



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2024) 2483 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 20 March 2024

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2483rd meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 21 February 2024

(morning)

PV(2024) 2483 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 21 February 2024 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.07 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Executive Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	

Absent:

Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms IVANOVA	Member

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

Mr FONTAN	Head of Cabinet to Mr BORRELL
Ms WEBBER	Head of Cabinet to Ms JOHANSSON
Mr LAHTI	Head of Cabinet to Ms URPILAINEN
Ms ALEXANDROVA	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms IVANOVA

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms SPINANT	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr WHELAN	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 9 and 10
Ms HOPMEIER	Member of the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Item 8
Ms SEMLALI	Policy Assistant in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	
Mr CHARLES	Secretariat-General	

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2024) 2483/FINAL; SEC(2024) 2483/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(2024) 2483)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 19 February 2024.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2479th, 2480th, 2481st and 2482nd meetings of 24 and 31 January, and 6 and 14 February 2024 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2024) 68)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) held on Thursday 15 February 2024 (RCC(2024) 68).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Sustainable use of plant protection products and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 (Regulation) – WIENER report – 2022/0196 (COD)**

Line set out in SPI(2024) 8.

- **Establishment of a framework of measures for strengthening Europe’s net-zero technology products manufacturing ecosystem (Net Zero Industry Act) (Regulation) – EHLER report – 2023/0081 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 116.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2017/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on mercury as regards dental amalgam and other mercury-added products subject to manufacturing, import and export restrictions (Regulation) – MORTLER report – 2023/0272 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 115.

- **Establishment of the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities (Regulation) – ĎURIŠ NICHOLSONOVÁ report – 2023/0311 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 108/2.

- **Effective coordination of economic policies and multilateral budgetary surveillance and repeal of Council Regulation (EC) No 1466/97 (Regulation) – DE LANGE & MARQUES report – 2023/0138 (COD)**
- **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1467/97 on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure (Council Regulation) – DE LANGE & MARQUES report – 2023/0137 (CNS)**
- **Amendment of Directive 2011/85/EU on requirements for budgetary frameworks of the Member States (Council Directive) – DE LANGE & MARQUES report – 2023/0136 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 117.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2021/1232 of the European Parliament and of the Council on a temporary derogation from certain provisions of**

Directive 2002/58/EC for the purpose of combating online child sexual abuse (Regulation) – SIPPEL report – 2023/0452 (COD)

Line set out in SI(2024) 118.

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

Line set out in SI(2024) 109/2.

- **European Health Data Space (Regulation) – SOKOL & TARDINO report – 2022/0140 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 114/2.

- **Approval and market surveillance of non-road mobile machinery circulating on public roads and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 – VANDENKENDELAERE report – 2023/0090 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 111/3.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027 (Council Regulation) – OLBRYCHT & MARQUES report – 2023/0201 (APP)**

Line set out in SP(2024) 90.

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

Line set out in SI(2024) 124.

- **European Declaration on cycling**

Line set out in SI(2024) 112.

– **Reduction of administrative burden for farmers – next steps**

Line set out in SI(2024) 120/2.

– **European Parliament resolution under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors – RUIZ DEVESA & MANDERS report – 2023/2051 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2024) 77.

– **Resolution of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Promotion of the freedom of scientific research in the EU – EHLER report – 2023/2184 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2024) 91.

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points, for transmission to the European Parliament:

– **Commission replies to the legislative resolutions (and list of non-legislative resolutions without formal reply) adopted by the European Parliament at its November II 2023 part-session**

Line set out in SP(2024) 109.

– **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its September, November II and December 2023 part-sessions**

Line set out in SP(2024) 110/3.

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point and took note of the compromise text:

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 as regards establishing a framework for a European Digital Identity (Regulation) – JERKOVIĆ report – 2021/0136 (COD)**

Line set out in SP(2024) 108 and compromise text attached to that document, further to notes SI(2023) 297/2 and SP(2023) 646, which the Commission had already approved on 18 July 2023 by written procedure, and on 6 December 2023, respectively.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Unitary supplementary protection certificate for plant protection products (Regulation) – WÖLKEN report – 2023/0126 (COD)**
- **Unitary supplementary certificate for medicinal products, and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2017/1001, Regulation (EC) No 1901/2006 and Regulation (EU) No 608/2013 (Regulation) – WÖLKEN report – 2023/0127 (COD)**
- **Supplementary protection certificate for plant protection products (recast) (Regulation) – WÖLKEN report – 2023/0128 (COD)**
- **Supplementary protection certificate for medicinal products (recast) (Regulation) – WÖLKEN report – 2023/0130 (COD)**
- **Standard essential patents and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2017/1001 (Regulation) – WALSMANN report – 2023/0133 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2024) 93.

- **Driving licences, amendment of Directive (EU) 2022/2561 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repeal of Directive 2006/126/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Regulation**

(EU) No 383/2012 – (Directive) - DELLI report – 2023/0053 (COD)

Information set out in SP(2024) 95.

- **Transparency and targeting of political advertising (Regulation) – GOZI report – 2021/0381 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 96, further to note SI(2023) 481, which the Commission had already approved on 6 December 2023.

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

Compromise text in SP(2024) 97, further to note SI(2023) 543, which the Commission had already approved on 12 December 2023.

- **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)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 99, further to note SI(2023) 489, which the Commission had already approved on 29 November 2023.

- **European Union geographical indications for wine, spirit drinks and agricultural products, and quality schemes for agricultural products, amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) 2017/1001 and (EU) 2019/787 and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 (Regulation) – DE CASTRO report – 2022/0089 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 100, further to note SI(2023) 429, which the Commission had already approved on 15 November 2023.

- **Data collection and sharing relating to short-term accommodation rental services and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 (Regulation) – VAN SPARRENTAK report – 2022/0358 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 101, further to note SI(2023) 485, which the Commission had already approved on 6 December 2023.

- **Protection of the environment through criminal law and replacement of Directive 2008/99/EC (Directive) – MANDERS report – 2021/0422 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 98, further to note SI(2023) 509, which the Commission had already approved on 6 December 2023.

- **Amendment of Protocol No 3 on the Statute of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Regulation) – CICUREL report – 2022/0906 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 102, further to note SI(2023) 564, which the Commission had already approved on 19 December 2023 by written procedure.

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

Compromise text in SP(2024) 103, further to note SI(2023) 498, which the Commission had already approved on 19 December 2023 by written procedure.

- **Nature restoration (Regulation) – LUENA report – 2022/0195 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 104, further to note SI(2023) 455, which the Commission had already approved on 21 November 2023.

- **Amendment of Directive 2014/59/EU and Regulation (EU) No 806/2014 as regards certain aspects of the minimum requirement for own funds and eligible liabilities (Directive) – FERNÁNDEZ report – 2023/0113 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 105, further to note SI(2023) 560, which the

Commission had already approved on 19 December 2023 by written procedure.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2024) 9)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2024) 9 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 14 February 2024.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2024) 58 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 12 and 18 February 2024.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2024) 59 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 12 and 18 February 2024.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2024) 60 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 12 and 18 February 2024 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2024) 61 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 19 and 23 February 2024.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2024) 62/2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2024) 17/2)

7.1. DG INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14/15

(PERS(2022) 73; PERS(2022) 73/5 TO /7)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘Resources’ Directorate at DG International Partnerships (PERS(2022) 73 and /5).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 5 and 6 June 2023 (PERS(2022) 73/6 and /7).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants’ qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms URPILAINEN, it then decided to appoint Mr Didier VERSE to the post.

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

**7.2. DG INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – APPOINTMENT OF A
PRINCIPAL ADVISER AT GRADE AD14/15
(PERS(2023) 71 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Adviser for G7 and G20 Sustainable Development Agendas at DG International Partnerships (PERS(2023) 71 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 30 January and 1 February 2024 (PERS(2023) 71/3 and /4).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms URPILAINEN, it then decided to appoint Ms Sandra BARTELT to the post.

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

**7.3. DG FINANCIAL STABILITY, FINANCIAL SERVICES AND CAPITAL
MARKETS UNION – ADOPTION OF A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR
THE POST OF MEMBER OF THE BOARD / DIRECTOR OF
RESOLUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION AT
THE SINGLE RESOLUTION BOARD (SRB)
(PERS(2024) 18 TO /3)**

The Commission took note of the information set out in point 2 of PERS(2024) 17/2 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms McGUINNESS, decided:

- to approve the list of two candidates, presented in alphabetical order, set out in point 2 of PERS (2024) 17/2, for the post of Member of the Board / Director of Resolution Policy Development and Coordination at the Single Resolution Board (SRB), and to consider it the Commission proposal;

- to ask Ms McGUINNESS, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to the European Parliament and to inform the Council;
- to ask Ms McGUINNESS to present to the Commission in good time, following feedback from the European Parliament, the proposal for the appointment of a Member of the Board / Director of Resolution Policy Development and Coordination at the Single Resolution Board (SRB), for transmission to the European Parliament for its approval.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.4. DG COMPETITION – AUTHORISATION TO RECRUIT A TEMPORARY STAFF MEMBER, UNDER ARTICLE 2(A) OF THE CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OF OTHER SERVANTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION (GRADE AD14) OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR A DIRECTOR POST PERS(2024) 19)

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

- to authorise the recruitment of a temporary staff member at grade AD14, under Article 2(a) of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union, with a view to filling the Director-level post of Chief Competition Economist in DG Competition, for a period of three years, renewable once for a maximum of two years;
- to authorise the external publication of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2024) 19.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.5. DG COMPETITION – CLOSURE OF AN EXTERNAL SELECTION PROCEDURE (GRADE AD14), AUTHORISATION TO RECRUIT A TEMPORARY STAFF MEMBER, UNDER ARTICLE 2(A) OF THE CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OF OTHER SERVANTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND EXTERNAL REPUBLICATION (GRADE AD14) OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR A DIRECTOR POST PERS(2023) 3; PERS(2024) 20)

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

- to close with immediate effect the selection procedure for the Director-level post of Chief Technology Officer in DG Competition, without making an appointment;
- to authorise the recruitment of a temporary staff member at grade AD14, under Article 2(a) of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union, with a view to filling the Director-level post of Chief Technology Officer in DG Competition, for a period of three years, renewable once for a maximum of two years;
- to authorise the external publication of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2024) 20.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE FACILITY – STRENGTHENING THE EU THROUGH AMBITIOUS

REFORMS AND INVESTMENTS**(COM(2024) 82 AND /2; SWD(2024) 70 AND /2; RCC(2024) 71)**

Mr DOMBROVSKIS explained that the mid-term evaluation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, or NextGenerationEU recovery plan, was an important stage and that the Facility had proven to be fully effective in achieving its objectives thus far. The evaluation was based on extensive consultation and in-depth country and thematic analyses, which would be published in parallel.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS welcomed the positive changes and tangible results generated by the Facility, with almost EUR 225 billion in funds already disbursed to Member States and 75% of the milestones they had set for the end of 2023 in their national plans already reached. In an effort to adapt the plans to a changing context, 23 Member States had added REPowerEU chapters to their respective plans. After a temporary slowdown in the disbursement of funds in 2023 as a result of these revised plans, disbursements had picked up this year.

He then noted the Facility's key role in speeding up the EU's green transition, with the plans of all Member States exceeding the threshold of 37% of the total allocation dedicated to climate objectives and some of them allocating more than 50%. In addition, the Facility was supporting social and employment policies, thereby contributing to a fairer green transition.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS also highlighted the economic impact of the instrument. The Commission's economic modelling showed that the NextGenerationEU recovery plan had the potential to increase the EU's real gross domestic product (GDP) by up to 1.4% in 2026 compared with a scenario without the recovery plan. Contrary to previous crises, public investment in Europe had risen during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent energy crisis, increasing from 3% of GDP in 2019 to an estimated 3.3% in 2023 and 3.4% in 2024. Around half of the increase in public investment came from investment financed by the EU budget, in particular through the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

The Facility was also supporting long-awaited reforms in Member States and contributing significantly to the implementation of the country-specific recommendations under the European Semester. The share of country-specific recommendations for which Member States had made at least ‘some progress’ had increased from 52% to 69% between 2021 and 2023, an improvement of 17%.

Lastly, Mr DOMBROVSKIS mentioned some lessons and opportunities for improvement gleaned from implementing the Facility. In particular, he referred to calls to increase flexibility and simplify the procedures for revising national plans. He also pointed out that local and regional authorities, social partners and other stakeholders had said that they had not been sufficiently involved in implementing national plans. Finally, it was essential to further strengthen administrative capacity in the Member States and bodies responsible for implementing national plans, in order to be able to fully meet the requirements of protecting the EU’s financial interests.

He concluded that, overall, the NextGenerationEU recovery plan was now delivering the expected results and helping to achieve the political objectives for which it was conceived.

Mr GENTILONI highlighted the robust and transparent nature of this mid-term evaluation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, given that it was based on an independent external study and involved all Commission departments. He emphasised the main finding of the evaluation – that the NextGenerationEU recovery plan was one of the biggest success stories of the Commission’s current term of office. This conclusion was based on many positive examples of reform and investment in the different Member States and on the high percentage of milestones and targets reached in the national plans at the halfway point.

The Facility had also helped to prevent the risk of wide divergences in the EU economy. The recovery plan had been announced right at the start of the COVID-19 crisis and had reassured the financial markets, helping to reduce Member States’

sovereign bond spreads. It had also had a very positive impact on the EU's GDP growth rate, which was now expected to be up by 1.4% in 2026, without taking into consideration the increase in productivity resulting from the reforms set out in the national plans. The Facility had already helped to increase public investment in the Member States and its contribution would probably be even more visible in the future.

Mr GENTILONI added that, until mid-2022, all these factors had led to a far stronger economic recovery in the EU than in the United States or China. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, however, had wrought particularly serious economic consequences for the EU, especially in terms of energy supply and prices. Consequently, the recovery plan had needed to be adapted to this new emergency situation, leading to a slowdown in payments during the first half of 2023. The disbursement of funds should return to normal again in the course of the current year.

As regards the process of managing the Facility, he referred first to the competing demands of the Member States, the EU institutions and the other stakeholders. On the one hand, several Member States wanted more flexibility as regards the instrument's management, while on the other, there was strong political pressure to strengthen checks and the supervision of funds. These two demands were difficult to reconcile.

Mr GENTILONI then pointed out that, on the whole, the NextGenerationEU recovery plan had strengthened the Commission's institutional role, as the implementation of major reforms on sensitive issues for the Member States, such as taxation, was now linked to the disbursement of the Facility's funds.

He also mentioned the concerns of local and regional authorities and civil society regarding their lack of involvement in the drafting and implementation of the recovery and resilience plans by the Member States. In this respect, the Commission should encourage the Member States to further involve the national parliaments and

the other stakeholders in the drafting of these plans, as well as in the design of the fiscal policy plans required by the new economic governance framework.

Mr GENTILONI emphasised the need for the Commission to optimise the use of the Facility and to ensure that these funds did not replace other EU financing. The search for synergies between the different sources of funding also had to be continued.

Lastly, as regards lessons for the future, Mr GENTILONI encouraged the Member States to stick to the deadlines set by the Facility's Regulation and the national plans. He thought that a debate should be launched, so that, during the next political cycle, a proportion of common EU funding could be allocated to common goals and to the common good, for the benefit of all Member States.

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

- the success of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan, and the sound and objective analysis carried out in the mid-term evaluation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility;
- the importance of the quality of the Member States' data on their green investments, which would allow the EU to provide more information to potential investors and step up the issuing of green bonds;
- the key role played by NextGenerationEU in establishing the euro as the world's second reserve currency, which was an important asset for the EU in the current geopolitical context;
- the major change introduced by the Facility in terms of performance-based, rather than results-based, funding, and the complexity that this change created, both within the Commission and at inter-institutional level;

- the smooth functioning of the recovery plan in the emergency context of successive crises, but also the need to improve certain aspects of the plan, in particular stakeholder participation, the substitution effect in relation to cohesion policy investment projects, and the administrative capacity of the national bodies managing the funds;
- in this context, the opportunity to bring the methodology used for managing cohesion policy funds into line with that of the Facility, by increasing cooperation with the Member States and the EU regions, to achieve more efficient and transparent use of EU funds;
- the model provided by NextGenerationEU for a future joint financing instrument for common goals, particularly in the areas of defence or economic stabilisation;
- the importance of increased flexibility for the Facility, while maintaining the original concept of making payments conditional on the implementation of country-specific recommendations;
- the role of the Facility in ensuring a level playing field in the internal market, promoting the twin green and digital transitions, and launching a real dialogue with the Member States on respecting the rule of law.

The PRESIDENT closed the discussion by emphasising the enormous progress that had been made thanks to NextGenerationEU. She recalled the difficulty of negotiating with the Member States on the political appropriateness of using an innovative performance-based approach to managing the funds – an approach that had proved effective in practice. The Commission should be proud of its success and communicate this to citizens.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2024) 82/2 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, together with the staff working

document distributed as SWD(2024) 70/2, the contents of which were noted.

9. WHITE PAPER – HOW TO MASTER EUROPE’S DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS?

(COM(2024) 81 TO /3; RCC(2024) 73)

10. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON SECURE AND RESILIENT SUBMARINE CABLE INFRASTRUCTURES

(C(2024) 1181 TO /3; RCC(2024) 73)

Ms VESTAGER presented the proposals to strengthen connectivity within the European Union, consisting of a White Paper on digital infrastructure and a Recommendation on submarine cable infrastructure.

She began by stressing the strategic importance of the millions of kilometres of submarine cables, which carried nearly all international data traffic. Although invisible in daily life, these cables were crucial in order to meet an ever-increasing demand for bandwidth and cope with emerging security threats such as hacking and espionage. The Recommendation therefore presented a set of actions to increase the security and resilience of submarine cables, including through better coordination within the EU and the adoption of a toolbox for cable security along the same lines as the toolbox developed for 5G. The Commission was also working on the establishment of an expert group of national authorities to assist Member States in the implementation of this Recommendation.

Turning to the White Paper on digital infrastructure, she noted the link between connectivity and economic growth. She argued that the future competitiveness of the European economy hinged on the deployment of advanced digital infrastructure and network services, which were essential for the development of the Internet of Things and real-time data processing. She also referred to the opportunities and

risks associated with the move towards cloud computing and edge computing, and stressed the importance of cybersecurity and reducing external dependencies.

Ms VESTAGER then highlighted the central role of connectivity for an inclusive society by improving access to public services for all citizens. Despite already extensive 5G coverage in the EU, she reported significant gaps in less densely populated and rural areas, as well as limited access to fibre networks compared to other parts of the world.

Ms VESTAGER therefore called for greater efforts to achieve the ambitions of the EU's Digital Decade Strategy, based on a robust digital infrastructure that ensured secure, fast and reliable connectivity everywhere and for everyone. In particular, she called for an increase in private investment in this infrastructure, with a target of EUR 200 billion over the next six years.

She also highlighted the challenges posed by the current fragmentation of the market and regulatory frameworks within the EU, which hampered potential synergies within the single market. The White Paper therefore proposed a series of measures to improve the situation, primarily by consolidating a genuine internal market in telecommunications capable of reducing costs for consumers while improving efficiency for businesses.

Ms VESTAGER concluded by stating that the proposals in the White Paper would be the subject of a public consultation, with the aim of reducing the administrative burden, ensuring a level playing field and facilitating business activities.

In turn, Mr BRETON stressed the crucial importance of a digital network infrastructure, based on emerging technologies, as a cornerstone of the European single market's competitiveness. This reflection on digital infrastructure was in line with the current Commission's industrial strategy aimed at consolidating and strengthening the digital internal market. He highlighted the progress already made in this regard, notably through the Regulations on digital services and markets (DSA

and DMA), the law on data governance, and the promotion of cutting-edge technologies with the legislation on artificial intelligence.

He felt it was now necessary to develop the right infrastructure and support in order to foster the expansion of this market, based on three fundamental pillars: investment, regulation and resilience.

The first pillar, on investment, proposed a series of industrial-policy measures to establish an innovative European ecosystem of connected collaborative networks, the ‘3C network’ (Connected Collaborative Computing), promoting cooperation between various key communities and industries to boost innovation. Such a collaborative approach could be implemented through pilot projects or a possible new important project of common European interest (‘IPCEI’) to support these advanced technologies. The White Paper therefore launched a consultation of all stakeholders, from infrastructure operators to industrial sectors such as transport and health, in order to propose concrete initiatives.

Mr BRETON also highlighted the EU’s crucial role in reducing the risks associated with investments in innovation and new technologies. He warned about the delay in achieving the digital decade targets by 2030 due to a lack of necessary private investment. He specified that an investment need of EUR 200 billion by 2030 had been identified in the extensive consultations carried out by the Commission in connection with the drafting of the White Paper.

The second pillar aimed to harmonise and unify the European regulatory framework, which was currently highly fragmented with 27 sets of national rules, in order to ensure fair competition. More specifically, Mr BRETON pointed out the inadequacy of telecommunications regulations dating back more than 20 years concerning cloud network providers, which were not subject to the same obligations as traditional telecommunications operators, thus creating disparities in the conditions of competition.

He stressed that a unified Regulation would foster the necessary investments and support the EU's ambitions by aligning them with the requirements of a more competitive and digital economy. He emphasised the importance of enabling all operators to benefit from clear and predictable rules as well as fair competition within the single market, in order to be able to make large-scale investments.

The third and final pillar identified concrete avenues for strengthening the physical security as well as the cybersecurity of European networks, thus ensuring optimal data protection during transmission. These avenues included the identification of post-quantum encryption standards, the creation of a dedicated toolbox for the security of submarine cable infrastructure for improved risk management, and the selection of strategic and priority cable projects for public funding (cable projects of European interest, or 'CPEI'). The latter two options were the subject of a Recommendation to Member States proposed jointly with the White Paper.

In conclusion, Mr BRETON announced a forthcoming in-depth consultation involving the European Parliament and all stakeholders. The aim of this consultation was to enrich the debate on the three pillars mentioned and to lay the foundations for a new Digital Networks Act as the cornerstone of an ambitious strategy to increase the EU's competitiveness on the global digital stage.

A brief discussion followed, during which the Commission notably welcomed the White Paper's focus on rural areas, given the importance of ensuring that the digital transition did not leave anyone behind in these regions.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- adopted the White Paper in COM(2024) 81/3 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 in principle the Commission Recommendation in C(2024) 1181/3 and empowered, under Article 13 of the Rules of Procedure, Mr BRETON, the

Member of the Commission responsible, to formally adopt the Commission Recommendation, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, in all the language versions as soon as they were available.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION UNDER ARTICLE 225 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (TFEU) – PROMOTION OF THE FREEDOM OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE EU (SP(2024) 91)

Ms VESTAGER said that, on 17 January 2024, the European Parliament had adopted a resolution under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on promoting the freedom of scientific research in the EU. The resolution called on the Commission to submit a proposal for a legislative act in order to guarantee, protect and promote the freedom of publicly funded non-profit research organisations and of researchers throughout their careers.

Emphasising the crucial importance of protecting the freedom of scientific research, she suggested responding favourably to the European Parliament's resolution. She added that a letter would be sent by the Commission to the European Parliament setting out the following points: (i) the need to further promote and protect the freedom of scientific research as a fundamental element for creating the European Research Area, (ii) a commitment to propose a legislative initiative to enhance the promotion and protection of the freedom of scientific research, and (iii) the announcement of a study to support the drafting of this future legislative proposal.

Ms VESTAGER explained that the study would provide a solid de jure and

de facto assessment of the protection and promotion of freedom of scientific research in Member States, as well as in a number of non-EU countries which scored highly on the Academic Freedom Index.

She concluded by noting that, in accordance with the Commission's working methods, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ would inform the European Parliament of the action taken on this resolution.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the line proposed in SP(2024) 91, including the draft letter to be sent by Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to the European Parliament.

**11.2. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION UNDER ARTICLE 225 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (TFEU) – EU FRAMEWORK FOR THE SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SITUATION OF ARTISTS AND WORKERS IN THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS
(SP(2024) 77)**

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ presented to the College the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 21 November 2023 calling for the creation of a European framework to improve social and professional conditions in the cultural and creative sectors. Under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the Commission had 3 months to reply.

The resolution addressed many of the problems currently faced by artists and workers in creative sectors, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and called on the Commission to put forward a Directive on decent working conditions. The Commission was also called upon to analyse the situation of professionals in these sectors in the EU, monitor relevant developments and set up a European platform that would define quality

standards regarding the status and situation of professionals in the cultural and creative sectors, with the full participation of the social partners.

In its reply, the Commission supported the policy objectives put forward by the European Parliament and confirmed its intention to initiate work in this area in order to address the recommendations made, within the legal limits set by the Treaties and within the framework of the existing EU social *acquis*.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ noted that the Commission was well aware of the risks and precariousness faced by workers in these sectors, since recent reports on the subject indicated that improvements were needed at national level and could be supported by EU action.

He argued that the Commission could further strengthen the implementation and enforcement of existing rules and identify regulatory gaps that would require further monitoring, in particular by (i) encouraging social partners in these sectors to negotiate an agreement on working conditions, (ii) launching a discussion on the full enforcement of EU occupational health and safety legislation with regard to professionals in these sectors, (iii) bringing together national experts and social partners in the areas of social security coordination, free movement of workers and undeclared work, in order to assess needs and propose possible solutions, and (iv) fostering mutual learning in other areas, such as social protection aspects in relation to artists and workers in the creative sector.

With this in mind, the Commission would draft a document setting out the principles and provisions of existing legislation covering these sectors, best practices and an analysis of potential gaps and challenges. This document would also constitute the Commission's contribution to the high-level round table that the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) proposed to organise in 2024, with the support and contribution of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

(DG EMPL). It would serve as a basis for further reflection with stakeholders on possible next steps and future initiatives.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ concluded that the Commission intended to continue its dialogue with partners in the sector and bring together stakeholders to find joint solutions.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the line proposed in SP(2024) 77, including the draft letter to be sent by Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to the European Parliament.

11.3. VISIT OF THE PRESIDENT TO KYIV (24 FEBRUARY 2024)

The PRESIDENT informed the College of her forthcoming visit to Kyiv to commemorate the second anniversary of the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. She underlined the importance of marking this tragic event by reaffirming the EU's solidarity with and unwavering support for Ukraine.

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The meeting closed at 10.17.