well as the scale of the investments needed to successfully implement the green and digital transitions and strengthen the resilience of the Union;
- hence the need to build up fiscal reserves in a period of economic growth and to reduce debt in a way that was long-lasting and conducive to growth, while at the same time investing;
- the ambitious overall approach advocated by the European Fiscal Board on the subject of economic governance reform, and the need to reach a political consensus on certain sensitive proposals such as the creation of central fiscal capacity for the EU;
- the key role the Commission could play in pursuing constructive dialogue, given the highly positive tone of the current discussions within the Eurogroup and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (Ecofin), by presenting high-quality proposals on the outstanding economic challenges and especially (i) the means of increasing public and private investment, (ii) more realistic and modulated pathways for the adjustment and sustainability of public debt, and (iii) the simplification of European fiscal rules and Member States' ownership of them, possibly by drawing on the experience acquired with the Recovery and Resilience Facility;
- the complexity of the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact and the need for a simplification which would not lead to more discretionary

decision-making on fiscal policy or place the Commission in the role of arbiter, but instead aimed to draw up a tailored roadmap to reduce debt levels on a lasting basis after a thorough reflection process.

In conclusion, Ms VESTAGER pointed out that the EU would need to hold this fundamental economic debate, in which there were no simple solutions, in the coming months. She once again thanked Mr THYGESEN and the European Fiscal Board for their excellent report, which came at the right time and would inform the work of the Commission and the Council.

The Commission took note of this information.

8. PRESENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATION ON THE ‘STRATEGIC COMPASS FOR SECURITY AND DEFENCE’

Ms VESTAGER invited Mr BORRELL to present his communication on the Strategic Compass for security and defence.

Mr BORRELL began by pointing out that he had been tasked by the EU Member States with drawing up a political document setting the security and defence agenda for the next five to ten years. He stressed that the project presented that day was the result of an extensive strategic dialogue with the Member States. He also set out his personal views on the Strategic Compass in a foreword.

The Commission had been closely associated throughout this process and he thanked the Members of the College for their support and contributions. The document reflected well this integrated working method and the complementarities of the proposals it contained with the Commission’s ongoing and future initiatives, both from the point of view of internal and external security and the military and non-military dimension of defence.

This Strategic Compass was based on the EU's view of the world as it was today, on the basis of a threat analysis carried out in 2020, the first of its kind to have been undertaken at European level. The EU was facing an era of strategic competition and complex security threats, with rising numbers of conflicts and sources of instability in its neighbourhood and beyond, growing hybrid threats, and cyber and space environments that were increasingly contested.

Faced with these risks, a stronger EU was needed that could protect its citizens, its interests and its values.

He emphasised that the Strategic Compass therefore proposed a common strategic vision for the security and defence of the EU. As its name suggested, it provided guidelines, set out a common sense of purpose, established concrete objectives and provided the means to achieve them.

He referred to the document's four main areas.

The premise of the first area, entitled 'Act', was that the EU should be able to act more robustly, rapidly and decisively. To this end, Mr BORRELL proposed developing an EU rapid deployment capacity, with a modular force of up to 5 000 troops comprising land, air and sea components, based on operational scenarios. These troops would train and conduct exercises together in order to improve their readiness and interoperability. He also suggested better planning of operations, live exercises and strengthening the EU's command and control structures.

On the second area, 'Secure', he confirmed that the EU needed to strengthen its overall resilience. Firstly, it had to improve its intelligence capabilities, but also develop a hybrid toolbox to facilitate a coordinated and coherent response to hybrid threats, devise response measures to counter foreign information manipulation and interference, and draw up an EU cyber defence policy and an EU space strategy for its security and defence. It was also important to increase the EU's resilience in the

context of climate change risks. In many of these areas, cooperation with the Commission would be essential.

Mr BORRELL then referred to the third area, ‘Invest’, and explained that, in order to be able to act and secure, the EU needed to have sufficient capacity and address the current shortfalls. The suggestion therefore was that Member States should develop together key land, air, sea and space military capabilities, as well as the essential tools for carrying out the EU’s missions. He also suggested investing more in emerging technologies, encouraging innovation and reducing the EU’s strategic dependencies. On these various points, he reiterated that the Commission’s work would play a key role, particularly in the context of the European Defence Fund.

Lastly, he addressed the fourth area, entitled ‘Partner’. A stronger EU in terms of security and defence needed to consolidate its partnerships, hence the proposal to deepen its cooperation with its major partners, starting with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Specifically, whatever was done to strengthen the EU’s defence would also benefit NATO, a message which would soon be the subject of an EU-NATO joint declaration. Moreover, the Strategic Compass also involved cooperation between the EU and the United Nations (UN), and with regional organisations and partners such as the United States, Canada, Norway and, when the time was right, the United Kingdom.

Finally, Mr BORRELL emphasised the ambitious nature of the proposals put forward, which were geared towards action, while stressing that it would be up to the Member States to agree upon them. Discussions would start on 15 November with the presentation of the draft to the EU Foreign Affairs and Defence ministers. After this, the document would have to be adopted by the Council of Ministers of the European Union and then endorsed by the European Council in March 2022.

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

- full support for the document presented, which had been the subject of excellent upstream cooperation with the Members of the Commission, the cabinets and the Commission departments concerned, and was making a key contribution in the current geopolitical context;
- some of the proposals mentioned in the document also concerned the Commission, in particular the global vision, which included elements of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and others which were strictly Community elements;
- the importance of the results achieved so far in certain areas of EU competence, for example trade, the single market, visas, transport and migration management;
- the need for the proposed document, at a time when Europe felt that the boundaries between internal and external security, on the one hand, and between conventional and hybrid threats, on the other, were becoming increasingly blurred; the fact that these new situations could not be managed using traditional diplomatic or defence tools alone and that all available instruments should therefore be mobilised;
- a reminder of the significant progress made in setting up the European Defence Fund;
- the importance of the four major areas on which the EU could now move forward, namely (i) space, in which it should draw lessons from the success of Galileo and complete ongoing new initiatives, such as secure satellite connectivity, (ii) cyber and its geostrategic dimension, with projects already implemented or announced, such as the creation of a joint cybersecurity unit, the future proposal for common European cybersecurity standards for products and services and, in 2022, the review of the European strategic framework for cyber defence, (iii) the urgent reduction in the EU's strategic dependencies, notably through the recent Action Plan on synergies between civil, defence and space

industries, and (iv) hybrid threats, against which the EU had to develop appropriate responses with its allies;

- the suggestion that the consequences of the EU's demographic decline should be incorporated into the reflection, in absolute terms and in relation to other countries and continents, as this would have a significant impact on the future geopolitical context.

Ms VESTAGER thanked Mr BORRELL for the document presented, which proposed guidelines and ways forward for Member States to improve security and defence at EU level, and which also concerned the work of the Commission.

It was not a Commission document to be adopted as such, but it had the College's full support.

She ended the discussion by pointing out that the debate on these issues remained open, that many initiatives were ongoing as part of the European Defence Fund, and that the Commission would present other additional proposals on defence matters in 2022.

9. OTHER BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

9.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

On the subject of the latest developments in external relations, Mr BORRELL reported to the College on the dramatic situation at the Poland-Belarus border, where a large number of irregular migrants were seeking to enter the EU. Other sections of the EU-Belarus border were also affected. He stressed the inhumane and unacceptable nature of the Belarusian regime's practices of using migrants to put pressure on the EU.

He fully supported the Commission's efforts in this context to mobilise all the

instruments at the EU's disposal. He added that the European External Action Service (EEAS) was working to facilitate the fact-finding mission that Mr SCHINAS would carry out in the countries of origin and transit of the migrants in question in the coming days.

The EU foreign ministers would discuss the situation at the borders with Belarus at the next meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 15 November, in particular with a view to extending the scope of the current sanctions regime.

Mr BORRELL then briefly mentioned the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution extending EUFOR Althea's mandate for one year.

He also informed the Members of the College of the latest developments related to the military coup in Sudan and the measures envisaged by the EU to try to end the conflict between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front in Ethiopia.

Lastly, he referred to the summit to be held on 2 December, which would bring together the EU Heads of State or Government and those of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. In the meantime, he called for work to be stepped up so that association agreements could be concluded with Chile and Mexico.

In the course of the discussion that followed, the Commission raised mainly the situation at the border with Belarus:

- the need for action in the field of air transport;
- the advisability of involving the United Nations in order to put an end to the inhumane practices currently being witnessed at the EU's borders, in breach of the international conventions in force;

- the concern around the fact that humanitarian organisations could not be present on the ground, while the health situation of migrants stranded in a buffer zone between the Belarusian border and Poland was expected to deteriorate further.

Ms VESTAGER wound up the discussion by arguing that the use of hybrid threats, as was currently the case at the EU's borders with Belarus, illustrated the value of the Strategic Compass presented by Mr BORRELL that day (see item 8 of these minutes). The College would return to this point at a later stage.

9.2. EVOLUTION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

At the invitation of Ms VESTAGER, Ms KYRIAKIDES gave an update on the epidemiological situation in the EU and referred to the worrying forecasts of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) regarding the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with regard to people over fifty who were not yet vaccinated. She reported a sharp increase in hospital admissions in many Member States, which made it advisable to keep health protection measures in place and launch booster campaigns.

She also noted that in some cases there were significant differences between Member States in vaccination rates and that the rate was still below 55% in seven of them.

Against this background, the Commission was continuing to negotiate contracts for the purchase of new vaccines and was currently concluding the eighth contract with a pharmaceutical company.

The EU's Civil Protection Mechanism was regularly solicited, as had been the case recently in Latvia and Romania, and might be used in the near future in Slovenia, where the health situation was deteriorating sharply.

A short discussion followed, during which the Commission referred mainly to

the importance of Member States continuing to cooperate closely in managing the epidemic on a concerted basis, given the increase in infection throughout the EU.

The Commission took note of this information.

*

* *

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

*

* *

The meeting closed at 12.06.