



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2022) 2403 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Strasbourg, 15 February 2022

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2403rd meeting of the Commission

held in Strasbourg

(Louise Weiss building)

on Tuesday 18 January 2022

(afternoon)

PV(2022) 2403 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

EN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	4-5
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2022) 2403/FINAL; SEC(2022) 2403/FINAL)	6
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET (RCC(2022) 2403)	6
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES (PV(2021) 2399; PV(2021) 2400, PV(2021) 2400, 2 ND PART).....	6
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2022) 1)	6
5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2022) 5 AND /2).....	8
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	9
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2021) 446 ET SEQ.; SEC(2022) 65 ET SEQ.).....	9
6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2021) 447 ET SEQ.; SEC(2022) 66 ET SEQ.).....	9
6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2021) 448 ET SEQ.; SEC(2022) 67 ET SEQ.)	9
6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2022) 68 AND /2)	9
7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2022) 69).....	9
7.1. DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 PRINCIPAL ADVISER (PERS(2021) 60 TO /4).....	10
7.2. DG PUBLICATIONS OFFICE – EXTENSION OF THE TEMPORARY POST OF PRINCIPAL ADVISER	10
7.3. DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL FROM THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE TO THE COMMISSION	11

7.4. DG REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART (SEC(2022) 48)	11
8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR UNIVERSITIES (COM(2022) 16 AND /2; SWD(2022) 6 AND /2; RCC(2022) 3 AND /2).....	12
9. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON BUILDING BRIDGES FOR EFFECTIVE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION COOPERATION (COM(2022) 17 AND /2; SWD(2022) 6 AND /2; RCC(2022) 3 AND /2)	12
10. OTHER BUSINESS.....	16
10.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS	16
10.2. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 225 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (SP(2022) 5)	18
10.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED KINGDOM	19
10.4. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	19

Single sitting: Tuesday 18 January 2022 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.03 with Mr TIMMERMANS in the chair.

Present:

Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms GABRIEL	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	Items 8 to 10
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	

Absent:

Ms von der LEYEN	President
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President

PV(2022) 2403 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

EN

Mr SCHMIT	Member
Mr GENTILONI	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member

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

Ms PETSCH	A member of Mr VÁRHELYI's staff
Mr SAVIGNAT	A member of Ms URPILAINEN's staff
Mr POWER	Chef de cabinet to Ms McGUINNESS

The following also sat in:

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
Mr VALERO	Secretariat-General

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2022) 2403/FINAL; SEC(2022) 2403/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(2022) 2403)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 17 January 2022.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2021) 2399; PV(2021) 2400; PV(2021) 2400, 2ND PART)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2399th and 2400th meetings of 1 and 8 December 2021, and held over approval of the minutes of its 2401st and 2402nd meetings of 14 and 22 December 2021 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2022) 1)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 14 January 2022 (RCC(2022) 1).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Objections pursuant to Rule 111(3) of Parliament's Rules of Procedure:**
 - **Commission Delegated Regulation supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards determining cases where identity data may be considered as same or similar for the purpose of the multiple identity detection – LÓPEZ AGUILAR report – C(2021) 5056 – 2021/2913 (DEA)**
 - **Commission Delegated Regulation supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards determining cases where identity data may be considered as same or similar for the purpose of the multiple identity detection – LÓPEZ AGUILAR report – C(2021) 5057 – 2021/2912 (DEA)**

Line set out in SP(2022) 14.

- **Coordinated approach to facilitate safe free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic and replacing Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 (Council Recommendation) – 2021/0396 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 2.

- **Oral question O-000075/2021 – Empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery**

Line set out in SP(2022) 15.

- **European Parliament resolutions based on Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Protecting workers from asbestos – VILLUMSEN report – 2019/2182 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2022) 5.

- **Preparation of the participation of the Members of the Commission in the Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (21-22 January 2022)**

Line set out in SPI(2022) 3/2 and the annexes thereto.

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

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

Line set out in SP(2022) 8/3.

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

Line set out in SP(2022) 12.

The Commission took note of the following point:

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

Compromise text in SP(2022) 16, further to note SI(2021) 322, which the Commission had already approved on 10 November 2021.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2022) 5 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2022) 5/2 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 12 January 2022.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2021) 446 ET SEQ.; SEC(2022) 65 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 20 December 2021 and 16 January 2022.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2021) 447 ET SEQ.; SEC(2022) 66 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 20 December 2021 and 16 January 2022.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2021) 448 ET SEQ.; SEC(2022) 67 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 20 December 2021 and 16 January 2022 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2022) 68 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 17 and 21 January 2022.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2022) 69)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2022) 1)

7.1. DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY – APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14/15 PRINCIPAL ADVISER (PERS(2021) 60 TO /4)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Adviser - Director of the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) in DG Health and Food Safety (PERS(2021) 60 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 26 October and 9 December 2021 (PERS(2021) 60/3 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, and after consulting Ms KYRIAKIDES, it then decided to appoint Ms Marina ZANCHI to the post.

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

7.2. DG PUBLICATIONS OFFICE – EXTENSION OF THE TEMPORARY POST OF PRINCIPAL ADVISER

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to approve the extension of the temporary post of Principal Adviser for Knowledge Management in the Publications Office until 31 December 2025.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.3. DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL FROM THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE TO THE COMMISSION

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms VĂLEAN, the Commission decided to approve the transfer, under Article 8 of the Staff Regulations, of Mr Kristian SCHMIDT from the European External Action Service to the Commission and to assign him to the post of Director of the ‘Land’ Directorate in DG Mobility and Transport.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.4. DG REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2022) 48)**

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

- to abolish the function of Principal Adviser for International Relations;
- to close, with immediate effect, the selection procedure for the post of Principal Adviser for International Relations, which was published internally, interinstitutionally and externally in COM/2021/820 and COM/2021/10401, without making any appointment;
- to change the name of the post of Deputy Director-General to Deputy Director-General for Implementation and International Relations;
- to approve the new organisation chart set out in SEC(2022) 48.

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

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR UNIVERSITIES

(COM(2022) 16 AND /2; SWD(2022) 6 AND /2; RCC(2022) 3 AND /2)

9. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON BUILDING BRIDGES FOR EFFECTIVE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION COOPERATION

(COM(2022) 17 AND /2; SWD(2022) 6 AND /2; RCC(2022) 3 AND /2)

Mr TIMMERMANS asked Mr SCHINAS and Ms GABRIEL to present the Communication on a European strategy for universities and the proposal for a Recommendation on increasing European cooperation in higher education.

Mr SCHINAS began by saying that whereas during the Renaissance Europe's universities had been important places for developing and exchanging ideas, the challenge now was to turn them into centres of excellence that were faithful to their historical heritage. He saw the existence of excellent and inclusive European universities as both a condition and a foundation for the European way of life, which supported openness, democracy and equal opportunities on the one hand and encouraged sustained growth, entrepreneurship, integration and employment on the other. Following Brexit, universities had a key role to play in promoting the European Union as a destination of choice for university studies in a globalised environment.

He called for this European dimension to be built using the tools and funding set out in the Commission's proposals that day, which came at a politically expedient time as they dovetailed with the priorities of the current French presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Mr SCHINAS mentioned the respective areas of responsibility of the Commission and the Member States in education and ended his presentation by highlighting the

main objectives of the proposed strategy, which were (i) to increase the number and raise the profile of European universities, (ii) to propose a new legal statute for alliances between universities that allowed them to pool their efforts and increase convergence in study programmes, (iii) to create a new European degree and (iv) to launch the project of a student card for all European students.

Ms GABRIEL stressed that the proposed strategy was aimed at all universities in the EU, which acted as beacons for the European way of life. Inclusion, equality, freedom of thought, academic freedom and the independence of universities were at the heart of Europe's identity and these principles must be preserved.

The initiatives being put forward that day were aimed at developing guidelines with all the stakeholders and the Member States by 2024 in order to protect the fundamental values underpinning the academic world and promote both the recognition of academic career paths and the status of academic careers, including beyond the world of universities. She explained that these key questions would be examined in more detail through a European framework to be proposed by the Commission in 2022, as it had announced in the Communication on the European Research Area.

Ms GABRIEL welcomed the fact that the strategy being presented that day was based on a clear vision in which universities were Europe's passport to the future and had a role to play in meeting today's challenges and anticipating the challenges of tomorrow.

The strategy set all the stakeholders four objectives to be achieved by mid-2024: (i) strengthen the European dimension of higher education and research through four major projects, (ii) support universities as flagship institutions for the European way of life, (iii) empower universities as key players in the twin digital and energy transition, and (iv) give universities a bigger role in projecting the EU's influence globally.

Ms GABRIEL then went into more detail regarding the four major projects, which

were being proposed in a new spirit of cooperation.

First, there would be a determined effort to encourage transnational cooperation and increase the number of alliances between European universities from 41 to 60 in the next 2 years, linking more than 500 institutions. Higher education institutions wishing to take part in the initiative could do so either by joining existing alliances or by proposing new ones.

Second, the Commission proposed that these European university alliances be given a legal statute to facilitate cooperation between them.

Third, it was proposed to create a European degree which would attest the learning acquired during university studies within these alliances and hence facilitate the mobility of European students by easing administrative formalities.

Lastly, and with the same aim of facilitating student mobility, the Commission was proposing to further develop the European Student Card project by extending it to mobile European students by the end of 2022 and all European students by the end of 2024.

Ms GABRIEL also stressed that this was the first time that a European strategy set out to bring together the worlds of higher education, research and business, defining specific common goals and placing a strong emphasis on synergy and coherence.

The strategy was intended to encourage closer cooperation between universities, research centres and innovative industrial ecosystems so that, together, they could meet the challenge of the twin energy and digital transition and develop the skills that the EU needed in certain cutting-edge fields such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, nanotechnologies and supercomputers.

She noted that the Commission was therefore putting forward practical proposals to forge close links between these different worlds, develop the entrepreneurial skills of young Europeans and strengthen the role of universities in innovative ecosystems at local level, where research centres had begun to spring up. She gave one example

of these practical proposals: innovation labs would be set up to train students in resolving complex problems.

Ms GABRIEL also announced that a European Talent Fair would now be held each year in a European town or city. The first of these, in 2022, would take place in Leiden in the Netherlands, which had also been designated as this year's European City of Science.

Finally, she stressed that resources were needed to realise an ambitious vision. A combined total of EUR 80 billion would be invested at European, national and regional level over the period from 2021 to 2027.

Ms GABRIEL ended her presentation by mentioning the proposal to set up a European Higher Education Sector Observatory in 2023. The Observatory would bring together and develop the various sources of European data on higher education and make them available to everyone, thereby enabling the Commission, the Member States and the various stakeholders to assess the progress made, based on the priorities defined by the strategy.

Following the brief discussion that followed, the Commission noted the genuine and growing interest in the European university system in certain regions of the world and the need to think about ways of making European universities more attractive, including in relation to educational establishments outside the EU which were able to offer a European baccalaureate giving de facto and de jure access to European universities.

Following the discussion, Ms GABRIEL said that the European ranking system, which unfortunately was relatively unknown, was open and democratic and used effective indicators. It would be adapted and given a higher profile in 2022.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2022) 16/2 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(2022) 6/2, the contents of which were noted.

- adopted the proposal for a Recommendation in COM(2022) 17/2 for transmission to the Council and, for information, to Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and to the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2022) 6/2, the contents of which were noted.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL reported to the College on the latest developments in external relations.

He referred to the discussions held at the informal meeting of EU defence ministers on 12 and 13 January and the meeting of foreign ministers (Gymnich) on 13 and 14 January, which had focused on Europe's security architecture and tensions with Russia.

With regard to security architecture in Europe, exchanges had taken place at various levels since December 2021 between Russia and the United States, on the one hand, and between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), on the other, on the basis of the draft treaties put forward by the Russian authorities. These discussions had not borne fruit, but the United States and NATO had undertaken to provide a written response to the Russian proposals in the course of the next few days.

As he had stated publicly, Mr BORRELL reiterated that it was inconceivable that issues which directly concerned the security architecture on the

European continent should be discussed without the involvement of the EU and its Member States. This stance was supported by the United States. Together with NATO and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the EU was a key player in terms of security on the European continent. He was in close contact with the EU's partners and allies on all these issues.

Recalling the principles which guided the EU's relations with Russia on Ukraine, he added that the EU had given a clear warning about the serious consequences that Russian military aggression against the sovereignty of Ukraine would entail. He reported on diplomatic efforts to defuse the current tensions. At the same time, EU ministers had agreed a common position on possible sanctions, which they were expected to confirm at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 24 January. They also wished to make progress on ongoing work on the Strategic Compass, which he welcomed.

He wound up by referring to other issues of serious concern, including the situation in the Sahel, particularly in Mali, and the political and humanitarian crises in Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Tigray and Yemen. Preparations for the EU/African Union summit were under way and everything should be done to make sure that it was a success.

Mr LENARČIČ said that the most severe humanitarian crisis in the world today was the one affecting Afghanistan. In response, the United Nations Organisation (UN) had made an urgent international call for funds of some USD 5 billion for 2022 alone. The EU might have to reconsider the amount of aid it had set aside for Afghanistan in the 2021-27 multiannual financial framework. In addition, funding earmarked for food aid for Yemen should be increased.

The Commission took note of this information.

**10.2. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
RESOLUTION PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 225 OF THE TREATY ON
THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
(SP(2022) 5)**

Mr TIMMERMANS asked Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in the absence of Mr SCHMIT, to present the Commission's draft reply to a European Parliament resolution pursuant to Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said that the PRESIDENT had undertaken to respond to these resolutions in full compliance with the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and better law-making.

The European Parliament resolution called on the Commission to put forward a European strategy for the removal of all asbestos and legislative proposals in several fields to provide workers with further protection against the harmful health impacts of exposure to asbestos.

M. ŠEFČOVIČ said that the Commission proposed to send a letter to the European Parliament in which it undertook to follow up its resolution and to present a Communication setting out the measures which could be taken under the existing and new instruments to strengthen protection against the risks posed by asbestos. In addition, the Commission had undertaken to look into the possibility of establishing a European framework for the improvement of indoor air quality based on a review of national and regional strategies in the field.

Mr TIMMERMANS thanked Mr ŠEFČOVIČ for his presentation. He noted that the College approved the line proposed in the note SP(2022) 5 and authorised Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to send the letter annexed thereto to the President of the European Parliament.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

At Mr TIMMERMANS' request, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ reported on the progress of the negotiations with the United Kingdom on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland under the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, following his meeting on 13 January with the UK Foreign Minister, Liz TRUSS, who had recently replaced David FROST as the UK's lead negotiator with the EU.

He stated that he was also working closely with Mr SINKEVIČIUS to settle outstanding issues relating to fisheries.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.4. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ms KYRIAKIDES gave a brief update on the evolution of the COVID-19 epidemic in the EU.

In general, the latest analyses seemed to confirm that the unvaccinated population was now the most seriously affected by the virus. Vaccination campaigns should therefore continue, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. She added that the European Medicines Agency (EMA) would shortly issue guidance on the vaccination of pregnant women.

As regards the epidemic itself, cases of infection continued to rise sharply, driven by the continued co-circulation of the Delta and Omicron variants in many countries. She explained that the rate stood at around 2008 per 100 000 people across the EU and that record numbers of cases of

infection were still being recorded on a daily basis in several Member States. Omicron was now the dominant variant in more than half of Member States.

The transmissibility of Omicron was demonstrated by the fact that, on average, nearly 14% of tests were currently reported to be positive across the EU, with rates of up to 30% in some Member States. That rate was around 5% at the end of November 2021, just before the Omicron variant took precedence over the Delta variant, which was the dominant one in the EU at that time.

She noted that while the death rate in the EU was still high, it had remained stable over the last seven weeks. The number of hospitalisations was increasing in some Member States, but the rate of admission to intensive care had remained virtually unchanged over the last six weeks. However, given the sharp increase in the number of Omicron infections, she considered that it was reasonable to expect hospital admissions and deaths to rise again in the coming weeks.

Ms KYRIAKIDES pointed out that according to the modelling of the Institute for Health, Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), most countries were still in the acute surge phase and some Member States were only at the beginning of their Omicron surge. It was estimated that peak infection would be reached in almost all countries over the next two to three weeks.

In this context, she noted that the proportion of asymptomatic infections was increasing significantly and was between 80 and 90% in some Member States. For this reason, these Member States were considering whether it would be appropriate to remove the obligation for asymptomatic cases to self-isolate, so as not to put too much pressure on the economy. In this regard, the ECDC had updated its guidance to take into account the vaccination rates of the population and the pressure placed on healthcare systems and society, and

was making the same recommendations for asymptomatic cases as for symptomatic, given the risk of further exacerbating Omicron transmission.

Ms KYRIAKIDES concluded her presentation by saying that given the apparent reduced severity of the disease caused by the Omicron variant, it was likely that hospitalisation and death figures would not reach the peak of previous waves. However, she called for caution because the sheer weight of numbers in terms of transmissions could place significant pressure on healthcare systems due to staff shortages.

The Commission took note of this information.

*

* *

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

*

* *

The meeting closed at 14.01.