



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2024) 2487 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Strasbourg, 23 April 2024

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2487th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 20 March 2024
(morning)**

PV(2024) 2487 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

EN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	5-6
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2024) 2487/FINAL; SEC(2024) 2487/FINAL)	7
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF HEADS OF CABINET (RCC(2024) 2487).....	7
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES (PV(2024) 2483).....	7
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2024) 79)	7
5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2024) 13).....	10
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	11
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2024) 85 ET SEQ.).....	11
6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2024) 86 ET SEQ.)	11
6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2024) 87 ET SEQ.)	11
6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2024) 88 AND /2)	11
7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2024) 89)	12
7.1. IDEA – INSPIRE, DEBATE, ENGAGE AND ACCELERATE ACTION – APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL ADVISER	12
7.2. DG BUDGET – APPOINTMENT OF AN PRINCIPAL ADVISER AT GRADE AD14/15 (PERS(2024) 29 TO /3)	13
7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL ADVISERS (PERS(2024) 30).....	14
7.4. DG ENERGY – EXTENSION OF A TEMPORARY POST OF DEPUTY DIRECTOR- GENERAL AND A TEMPORARY TASK FORCE.....	15
7.5. DG INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – APPOINTMENT OF A PRINCIPAL	

ADVISER AT GRADE AD14/15 (PERS(2023) 72 TO /4).....	15
8. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE COUNCIL BRINGING URGENT SUPPORT TO UKRAINE BY DEPLOYING REVENUE FROM IMMOBILISED RUSSIAN ASSETS (JOIN(2024) 11 AND /2; RCC(2024) 86).....	16
9. JOINT PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL REGULATION AMENDING COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) NO 833/2014 CONCERNING RESTRICTIVE MEASURES IN VIEW OF RUSSIA’S ACTIONS DESTABILISING THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE (JOIN(2024) 12 AND /2; RCC(2024) 86)	16
10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH NATURE – BOOSTING BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOMANUFACTURING IN THE EU (COM(2024) 13 TO /3; RCC(2024) 84)	17
11. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS - LABOUR AND SKILLS SHORTAGES IN THE EU: AN ACTION PLAN (COM(2024) 131 TO /4; RCC(2024) 82).....	19
12. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON IMPROVING AND ENFORCING WORKING CONDITIONS OF TRAINEES AND COMBATING REGULAR EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS DISGUISED AS TRAINEESHIPS (COM(2024) 132 AND /2; SWD(2024) 66;	

SWD(2024) 67; SWD(2024) 68; SEC(2024) 97; RCC(2024) 82)	19
13. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON A REINFORCED QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINEESHIPS (COM(2024) 133 TO /3; RCC(2024) 82)	19
14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL ON PRE-ENLARGEMENT REFORMS AND POLICY REVIEWS (COM(2024) 146 TO /3; RCC(2024) 85)	25
15. OTHER BUSINESS.....	27
<i>PREPARATION OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (21 AND 22 MARCH 2024)</i>	<i>27</i>

Single sitting: Wednesday 20 March 2024 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.06 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	Items 11/13 (in part) to 15
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	Items 7 to 15
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	Item 15 (in part)
Ms DALLI	Member	Items 8/9 (in part), 14 (in part) and 15
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part), and 11/13 (in part) to 15
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	
Ms IVANOVA	Member	
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	

Absent:

Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr REYNDERS	Member

PV(2024) 2487 final

Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member

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

Mr NOCIAR	Head of Cabinet to Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Items 1 to 11/13 (in part)
Mr FONTAN	Head of Cabinet to Mr BORRELL	
Mr REIG RODRIGO	Head of Cabinet to Ms KYRIAKIDES	Items 1 to 15 (in part)
Ms TUTS	Head of Cabinet to Mr REYNDERS	
Ms CUPSAN-CATALIN	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms JOHANSSON	
Mr HORVÁTH	Expert in Mr VÁRHELYI's cabinet	
Mr GRASSI	Head of Cabinet to Ms SIMSON	Items 11/13
Ms PREISING	Head of Cabinet to Mr SINKEVIČIUS	

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	
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 9 and 10
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(2024) 2487/FINAL; SEC(2024) 2487/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) 2487)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of cabinet held on Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 March 2024.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2024) 2483)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2483rd meeting of 21 February 2024 and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2484th, 2485th and 2486th meetings of 27 February and 5 and 12 March 2024 until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2024) 79)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) held on Friday 15 March 2024 (RCC(2024) 79).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

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

Line set out in SI(2024) 180.

- **Establishment of measures to strengthen solidarity and capacities in the Union to detect, prepare for and respond to cybersecurity threats and incidents (Regulation) – GÁLVEZ MUÑOZ report – 2023/0109 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 181.

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

Line set out in SI(2024) 179.

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

Line set out in SI(2024) 173.

- **Amendment of Directives 2009/102/EC and (EU) 2017/1132 as regards further expanding and upgrading the use of digital tools and processes in company law (Directive) – RADEV report – 2023/0089 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 174.

- **Prohibition of products made with forced labour on the Union market (Regulation) – LEITÃO-MARQUES & RAFAELA report – 2022/0269 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 167/3.

- **Amendment of Directive (EU) 2015/413 facilitating cross-border exchange of information on road-safety-related traffic offences (Directive) – ZŁOTOWSKI report – 2023/0052 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 185.

- **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) (recast – Regulation) – LANGE report – 2022/0288 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 189.

- **Temporary trade-liberalisation measures supplementing trade concessions applicable to Ukrainian products under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part (Regulation) – 2024/0028 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 191.

- **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and amendment of Directive (EU) 2019/1937 (Directive) – WOLTERS report – 2022/0051 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 192.

- **Position of farmers in the food supply chain – next steps**

Line set out in SI(2024) 187/2.

- **DG ENER meeting with a delegation of the French Senate’s Committee of Inquiry on ‘Generation, consumption and price of electricity for 2035**

and 2050' (21 March 2024)

Line set out in SNP(2024) 5.

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 part-sessions of July, November II and December 2023, and January I 2024**

Line set out in SP(2024) 209/3.

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point, for transmission to the Committee of the Regions:

- **Follow-up to opinions of the Committee of the Regions – Plenary session of November 2023**

Line set out in SR(2024) 5/3.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 as regards the revision of the suspension mechanism (Regulation) – NEMEC report – 2023/0371 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2024) 184.

- **Results of the European Parliament's March 2024 part-session**

Information set out in SP(2024) 208.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2024) 13)**

PV(2024) 2487 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

EN

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2024) 13 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 13 March 2024.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2024) 85 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 11 and 17 March 2024.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2024) 86 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 11 and 17 March 2024.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2024) 87 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 11 and 17 March 2024 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2024) 88 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 18 and 22 March 2024.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2024) 89)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (PERS(2024) 28)

During the meeting, Mr HAHN presented an additional proposal for an administrative decision, which was tabled directly to the College for approval.

Accordingly, it was proposed to appoint Mr Sauli NIINISTÖ, former President of the Republic of Finland, as Special Adviser for European Defence and Security, reporting directly to the PRESIDENT and administratively attached to IDEA – Inspire, Debate, Engage and Accelerate Action. Mr NIINISTÖ would be responsible for drawing up a report on the EU's state of preparedness in civil and defence matters.

The PRESIDENT welcomed this appointment and highlighted Mr NIINISTÖ's extensive experience in the area of defence, in particular as President of a country with a comprehensive civilian defence strategy designed to prepare the population for all emergencies, including military and hybrid threats and natural disasters. The report on the EU's state of preparedness in civil and defence matters would precisely aim to promote a broad approach to the concept of security, and would encompass natural disasters. The report, which was expected to be ready by October 2024, would be drawn up in close cooperation with the Member States and Mr BORRELL and would contribute to defining the next Commission's term of office in the areas of security and defence.

7.1. IDEA – INSPIRE, DEBATE, ENGAGE AND ACCELERATE ACTION – APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL ADVISER

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

- to appoint Mr Sauli NIINISTÖ as Special Adviser for European Defence

and Security, reporting directly to the PRESIDENT and administratively attached to IDEA – Inspire, Debate, Engage and Accelerate Action. His contract as a special adviser would run until the end of the current Commission's term of office, with a maximum of 200 working days, all of which could be mission days;

- to make available to Mr Sauli NIINISTÖ a core team that would support him in his work during his term of office – seconded to or employed by IDEA – consisting of an administrative assistant, a political assistant, two editors, a seconded national expert – in accordance with Commission Decision C(2008) 6866 – and a maximum of six experts from the Directorates-General for Defence Industry and Space; Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs; Migration and Home Affairs; European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations; Communications Networks, Content and Technology, as well as from the European External Action Service. He would also be assisted, where appropriate, by other experts from the relevant Commission departments. The team would work in close coordination with the Secretariat-General, and cooperation with all relevant departments would be crucial for the accomplishment of its mission;
- to make offices available to Mr Sauli NIINISTÖ and his core team, within the space allocated to IDEA;
- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement this decision by signing the contract on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.2. DG BUDGET – APPOINTMENT OF AN PRINCIPAL ADVISER AT
GRADE AD14/15
(PERS(2024) 29 TO /3)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Adviser in charge of ‘Task Force One Stop Shop - Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (OSS STEP)’ in DG Budget (PERS(2024) 29).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 20 and 29 February 2024 (PERS(2024) 29/2 and /3).

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 Ms Christiane CANENBLEY to the post.

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

7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL ADVISERS
(PERS(2024) 30)

The Commission took note of the information in point 2 of PERS(2024) 28 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to adopt the list of special advisers to the Commission, valid from 1 April 2024 until the end of the current Commission’s term of office, as set out in PERS(2024) 30;
- by way of derogation from the provisions under point 6, second paragraph, of Commission Decision C(2007) 6655 of 19 December 2007 on the rules on special advisers to the Commission, to authorise Mr HAHN, the Member of the Commission responsible for budget and administration, to conclude addenda to the existing contracts in the event of duly justified and urgent needs, subject to the availability of sufficient budgetary appropriations;

- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement this decision by signing contracts of employment on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.4. DG ENERGY – EXTENSION OF A TEMPORARY POST OF DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND A TEMPORARY TASK FORCE

The Commission took note of the information in point 4 of PERS(2024) 28 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms SIMSON, decided to extend for 12 months, until 31 May 2025:

- the temporary post of Deputy Director-General;
- the Energy Platform Task Force;
- the temporary post of Head of the Task Force;
- the two temporary Units (ENER.TF.1 and ENER.TF.2).

These decisions would take effect on 1 June 2024.

7.5. DG INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – APPOINTMENT OF A PRINCIPAL ADVISER AT GRADE AD14/15 (PERS(2023) 72 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 Emerging Donors in DG International Partnerships (PERS(2023) 72 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 30 January and 1 February 2024 (PERS(2023) 72/3 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 Mr Mathieu BRIENS to the post.

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

8. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE COUNCIL BRINGING URGENT SUPPORT TO UKRAINE BY DEPLOYING REVENUE FROM IMMOBILISED RUSSIAN ASSETS

(JOIN(2024) 11 AND /2; RCC(2024) 86)

9. JOINT PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL REGULATION AMENDING COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) No 833/2014 CONCERNING RESTRICTIVE MEASURES IN VIEW OF RUSSIA'S ACTIONS DESTABILISING THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

(JOIN(2024) 12 AND /2; RCC(2024) 86)

The PRESIDENT introduced the College's discussion on the use of windfall revenues from immobilised Russian assets, stressing the importance of ensuring that Russia was held accountable for its actions in the context of its war of aggression and that this exceptional revenue financed Ukraine's most urgent needs. The measures proposed that day had been developed in close consultation with Member States and G7 members.

In the absence of Mr BORRELL, Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Ms JOUROVÁ presented the initiatives proposed that day, arguing in particular that Ukraine's most pressing needs at present were of a military nature and highlighting the need for Russia to pay for the damage caused by its unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the joint communication to the Council in JOIN(2024) 11/2 for transmission to the Council and, for information, to the Permanent Representations;
- adopted the joint proposal for a Council Regulation in JOIN(2024) 12/2 for transmission to the Council and, for information, to the Permanent Representations.

10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH NATURE – BOOSTING BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOMANUFACTURING IN THE EU (COM(2024) 137 TO /3; RCC(2024) 84)

The PRESIDENT introduced the College's discussion on biotechnology and biomanufacturing, stressing the crucial importance of this specific area of research and innovation.

Ms VESTAGER explained that the aim of that day's Communication, which was eagerly awaited by both the Member States and the industry, was to stimulate the development of biotechnology and biomanufacturing in the EU. The Communication detailed the sector's contribution to the European economy and laid the foundations for more coordinated future political action in order to exploit its full potential.

Ms VESTAGER noted that biotechnology and biomanufacturing were among the cutting-edge technologies identified under the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), contributing to the EU's economic security and strengthening its open strategic autonomy. She highlighted the key role of these technologies in European competitiveness and prosperity, and the solutions they could offer to

major challenges such as climate change, the scarcity of natural resources and the treatment of rare diseases which were incurable at present.

Ms VESTAGER gave examples of the practical application of these biotechnologies, such as the use of enzymes to purify wastewater, the use of fermentation processes to produce healthier and more sustainable food, and the use of bacteria to produce natural pigments, thus replacing chemical colouring agents in the textile industry and contributing to water conservation.

The Communication identified the current challenges facing the sector in the EU, including the lack of qualified staff, difficulties in accessing financing and an often heavy regulatory burden for this emerging sector, which was sometimes unfairly treated in the same way as much more mature and competitive sectors. She referred in particular to the slow process of granting permits in the EU, which harmed competitiveness and forced businesses to go abroad to develop their innovation projects.

To overcome these obstacles and strengthen the EU's competitiveness, the Communication proposed a set of key actions, including the creation of a biotech hub to help businesses exploit the full potential of the European regulatory framework and funding system. She also highlighted the increased use of artificial intelligence and the launch of studies to prepare the ground for future European legislation on biotechnology.

Ms VESTAGER concluded her presentation by expressing her belief that this Communication would help to create an environment conducive to the growth of this sector in Europe and to provide comprehensive solutions to societal and environmental challenges.

Following the presentation, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2024) 137/3 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.

- 11. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS - LABOUR AND SKILLS SHORTAGES IN THE EU: AN ACTION PLAN**
(COM(2024) 131 TO /4; RCC(2024) 82)
- 12. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON IMPROVING AND ENFORCING WORKING CONDITIONS OF TRAINEES AND COMBATING REGULAR EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS DISGUISED AS TRAINEESHIPS**
(COM(2024) 132 AND /2; SWD(2024) 66; SWD(2024) 67; SWD(2024) 68; SEC(2024) 97; RCC(2024) 82)
- 13. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON A REINFORCED QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINEESHIPS**
(COM(2024) 133 TO /3; RCC(2024) 82)

Mr DOMBROVSKIS explained that the set of initiatives for consideration that day was aimed at addressing the challenge of ever greater shortages of labour and skills in Europe. It comprised an action plan to combat such shortages, as well as a proposal for a Directive and a proposal for a Council Recommendation aimed at improving trainees' working conditions.

Regarding the action plan, Mr DOMBROVSKIS pointed out that EU competitiveness was being weakened by the difficulty in finding skilled workers. Two thirds of the EU's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) had reported experiencing difficulties filling vacancies, in particular those requiring specialist expertise in the field of information and communication technologies.

This skills shortage was driven by a number of factors, including, in particular, demographic shifts, the emergence of new skills linked to technological progress and the green and digital transitions, and ambitions in terms of industrial development or defence and security. These challenges were exacerbated further by

unattractive working conditions in certain sectors and regions. Mr DOMBROVSKIS argued that the consequences of these shortages were substantial, undermining the European Union's competitiveness, resilience and sustainable growth potential. He also stressed their impact on the EU's capacity for innovation, its attractiveness for investors and its ability to finance its social welfare model.

In response to these challenges, the action plan was like a roadmap, setting out the existing initiatives and those that the Commission would undertake to address the skills shortage. It also encouraged Member States to take measures of their own at national level, while stressing the commitments made by social partners. Drawing on the momentum from the Val Duchesse Social Partners' Summit of 31 January 2024, the action plan emphasised the immediate measures, thereby laying the foundations of the Commission's next term of office.

The action plan focused on five key areas, aimed at (i) supporting the activation of under-represented people in the labour market, such as women, older people, young people and migrants, (ii) providing support for skills, training and education, (iii) improving working conditions in certain sectors and professions, *inter alia* by establishing minimum quality standards for traineeships, (iv) improving fair intra-EU mobility for workers and learners, in particular through support for the mobility of trainees and ensuring the mutual recognition of qualifications by Member States, and (v) attracting talent from outside the EU, through 'talent partnerships' and an EU Talent Pool.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS then highlighted the vital importance of traineeships in facilitating the entry of young people into the labour market and enhancing their employability, while noting the concerns relating to the variable quality of such work experience. He pointed out that certain traineeships suffered from a lack of opportunities for structured learning, provided unsatisfactory working conditions, were unpaid or did not provide welfare cover. He referred to a Eurobarometer survey carried out in 2023 which showed that only 55% of trainees received some form of pay.

In this context, he argued that the Quality Framework for Traineeships, introduced in 2014 by way of a Council Recommendation, had resulted in noticeable improvements for a great many trainees. However, he acknowledged that this framework could be improved further, in particular regarding its effective implementation and ensuring decent working conditions for trainees. Consequently, he noted that the framework would be significantly reinforced.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS pointed to the constraint imposed by the EU treaties, which did not allow the Commission to submit a legislative act outlawing unpaid traineeships, despite calls for such a measure from various stakeholders. The day's proposals would, however, ensure that trainees were treated in a way equivalent to that of regular employees, except where such differences were justified on objective grounds, such as specific tasks, lesser responsibilities or work intensity, or an emphasis on learning and training.

To conclude, he stressed that traineeships should not be used as a means to disguise regular employee positions, and that rigorous inspections and checks would be carried out at national level to this end.

Mr SCHINAS noted that the day's proposals represented the penultimate deliverable of the European Year of Skills, before the College adopted initiatives on higher education the following week. He pointed out that, despite significant progress, the EU was still suffering from a skills shortage. He emphasised the paradigm shift seen in the labour market, from a situation in which people were looking for work to one in which it was now companies looking for staff, owing to growing demand for skilled workers.

He stressed three key points, noting first of all that the EU was actively competing on a global basis to attract skilled workers, performing particularly well in this field. He underlined the vital importance of the orderly mobility of skilled workers towards the EU.

Second, he called for tangible measures to enhance skills, emphasising the need for continued cooperation with Member States and stakeholders, particularly in the sectors hardest hit by shortages.

Finally, Mr SCHINAS spoke of the considerable financial resources available to support skills development in the EU. He noted that the EU budget together with the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) contained a sizeable reserve of some EUR 65 billion for this purpose.

Mr SCHMIT, in turn, stressed the urgent need to improve the quality of traineeships, responding to calls for a more robust framework from the European Parliament and various stakeholders, such as youth organisations and participants attending the Conference on the Future of Europe. However, he noted that the EU Treaties limited the possibilities for outlawing unpaid traineeships.

In order to respond to the challenges identified despite these limitations, he highlighted the proposed two-pronged approach. First, the proposed new Directive, based on Article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), focused on workers' rights. The Directive aimed to identify situations in which trainees operated essentially as full-time employees without receiving adequate pay, and to prohibit unpaid work in such cases. Second, the proposal for a Council Recommendation, applicable to all traineeships regardless of their nature, clearly mentioned that traineeships must be paid. The Recommendation also emphasised the need to improve quality standards for traineeships and limit their duration. Member States would have to take this Recommendation into account when transposing the Directive into their national legislation.

Mr SCHMIT then acknowledged the significant challenge posed by labour and skills shortages in Europe, identified as an obstacle for around 7 out of 10 companies. He proposed several courses of action to address this complex issue.

With regard to increasing the participation of groups that were under-represented in the labour market, he highlighted the promotion and facilitation of upskilling and

reskilling for workers over the age of 50, in order to ensure that they had the required skills. He also addressed the situation of the 8 million young people who were currently neither employed nor in training. In this regard, he proposed to extend initiatives based on the Youth Guarantee to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

He also stressed the need to facilitate career transitions between sectors in order to enable workers to adapt to the changing demands of industry and to discover new opportunities. He saw it as vital to continue investing in skills development in all areas in order to maintain the competitiveness of the European workforce in the global market.

Mr SCHMIT also pointed out that working conditions were unattractive in certain sectors, such as hospitality, and that this lack of appeal contributed to the shortage of labour. Referring to the challenge of the ‘brain drain’, he also highlighted the narrowing of wage gaps as a potential measure to keep talented workers in Europe. Lastly, he stressed the importance of facilitating fair mobility within the EU to enable skilled workers to meet the needs of regions particularly hard hit by labour shortages.

In conclusion, Mr SCHMIT pointed out that, despite these measures, the European Union would still need to call on skilled workers from other regions of the world. He stressed the need to capitalise on the positive aspects of migration, and called for the creation of talent pools and the development of targeted partnerships with non-EU countries.

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

- the major challenges facing the EU in terms of the labour market and skills, and the need in this context to harness the potential of an underutilised workforce, especially women, young people and older skilled workers;

- the responses that could be provided by the demography toolbox, focusing on the four pillars of family, youth, older people and legal migration;
- the focus of citizens, in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, on outlawing unpaid traineeships;
- existing skills shortages in the EU institutions, in particular in the IT and cybersecurity sectors, and possible solutions, including opening up certain posts to non-EU nationals and modifying the formal qualifications needed for hiring.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2024) 131/4 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 proposal for a Directive in COM(2024) 132/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document, the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2024) 66, SWD(2024) 67, SWD(2024) 68 and SEC(2024) 97, the contents of which were noted;
- adopted the proposal for a Council Recommendation in COM(2024) 133/3 for transmission to the Council, and, for information, to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments.

**14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL ON PRE-ENLARGEMENT REFORMS AND POLICY REVIEWS
(COM(2024) 146 TO /3; RCC(2024) 85)**

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said that the Communication presented to the College for approval that day was the starting point for a process that the Commission would be proceeding with beyond the current term of office. With this Communication, the Commission was highlighting the benefits of previous enlargements and sending out a clear signal about the need for both sides - candidate countries and the EU - to prepare for future enlargement.

The Communication restated the basic principles of the EU's enlargement policy as formulated and fine-tuned over the years, in particular with the revised enlargement methodology of 2020. In accordance with these principles, enlargement was merit-based and founded on respect for the rule of law, democracy and the EU's other fundamental values.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ also underlined the need to keep enlargement constantly in mind when reflecting on future policies, budget planning and the design of future governance models. He referred to the new approach to enlargement proposed in the Communication, based on the gradual integration of candidate countries.

The Communication was intended to feed into discussions on the future of Europe, particularly in the Council and the European Council, and to lay the foundations for a forthcoming review of pre-enlargement policies. The review would start at the beginning of 2025, taking into account the political guidelines issued by the European Council and the new Commission, and the high-level expertise made available in Enrico Letta's report on the Single Market and in Mario Draghi's report on European competitiveness. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ felt that this exercise could not be separated from the other discussions on the future of Europe, the political priorities

of the new Commission and the preparation of the next Multilateral Financial Framework.

The Communication did not pre-empt how political reforms would be shaped in future since enlargement was not the only trigger making such reforms necessary. The aim was not to speculate on the cost of enlargement or to decide which instruments should be reinforced. Nor was this an attempt to revise the *acquis communautaire* downwards or suggest any alternative to the merit-based approach. Instead the objective was to start a discussion on the future enlargement of the EU and the gradual integration of candidate and potential candidate countries.

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

- the expectations of the various stakeholders regarding the Communication presented that day;
- the need, felt by some, to embark on an inclusive discussion involving all stakeholders on potential internal reforms in the EU, in particular as regards governance and budgetary structures, in order to adequately prepare future enlargements and prevent frustration among both Member States and candidate countries;
- the preference, expressed by others, for a cautious approach at this stage, since internal issues did not arouse significant interest among the electorate;
- a reminder of the major differences of opinion between Member States about potential reforms or Treaty amendments with an eye to enlargement;
- the importance of the EU rule of law toolbox and the political advisability of developing it subsequently so that it could be used effectively in future, irrespective of the financial assistance provided by the EU to Member States and candidate and potential candidate countries.

In reply to several questions raised during the debate, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ pointed out that the Communication mainly reflected the Commission's perspective, while encouraging the other EU institutions to look at the question of preparing for enlargement from their respective points of view. He also emphasised the usefulness of *passerelle* clauses, as a first step, to adapt the EU's policies with a view to enlargement while remaining open to any requests to amend the Treaties.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2024) 146/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council and, for information, to the national parliaments.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

PREPARATION OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (21 AND 22 MARCH 2024)

The PRESIDENT informed the College of the main topics that would be addressed at the upcoming meeting of the European Council on 21 and 22 March 2024 in Brussels.

First, the situation in Ukraine would be a central focus of the discussions, which would be attended by the Ukrainian Prime Minister, Mr Denys Shmyhal. In this connection, the PRESIDENT announced that the Commission would, on the same day, be paying the first instalment of EUR 4.5 billion in aid under the EU's new Ukraine Facility.

The EU leaders would also discuss the situation in the Middle East; a meeting was scheduled for the same day between the Commission and the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, to explore possible solutions to the crisis. The PRESIDENT referred in this context to the recent establishment of a sea corridor to ship aid to Gaza, and to the US plan to build a floating dock to provide a temporary alternative to access by road. However, while the sea corridor could

provide short-term relief, it did not replace the access by road needed to tackle the famine and humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Agriculture, defence and security, EU enlargement and migration were also on the agenda for the summit. On the subject of enlargement, the Commission would report on the progress towards accession made by Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and Moldova.

The PRESIDENT welcomed the progress made on migration, highlighted in the recent Commission Communication taking stock of achievements in this area over the last four years. Of particular importance were the adoption of common EU rules on migration thanks to the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and also the establishment of comprehensive cooperation partnerships with neighbouring countries such as Tunisia and Egypt. She also stressed the need to foster legal migration, pointing out that in the past year, the EU had received more than three times as many legal migrants as illegal migrants.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT referred to her recent visits to the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and welcomed the opening of an EU Office in Nuuk, which would strengthen bilateral relations with the region. It was vital to develop long-term relations with these territories and strengthen their ties to Europe.

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

- the observation that it was far better to use the recently reinforced existing State aid rules to full effect to support the agricultural sector, rather than seeking to amend them;
- the possible ways of sending the necessary humanitarian supplies quickly to Gaza from neighbouring countries, without additional restrictions imposed by Israel;

- the irreplaceable role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in managing humanitarian aid to Gaza.

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 10.26.