



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2023) 2475 final

- English language version of the French text which is authentic -

Brussels, 31 January 2024

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2475th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 29 November 2023
(morning)**

PV(2023) 2475 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 29 November 2023 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.10 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	
Ms IVANOVA	Member	Items 8 to 13
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	

Absent:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President

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

Ms SPANOU	Head of Cabinet to Mr SCHINAS	Items 9/12 and 13
Mr DESPREZ	Mr SCHINAS's cabinet	Item 8
Mr KRISTÓFFY	Head of Cabinet to Mr VÁRHELYI	Item 13 (in part)

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms SPINANT	Acting 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 cabinet	
Mr FLOSDORFF	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms CABRAL	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 9/12 (in part) and 13
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 9/12 (in part) and 13
Ms REICHTEIN	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	
Ms BUKA	Secretariat-General	

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2023) 2475/FINAL; SEC(2023) 2475/FINAL)

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings.

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF HEADS OF CABINET

(RCC(2023) 2475)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 27 November 2023.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2472nd, 2473rd and 2474th meetings of 8, 15 and 21 November 2023 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2023) 189)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 24 November 2023 (RCC(2023) 189).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Binding standards for equality bodies:**
 - **Standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and**

occupation, and deletion of Article 20 of Directive 2006/54/EC and Article 11 of Directive 2010/41/EU (Directive) – ANGEL & PIETIKÄINEN report – 2022/0400 (COD)

- **Standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in the field of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and deletion of Article 13 of Directive 2000/43/EC and Article 12 of Directive 2004/113/EC (Council Directive) – PIETIKÄINEN report – 2022/0401 (APP)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 478.

- **Protection of persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation') – WÖLKEN report – 2022/0117 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 479.

- **Definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures (Directive) – IN 'T VELD report – 2022/0398 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 480.

- **Shipments of waste and amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1257/2013 and (EU) 2020/1056 (Regulation) – WEISS report – 2021/0367 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 498.

- **Amendment of Directive 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (Directive) – ZALEWSKA report – 2023/0025 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 507.

- **Methane emissions reduction in the energy sector and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/942 (Regulation) – PAULUS & SARDONE report – 2021/0423 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 491.

- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1227/2011 and (EU) 2019/942 to improve the Union’s protection against market manipulation in the wholesale energy market (Regulation) – CARVALHO report – 2023/0076 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 489.

- **‘Fit for 55’:**
 - **Internal markets for renewable and natural gases and for hydrogen (Regulation – recast) – BUZEK report – 2021/0424 (COD)**
 - **Common rules for the internal markets in renewable and natural gases and in hydrogen (Directive) – GEIER report – 2021/0425 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 505.

- **Establishment of a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amendment of Regulations (EU) 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020 (Regulation) – BEER report – 2023/0079 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 484/3.

- **Automated data exchange for police cooperation (‘Prüm II’) and amendment of Council Decisions 2008/615/JHA and 2008/616/JHA and Regulations (EU) 2018/1726, 2019/817 and 2019/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council (Regulation) – RANGEL report – 2021/0410 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 497.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 691/2011 as regards introducing new environmental economic accounts modules (Regulation) – CANFIN report – 2022/0210 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 493.

- **Horizontal cybersecurity requirements for products with digital elements and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 (Regulation) – DANTI report – 2022/0272 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 494.

- **Establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market (European Media Freedom Act) and amendment of Directive 2010/13/EU (Regulation) – VERHEYEN report – 2022/0277 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 483/2.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/881 as regards managed security services (Regulation) – CUTAJAR report – 2023/0108 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 487.

- **Improving working conditions in platform work (Directive) – GUALMINI report – 2021/0414 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 488/3.

- **Standards of quality and safety for substances of human origin intended for human application and repeal of Directives 2002/98/EC and 2004/23/EC (Regulation) – COLIN-OESTERLÉ report – 2022/0216 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 495.

- **Prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing (Regulation) – HEINÄLUOMA & CARÊME report – 2021/0239 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 499/2.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1242 as regards strengthening the CO₂ emission performance standards for new heavy-duty vehicles and integrating reporting obligations, and repeal of Regulation (EU) 2018/956 (Regulation) – JADOT report – 2023/0042 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 503.

- **Establishment of a Union certification framework for carbon removals (Regulation) – PEREIRA report – 2022/0394 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 504.

- **Joint Statement of the Coordinators, Special Representatives and Ambassadors on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination**

Line set out in SPI(2023) 52.

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point, for transmission to the European Parliament:

- **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its May I and September 2023 part-sessions**

Line set out in SP(2023) 618/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Transfer of proceedings in criminal matters (Regulation) – KANKO report – 2023/0093 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 451/2.

- **Import, export and transit measures for firearms, their essential components and ammunition, implementing Article 10 of the United Nations’ Protocol against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UN Firearms Protocol) (Regulation - recast) – LANGE report – 2022/0288 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 496.

- **Accounting of greenhouse gas emissions of transport services (Regulation) – THALER & CANFIN report – 2023/0266 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 500.

- **Amendment of Directive 2005/35/EC on ship-source pollution and on the introduction of penalties, including criminal penalties, for pollution offences (Directive) – MARINESCU report – 2023/0171 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 506/2.

- **Results of the European Parliament’s November II 2023 part-session**

Information set out in SP(2023) 598.

- **Meetings of the European Parliament committee chairs, the Belgian Presidency and the Commission representative, (Brussels, 14 and 16 November 2023) – Meetings with ITRE, IMCO, ENVI, EMPL, AGRI and TRAN**

Information set out in SPI(2023) 51.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2023) 40)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2023) 40 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 22 November 2023.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2023) 378 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 20 and 26 November 2023.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2023) 379 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 20 and 26 November 2023.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2023) 380 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 20 and 26 November 2023 archived in Decide.

**6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2023) 381 AND /2)**

The Commission took note of the significant procedures for which the time limit expired between 27 November and 1 December 2023.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2023) 382 AND /2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (PERS(2023) 108 AND /2)

During the meeting, Mr HAHN presented two additional proposals for administrative decisions, which were submitted directly to the College for approval.

It was proposed to appoint Ms Daniela SPINANT to the post of Director-General of DG Communication, and Mr Christos ELLINIDES to the post of Director-General of DG Translation. Mr HAHN highlighted the great skills, outstanding career and recognised expertise in their respective fields of Ms SPINANT and Mr ELLINIDES and congratulated them on their appointment.

7.1. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR-GENERAL AT GRADE AD15/16 (PERS(2023) 77 TO /4)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director-General of DG Communication (PERS(2023) 77 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 22 and 23 November 2023 (PERS(2023) 77/3 and /4).

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission then decided to appoint Ms Daniela SPINANT to the post.

This decision would take effect as soon as possible.

**7.2. DG TRANSLATION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR-GENERAL AT
GRADE AD15/16
(PERS(2023) 53 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director-General of DG Translation (PERS(2023) 53 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 27 September and 23 November 2023 (PERS(2023) 53/3 and /4).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Christos ELLINIDES to the post.

This decision would take effect as soon as possible.

**7.3. DG EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORT AND CULTURE – TRANSFER OF
AN AD15 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF
REGULATIONS**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms FERREIRA and Ms IVANOVA, the Commission decided to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Normunds POPENS – currently Deputy Director-General for Implementation and International Relations in DG Regional and Urban Policy – to the post of Deputy Director-General in charge of Directorates C and D in DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture.

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

**7.4. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – UPDATE WITH EFFECT
FROM 1 JULY 2023 OF THE RATE OF CONTRIBUTION TO THE
PENSION SCHEME OF OFFICIALS AND OTHER SERVANTS OF**

***THE EUROPEAN UNION AND, WITH EFFECT ON 1 JANUARY 2024,
OF THE EFFECTIVE RATE FOR CALCULATION OF COMPOUND
INTEREST***

(SEC(2023) 393)

The Commission took note of SEC(2023) 393.

**8. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL – STATE OF
PLAY OF EU-TÜRKIYE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND TRADE
RELATIONS**

(JOIN(2023) 50 TO /3; RCC(2023) 186)

Mr BORRELL began by saying that the Joint Communication responded to the request from the European Council of 29 and 30 June 2023 to present the state of play of EU-Türkiye relations. He noted that this stocktaking was based on the options and instruments identified by the European Council and placed them in the context of a forward-looking geopolitical vision. The Communication, which he considered balanced, would guide discussions at the forthcoming European Council in December.

He pointed out that the European Council had repeatedly reaffirmed the EU's strategic interest in ensuring a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in developing cooperative and mutually beneficial relations with Türkiye. At the recent NATO ministerial meeting, the need to improve relations with this key partner of the EU had also been underlined.

Given the current geopolitical challenges, relations with Türkiye had to be addressed more strategically and in the light of the EU's interests and values. Mr BORRELL mentioned in particular the need to seek a solution to the Cyprus issue, to manage migration effectively at the EU's borders and to avoid any circumvention of sanctions against Russia.

He pointed out that the framework proposed by the Commission in its Joint Communication of March 2021, endorsed by the European Council in June 2021, had already improved EU-Türkiye relations, with concrete steps towards re-engagement. That day's Communication proposed further steps towards constructive engagement in areas of common interest such as (i) resuming high-level dialogues, (ii) seeking opportunities for more structured engagement on foreign policy and regional issues, and (iii) continuing and expanding sectoral cooperation, notably on trade, connectivity, migration management and refugee support, visa facilitation and trade investment.

Mr BORRELL concluded his presentation by stressing the importance of maintaining a progressive, proportionate and reversible approach, on the basis of the conditions set out by the European Council in June 2021, and by not ruling out the use, where appropriate, of the instruments available to the EU to defend its interests and those of its Member States.

Mr VÁRHELYI referred to the Commission having been tasked by the European Council with developing a realistic strategy to improve relations with Türkiye. In parallel with the EU accession process, which set out the path for resuming negotiations, the aim was to identify other areas for intensified cooperation between the EU and Türkiye. It was important to deal with those two processes separately and independently.

He stressed Türkiye's strategic importance, as a key player in the context of Russian's war of aggression against Ukraine, owing to its geographical position on the Black Sea, as well as its historical stabilising role in the Middle East. He underlined the importance of a pragmatic and gradual approach to strengthening cooperation with Türkiye, in order to foster mutual trust through concrete sectoral measures.

Mr VÁRHELYI referred in particular to visa cooperation. To mitigate the risks and impact of full visa liberalisation for Member States, he suggested prioritising visa

facilitation for students and business people travelling between Türkiye and the EU by simplifying procedures for obtaining entry and long-stay visas. That proposal met the needs expressed by the Turkish business sector.

He also stressed the need to modernise the customs union agreements. The Turkish government had declared its willingness to start negotiations, and progress had already been made on several trade irritants. This evolution should facilitate EU-Türkiye trade.

Mr VÁRHELYI also pointed out that a common investment platform was planned, which would mobilise joint financing in key sectors such as green and digital. He also welcomed the fact that, following the devastating earthquake in Türkiye, the European Investment Bank (EIB) had resumed its activities, which had been suspended in the country.

On migration, he referred to the need to think about a possible successor to the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye. The Commission had proposed continuing the measure in the context of the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Türkiye seemed open to doing so on a similar basis, with adjustments and updates that would not require full renegotiation of the agreement.

The priority would be to stem the influx of illegal migrants, by stepping up the fight against smuggling networks and supporting Türkiye in strengthening its border checks. In conclusion, Mr VÁRHELYI highlighted the need to ensure safe, voluntary and dignified returns to countries of origin, in collaboration with the UNHCR.

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

- the importance of facilitating the acquisition of visas for businesspeople, students and certain professions such as lorry drivers and, in this context, addressing the concerns related to document fraud;

- the improved cooperation on illegal migration flows, including through a second high-level dialogue with the Turkish Minister of Interior on this issue and Türkiye’s initiative to organise tripartite study visits with the Greek and Bulgarian border authorities in order to prevent irregular arrivals to those Member States;
- the good cooperation also with Turkish airline companies in the fight against student visa fraud;
- persistent concerns about the readmission of Turkish nationals;
- the need for better alignment of visa-free regimes and the importance of establishing an early warning system to inform the EU of changes made by Türkiye to its visa agreements with other countries, which could have an immediate impact on the flows of migrants arriving in the EU;
- Türkiye’s willingness to engage with the European Union in concrete areas of economic cooperation, in particular as regards the Customs Union, exchanges under the Digital Europe Programme and the Single Market Programme, as well as cooperation in the defence industry sector;
- the need for a constructive dialogue with Türkiye, given its indispensable role as a geopolitical actor and as the EU’s seventh-largest trading partner;
- the importance of this cooperation, particularly in the energy, health and critical raw materials sectors;
- a reminder by some of the hardening of the Turkish position in recent conflicts, which called into question its potential role as a mediator, Türkiye’s circumvention of the sanctions imposed on Russia and the deterioration of human rights and civil liberties in Türkiye, in particular the rights of women and children;

- Türkiye's complicated relations with several EU Member States, as well as the lack of introspection and reciprocity in its relations with the EU;
- in this context, confirmation of the importance of adopting a realistic and pragmatic approach, centred on the interests of the EU, and the need for very targeted and precise interactions with Türkiye, taking into account the evolution of the country's positions in the different areas concerned;
- a reminder of the interest of all parties in improving relations between the Cypriot communities, and, in this context, the expression by some of concerns linked to Türkiye's promotion of a two-State solution, which had led to delays in the implementation of projects and limited access by the Turkish Cypriot community to the benefits of EU membership;
- in this context, the importance of ensuring lasting improvements in the EU's relations with Türkiye by seeking a definitive solution to the Cyprus issue.

The PRESIDENT concluded the discussion by welcoming the realistic and balanced approach of the Communication, which took into account both the challenges to be met in the EU's relations with Türkiye and the many steps that could be envisaged in collaboration with this strategic partner.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Joint Communication in JOIN(2023) 50/3, for transmission to the European Council and, for information, to the European Parliament, the Council and the national parliaments.

9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – CREATION OF A COMMON EUROPEAN MOBILITY DATA SPACE (COM(2023) 751 AND /2; RCC(2023) 194)

- 10. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATIONS (EC) N° 261/2004, (EC) N° 1107/2006, (EU) N° 1177/2010, (EU) N° 181/2011 AND (EU) 2021/782 AS REGARDS ENFORCEMENT OF PASSENGER RIGHTS IN THE UNION (COM(2023) 753 AND /2; SWD(2023) 389; SWD(2023) 386 AND /2; SWD(2023) 387; SEC(2023) 392; RCC(2023) 194)**
- 11. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON PASSENGER RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIMODAL JOURNEYS (COM(2023) 752 AND /2; SWD(2023) 389; SWD(2023) 386 AND /2; SWD(2023) 387; SEC(2023) 392; RCC(2023) 194)**
- 12. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING DIRECTIVE (EU) 2015/2302 TO MAKE THE PROTECTION OF TRAVELLERS MORE EFFECTIVE AND TO SIMPLIFY AND CLARIFY CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE DIRECTIVE (COM(2023) 905 AND /2; SWD(2023) 905; SWD(2023) 908; SWD(2023) 906 AND /2; SWD(2023) 907 AND /2; SEC(2023) 540; RCC(2023) 194)**

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ presented the package of measures to improve travellers' experience by strengthening their rights, which included (i) a Communication on the creation of a common European mobility data space, (ii) a revision of the passenger rights Regulations, amending five existing Regulations, (iii) a new Regulation defining passenger rights in a multimodal context, and (iv) the revision of the 2015 Package Travel Directive. He stressed the importance of these proposals, which would strengthen citizens' rights when travelling, especially in the event of unforeseen disruptions such as delays or cancellations.

European rules protecting passengers were already robust, but they had been put to the test, in particular during the COVID-19 crisis which had had a major impact on both travellers and the travel market. The new rules therefore built on the lessons

learned from past experiences, while adding a green dimension to the relevant legislation.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ explained that the package would also allow for smoother journeys, in particular those involving different travel services or modes of transport. He considered it particularly important to encourage multimodal travel, as this form of travel was more sustainable and efficient, leading to a reduction in transport emissions. This meant that the new rules would also contribute to the overall objectives of the Green Deal.

In this regard, he considered that by ensuring the protection of passengers' rights related to multimodal travel, the EU would encourage more passengers to use public transport as a reliable, practical, greener and more sustainable alternative to private cars.

Ms JOUROVÁ said that the proposed revision of the Package Travel Directive introduced targeted changes aimed at strengthening travellers' rights and clarifying the obligations and responsibilities of travel organisers in this sector of the European market in which 2.5 million companies operated. The revised Directive would thus provide travellers with clear guarantees regarding their package travel. It would also provide travel operators with relevant and flexible provisions, which were particularly relevant for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or even micro-enterprises, which accounted for the majority of businesses in the tourism sector.

She pointed out that the mass travel cancellations during the COVID-19 pandemic and the liquidity problems of travel organisers had had a significant impact both on the situation of businesses in the sector and on travellers' trust. In this context, the Commission had proposed a harmonised approach in May 2020, adopting a Recommendation on the use of voluntary vouchers. However, Member States had continued to implement the existing legislation in different ways.

Ms JOUROVÁ pointed out that that day's proposal for a Directive brought clarity and improvements to the existing legal framework. The proposal included new

definitions of package travel, as well as rules on vouchers, refunds, down payments and insolvency mechanisms. The aim was to have a framework that worked well in normal times and which could also be applied in crisis situations or situations of *force majeure*. She hoped that the new rules would be adopted swiftly by the co-legislators, so that citizens could enjoy their package holidays and businesses could have the necessary legal certainty.

Ms VĂLEAN then presented the new passenger rights framework in more detail. She noted that it would directly benefit the 13 billion passengers travelling in the EU each year by plane, train, coach, bus and ferry. The EU already had one of the world's strongest legal frameworks for passenger rights. There were currently four Regulations covering air, rail, bus and coach, and waterborne transport, as well as a specific Regulation for people with reduced mobility travelling by air. These Regulations protected travellers from discrimination, delays, cancellations and other practices such as overbooking, while ensuring additional assistance for passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility.

As regards the implementation of existing legislation, Ms VĂLEAN pointed out that Member States often lacked the legal means and resources to enforce passenger rights. Whereas citizens should be able to expect the same level of protection regardless of their country of origin or destination, the situation was not the same everywhere in the EU. The Commission therefore proposed several measures to improve this, namely: (i) more structured monitoring by Member States' enforcement bodies of real problems encountered on the ground, and the mandatory development of action plans to address any weaknesses identified, (ii) making it easier for passengers to seek redress by establishing harmonised forms and facilitating access to alternative resolution mechanisms, and (iii) increased transparency requirements for carriers, including real-time information to passengers on the status of their journey and publication of quality standards regarding delays, cancellations or refunds.

Ms VĂLEAN then turned to the issue of standards for the size of hand luggage that could be carried on board when travelling by plane. Each airline had its own standard or even several standards, complicating the situation for passengers. The European Parliament had asked the Commission to take action in this regard, but there was no immediate one-size-fits-all solution given the different aircraft configurations. The proposed Regulation therefore encouraged airlines and aircraft manufacturers to reach an agreement to develop more harmonised standards in the sector for the benefit of passengers.

There was also a need to ensure that passengers got the same level of service whether they bought their ticket directly from an air carrier or from an intermediary. Passengers were often not informed by their travel agency of disruptions or delays in their flight, and in the case of problems, they were faced with a complex reimbursement process. The proposed reinforcement of the existing legislative framework would remedy this situation.

Ms VĂLEAN went on to present the proposal for a Regulation creating new rights and protections for passengers combining different modes of transport during the same journey. Better protection of these passengers against disruptions was essential to promote greater multimodality and offer more travel opportunities. The integrated ticket market, which was still in its infancy, should be developed further. In this context, the Commission proposed establishing the same basic rights for these passengers as in the case of single modes of transport, namely non-discrimination, the right to Information, care and assistance in the event of delays, and, in cases where tickets were purchased under a single contract, compensation for missed connections.

Turning to aspects of the package of measures relating to passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility, Ms VĂLEAN stressed that these passengers had special needs, in particular in terms of assistance, information and support, as well as the handling of mobility equipment or assistance dogs. To improve the travel experience of such passengers, the measures proposed by the Commission included:

(i) harmonisation of the rules on accompanying persons who would travel free of charge if the transport operator required a person with reduced mobility to have someone assisting them, (ii) extension to multimodal journeys of all the specific rights granted to such passengers, such as assistance before and during the journey and compensation for damage or loss of mobility equipment, and (iii) the need for multimodal platform operators in cities with over 100 000 inhabitants to set up a single point of contact to enable passengers with disabilities to be assisted from the time they landed until they reached the bus, train or ferry, so that they did not have to contact a whole series of operators as was the case at the moment.

Finally, Ms VĂLEAN referred to the creation of a common European mobility data space aimed at improving the availability and interoperability of data between stakeholders in the transport sector. With this Communication, the Commission was creating a governance structure that would make it easy to use and share all data available in real time, thereby guaranteeing that passengers had access to more information and a smooth trip using all modes of travel.

With regard to the Package Travel Directive, Mr REYNDERS pointed out that the EU had for years enjoyed very good consumer protection with a legislative framework that was easily applicable in a period without instability. However, it had proved difficult to enforce the framework on several occasions during recent crises, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the bankruptcy of a major operator. These crises had resulted in problems reimbursing passengers and tackling SME bankruptcies in the package travel sector.

He listed the main elements in the proposed revision of the Directive aimed at addressing such problems in future. Vouchers would remain voluntary and not compulsory, but specific rules on reimbursement within seven days between package travel organisers and operators had been introduced so that passengers could be refunded within 14 days. A flexible limitation of down payments to 25% for these journeys was introduced in order to alleviate the risk of bankruptcy, and

Member States would have to organise rescue funds to guarantee passenger refunds and the validity of vouchers in the event of a tour operator's bankruptcy.

Mr REYNDERS was convinced that, as a result of these changes, the EU could provide better protection for consumers and also for SMEs, which accounted for the vast majority of package travel organisers. He hoped that the proposal could be adopted by the co-legislators before the summer of 2024.

The PRESIDENT ended the discussion on this matter by thanking the Members of the College concerned for their high-quality work on this broad package of measures, which would entail many benefits for both travellers and businesses in the sector.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2023) 751/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments;
- adopted the proposals for a Regulation in COM(2023) 753/2 and COM(2023) 752/2, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Data Protection Supervisor 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(2023) 389, SWD(2023) 386/2, SWD(2023) 387 and SEC(2023) 392, the contents of which were noted;
- adopted the proposal for a Directive in COM(2023) 905/2, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Data Protection Supervisor 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(2023) 908, SWD(2023) 905, SWD(2023) 906/2, SWD(2023) 907/2 and SEC(2023) 540, the contents of which were noted.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

13.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL began by referring to the difficult situation in Africa, following the *coup d'état* in Niger and the withdrawal of French troops from the region. War continued in Mali, where the Wagner Group had consolidated its presence, and in Congo it was impossible for the EU election observation mission to deploy across the country, which raised the urgent question of whether it should remain in place or be recalled. He also referred to the ongoing conflicts in the Horn of Africa, in particular in Sudan, where the involvement of neighbouring countries was fuelling a situation of civil war between various factions. However, he welcomed the progress observed in Yemen, where a ceasefire could be in place by the end of the year, and said that he would visit the region in the course of December.

As regards Latin America, the region was undergoing major change. He referred to the elections in Venezuela and the prospects for the EU election observation mission. The new president of Argentina, recently elected by a significant majority, was stating positions that would have implications for the planned EU-Mercosur free trade agreement as well as for the region's support for the EU's stance on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Mr BORRELL turned to the situation in Ukraine, 650 days after Russia's full-scale invasion. The Ukrainian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Dmytro KULEBA, had been in Brussels that Tuesday, at the same time as

the PRESIDENT had held a videoconference with the Ukrainian President, Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKY. Russia was taking advantage of the fact that the international community had switched its focus to the Middle East to inflict greater destruction on Ukraine, as witnessed, for example, by the extensive drone attack on Kyiv over the previous weekend.

Mr BORRELL considered that Ukraine had made significant military gains on the ground and referred to the restoration of the Black Sea corridor allowing maritime transport to and from the country. It was important at this stage to reassure the Ukrainian authorities and the Ukrainian people of the EU's financial and military support in the short and long term.

Member States had depleted their stocks of military equipment to the point where the priority now had to be to redirect to Ukraine military exports destined for third countries. Mr BORRELL welcomed the success of the EU's training mission to Ukraine, which would benefit close on 40 000 Ukrainian soldiers at the end of the year, making of the EU the primary provider of military training to Ukraine.

He then addressed the situation in the Middle East by informing the College of the political outcomes of the 8th Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona, which he had chaired jointly with the Jordanian Minister for Foreign Affairs. While he regretted the absence of Israel, he felt that the meeting had been useful and remarked that, given the focus of the discussion on the current humanitarian crisis, the Commission had been represented by Mr LENARČIČ.

He stressed that the Arab countries were very concerned about the situation in Gaza and the possible spillover of the conflict. The United States was showing support for a cessation of hostilities and a political negotiation between the parties. He stressed the legitimate concerns about the fate of the remaining hostages and the vital role of the Palestinian Authority for the

future and stability of the region, in particular in connection with a two-State solution.

Mr BORRELL concluded by saying that he would be attending a meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that week in Skopje, North Macedonia, where the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Sergei LAVROV, was also expected to be present. It would be important to support Malta's candidacy for the OSCE's rotating chairmanship at that meeting.

During the discussion which followed, the Commission raised the following points:

- the historic success represented by the signing of the new agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States; this Samoa Agreement, succeeding the Cotonou Agreement, covered 79 countries and sent an important political signal in the current climate of geopolitical fragmentation;
- the key role of this Agreement in strengthening multilateral cooperation and the observation that all of the signatory countries represented, with the EU, more than half of the seats at the United Nations;
- practical progress on the migration issue, with annexes to the Agreement covering the obligations of countries of origin, and bilateral readmission agreements to be developed;
- the success of the International Conference on a Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling held on Tuesday 28 November 2023 in Brussels, with a view to taking effective action against smugglers and their networks;
- the difficult political situation in Niger, where legislation countering

smugglers and human traffickers had been withdrawn.

The PRESIDENT wrapped up by referring to the words of Mr STOLTENBERG, NATO Secretary-General, when he had attended the meeting of the College on 15 November 2023 and had called on European countries to increase their financial and material support to Ukraine so that it could win the war and enter political negotiations on peace on its own terms.

The Commission took note of this information.

13.2. PREPARATION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (COP 28)

Mr HOEKSTRA briefed the College on the progress made in preparing for the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 28), which would take place in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 12 December 2023. He mentioned the complex geopolitical context in which the Conference would take place, and the importance of this stage following the Paris Agreement in 2015.

He noted the urgent and wide-ranging nature of the issues at stake and the major climate change concerns of scientists. Thanks to a clear mandate, the EU and its Member States were in a good position to lead the discussions in terms of the level of ambition. Reaching a quick agreement on financing for vulnerable countries – in particular on the loss and damage fund – could help unlock other subjects and guarantee the goodwill of the EU's partners, especially the Global South, towards the EU's priorities.

According to Mr HOEKSTRA, work had to be carried out on all the relevant questions at the same time, given the way in which the multiple dimensions of the climate file were interlinked. He thus prioritised the EU's ambitions on

mitigating climate change, for which it would be necessary to phase out fossil fuels worldwide, reduce methane emissions, create a global consensus on carbon markets, triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 and double energy efficiency. In this connection, investment and new sources of financing would have to be increased continuously.

In conclusion, he stated that the diplomatic positions represented at COP 28 were more complicated than usual, with several blocs pursuing different objectives, and reiterated his strong commitment to contributing to the Conference's success.

The PRESIDENT congratulated Mr HOEKSTRA on the speed and efficiency with which he had taken up this priority file for the EU. She warned against positions advocating for the continued use of fossil fuels by combining them with carbon capture usage and storage (CCUS) technology. While such technology could be important in sectors where it was difficult to reduce emissions, it was imperative to prevent this from becoming the norm. When it came to maintaining the status quo on fossil fuels, there were many commercial interests at play.

She welcomed the favourable reception given to the objectives put forward by the EU to triple renewables and double energy efficiency by 2030: over 150 countries had made pledges in this respect. These commitments now had to be incorporated into the final document resulting from the Dubai Conference, so that an annual assessment could be made of whether the world was on track to meet these objectives.

Lastly, as regards carbon markets, the PRESIDENT pointed out that the EU and Canada were actively promoting a global carbon price and proven, fair, market-focused and revenue-generating emission trading systems. These markets could still be complemented, however, by grant-linked carbon credits, which could help developing countries attract further investment.

These credits and the projects giving rise to them had to be normalised, however, in order to prevent greenwashing and to reward the countries producing very few emissions.

The Commission took note of this information.

**13.3. DG BUDGET – COMMISSION REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU BORROWING, DEBT MANAGEMENT AND RELATED LENDING OPERATIONS AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HIGH LEVEL RISK AND COMPLIANCE POLICY FOR THE PERIOD 1 OCTOBER 2022 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2023
(SEC(2023) 394)**

The PRESIDENT invited Mr HAHN to present to the College the second report of Ms TSANOVA, the Deputy Director-General for Budget and Chief Risk Officer (CRO), on the implementation of the EU borrowing, debt management and related lending operations and in accordance with the high level risk and compliance policy for the period 1 October 2022 – 30 September 2023.

The Commission took note of the report set out in SEC(2023) 394.

13.4. STATE OF PLAY IN HUNGARY REGARDING THE HORIZONTAL ENABLING CONDITIONS AND THE BUDGETARY CONDITIONALITY MECHANISM

The College took stock of the ongoing assessment of Hungary's efforts in the context of the horizontal enabling conditions for accessing cohesion funds, in particular as regards judicial independence, and in relation to the budgetary conditionality mechanism.

The Commission took note of the progress made and set out the next steps in the process on the basis of the conclusions of the joint assessment carried out by its departments.

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 11.58.