



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2397 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 22 December 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2397th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 17 November 2021

(morning)

PV(2021) 2397 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 17 November 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	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	Items 1 to 14.2 (in part)
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms GABRIEL	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	Item 14
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	Items 1 to 14.1 (in part)
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	Items 8 (in part) to 14
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 11/12 to 14.1 (in part)
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	

Ms SIMSON	Member
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member

Absent:

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

Mr GOLUBIEWSKI	Chef de cabinet to Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Items 1 to 13
Mr SOBRAL	Chef de cabinet to Ms FERREIRA	
Mr KRISTÓFFY	Chef de cabinet to Mr VÁRHELYI	Items 1 to 11/12

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	Item 14
Mr WHELAN	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 11/12 and 13
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 14 (in part)
Mr SMITH	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Items 9/10
Ms SCHULTZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	

Ms BUKA

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) 2397/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2397/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) 2397)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 15 November 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2021) 2393; PV(2021) 2393, 2ND PART; PV(2021) 2394; PV(2021) 2395; PV(2021) 2395, 2ND PART)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2393rd, 2394th and 2395th meetings of 13, 19 and 27 October 2021, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2396th meeting of 10 November 2021 for a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 205)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 12 November 2021 (RCC(2021) 205).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Amendment of Directive 2004/37/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (Directive) –**

ZAMBELLI report – 2020/0262 (COD)

Line set out in SI(2021) 320/2.

- **Respect for private life and the protection of personal data in electronic communications and repeal of Directive 2002/58/EC (Regulation) – SIPPEL report – 2017/0003 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 327/2.

- **Implementation of the Single European Sky (recast) (Regulation) – MARINESCU report – 2013/0186 (COD) / Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 as regards the capacity of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency to act as Performance Review Body of the Single European Sky (Regulation) – LIBERADZKI report – 2020/0264 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 328.

- **Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act) (Regulation) and amendment of Directive 2000/31/EC – SCHALDEMOSE report – 2020/0361 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 329.

- **Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Council Recommendation) – 2021/0230 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 332/2.

- **Oral question O-000071/2021 – Introduction of a European social security pass for improving the digital enforcement of social security rights and fair mobility**

Line set out in SP(2021) 702.

- **Resolutions of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Legal migration policy and law – AL-SAHLANI report – 2020/2255 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 704/3.

- **Resolutions of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Digitalisation of the European reporting, monitoring and audit – GRAPINI report – 2021/2054 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 705/2.

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

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

Line set out in SP(2021) 709/3.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework – Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):**
 - **Rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the Common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (Regulation) – JAHR report – 2018/0216 (COD)**

- **Financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 (Regulation) – MÜLLER report – 2018/0217 (COD)**
- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products, (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs, (EU) No 251/2014 on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications of aromatised wine products, (EU) No 228/2013 laying down specific measures for agriculture in the outermost regions of the Union and (EU) No 229/2013 laying down specific measures for agriculture in favour of the smaller Aegean islands (Regulation) – ANDRIEU report – 2018/0218 (COD)**

Compromise texts in SP(2021) 699, SP(2021) 700 and SP(2021) 701, further to note SI(2021) 193/3 already approved by the Commission on 6 July 2021.

– **Results of Parliament’s November I 2021 part-session**

Information set out in SP(2021) 693.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2021) 46)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 46 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Thursday 11 November 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2021) 372 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 8 and 12 November 2021.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2021) 373 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 8 and 12 November 2021.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2021) 374 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 8 and 12 November 2021 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2021) 375 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 15 and 19 November 2021, and of a finalisation written procedure.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2021) 376)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**(PERS(2021) 103)****7.1. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – PROMOTION OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS HOLDING A BASIC POST OF DIRECTOR-GENERAL OR DIRECTOR****(PERS(2021) 104)**

Having noted the procedure followed, as set out in point 1 of PERS(2021) 103, and taken into account the opinion of the Consultative Committee on Promotion for Senior Officials (CC-PSO), and having examined the qualifications of the persons concerned with regard to the selection criteria set out in the ‘Principles and Procedure’, the Commission decided, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT:

- to promote to grade AD16, in the basic function of Director-General, the following officials, listed in alphabetical order: Mr Koen DOENS, Mr Christos ELLINIDES, Ms Sandra GALLINA, Ms Celine GAUER, Ms Ditte JUUL JØRGENSEN, Mr Pascal LEARDINI, Mr Maciej POPOWSKI and Ms Sabine WEYAND, from 1 January 2021;
- to promote to grade AD15, in the basic function of Director, the following officials, listed in alphabetical order: Ms Nathalie DE BASALDUA LEMARCHAND, Ms Maria Teresa FÁBREGAS FERNÁNDEZ, Mr Eric MAMER, Mr Michael NIEJAHR, Mr Matthias OEL, Ms Alexandra PANAGAKOU, Mr John RYAN, Mr Ilkka SALMI, Mr William SLEATH, Ms Yvon SLINGENBERG, Ms Daniela SPINANT, Mr Paolo STANCANELLI, Ms Valentina SUPERTI, Mr Slawomir TOKARSKI, Mr Johan UREEL, Mr Philippe VAN DAMME, Ms Veronika VEITS, Ms Maria VELENTZA and Mr Eric VON BRESKA, from 1 January 2021.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.2. EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR
(PERS(2021) 6 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘Expenditure – Operations & Investigations’ Directorate in the European Anti-Fraud Office (PERS(2021) 6 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 2 and 21 October 2021 (PERS(2021) 6/3 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 Joanna KRZEMINSKA-VAMKAVA to the post.

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

**7.3. DG INFORMATICS – AUTHORISATION OF THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14, OF A DIRECTOR POST
(PERS(2021) 105)**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication, at grade AD14/15, and external publication, at grade AD14, of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2021) 105 for the post of Director of the ‘IT Security’ Directorate in DG Informatics, 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.

7.4. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR OF THE PANEL REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 143 OF THE FINANCIAL REGULATION (PERS(2021) 106)

The Commission took note of the information in point 4 of PERS(2021) 103 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to appoint Ms Maria Isabel ROFES I PUJOL and Mr Igors LUDBORŽS respectively as standing independent chair and vice-chair of the Panel referred to in Article 143 of the Financial Regulation (Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046);
- to appoint Ms Maria Isabel ROFES I PUJOL and Mr Igors LUDBORŽS as special advisers to Mr HAHN;
- to authorise Mr HAHN, the Member of the Commission responsible, by derogation to the second paragraph of point 6 of Commission Decision C(2007) 6655, to amend the contracts of Ms Maria Isabel ROFES I PUJOL and Mr Igors LUDBORŽS in the event of urgent and duly justified 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.

7.5. DG RESEARCH AND INNOVATION – EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CLEAN SKY 2 JOINT UNDERTAKING (CS 2 JU) AT GRADE AD14

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

- to propose to the Governing Board of the Clean Sky 2 Joint Undertaking to extend from 1 February 2022 to 30 November 2026 the term of office of the Executive Director, Mr Axel KREIN, in accordance with Article 52(a) of the Staff Regulations; however, the term of office would continue to run after CS 2 JU was abolished only if a Council Regulation establishing the joint undertakings under Horizon Europe created a new joint undertaking and made it the legal and universal successor to CS 2 JU, and unless the Governing Board of the new joint undertaking decided otherwise;
- to ask Ms GABRIEL, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to the Governing Board of the Clean Sky 2 Joint Undertaking.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.6. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – EXTENSION OF CERTAIN MEASURES ALREADY TAKEN TO MEET DEPARTMENTAL STAFFING NEEDS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In order to provide the departments with sufficient flexibility to cover their staffing needs after the COVID-19 pandemic, over the recovery period and during the implementation of the Multiannual Financial Framework and NextGenerationEU, the Commission decided, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, to extend the following measures until the date of application of a new decision:

- the authorisation granted at the 2335th meeting of the Commission to DG Human Resources and Security to extend beyond three years, at the

duly justified request of the departments, the contracts of temporary staff members recruited under Article 2(b) and (d) of the Conditions of Employment of other servants of the European Union (TA2b/d), and to amend the duration of any extensions of less than two years already granted for TA2b/d contracts, without requiring a selection procedure as set out in the third subparagraph of Article 3(2)(a) of Commission Decision C(2013) 9049;

- the suspension of the application of Article 3(1) of Commission Decision C(2013) 9049, first stopped on 30 October 2019 (point 7.2 of the minutes of the 2313th meeting of the Commission – PV(2019) 2313) and extended at its 2346th meeting;
- the authorisation given at the 2346th Commission meeting to DG Human Resources and Security to depart, in exceptional circumstances, from the rules on classification in grade of the ‘Administrators’ function group defined in the second subparagraph of Article 3(2)(a) of Commission Decision C(2013) 9049, where the duly justified interest of the service required certain skills and specific professional experience that were particularly relevant for a given job.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.7. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF A HEAD OF A EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPRESENTATION

The Commission took note of the decision taken by the Appointing Authority to appoint Ms Vivian LOONELA to the post of Head of the European Commission’s Representation in Tallinn, Estonia.

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

8. OTHER BUSINESS

DRAFT GENERAL BUDGET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR 2022

The PRESIDENT asked Mr HAHN to report to the College on the outcome of the conciliation period in the interinstitutional negotiations on the draft annual budget of the European Union for 2022.

Mr HAHN welcomed the conclusion of a political agreement between the European Parliament and the Council, on the basis of the Commission's proposal, on Monday 15 November, just before the conciliation period expired. The outcome of the negotiations was a draft EU budget for 2022 of €169.5 billion in commitments and €170.6 billion in payments, including special instruments.

He explained that the main focus of the discussions had been the overall size of the EU budget, the additional items requested by Parliament for 2022 and how to allocate the funds that would not be used next year because of the current low interest rates.

On this last point, the three institutions had made a formal statement on the draft 2022 budget to the effect that the savings generated as a result of low interest payments in 2022 would be retained with a view to the early repayment, during the Multiannual Financial Framework, of loans contracted in connection with NextGenerationEU. For its part, the Commission had issued a unilateral statement announcing that it would continue to follow this principle in future.

Mr HAHN felt that the budget negotiations had yielded an excellent result which increased the funds allocated to the EU's main political priorities and would provide the basis for a continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences as well as action to kick-start a sustainable recovery and protect and create jobs in a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe. The budget also included a margin of manoeuvre to cover contingencies in 2022.

He ended by announcing that the 2022 EU budget would be formally adopted the following week at the plenary session of the European Parliament, before being approved by Council.

The Commission took note of this information.

- 9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – EU SOIL STRATEGY FOR 2030 – REAPING THE BENEFITS OF HEALTHY SOILS FOR PEOPLE, FOOD, NATURE AND CLIMATE
(COM(2021) 699 AND /2; SWD(2021) 323; RCC(2021) 209)**
- 10. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON THE MAKING AVAILABLE ON THE UNION MARKET AS WELL AS EXPORT FROM THE UNION OF CERTAIN COMMODITIES AND PRODUCTS ASSOCIATED WITH DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION AND REPEALING REGULATION (EU) No 995/2010
(COM(2021) 706 TO /3; SWD(2021) 325; SWD(2021) 326 AND /2; SWD(2021) 327; SWD(2021) 328; SWD(2021) 329; SEC(2021) 395; SEC(2021) 396; RCC(2021) 209)**

The PRESIDENT asked Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr SINKEVIČIUS to present the communication entitled ‘EU Soil Strategy for 2030 – Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate’ and the proposal for a Regulation on the making available on the Union market as well as export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation.

First, Mr TIMMERMANS presented the Soil Strategy, explaining that today soils were the foundation for 95% of the food we ate, hosted more than 25% of all biodiversity and formed the largest terrestrial carbon pool on the planet. However, 70% of soil in the EU was not healthy.

He therefore welcomed the fact that the Commission was putting forward a practical vision of how to remedy this situation. The Soil Strategy set out specific measures for the protection, restoration and sustainable management of soils. It aimed to increase soil carbon, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil and ensure that, by 2050, all natural ecosystems were restored, resilient and adequately protected. This would reduce soil pollution to levels that were not harmful to people or the environment.

He welcomed the fact that the Commission was committing itself to a new Soil Health Law that would ensure the same level of protection for soil as already existed for water and air in the EU.

Mr TIMMERMANS then turned to the proposal on deforestation. He felt that forests should be seen as a living organism. The debates within the Commission over the drafting of this proposal had been constructive but also passionate, which showed that the initiative was proposing real change. He thanked in particular Mr DOMBROVSKIS, Ms URPILAINEN, Ms SIMSON and Mr LENARČIČ and their teams for their contribution to these efforts.

He felt that the Commission could be proud of the proposed Regulation, which would resonate widely, as it set a new standard and contributed to the green transition.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS explained that soil was an ecosystem without which the planet could barely survive. Alongside the vital roles it played as mentioned by Mr TIMMERMANS, it was also a crucial ally in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

He noted that the Soil Strategy set out an ambitious agenda for the years to come, with a set of voluntary and binding measures and actions to be implemented at local, regional, national, EU and global level.

He highlighted three key elements of this strategy.

First, it defined a new perspective, with short-term measures for 2030, and a long-term vision of healthy soils by 2050.

Second, it set a new policy framework, with tangible measures to protect, restore and use soils sustainably, in line with the European Green Deal, and complementing the Horizon Europe Mission on Soil and the EU Soil Observatory.

Third, it announced the launch of an impact assessment for a new Soil Health Law, which would be adopted by mid-2023, to address the cross-border impacts of soil degradation, secure fair market conditions, promote policy coherence between EU and national level and help achieve the EU's goals on climate change, biodiversity, food security and water protection.

Evidence showed that there was a clear soil protection gap and that voluntary measures alone had not been enough to fill that gap.

There was now greater awareness that without healthy soils, it was impossible to meet the objectives for the climate, biodiversity, the circular economy, human health, as well as food safety and security.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS then turned to the proposal on deforestation, which he was proud to present, as he saw it as a ground-breaking step that would confirm the EU's determination to act as a leading force in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss. The proposal was timely, coming just a few days after the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, where world leaders had committed to halt deforestation by 2030, and just before COP15, where decisive steps would have to be taken to combat biodiversity loss. It was also an eagerly awaited proposal, as evidenced by the results of the open public consultation, which

had gathered more than 1.2 million responses, the second most popular in the history of the EU, showing just how high the stakes were.

Above all, this proposal would enable the EU to deliver on the European Green Deal and mark a decisive turning point in the global fight against deforestation and forest degradation. It would drive change in the market and green supply chains to address today's two major environmental challenges, global warming and biodiversity loss.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS reported that deforestation and forest degradation were continuing at an alarming rate, with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimating that around 10% of the world's forests, an area larger than the EU, had been lost over the last 30 years. According to FAO estimates, about 90% of deforestation was caused by the expansion of agricultural land linked to the production of a range of products such as soya, beef, palm oil, wood, cocoa and coffee.

As a major economy and large consumer of these products linked to deforestation and forest degradation, the EU was partly responsible for this problem. It should therefore bear its share of responsibility in its resolution, while also pointing the way for others.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS noted that in order to curb deforestation and forest degradation, the EU could ensure that the commodities consumed by its citizens were not produced on land that had been deforested anywhere in the world. In order to achieve the proposed objectives, those who placed such products on the EU market should bear full responsibility for their activity's environmental impact. It was therefore proposed to establish mandatory due diligence rules and strict traceability of the commodities and products placed on the EU market.

This was the most ambitious proposal ever put forward to combat deforestation, not only because of the strict traceability it introduced, but also because the EU was the

first to take a decisive step to combat illegal deforestation, on the one hand, and against deforestation driven by agricultural expansion, on the other.

The proposal focused on the six products for which EU intervention was considered to be most effective – namely beef, wood, palm oil, soya, coffee and cocoa – using a system through which the scope of the products targeted could be updated regularly. It also covered the main forms of marketing of these products, including a number of derived products, such as leather, chocolate and furniture. The product list would be subject to review over time.

Above all, the products, whether produced inside or outside the EU, would all be subject to the same requirements. Traders and large operators would be required to observe due diligence to ensure that the commodities and products concerned were both ‘deforestation-free’, as defined in the new Regulation, and legal, within the meaning of the legislation of the country of production, in order to be authorised on the EU market.

Specifically, the proposal was based on internationally agreed definitions, and in particular on the work of the FAO, to establish what constituted ‘deforestation-free’ products under this Regulation. It also stipulated that products from land deforested or degraded as from 31 December 2020 would not be allowed to enter the EU market, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 15.2, which committed all countries to halting deforestation by the end of 2020.

The Commission’s proposal was therefore forward-looking and aimed at preventing further deforestation rather than punishing unsustainable behaviour in the past. In addition, operators and traders would be required to collect information through geolocation coordinates on production plots, ensuring that only deforestation-free products were allowed on the European market and that enforcement authorities had the means to verify this.

Moreover, the due diligence obligations would operate in combination with a benchmarking system. At the outset, all countries would be assigned a ‘standard’

risk, but the proposal empowered the Commission to propose that countries or certain areas be given a lower or higher risk of deforestation and forest degradation linked to the production of the products concerned. The obligations of operators and Member States' authorities would vary depending on the level of risk in the country of production. The aim of this system was to encourage countries to step up the protection of their forests. There would be no ban on any country or product. Deforestation-free producers, even from high-risk areas, would continue to be able to sell their products in the EU.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS also announced that the Commission planned to step up discussions and cooperation programmes with its international partners so that they could reap the benefits of the forthcoming new rules. The proposal would support partner countries in strengthening the capacity of governments, the private sector and civil society stakeholders to work together to address the challenges of deforestation and forest degradation. A new development cooperation tool, forest partnerships, would be tailored to each country's needs.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS concluded his presentation by stating that the EU should also intensify its dialogue with other major consumer markets such as the US and China with a view to encouraging them to also take measures to remove deforestation products from their supply chains.

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

- the broad support of the College for the timely and necessary initiatives presented that day;
- a reminder that the European Green Deal underpinning these proposals was a growth strategy in all its dimensions – environmental, economic and social;

- as regards the Soil Strategy, the importance of soil analyses, the results of which should be adequately monitored; in this context, the need to monitor the evolution of fertiliser prices;
- the strong external and commercial dimension of the proposal on deforestation, which was a phenomenon found mainly outside the EU; hence the need for a clear communication strategy to explain this proposal to the EU's trading partners, through international partnerships and EU delegations, and the balance to be ensured in order to minimise the risk of complaints within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The PRESIDENT concluded the discussion by thanking Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr SINKEVIČIUS for their presentations of these particularly important initiatives, which were an integral part of the European Green Deal and which, in her view, paved the way for essential changes.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2021) 699/2 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2021) 323, the contents of which were noted;
- adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2021) 706/3, for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments, together with the staff working documents, the impact assessment and summary thereof, and the opinions of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board on the impact assessment and on the fitness check in SWD(2021) 325, SWD(2021) 328, SWD(2021) 329, SWD(2021) 326/2, SWD(2021) 327, SEC(2021) 395 and SEC(2021) 396, the contents of which were noted;

11. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – OUR WASTE, OUR RESPONSIBILITY: WASTE SHIPMENTS IN A CLEAN AND MORE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

(COM(2021) 708 AND /2; RCC(2021) 210)

12. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON SHIPMENTS OF WASTE AND AMENDING REGULATIONS (EU) No 1257/2013 AND (EU) 2020/1056

(COM(2021) 709 AND /2; SWD(2021) 330; SWD(2021) 331; SWD(2021) 332; SEC(2021) 402; RCC(2021) 210)

Mr TIMMERMANS presented to the College the Communication entitled ‘Our waste, our responsibility: waste shipments in a clean and more circular economy’, which was accompanied by a proposal for a revised Regulation on waste shipments.

Better waste management was one of the key elements of the European Green Deal, while waste recovery needed to be encouraged as part of the circular economy.

Many Member States were still exporting their waste to third countries where it was not always treated in a sustainable manner. For this reason, the proposal for a revised Regulation laid down stricter conditions for the incineration and landfilling of waste, requiring it to undergo sustainable treatment methods before it could be exported. It was also why the Commission was that day proposing measures on waste shipments within the EU, to OECD countries and to third countries.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS stressed that the Commission’s proposals aimed to ensure the sustainable treatment of waste and its use as a valuable resource in the circular economy.

Steel and non-ferrous scrap, sorted waste paper, glass cullet and now plastic bottles were all useful inputs to the European economy. They could also relieve the pressure on extracting natural resources, promote an innovative circular economy and improve security of supply for many industrial ecosystems in the EU.

For this to happen, it was necessary to make sure not only that valuable waste materials could circulate smoothly in the EU but also that it could be treated sustainably, so that it did not harm human health or pollute the environment.

The ‘Our waste, our responsibility’ slogan summed up the EU’s approach, which aimed to minimise the pollution footprint on a global scale by taking greater responsibility for the waste it produced.

In 2020, the EU had exported 33 million tonnes of waste, which was an increase of 75% since 2004. Half of this waste went to non-OECD countries, where waste management standards and practices were considerably lower than in the EU.

The circulation of waste in the EU was also significant, since waste shipments among the Member States amounted to 70 million tonnes per year.

Nonetheless, he did not see these figures as bad news, insofar as waste could be a significant resource in a circular economy as long as it was treated with care, applying the polluter pays principle.

This was not always the case, however: between 15 and 30% of waste shipments were probably illegal, amounting to 9.5 billion euros in annual revenues in the EU which should be spent on proper waste management, otherwise taxpayers could bear the cost of cleaning up pollution and environmental degradation, while suffering its consequences.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS went into more detail on the problems the EU wished to solve through its proposals. Firstly, waste exports caused environmental problems and harmed public health at their final destination, which was often in developing

countries, where it was dumped in open sites or burned in the open air, contaminating the soil, air and water and causing illnesses.

Secondly, exports of waste from the EU also damaged its own environment since some of that waste ended up in the ocean and caused wider harm to ecosystems.

These exports also meant a considerable loss of resources for the EU economy and lost opportunities for green growth and innovation in the circular economy. This waste could be processed close to where it was generated and used as secondary raw material to produce new products, which would reduce the EU's dependence on primary raw materials like iron ore, paper pulp and bauxite.

Moreover, current rules were seen as too burdensome by economic operators who wanted to ship waste for recycling within the EU. Simplifying them was one of the challenges that needed to be met under the proposed measures.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS also referred to the significant problem of waste trafficking linked to organised crime and explained that the proposal for a Regulation had three main objectives in this regard: (i) stop exporting the EU's waste problems to third countries, (ii) facilitate and simplify shipments of waste for recycling within the EU, and (iii) combat illegal shipments more effectively.

The shipment of the most problematic and hazardous waste to non-OECD countries was already banned. The aim of the proposed measures was to tighten the conditions under which other types of waste could be exported to those countries. It would only be possible to send waste for recovery if countries explicitly notified the Commission of their wish to receive EU waste and demonstrated that they were able to treat it in a sustainable manner.

Exports of waste to OECD countries would be monitored more closely and, under the proposal for a revised Regulation, the Commission could take steps to address any problems and ultimately suspend exports. Moreover, EU companies exporting waste outside the EU should carry out third party audits to ensure that their exports

were sustainable and that they fulfilled their responsibilities, which was already the case for many of them.

Regarding shipments of waste within the EU, their transport for re-use and recycling would be made easier by introducing a digital system. The development of this system meant the full digitalisation of procedures and more harmonised classification of waste to help the market to function, with stricter conditions being applied for waste destined for incineration and landfilling.

On the issue of illegal shipments within the EU, the Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) would support Member States' investigations on the ground. In addition, a new EU 'waste shipment enforcement group' would increase cooperation between customs, police and national inspection authorities.

In conclusion, Mr SINKEVIČIUS explained that the EU would continue to help developing countries to deal with the challenge of managing waste sustainably and that modern environmental infrastructure to treat waste could create many opportunities for economic growth. The EU intended to lead the way at international level to a circular economy where waste was minimised and was no longer a challenge but an opportunity to promote sustainable growth.

A short discussion followed, during which the Commission referred mainly to the lucrative nature of illegal waste trafficking, the elimination of which should be seen as a priority; the concerns that could be raised by facilitating shipments within the EU, which needed to be tightly controlled; and, finally, the need to present waste as an asset and a resource to be exploited in the context of the circular economy.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS wound up the discussion by stressing that the Regulation presented that day was the most ambitious ever proposed at international level to resolve waste shipment problems. He felt that the EU was thus fulfilling its responsibilities and turning words into action by reducing its contribution to pollution and the loss of biodiversity at global level.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2021) 708/2 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments;
- adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2021) 709/2, for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document, the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2021) 330, SWD(2021) 331, SWD(2021) 332 and SEC(2021) 402, the contents of which were noted.

**13. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – A COMPETITION POLICY FIT FOR NEW CHALLENGES
(COM(2021) 713 A /3; RCC(2021) 208)**

The PRESIDENT stressed that the economic environment had developed significantly over the past two years and that the State aid framework had proven to be flexible to cope with the pandemic. She thought that the Communication proposed that day, entitled ‘A competition policy fit for new challenges’, was a high-quality document that presented a balanced approach as regards the various competition policy tools for supporting the EU’s digital and green future and the resilience of the internal market.

Ms VESTAGER pointed out that, for the most part, European competition rules dated back to the beginning of the European Union and were essentially aimed at preventing mergers likely to destabilise the Member States’ economies. She noted that competition policy – an exclusive EU competence – was the key to the smooth

functioning of the internal market. In order to prosper, the EU needed an internal market that was both open and predictable; competition remained a vital driving force in the context of Europe's economic recovery and regrowth in the wake of the pandemic.

She also noted that competition supervision was based on three main instruments, which were currently being updated, namely: (i) merger control, to maintain innovation and freedom of choice within the internal market, (ii) antitrust rules, to control the big economic players, and (iii) State aid control, which allowed the Member States to support businesses while respecting certain conditions and avoiding distortions of competition likely to undermine single market cohesion. This review was intended to ensure that all these instruments remained fit for purpose and complemented the existing toolbox.

She believed that the Communication proposed that day sent a clear signal of the Commission's ambitions, based on what it had successfully achieved in the field of competition over the past decades, promoting the European economy of tomorrow and steering it on a path towards recovery, the green and digital transitions and a resilient single market. The Communication highlighted the in-built ability of competition policy to adapt to developing market conditions, strategic priorities and consumer needs.

She explained the two key messages of the Communication.

First, strong competition enforcement was fundamental for businesses and consumers to reap the full benefits of the single market. It gave businesses of all sizes a fair chance to compete. It made sure businesses endeavoured to deliver the best and most innovative solutions for consumers. It also gave customers a choice of products and services, thus contributing to reliable and diverse supply chains. That was why effective competition policy was needed now, more than ever, to give the European economy the agility and the means needed to overcome the challenges facing it.

Second, competition rules had an in-built flexibility to adapt. This Communication was part of the Commission's review of competition policy, the scope and ambition of which was unprecedented. The aim was to ensure that all competition instruments remained fit for purpose and complementing the existing toolbox with new instruments to tackle foreign subsidies or digital gatekeepers.

Ms VESTAGER went on to highlight the strong growth currently experienced in the euro area. In her view, in order to support the recovery, the green and digital transition and a resilient internal market, it was important to allow the Member States to strengthen their direct aid to investment and solvency, by focusing on private investment for small and medium-sized enterprises.

In this connection, she referred to the sixth revision of the State aid Temporary Framework, which the Commission would adopt by written procedure the following Thursday, 18 November. Pursuant to this amendment, the arrangements in place since March 2020 and due to expire on 31 December 2021 would be extended to 30 June 2022 to tackle the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These arrangements had allowed the Member States to provide support to businesses while limiting as much as possible differences within the EU. In addition, with this revision the Commission had decided – in order to speed up the recovery – to introduce two new measures to create direct incentives for private investments and solvency support measures for a limited additional period. As regards the duration of the temporary arrangements, the Commission would monitor how the recovery progressed.

Lastly, she discussed the public support that could be granted to produce semi-conductors. She highlighted the current market failure in the microchip sector, where production had slowed down significantly, if not stopped, and the importance of an EU strategy in this area. In this regard, she referred to the future European legislative initiative on microchips mentioned by the PRESIDENT in her State of the Union speech. She noted that any operating aid to this sector should be open to

all Member States and be proportionate and necessary, irrespective of where production was located.

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

- full support for the document presented, which was set against a completely new economic background and which modernised competition policy by taking due account of its different aspects and tailoring it towards the EU's green and digital transition and the resilience of the single market;
- the parallels that could be drawn between the EU's current situation and the situation at the time of the first industrial revolution, i.e. the start of a powerful economic transformation that also involved major changes that would take place within one generation;
- hence the importance of broadening the discussion and adapting competition policy without sacrificing its fundamental principles; the model that this modernisation could inspire for other European policies;
- the need for a strong, modern competition policy, based on legal rules and effective technical instruments adapted to a changing world in which a definition of the relevant markets was essential;
- the need to integrate all developments, as the Communication had done, by recognising the interests of customers, business-to-business relationships and the need for a resilient value chain;
- the need to maintain and restore confidence, which was an indispensable prerequisite for the massive investments that would enable a successful green and digital transition to take place, especially investments in small and medium-sized enterprises, which had suffered greatly because of the current crisis and which would benefit from the changes made to the State aid Temporary Framework;

- the risk of divergence between the Member States in the context of the economic recovery and the fact that State aid had to guarantee a balance within the internal market, without favouring some to the detriment of others;
- the importance for the European Union of having a skilled workforce capable of adapting to a changing world and to the challenges of modernisation, especially in rapidly changing strategic sectors;
- the desirability of allowing European consumers to make informed choices, at a fair price, while knowing exactly where the products in question came from, with the guarantee of fair competition between the producer countries;
- a reminder that State aid had to be granted for good reasons, so as to avoid international disputes and preserve the EU's credibility with regard to the World Trade Organization;
- the value of the EU continuing to fight against all illegal subsidies at international level, particularly through the future instrument for tackling foreign subsidies, a new trade policy strategy and a more systematic use of the available tools, e.g. as regards anti-dumping;
- the importance of the future microchip proposal and the need for an innovative and targeted approach promoting research and development and capital raising, within a strategic ecosystem where it was imperative for the EU to take the lead while other major countries developed their own strategies in this area.

In conclusion, Ms VESTAGER pointed out that the proposed new rules would allow the Commission to meet its green and digital transition targets, and stressed the need to fully respect these rules in order to ensure the cohesion and integrity of the European internal market.

The President thanked Ms VESTAGER for the excellent Communication that she had presented to the College.

Following this presentation, the Commission agreed, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, that the Communication in COM(2021) 713/3 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 18 November 2021 (PE/2021/8450).

14. OTHER BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

14.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRESIDENT reported to the College on her participation in the G20 summit in Rome on 30 and 31 October, and on her meeting with the President of the United States, Joe BIDEN, at the White House on 10 November.

An agreement had been reached at the G20 summit on two main issues, namely the specific target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, which she considered to be a significant political achievement, and the advisability, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, of creating a council of G20 finance and health ministers, in order to ensure the necessary strategic investment in health systems through a Financial Intermediary Fund (FIF).

In view of the difficulty of the negotiations that had taken place during the G20 summit, she believed that the EU had to strengthen its inclusive approach in preparatory work, and begin preparations right away for the next summit, which would take place the following year in Indonesia.

With regard to her meeting with the US President at the White House, the PRESIDENT reported that the discussions had essentially concerned the most pressing international issues, in particular the crisis at the EU's border with Belarus and the situation in Ukraine. The US government had expressed interest in adopting its own sanctions against the Belarusian regime as part of a concerted action with the EU.

The PRESIDENT turned to the crisis relating to Belarus. She confirmed that the EU must continue its efforts to stem the migration flows towards Belarus, which was why she had asked Mr SCHINAS to establish close cooperation with the migrants' main countries of origin or transit and the airlines involved in transporting them to Belarus. She noted the effectiveness of this last approach, which had enabled the EU to send a clear message to airlines facilitating trafficking in human beings that they would be heavily sanctioned. She noted that one Turkish and one Syrian company had already announced that they would cease their flights to Belarus. Thanks to these efforts, the number of migrants trapped at the EU-Belarus border was already decreasing.

She also said that she had held talks with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo GRANDI, with a view to ensuring humanitarian access to people stranded in the border area in question. He had confirmed that access was now possible on the Belarusian side of the border and that the UN was now providing assistance together with the European Commission.

The PRESIDENT raised the question of the circumstances that had enabled the Belarusian regime to implement this new form of hybrid attack against the EU. She called for every effort to be made to promote the unity of the Member States on these migration issues. This included mobilising funding for the Member States affected by the arrival of migrants to purchase electronic border surveillance equipment and proposing a new set of measures to strengthen the security of the borders concerned. She also called for a broader discussion on how the EU should envisage the development of its migration policy.

Mr SCHINAS explained that the purpose of his mission to the countries of origin or transit of the migrants at the EU-Belarus border was to put an end to the transfer of migrants organised by the Belarusian regime.

The message he had sent the migrants was to dissuade them from risking an attempted transit through Kiev, since what they were being offered was not an entry ticket to the EU but a criminal political manoeuvre by the Belarusian regime. This message seemed to have been heard. A second message, addressed to the authorities of the countries of origin, aimed to raise their awareness of the inhumane exploitation of which their nationals were victims, in order to encourage them to put a stop to it. Lastly, the message to airlines about the blacklisting of companies making flights from the countries of origin in question to Minsk was already proving its effectiveness, since some airlines had already suspended the sale of tickets to Belarus.

Mr SCHINAS went on to explain that the focus should be on the dramatic situation of the people already stranded at the border with Belarus. He noted that Belarus had shown some openness to give humanitarian organisations access to the areas where the migrants were currently trapped. In his view there was a twofold challenge to be addressed, the first being the organisation of voluntary return flights and the second that of non-voluntary return flights and the reintegration of returned migrants in their countries of origin, in close cooperation with the authorities concerned.

In conclusion, Mr SCHINAS listed the main lessons to be drawn from this crisis, namely (i) that many of the EU's partners in the Middle East, in particular the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and Iraq, were ready to cooperate and that these partnerships should be fostered, (ii) that the successes of a geopolitical Commission depended on the use of tools based on EU law, such as trade policy instruments, which were both effective and relevant, and (iii) that the EU should remain vigilant and be prepared for new attempts to exploit migrants.

Mr BORRELL reminded the meeting that the Belarusian leadership had made the first transfers of migrants in August 2021, which was why the European External Action Service (EEAS) had contacted the authorities concerned to

call for flights to Minsk to be suspended. After a lull in September, flights had resumed in October from the whole of the Middle East region. Hence the desirability of the efforts made to raise awareness among the authorities of the migrants' countries of origin.

Mr BORRELL said that these efforts should be pursued, particularly with the governments of countries which could become new sources of migratory flows. At the same time, the EU should consider dissuasive counter-measures. He argued that the Belarusian regime now appeared to understand that it would not derive any benefit from its attempted exploitation of migrants, many of whom could remain stranded on its territory. He also noted that many of the migrants in this situation decided voluntarily to return to their countries of origin after realising that they had been misled.

Finally, Mr BORRELL stressed the urgent need to provide humanitarian aid to people on the ground who were living in inhumane conditions. He stressed that this assistance must be provided on both sides of the border by ensuring access for humanitarian organisations from Poland and Belarus, in close cooperation with the United Nations. Many organisations were ready to contribute to the technical aspects of voluntary returns so that they could be implemented in the best possible conditions.

In conclusion, he said that the Polish Parliament had recently passed a law on the reception of asylum seekers whose compatibility with EU law had yet to be assessed, while a humanitarian crisis had to be avoided at all costs.

Ms JOHANSSON said that this was an unprecedented situation that had now given rise to an acute crisis. She pointed out that Belarus was not a country that was subject to migratory pressure and that it usually respected the right to asylum. Between 7 000 and 8 000 migrants had so far succeeded in crossing the border and had applied for asylum in the EU, in addition to the large number of migrants from Belarus who had been received by Germany. She

reported that around 50% of those stranded at the border were women and children, that 11 people had died and that returns, already initiated for Iraqi nationals, were expected to pose more difficulties in the case of Afghans and Syrians.

She also noted the violence against migrants by the Belarusian authorities, who were deliberately directing them towards the Polish border. She added that cooperation with the Polish authorities should be stepped up in order to assist them in managing this crisis in accordance with EU rules and values. For the moment, the priority was to put an end to the illegal transfer of migrants to the EU's external border, and the EU should pursue its approach of seeking to stem the migration flow and engaging with partner countries. The establishment of a dialogue with the EU's partner countries was precisely one of the key elements of the new Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Mr LENARČIČ welcomed the solidarity shown by the Union. 19 Member States, and also Norway, had provided aid in kind to Lithuania through the Civil Protection Mechanism, under which it had requested assistance in July. For its part, Poland had not yet requested assistance, and humanitarian access to migrants on the Polish side of the border remained limited to date. He reiterated the Commission's readiness to provide assistance to Poland, as it had done for Lithuania.

He felt that the crisis with Belarus went far beyond a simple issue of migration and ought to be classified as a crime, since it was in fact state sponsored human trafficking. He called for greater attention to be paid to the humanitarian aspects of this crisis, as the lives of those now stranded at the Belarusian border were at risk through lack of food, water and shelter and due to the cold. He stressed that, in such circumstances, humanitarian access was essential and was a moral imperative for the EU. The Commission would allocate up to EUR 200 000 to the International Federation of Red Cross and

Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and up to EUR 500 000 to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Finally, Mr LENARČIČ summarised the three possible options for those currently stranded at the border, namely (i) returning to their countries of origin, with the readmission difficulties that this entailed, (ii) seeking asylum in Belarus, which was certainly not willing to receive such a number of migrants and did not have the necessary facilities to do so, or (iii) applying for family reunification in the EU if the conditions for this were met.

Ms VÁLEAN welcomed the fact that the actions taken by Mr SCHINAS and the Commission departments had led certain airlines to immediately suspend their flights to Belarus. She explained that the airlines in question were reputable companies, whose activities would be directly impacted by the threat of EU blacklisting. However, there were also companies that were currently not authorised to travel to the EU, and blacklisting these would therefore have no effect.

Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI noted that the organised transfer of migrants to the Poland-Belarus border was indeed a hybrid attack on the EU, one of the aims of which was to provoke a humanitarian tragedy, which was currently taking place only on Belarusian territory. He felt that the EU should therefore continue to firmly protect its borders against this new form of aggression.

The PRESIDENT thanked the College for its collective work. She stressed the need to strike the right balance between firmness vis-à-vis the Belarusian regime and a humane approach to migrants trapped on the ground, who must have urgent humanitarian aid, to be delivered in close cooperation with UN agencies. She called for talks with Belarus to be continued at technical level in order to assist the migrants, while unreservedly opposing Belarus's hybrid attack. On the basis of the experience gained, she was confident of the EU's

ability to remedy this situation by mobilising all the instruments at its disposal, in accordance with its principles and values.

In conclusion, she said that the Commission was preparing a package of security measures to support Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, which would be presented at the College meeting on 23 November.

At the PRESIDENT's request, Mr TIMMERMANS then reported on the 26th United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP26), held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November 2021.

He began by reminding the meeting that just one year ago only 30% of the planet's nations had set a climate-neutrality target, whereas 90% had now done so. He fully appreciated the value of this global consensus.

In the wake of the G20 summit in Rome, the parties to COP26 had confirmed the goal of limiting global warming to a figure as close as possible to 1.5°C in relation to pre-industrial levels; this also represented significant progress since the Paris Agreement, which had set a limit of below 2 C. The parties would have to take account of this in their national climate plans before the next conference, COP27, which would take place in Egypt in 2022.

Mr TIMMERMANS outlined the other important progress made in Glasgow, mentioning in particular the agreement of the parties on the rules of the Paris Agreement, which was crucial for establishing the same conditions for all. Furthermore, 105 countries had signed the agreement on reducing methane emissions, and an agreement had been reached on ending deforestation.

Finally, he highlighted the commitment made by the parties in Glasgow to progressively reducing the use of coal in their countries, and reminded the meeting that the members of the G20 had also undertaken to phase out subsidies for the use of coal beyond their borders. He stressed that he considered this too to be an important outcome.

Mr TIMMERMANS said he was very happy to see that the EU's Member States had remained united throughout the conference, and that the EU had played a decisive role in keeping the discussions on track by working together with its partners.

He stated nonetheless that the negotiations on financing had been difficult, but he thought that in 2022 the parties would manage to raise the promised 100 billion dollars to assist vulnerable developing countries in adapting to climate change. He desired Team Europe to actively prepare for a reminder of the contribution that the EU had committed to making, and to inform all its partners of this, inviting the industrialised nations to follow its example.

Finally, he praised the outstanding expertise of the Commission officials who had taken part in preparing for the COP26 discussions, and their mastery of the extremely complex issues they had addressed.

Mr TIMMERMANS concluded his presentation by noting that the positive outcomes achieved in Glasgow marked the start of significant work to be undertaken with a view to the next conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, and confirmed that the EU had numerous allies around the world that shared its climate ambitions.

In the course of the brief discussion that followed, the Commission warmly thanked Mr TIMMERMANS for his activities during the conference in Glasgow, which demonstrated the EU's leading role in the fight against climate change and had contributed to the positive results achieved.

The PRESIDENT warmly thanked Mr TIMMERMANS for his extensive engagement with countries around the world in order to forge a network of partners on whom the Union had been able to count during COP26, and for the outstanding role he played at that event on behalf of the Commission. She welcomed the fact that the EU's voice had been able to explain that it was possible to thrive and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the same time,

whilst showing solidarity. She confirmed that the EU had to make a start without delay on the work required for COP27 in Egypt.

The Commission took note of this information.

14.2. SITUATION REGARDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The PRESIDENT invited Ms KYRIAKIDES to give an update on the epidemiological situation in the EU.

Ms KYRIAKIDES began by noting that, while the situation was worsening, it should be remembered that the EU was in much better shape than a year ago thanks to the safe and effective vaccines available to all its Member States. A further piece of good news was that the first treatments against COVID-19 would soon be available.

She explained that the increase in infections had accelerated last week, that hospitalisations and deaths had also increased during the same period and that Member States were adopting new restrictive measures, aimed at unvaccinated people in particular.

She reported on the information provided by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) according to which this trend was expected to continue in the coming weeks, due to a combination of factors, namely new variants (which were infecting more and more people, including vaccinated people), better identification of cases, the winter season (conducive to the spread of viruses), increased mobility and some relaxation of protection measures.

The COVID-19 Delta variant was currently dominant in infections and a new variant, slowly increasing in the Member States, was being closely monitored by the ECDC.

She also pointed out that 75% of the adult population and 65% of the total population in the EU had now been vaccinated, but that there were still 150 million unvaccinated people. Seven Member States had fully vaccinated less than 55% of their total population and eight had fully vaccinated more than 70%. The EU, through the ECDC and a COVID-19 scientific advice platform, was providing expert support to Member States with low vaccination rates.

She stressed that the aim was to ensure that the vaccine response was as coordinated as possible, based on science, and to avoid divisions in the EU.

She added that the effectiveness of the vaccines administered during the initial vaccination campaigns tended to decrease over time, that some Member States recommended the booster dose and that the digital COVID certificate was being adapted to take account of these third doses.

The ECDC was expected to make a decision very soon on the sensitive issue of vaccinating children.

She added that two monoclonal antibody treatments had been authorised in the EU and that contracts could be concluded by the end of the year. Some Member States had already placed orders. Ten potential treatments were currently being studied at EU level.

Finally, she mentioned that a number of Member States had used the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to obtain assistance in order to deal with difficult public health situations.

The PRESIDENT praised the work carried out tirelessly by Ms KYRIAKIDES on all aspects of managing the pandemic. She pointed out that the Commission had ensured that enough doses, i.e. 1.8 billion, were available to cover the needs of its total population, including booster doses, and to donate to third countries.

Mr REYNDERS referred to the digital COVID certificate in force in the EU, which he confirmed would be able to take into account the booster dose. More than 50 third countries were working with the EU under this scheme.

In view of the current health situation, the Commission was proposing that the validity of the digital COVID certificate be extended beyond the summer of 2022 and that the discussions to be held with the European Parliament and the Council would focus on the duration of the effectiveness of the second vaccine dose.

He considered it appropriate to continue encouraging people to get vaccinated in the EU. He called for the avoidance of piecemeal measures taken by Member States, be it compulsory vaccination, restrictions on unvaccinated people or the adoption of vaccine passports, and reminded the meeting of the principle of proportionality.

A discussion followed, during which the Commission mainly referred to the insufficient vaccination rates in some Member States, even though the EU had made considerable efforts to be able to deliver vaccine doses to all its citizens while some countries in the rest of the world were desperately awaiting deliveries, as well as the need to focus strongly on providing information for people who were still reluctant to get vaccinated.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 12.38.