



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2398 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 22 December 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2398th meeting of the Commission

held in Strasbourg

(Louise Weiss building)

on Tuesday 23 November 2021

(afternoon)

PV(2021) 2398 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Tuesday 23 November 2021 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.05 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	Items 1 to 22/26 (in part)
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	Items 8/9 to 27
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	Items 1 to 22/26 (in part)
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms GABRIEL	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	

Absent:

Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President
Mr REYNDEERS	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member

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

Ms LOTSON LÓPEZ	Policy assistant in Mr BORRELL's Office	Items 8/9 (in part) to 27
Ms TUTS	Chef de cabinet to Mr REYNDEERS	
Mr HORVÁTH	Expert in Mr VÁRHELYI's Office	
Mr SAVIGNAT	A member of Ms URPILAINEN's staff	Items 8/9 to 27

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 10/13 (in part)
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	Items 1 to 22/26 (in part)
Ms CABRAL	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 10/13 to 27
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8/9
Ms SCHULTZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr VALERO	Secretariat-General	

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, assisted by Mr LE VILLAIN, administrator in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2021) 2398/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2398/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) 2398)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 22 November 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2396th and 2397th meetings of 10 and 17 November 2021 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 206)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 19 November 2021 (RCC(2021) 206).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 (Regulation) – KRASNODEŹBSKI report – 2020/0360 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 333.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 establishing a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (Regulation) – KOPCIŃSKA report – 2020/0320 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 334.

- **Amendment of Directive 2014/41/EU as regards its alignment with EU rules on the protection of personal data (Directive) – KALJURAND report – 2021/0009 (COD) and amendment of Council Framework Decision 2002/465/JHA as regards its alignment with EU rules on the protection of personal data (Directive) – LENAERS report – 2021/0008 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 337.

- **Pilot regime on distributed ledger technology market infrastructures (Regulation) – VAN OVERTVELDT report – 2020/0267 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 339.

- **Roaming on public mobile communications networks within the Union (Regulation – recast) – WINZIG report – 2021/0045 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 340.

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

Line set out in SI(2021) 335.

- **Major interpellation for written answer G-0001002/2020 – Commission's assessment of the quality of its answers to questions for written answer**

Line set out in SP(2021) 726.

- **Position to be taken on behalf of the European Union, for the period 2021- 2026, in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries established by the**

Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other part (Council Decision) – 2021/0174 (NLE)

Line set out in SI(2021) 336.

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

- **Replies to the legislative resolutions (and list of non-legislative resolutions without formal reply) adopted by Parliament at its October II 2021 part session**

Line set out in SP(2021) 728.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Adequate minimum wages in the European Union (Directive) – RADTKE & JONGERIUS report – 2020/0310 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2021) 325.

- **Framework of measures for ensuring the supply of crisis-relevant medical countermeasures in the event of a public health emergency at Union level (Council Regulation) – 2021/0294 (NLE)**

Information set out in SI(2021) 346.

- **Measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, and repeal of Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (Directive) – GROOTHUIS report – 2020/0359 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2021) 347.

- **General budget of the European Union for the financial year 2022 – All sections – RESSLER & BOESELAGER report – 2021/0227 (BUD)**

Information set out in SP(2021) 715.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2021) 47)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 47 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 17 November 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2021) 383 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 15 and 21 November 2021.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2021) 384 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 15 and 21 November 2021.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2021) 385 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 15 and 21 November 2021 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2021) 386 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 22 and 26 November 2021, and of the finalisation written procedures.

6.5. EMPOWERMENT DECISIONS RELATING TO REGULATION (EU) 2021/1529 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING THE INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA III)

(C(2021) 8600)

The Commission decided to grant an empowerment to the Member of the Commission responsible for neighbourhood and enlargement and an empowerment to the Member of the Commission responsible for agriculture for the measures coming exclusively within their areas of responsibility, to adopt, on behalf of the Commission and under its responsibility, certain decisions concerning Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III), under the conditions laid down in Articles 2 to 7 of this decision.

The Commission adopted the decision in C(2021) 8600.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2021) 387 AND /2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2021) 107 AND /2)

**7.1. DG EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID
OPERATIONS (ECHO) – AUTHORISATION OF INTERNAL
PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD15/16
DIRECTOR-GENERAL POST
(PERS(2021) 112)**

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

- to authorise the internal publication, at grade AD15/16, of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2021) 112 for the post of Director-General of DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations;
- to authorise Mr HAHN, the Member of the Commission responsible for the budget and administration, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, to decide on the date and period of the publication of this post.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.2. DG BUDGET – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD15 ADVISER HORS
CLASSE
(PERS(2021) 58 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 a post of adviser hors classe in DG Budget (PERS(2021) 58 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 10 and 12 November 2021 (PERS(2021) 58/3 and /4).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Siegfried Berthold RUHL to the post.

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

7.3. DG COMMUNICATION – EXTENSION OF THE POSTING OF THE HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPRESENTATION IN HUNGARY, AND REINSTATEMENT OF THIS GRADE AD15 OFFICIAL

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

- to derogate from Article 3 of Commission Decision C(2008) 3983 of 31 July 2008 on establishing rules on the rotation of officials in Representations, and to extend exceptionally the posting of the Head of the European Commission Representation in Hungary, Mr Gabor ZUPKÓ, from 1 December 2021 to 31 May 2022;
- to approve the reinstatement of Mr Gabor ZUPKÓ, currently Head of the European Commission Representation in Hungary, to the vacant post of Principal Adviser for the Relations with stakeholders, civil society, think tanks and outreach in DG Communication, on 1 June 2022.

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

7.4. DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND APPOINTMENT OF AN AD16 ADVISER HORS CLASSE

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

- to create a temporary adviser hors classe post in DG Health and Food Safety; this post would be abolished upon the departure of the job holder;
- to transfer to this post, in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Ladislav MIKO, an AD16 official currently Head of the European Commission Representation in Bratislava, in Slovakia.

These decisions would take effect on 1 January 2022.

7.5. DG COMMUNICATION – AMENDMENT OF ORGANISATION CHART AND APPOINTMENT OF AN AD16 HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPRESENTATION IN BRATISLAVA, IN SLOVAKIA

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

- to end the secondment in the interests of the service of Mr Vladimir ŠUCHA, an AD16 official, to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, and to reinstate him, on 31 December 2021, to the temporary post of adviser hors classe for culture and creativity in DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; this post would be abolished upon the departure of the job holder;
- to move Mr Vladimir ŠUCHA, currently adviser hors classe for culture and creativity in DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, to the post of Head of the European Commission representation in Bratislava, Slovakia;
- consequently, by derogation from the decision on middle management staff (C(2016) 3288 final), this post would be upgraded to the level of senior management until Mr Vladimir ŠUCHA's departure.

Unless indicated otherwise, these decisions would take effect on 1 January 2022.

7.6. DG CLIMATE ACTION – AMENDMENT OF ORGANISATION CHART AND INTERNAL PUBLICATION AT GRADE AD14/15 OF THREE DIRECTOR POSTS

(SEC(2021) 404; PERS(2021) 108; PERS(2021) 109; PERS(2021) 110)

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

- to change the title of the Deputy Director-General to ‘Deputy Director-General – Innovation, adaptation and resilience, stakeholder relations’, in line with the change in responsibilities with regard to the coordination and supervision of various activities in Directorates C and E; consequently, the Deputy Director-General would have direct reporting lines and would supervise the CLIMA.C ‘Innovation for a low carbon, resilient economy’ and CLIMA.E ‘Adaptation & resilience, communication and civil society relations’ Directorates;
- to create two directorates, CLIMA.D ‘International affairs and climate finance’, reporting to the Director-General, consisting of three units, and CLIMA.E ‘Adaptation & resilience, communication and civil society relations’, consisting of three units; the resources already existing at DG Climate Action would be made available to these newly-created administrative entities;
- to create two units in the newly-created Directorate CLIMA.D, namely:
 - CLIMA.D.2 ‘Bilateral relations’;
 - CLIMA.D.3 ‘Climate finance’;
- to create three units in the newly-created Directorate CLIMA.E, namely:
 - CLIMA.E.1 ‘Adaptation & resilience to climate change’;

- CLIMA.E.2 ‘Communication, civil society relations & climate pact’;
- CLIMA.E.3 ‘Climate information system’;
- to publish internally, at grade AD14/15, with immediate effect, the three vacancy notices in PERS(2021) 108, PERS(2021) 109 and PERS(2021) 110 respectively, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations, with a view to filling:
 - the post of Director of the ‘Innovation for a low carbon, resilient economy’ Directorate (CLIMA.C);
 - the post of Director of the ‘International affairs and climate finance’ Directorate (CLIMA.D);
 - the post of Director of the ‘Adaptation & resilience, communication and civil society relations’ Directorate (CLIMA.E);
- to approve the new organisation chart set out in SEC(2021) 404.

Following the reorganisation, the total number of directorates in DG Climate Action would increase from 3 to 5 and the number of units would increase from 12 to 17.

Unless indicated otherwise, these decisions would take effect on 16 January 2022.

7.7. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF CONTROLLER OF PROCEDURAL GUARANTEES ESTABLISHED FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROTECTING AND COMPLYING WITH PROCEDURAL GUARANTEES AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF INVESTIGATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD

OFFICE (OLAF)

(PERS(2021) 56 TO /3)

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

- to approve the restricted list of three candidates, listed in order of preference, in point 6 of PERS(2021) 107, with a view to filling the post of Controller of procedural guarantees established for the purpose of protecting and complying with procedural guarantees and fundamental rights in the context of investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF);
- to ask Mr HAHN, the Member of the Commission responsible, to consult the European Parliament and the Council;

The appointment of the Controller of procedural guarantees established for the purpose of protecting and complying with procedural guarantees and fundamental rights in the context of the investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office, and the establishment of a reserve list consisting of the two remaining candidates, would be submitted to the College again for their final approval, after consulting the European Parliament and the Council.

7.8. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION TO YEMEN (AT GRADE AD9/14)
(PERS(2021) 111)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to approve the list of candidates for the post of Head of the European Union Delegation to Yemen (at grade AD9/14) set out in PERS(2021) 111.

The competent authority of the European External Action Service (EEAS) would make the final appointment on the basis of this list.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**7.9. DG BUDGET – YEARLY REPORT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL ON DATA PERTAINING TO THE BUDGETARY IMPACT OF REMUNERATION AND PENSIONS OF UNION OFFICIALS FOR 2021
(INFO(2021) 23)**

The Commission took note of the information in INFO(2021) 23.

**8. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – RESPONDING TO STATE-SPONSORED INSTRUMENTALISATION OF MIGRANTS AT THE EU EXTERNAL BORDER
(JOIN(2021) 32 AND /2; RCC(2021) 217)**

**9. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON MEASURES AGAINST TRANSPORT OPERATORS THAT FACILITATE OR ENGAGE IN TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS OR SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS IN RELATION TO ILLEGAL ENTRY INTO THE TERRITORY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
(COM(2021) 753 AND /2; RCC(2021) 217)**

The PRESIDENT introduced the discussion on the Joint Communication entitled ‘Responding to State-sponsored instrumentalisation of migrants at the EU external border’ and the Regulation proposing measures against transport operators that facilitate or engage in trafficking in persons or smuggling of migrants in relation to illegal entry into the territory of the European Union. She was proud of how swiftly

and efficiently the Commission had responded to the hybrid attack launched against the EU by the Belarusian regime.

Mr SCHINAS stressed that this was not a migration crisis but a security issue caused by the actions of Belarus, with many international ramifications. He highlighted the need for the Commission to cooperate with the international partners concerned and noted the visits made or planned by several Commissioners to migrants' countries of origin with a view to stopping departures to Minsk and encouraging returns to those same countries. He referred in this connection to the case of Uzbekistan, potentially a new stopover for migrants to Belarus.

The sanctions proposed against transport operators, particularly air carriers, which facilitated the smuggling of migrants at the EU's external borders were threats which acted as a credible deterrent and should be made public in order to increase their effectiveness.

He welcomed the fact that the number of migrant repatriations was increasing. The EU would need to help organise flights from Belarus and meet the commitments made to provide financial assistance for the reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin.

In conclusion, Mr SCHINAS referred to the new version of the Schengen Code which he would shortly be presenting with Ms JOHANSSON. This revision would take due account of recent events at the EU's external borders, for example as regards the legal definition of the concept of instrumentalisation and the ways and means available to the EU and the Member States to best manage the right to asylum in the future.

Ms JOHANSSON referred to asylum applications in some Member States and confirmed that the current events at the EU border with Belarus were essentially a humanitarian crisis rather than a migratory one. The first returns of migrants had indeed begun, in particular to Iraq. Some international organisations that received EU funding, such as the International Organization for Migration, the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross, had been granted ad hoc access on the Belarusian side to the border area where the migrants were stranded.

She hoped that the blacklist of transport operators would have a sufficient deterrent effect and proposed extending the ongoing information and awareness-raising steps to tour operators, who also played an important role in the movement of migrants.

Ms JOHANSSON felt that these events clearly demonstrated the usefulness of the Pact on Asylum and Migration proposed by the Commission and the need for a common European policy in these areas.

Ms VĂLEAN pointed out that the proposal for a Regulation would apply to all transport operators, not just those in the aviation sector. In a changing situation the possibility could not be ruled out of the maritime and inland waterway sector being solicited along new migration routes. The sanctions proposed by the Commission would be adopted in the form of an implementing act under the comitology procedure, making it possible to combine speed and efficiency.

The blacklist of airlines not meeting certain safety criteria was an effective instrument and the mere threat of being blacklisted was a strong deterrent for carriers, even those not operating stopovers in Europe.

The PRESIDENT warmly thanked Mr SCHINAS, Ms JOHANSSON and Ms VĂLEAN and also Mr BORRELL, who was absent that day, for their excellent joint work and the speed with which they had prepared these countermeasures.

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

- full support for the initiatives presented, which clearly demonstrated the hybrid nature of the attack on the EU and some of its Member States by Belarus and put forward measures that were both equitable and firm;

- the need to manage the humanitarian side of the crisis with Belarus with the utmost care, and for the EU to remain true to its values;
- the need for precise communication on all these issues as the situation changed on the ground;
- the importance of rapidly implementing the sanctions, which would need to be uniform in order to provide an effective deterrent;
- the strong condemnation of the instrumentalisation by Belarus of social networks, airlines and its own diplomatic services in pursuit of its attempt to destabilise the European Union;
- the destabilising role played by certain powers in various hybrid attacks and disinformation campaigns, and a reference to the new tools introduced in the EU's Strategic Compass to deal with them, if the Member States gave them their support;
- a call to monitor the regional context very closely and to be vigilant as regards the situation in the energy market.

Ms JOHANSSON announced that she would raise the issue of Poland's access to the migrants stranded in the border area with Belarus at her next meeting with the Polish interior minister on Thursday 25 November.

The PRESIDENT concluded by noting that the Commission and its departments were in close and constant contact with the various actors on the ground in order to give optimum support to the humanitarian management of this crisis, in extremely difficult and fluctuating circumstances.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Joint Communication in JOIN(2021) 32/2 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) 753/2 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments.

**10. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND FISCAL POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2022 – COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK – ANNUAL SUSTAINABLE GROWTH STRATEGY 2022
(COM(2021) 740 AND /2; RCC(2021) 214)**

**11. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND FISCAL POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2022 – REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE – ALERT MECHANISM REPORT 2022
(COM(2021) 741 AND /2; SWD(2021) 361; RCC(2021) 214)**

**12. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND FISCAL POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2022 – RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON THE ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE EURO AREA
(COM(2021) 742 AND /2; SWD(2021) 362; RCC(2021) 214)**

13. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND FISCAL POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2022 – PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT EMPLOYMENT

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION AND THE COUNCIL
(COM(2021) 743 AND /2; RCC(2021) 214)**

The PRESIDENT asked Mr DOMBROVSKIS, Mr GENTILONI and Mr SCHMIT to present the set of analyses carried out as part of the autumn cycle of the European Semester of economic, social and fiscal policy coordination.

By way of a general introduction, Mr DOMBROVSKIS noted that, as a result of the collective EU effort to mitigate the economic damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the European economy was now emerging from recession, driven by the rebound in demand across Europe. Nevertheless, although the situation had improved, the economic outlook was still clouded by uncertainty. New risks were emerging that could hold back the current upturn, starting with the evolution of the health situation in many parts of the EU.

Against this background, the survey carried out as regards the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) highlighted the need to pursue competitive sustainability in order to make Europe economically and socially stronger, more resilient to cope with future shocks and better equipped to make the most of opportunities offered by the green and digital transitions. The ASGS also outlined the role that the Recovery and Resilience Facility could play in achieving these objectives, in synergy with the European Semester exercise, while avoiding any overlaps. The European Semester remained the primary tool for coordinating the EU's economic, fiscal and employment policies but was tailored to fit the circumstances and needs.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS then focused on the various policies covered by the European Semester that were needed to ensure an inclusive recovery and a fair transition towards greener and more digital economies.

On employment, EU labour markets were recovering but job numbers had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels and at the same time some businesses were weighed down by financial difficulties due to the crisis. He stressed here that while some jobs might disappear now, many others would be created through the green and

digital transitions. That is why the EU needed to pursue active labour market policies and give support to those in job transitions.

On the fiscal side, the Commission felt that the Member States should continue to provide targeted and temporary support in 2022 and, when conditions in their own countries permitted, they should ensure the medium-term sustainability of their public finances. From this perspective, the package differentiated strongly between Member States that faced high risks in terms of debt sustainability and those where the risks were low. He explained that the general guidance to Member States was to maintain the level of their national investments, to invest more through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and to limit the increase in their current spending. On this last point, he added that the Commission was sounding a note of caution regarding the draft budgetary plans of Italy and, to a lesser extent, Lithuania and Latvia. In addition, given their high level of debt, it was important that Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain step up their efforts to maintain sustainable public finances.

On the question of correcting macroeconomic imbalances, Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that putting into effect the reforms and investments contained in each national recovery plan would help a great deal. The Commission had not identified any new Member States with a macroeconomic imbalance and would carry out in-depth reviews only for the nine Member States already identified with imbalances – Croatia, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden – and the three with excessive imbalances: Cyprus, Greece and Italy.

He touched briefly on the Commission report under enhanced surveillance for Greece, which found that the country had made further progress towards achieving the agreed commitments. He also noted that the excessive deficit procedure in respect of Romania, under way since April 2020, had been suspended. The situation would be re-assessed once the new government had presented a medium-term fiscal strategy and a draft budget for 2022.

He concluded by saying that the country reports and recommendations would be published in the spring, so the Commission was not considering presenting a separate winter package in the European Semester cycle.

For his part, Mr GENTILONI stressed that the Commission could be proud of the economic guidance it had given to the Member States over the past 2 years. Given the unpredictability of the current situation, he stressed the need to pursue economic policy coordination efforts within the EU, including through the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

He pointed to the favourable economic forecasts recently published by the Commission, which announced growth of 5% this year and 4.3% next year in the EU as a whole, despite the higher risks arising from the pandemic, supply chain problems and inflation. He stressed the magnitude of the current uncertainties. Even if the recovery seemed solid for the time being, the EU would have to make the right choices and avoid a premature tightening of its economic policies. Its fiscal stance would therefore remain moderately positive, more targeted and prudent as regards the medium-term position.

He then went on to review the various documents presented that day. The ASGS had carried out an overall analysis that took account of social, environmental and economic factors. The recommendation made to the euro area proposed five approaches for providing more targeted support to the economy: through the budget, fiscal policy, labour markets, solvency support for companies and the deepening of the Banking Union. The Alert Mechanism Report did not require new Member States to undergo an in-depth assessment, but it did draw attention to two trends that would have to be monitored very closely, namely higher debt, as a result of the decisions taken in 2020, and higher house prices. Lastly, on the basis of its opinions on the draft budgetary plans of the euro area Member States, the Commission concluded that public deficits would decrease significantly in the coming years, whereas the reduction in public debts would be very slow.

Mr GENTILONI explained that the Commission's recommendations to the Member States were still qualitative, i.e. they were not being asked to reduce their deficits and debts by a specific percentage. The overall assessment of their public finances was quite positive, given that the Member States had been able to maintain public investment levels and use the Recovery and Resilience Facility to finance additional investment. The Commission recommended in particular to Member States with low debt to maintain a supportive fiscal stance, while highly indebted Member States were asked to limit increases in expenditure, which should be calibrated to ensure sustainable growth. Only sustainable growth would be able to reduce high levels of debt in the long term. Mr GENTILONI considered this to be a major challenge for the EU's budgetary policy and rules and welcomed the sound balance achieved in this regard during the autumn cycle of the European Semester.

Mr SCHMIT, for his part, also advocated a comprehensive approach to achieving the goal of sustainable growth and thereby mitigating the difficulties linked to debt and the labour market. He underlined the EU's success in managing the major crisis caused by the pandemic and referred to the positive signs coming from the real economy. He noted, however, that labour market bottlenecks could put a brake on growth in certain Member States.

He explained that, according to the Joint Employment Report, sectoral labour shortages should be tackled through better skill-matching and a change in the attitude of workers towards their jobs. Labour market policy had to ensure that people with the appropriate skills were ready to fill the new jobs created by the green and digital transition. During this transformation, which would affect many sectors, the EU would have to ensure that workers were able to move from one sector to another.

Mr SCHMIT also pointed out that the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan set three major targets for the EU to achieve by 2030: (i) at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment, (ii) at least 60% of adults should participate in training every year, and (iii) the number of people at risk of poverty or

social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million. He noted that these targets had been incorporated into the new Joint Employment Report and were also linked to growth. The Commission therefore had to deepen its understanding and hone its analysis of the social imbalances in the Member States.

In addition, by the end of the year the Commission would draft a recommendation on accompanying social and employment measures, which would play a decisive role in the success of the European Green Deal and the digital transformation of various economic sectors.

Lastly, he welcomed the importance given to employment policies in the recommendation for the euro area, especially the emphasis on the need to facilitate job transitions in the labour market.

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

- the realistic assessment of the economic recovery made in this European Semester cycle, with its various uncertainties, and the comprehensive and balanced approach taken to analyse the situation;
- mention of the main risks identified, which were linked to the management of public debt, supply chain shortages in several sectors of the single market and the high rate of inflation;
- the internal imbalances in each Member State and the need to integrate the regional dimension into the European Semester exercise, in order to take account of the growth levels and innovation capacities of the different regions of the EU and to exploit the synergies between the measures taken under the Facility and those taken pursuant to cohesion policy;

- the importance of making progress in the difficult process of deepening the Banking Union, to support sustainable growth and the twin green and digital transitions;
- the need for the Member States – in using EU funds – to focus on upskilling their citizens, especially in relation to digital skills, which would contribute to productivity and economic growth;
- the fact that, to tackle the bottlenecks identified in the labour market and to combat trafficking in human beings, the EU had to prioritise the legal migration of highly skilled people.

The PRESIDENT concluded the debate by thanking all the participants and stressing, once again, the importance of developing the skills of European citizens, especially young people and women, but also the importance of making the EU a more attractive place for skilled migrants.

Following these presentations, the Commission agreed, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, that the Communication, the Report, the Recommendation for a Council Recommendation and the proposal for a Joint Report, currently set out respectively in documents COM(2021) 740/2, COM(2021) 741/2, COM(2021) 742/2 and COM(2021) 743/2, would be adopted by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 9.30 on Wednesday 24 November 2021 (PE/2021/8633, PE/2021/8685, PE/2021/8645 and PE/2021/8622).

**14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – CAPITAL MARKETS UNION – DELIVERING ONE YEAR AFTER THE ACTION PLAN
(COM(2021) 720 AND /2; RCC(2021) 215)**

- 15. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATION (EU) No 600/2014 AS REGARDS ENHANCING MARKET DATA TRANSPARENCY, REMOVING OBSTACLES TO THE EMERGENCE OF A CONSOLIDATED TAPE, OPTIMISING THE TRADING OBLIGATIONS AND PROHIBITING RECEIVING PAYMENTS FOR FORWARDING CLIENT ORDERS**
(COM(2021) 727 AND /2; SWD(2021) 346; SWD(2021) 347; SEC(2021) 573; RCC(2021) 215)
- 16. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING DIRECTIVE 2014/65/EU ON MARKETS IN FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS**
(COM(2021) 726 AND /2; SWD(2021) 346; SWD(2021) 347; SEC(2021) 573; RCC(2021) 215)
- 17. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2015/760 AS REGARDS THE SCOPE OF ELIGIBLE ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS, THE PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION AND DIVERSIFICATION REQUIREMENTS, THE BORROWING OF CASH AND OTHER FUND RULES AND AS REGARDS REQUIREMENTS PERTAINING TO THE AUTHORISATION, INVESTMENT POLICIES AND OPERATING CONDITIONS OF EUROPEAN LONG-TERM INVESTMENT FUNDS**
(COM(2021) 722 AND /2; SWD(2021) 342 AND /2; SWD(2021) 343; SEC(2021) 571; RCC(2021) 215)
- 18. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING DIRECTIVES 2011/61/EU AND 2009/65/EC AS REGARDS DELEGATION ARRANGEMENTS, LIQUIDITY RISK MANAGEMENT, SUPERVISORY REPORTING, PROVISION OF DEPOSITARY AND CUSTODY SERVICES AND LOAN ORIGINATION BY ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT FUNDS**

(COM(2021) 721 AND /2; SWD(2021) 340; SWD(2021) 341; SEC(2021) 570; RCC(2021) 215)

19. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING A EUROPEAN SINGLE ACCESS POINT PROVIDING CENTRALISED ACCESS TO PUBLICLY AVAILABLE INFORMATION OF RELEVANCE TO FINANCIAL SERVICES, CAPITAL MARKETS AND SUSTAINABILITY

(COM(2021) 723 AND /2; SWD(2021) 344 AND /2; SWD(2021) 345 AND /2; SEC(2021) 572; RCC(2021) 215)

20. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING CERTAIN REGULATIONS AS REGARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN SINGLE ACCESS POINT

(COM(2021) 725 AND /2; SWD(2021) 344 AND /2; SWD(2021) 345 AND /2; SEC(2021) 572; RCC(2021) 215)

21. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING CERTAIN DIRECTIVES AS REGARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN SINGLE ACCESS POINT

(COM(2021) 724 AND /2; SWD(2021) 344 AND /2; SWD(2021) 345 AND /2; SEC(2021) 572; RCC(2021) 215)

The PRESIDENT invited Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Ms McGUINNESS to present the package of measures they were proposing that day relating to the Capital Markets Union.

By way of introduction, Mr DOMBROVSKIS took stock of the considerable progress that the Commission had made with regard to building the Capital Markets Union since the adoption of the first Action Plan in 2015 and of 12 of the

13 legislative proposals set out in that Plan. The current Commission had presented a new Action Plan just over a year ago to continue these efforts.

The package of measures proposed that day was a significant milestone for the Commission in terms of implementing the new Plan and helping the EU move towards deep, integrated and well-functioning capital markets that would play a major role in ensuring a robust economic recovery.

The aim of the new proposals was to (i) help SMEs to get off the ground and expand, and larger companies to thrive, (ii) ensure that people could invest easily and safely for their future, and (iii) integrate national capital markets into a genuine single market. At a time when the EU was embarking on green and digital transitions, it was necessary to attract significant investment to make the EU economy more inclusive and resilient.

The four initiatives tabled that day would help to achieve these objectives. The aim of the initiatives was to attract and protect investors; improve their access to company and trading data; increase sources of financing and make it easier for SMEs to access funding, especially in smaller markets; and steer investments towards the EU's green and digital priorities.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that the Communication also announced four further initiatives that the Commission would present the following year to follow up on the Capital Markets Union Action Plan. The aim of the first initiative was to cut red tape to encourage more companies to list on public markets and stay listed. Second, the Commission would present an open finance framework for data that would enable consumers to find the best financial products for them. Third, a financial education framework would be drawn up to set out the competences that people needed to have in order to make the right investment decisions. Lastly, the Commission would present a major initiative to harmonise certain corporate insolvency rules that would make it easier for cross-border investors to anticipate

the outcome of insolvency proceedings anywhere in the EU and thus to make better-informed investment decisions.

Ms McGUINNESS said that it was now more urgent than ever to finalise a Union of deep and liquid capital markets to help finance the EU's green and digital transitions, contribute to the economic recovery following the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and help ensure the EU's open strategic autonomy.

She gave a brief overview of the four legislative proposals in that day's package.

The first proposal concerned the European Single Access Point (ESAP).

She explained that, as things stood, financial and sustainability information on companies and investment products was scattered across Member States, which was problematic for investors. The objective of the ESAP was to give users free access via a single access point to financial and sustainability information that had been publicly disclosed by listed companies and financial companies. Private companies that were not subject to financial regulation would also be able to report some financial and sustainability-related information on a voluntary basis.

The initiative would facilitate cross-border investment and was an integral part of the EU's climate transition, since it covered information that was key to that transition, and it was also a core part of the digital strategy, as the information would be machine readable.

The ESAP was a public good and would be run by a public authority, the European Securities and Markets Authority. It would be funded under the Digital Europe Programme in 2022 and 2023, and then by the EU and national budgets once it became operational in 2024.

The second proposal was a review of legislation on European long-term investment funds (ELTIF).

These funds channelled financing to long-term projects, such as transport and energy infrastructure, social infrastructure and digital and climate investments, on the one hand, and SMEs on the other. The funds could also encourage EU citizens to put their savings to work to finance the real economy.

Ms McGUINNESS noted that there had been little uptake of the funds so far, with only 57 funds having been registered in four Member States. The idea was thus to remove the barriers that made it difficult for retail investors to participate in these funds, while maintaining strong investor protection rules, to broaden the scope of eligible assets that these funds could invest in, and to facilitate the creation of ELTIFs by fund managers.

The third proposal was for a Directive on alternative investment funds, which was a review of the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (AIFMD), and also included some amendments to the Undertakings for Collective Investment in Transferable Securities Directive (UCITS) on retail funds.

Generally speaking, the framework for alternative investment funds was working well, so the review only targeted certain specific aspects.

As things stood, funds that originated loans were subject to national rules, which fragmented the single market. The Commission was therefore proposing harmonised rules allowing the funds to be marketed across the EU. The funds were particularly useful for companies in need of non-bank finance, particularly in the event of market distress.

Under the current legislation, managers of the funds could delegate some of their tasks to entities located inside or outside the EU to optimise business processes or access specific expertise on a particular market. However, it was necessary to prevent management companies from delegating too many tasks and becoming letter-box entities in the EU. That was why, in its proposal, the Commission was clarifying the applicable rules and ensuring they were consistently applied by fostering supervisory convergence.

Lastly, Ms McGUINNESS briefly presented the fourth proposal relating to the Markets in Financial Instruments Regulation (MiFIR), which governed how trading and financial instrument exchanges worked in the EU.

The trading structure in the EU was very fragmented, with almost 500 stock exchanges, alternative platforms for trading and other investment banks playing a similar role to stock exchanges. This competition had reduced trading costs for investors, but the system could be improved.

The Commission was proposing three sets of measures, which would (i) strengthen transparency requirements to ensure a level-playing field between stock exchanges and investment banks, (ii) propose measures fostering the competitiveness of EU markets, and (iii) create the right conditions for the emergence of a consolidated tape that would collect all trade data reported by execution venues across the EU.

The consolidated tape would provide all investors with information on whether they had obtained the best price when selling or buying securities. Furthermore, the proposal acknowledged the fundamental role played by stock exchanges in ensuring a well-functioning Capital Markets Union, which was why the consolidated tape provider would share its revenue with exchanges.

In conclusion, Ms McGUINNESS saw the package of measures presented that day as an important step towards the completion of the Capital Markets Union. With regard to the measures proposed for 2022, she highlighted the harmonisation of certain aspects of insolvency law, the aim of which was to remove a long-standing obstacle that impeded the single market for capital.

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

- the importance of the proposals presented, which would help to make the EU market more appealing to investors by clarifying or simplifying certain rules, at a time when the EU needed to attract a considerable amount of capital

to see through the largest industrial transformation it had ever experienced, namely the green and digital transitions;

- support for the key message of the proposals with regard to the EU's competitiveness, and the appropriateness of the initiatives announced for 2022, which would be just as important in that respect.

Following these presentations, the Commission agreed, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, that the Communication and the proposals for Regulations and Directives in COM(2021) 720/2, COM(2021) 727/2, COM(2021) 726/2, COM(2021) 722/2, COM(2021) 721/2, COM(2021) 723/2, COM(2021) 725/2 and COM(2021) 724/2 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 11.00 on Thursday 25 November 2021 (PE/2021/8644, PE/2021/8648, PE/2021/8949, PE/2021/8620, PE/2021/8621, PE/2021/8640, PE/2021/8641 and PE/2021/8642).

**22. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – PROTECTING ELECTION INTEGRITY AND PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION
(COM(2021) 730 AND /2; RCC(2021) 213)**

**23. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON THE STATUTE AND FUNDING OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTIES AND EUROPEAN POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS (RECAST)
(COM(2021) 734 AND /2; SWD(2021) 359; SWD(2021) 360; SEC(2021) 577; RCC(2021) 213)**

24. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON THE TRANSPARENCY AND TARGETING OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING

(COM(2021) 731 AND /2; SWD(2021) 355; SWD(2021) 356; SEC(2021) 575; RCC(2021) 213)

25. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DIRECTIVE LAYING DOWN DETAILED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EXERCISE OF THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND STAND AS A CANDIDATE IN ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FOR UNION CITIZENS RESIDING IN A MEMBER STATE OF WHICH THEY ARE NOT NATIONALS (RECAST)

(COM(2021) 732 TO /3; SWD(2021) 357; SWD(2021) 358; SEC(2021) 576; RCC(2021) 212)

26. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DIRECTIVE LAYING DOWN DETAILED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EXERCISE OF THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND TO STAND AS A CANDIDATE IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS BY UNION CITIZENS RESIDING IN A MEMBER STATE OF WHICH THEY ARE NOT NATIONALS (RECAST)

(COM(2021) 733 AND /2; SWD(2021) 357; SWD(2021) 358; SEC(2021) 576; RCC(2021) 212)

The PRESIDENT asked Ms JOUROVÁ to present the Communication ‘Protecting election integrity and promoting democratic participation’ and the four legislative proposals which it accompanied.

Ms JOUROVÁ began by emphasising that democracy was under significant pressure in the EU, especially in the digital age, and that it was important to inculcate democratic values in the younger generations.

All the proposals presented that day followed up the European Democracy Action Plan which the Commission had presented on 3 December 2020 with the aim of protecting democracy and election integrity in the EU.

They consisted first and foremost of the recast of two Directives laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in European and municipal elections. The recast was designed to update the existing rules on the protection of the rights of mobile EU citizens, i.e. citizens of one Member State who exercised their right to vote and stand as a candidate in another Member State. Around 13 million citizens throughout the EU were concerned.

Next, the Commission was proposing a recast of the Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations, and a Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising.

The aim of the recast of the Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations was to change the existing rules by strengthening the financial viability of those bodies and to improve the transparency of donations made to them, while reducing red tape.

To ensure that the updated rules were fit for purpose, the Commission had carried out extensive consultations with the interested parties. She had given the European Parliament an undertaking that the rules on transnational election campaigns would be adopted before the next European elections in 2024. The proposal stated that European political parties should not be prevented from conducting cross-border campaigns.

The proposal for a Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising was an innovation designed to make that form of advertising more transparent. As a *lex specialis* it introduced stricter rules for political advertising than the digital services legislation. The aim was to address the threat to democracy posed by misleading and dishonest methods used in election campaigns by reducing the risk of citizens' views and opinions being manipulated. She recalled the case of Cambridge Analytica and disinformation campaigns by third countries. The stricter rules laid down in the proposal would make it possible to identify the origin of political advertising and determine how it was funded.

Ms JOUROVÁ said that the proposal did not just concern big tech companies and that the legally binding rules it laid down would make political advertising without transparency illegal.

The proposal restricted the scope for micro-targeting and amplification with the aim of preventing citizens' sensitive data being used for political ends and enabling users to better understand what was happening behind algorithms and to opt out of polls or other requests where appropriate.

Lastly, the proposal for a Regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising was in line with digital services legislation and with the general data protection rules.

Ms JOUROVÁ concluded her presentation by reiterating her intention of ensuring that these various rules would enter into force before the next European elections in 2024.

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

- the broad support of the College for this set of initiatives, which sent a clear and tangible message of transparency and accountability and sought to empower citizens to fully exercise their rights with a view to ensuring a more dynamic and resilient democracy in the European Union;
- the importance, in that context, of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and the need to improve participation in policy-making to ensure that European democracies were well equipped to face the future;
- the issue of financial support from third countries to European political parties, including in the form of loans, and the advisability of ensuring full transparency on these practices.

Mr TIMMERMANS wound up the discussion by thanking Ms JOUROVÁ for the excellent initiatives she had presented that day.

Following the presentations, the Commission decided that the Communication and the proposals for a Regulation and a Directive set out in COM(2021) 730/2, COM(2021) 734/2, COM(2021) 731/2, COM(2021) 732/3 and COM(2021) 733/2 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 09.00 on Thursday 25 November 2021 (PE/2021/8624, PE/2021/8635, PE/2021/8646, PE/2021/8601 and PE/2021/8602).

27. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mr TIMMERMANS invited Ms KYRIAKIDES to give an update on the epidemiological situation in the EU.

Ms KYRIAKIDES reported that the number of infections and hospitalisations, and also the mortality rate, had continued to increase rapidly over the last week. She also noted that the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) was of the view that this trend would continue in the coming weeks.

In this context, she argued that it was increasingly clear that administering a third vaccine dose would significantly reduce the number of symptomatic cases and the transmission of the virus.

She stated that the ECDC could therefore recommend administering a booster dose for everyone from the age of 18, and in particular for those over 40 years of age who had received their second dose six months earlier, in order to control transmission chains, even in Member States with high vaccination rates.

The policy of pre-purchasing vaccines should therefore be continued. A contract for the pre-purchase of a new vaccine from Valneva would be signed later that week and this vaccine would be part of the EU portfolio once the European Medicines Agency (EMA) had granted marketing authorisation.

She pointed out that the EMA would also deliver its opinion on the application for the authorisation of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines for children aged 5-11 by the end of that week.

With regard to therapeutics, Ms KYRIAKIDES said that two new treatments had been authorised on 12 November and four more could be authorised by the end of the year.

In view of the evolution of the pandemic, she considered it very important to communicate clearly on the need for the booster dose while continuing to administer the first dose to the EU population, explaining in particular that while the vaccine did not prevent the transmission of the virus, it protected against serious forms of COVID-19.

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

- the incidence of deaths in the non-vaccinated population of the EU, while vaccines were available in all Member States;
- the need to accurately monitor the vaccine stocks available, in particular in order to make them available to those Member States that might need them in the coming weeks, given that infections were rapidly increasing;
- the urgent need to roll out the booster dose campaigns throughout the EU and the desirability of the EMA providing clear recommendations for these campaigns, for example concerning the administration of a third dose six months after the second one;

- whether it was appropriate to make the validity of the EU Digital COVID Certificate subject to the administration of a booster dose;
- the importance of continuing to tackle disinformation, especially on social media, in order to increase the vaccination rate of the population by convincing those who are still sceptical or reluctant;
- the exhaustion of health workers after successive waves of the virus, without an end to the pandemic being yet in sight;
- the need, therefore, to step up the vaccination campaigns for those who had not yet been vaccinated.

Ms KYRIAKIDES stressed that there was fatigue as a result of the continuing pandemic. However, it was important not to let our guard down and to continue the fight against the virus by all available means, without forgetting the protective measures to be applied in daily life. She explained that there were difficulties with the vaccine donations between Member States because each Member State was the owner of and legally responsible for its own stock. It was also important to link the validity of the EU Digital COVID Certificate to the booster dose throughout the EU in order to avoid different periods of validity from one Member State to another.

She recommended continuing to communicate on the basis of scientific facts and supported a reinforced mandate for the EMA, with the support of the European Parliament, in order to speed up its procedures and broaden the scope of its recommendations.

Ms KYRIAKIDES concluded that the current increase in infections was due to various factors at play at the same time: the seasonal resurgence of the virus, the presence of certain variants, a section of the population that remaining unvaccinated and the relaxation of protective measures, all of which could be addressed only by continuing the measures already implemented and stepping up the vaccination campaigns.

The Commission took note of this information.

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

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The meeting closed at 15.23.