



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2024) 2499 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic –

Brussels, 11 September 2024

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2499th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 24 July 2024

(morning)

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PV(2024) 2499 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic –

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(C(2024) 5001)	29
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Single sitting: Wednesday 24 July 2024 (morning)

The sitting opened at 09:05 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
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President
Mr HAHN	Member
Mr SCHMIT	Member
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member
Mr BRETON	Member
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member
Mr REYNDERS	Member
Ms DALLI	Member
Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Mr LENARČIČ	Member
Ms VÁLEAN	Member
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member
Ms IVANOVA	Member
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member

Absent:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Mr BORRELL I FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr GENTILONI	Member

Ms FERREIRA	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member

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

Ms SOEWARTA	Head of Cabinet to Ms VESTAGER
Ms LOTSON	Member of Mr BORRELL's cabinet
Mr BALASSONE	Head of Cabinet to Mr GENTILONI
Ms TEEDUMÄE	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Mr VÁRHELYI
Mr LAHTI	Head of Cabinet to Ms URPILAINEN
Mr GRASSI	Head of Cabinet to Ms SIMSON

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT
Mr LADENBURGER	Deputy 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 PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet
Mr TAQUET-GRAZIANI	Acting 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) 2499/FINAL; SEC(2024) 2499/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) 2499)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Tuesday 23 July 2024.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2024) 2493; PV(2024) 2494; PV(2024) 2495; PV(2024) 2495, PART II)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2493rd, 2494th and 2495th meetings of 22 and 29 May and 12 June 2024, and held over approval of the minutes of its 2496th, 2497th and 2498th meetings of 19 and 26 June and 3 July 2024 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2024) 122)

The Commission took note of the outcome of the written exchange of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) for the week from 15 to 19 July 2024 (RCC(2024) 122).

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point:

- **EU position for the annual bilateral EU-UK, EU-Iceland and EU-Faroe Islands, trilateral EU-UK-Norway and multilateral consultations with coastal states on fishing opportunities and related provisions in the North Sea and North-East Atlantic for 2025**

Line set out in SI(2024) 307.

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 April II 2024 part-session**

Line set out in SP(2024) 433/2.

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point, for transmission to the Economic and Social Committee:

- **Follow-up to opinions of the Economic and Social Committee – Plenary session of April 2024**

Line set out in SC(2024) 22/2.

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 April 2024**

Line set out in SR(2024) 14/2.

The Commission took note of the following point:

- **Joint assessment of the implementation of the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the**

European Commission

Information set out in SP(2024) 424.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2024) 30)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2024) 30 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 17 July 2024.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2024) 189 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 1 and 21 July 2024.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2024) 190 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 1 and 21 July 2024.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2024) 191 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 1 and 21 July 2024 archived in Decide.

**6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2024) 192 AND /2)**

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 22 and 26 July 2024, and of the finalisation written procedure.

**6.5. COMMISSION DECISION GRANTING POWERS TO THE MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPETITION AND THE MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INTERNAL MARKET IN RELATION TO PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TO ADOPT CERTAIN DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN UNDER REGULATION (EU) 2022/2560 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN SUBSIDIES DISTORTING THE INTERNAL MARKET AND COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2023/1441 ON THE DETAILED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CONDUCT OF PROCEEDINGS BY THE COMMISSION PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2022/2560 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN SUBSIDIES DISTORTING THE INTERNAL MARKET;
(C(2024) 4632)**

The Commission decided to empower the Member of the Commission responsible for competition and the Member of the Commission responsible for the internal market to adopt, on behalf of the Commission and under its responsibility, and subject to the conditions laid down in Articles 3, 4 and 5 of this Decision, certain decisions relating to foreign subsidies distorting the

internal market as well as certain decisions concerning detailed arrangements for the conduct of proceedings by the Commission.

The Commission adopted the Decision in C(2024) 4632.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2024) 193 TO /3)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2024) 52 TO /3)

During the meeting, Mr HAHN presented a proposal for an administrative decision which was tabled directly to the College for approval. It was proposed to appoint Ms Sophia ERIKSSON WATERSCHOOT to the post of Deputy Director-General of DG Communication. Mr HAHN highlighted her great skills, outstanding career and recognised expertise, and congratulated her on her appointment.

7.1. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF A DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL AT GRADE AD15/16

(PERS(2024) 53 TO /3)

The Commission had before it the list of applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Deputy Director-General of DG Communication (PERS(2024) 53).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 14 March and 11 April 2024 (PERS(2024) 53/2 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 Sophia ERIKSSON WATERSCHOOT to the post.

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

**7.2. DG COMPETITION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14/15
(PERS(2024) 11 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 of the ‘State aid - General Scrutiny and Enforcement’ Directorate in DG Competition (PERS(2024) 11 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 23 May and 4 July 2024 (PERS(2024) 11/3 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 VESTAGER, it then decided to appoint Mr Koen VAN DE CASTEELE to the post.

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

7.3. DG ENVIRONMENT – CLOSURE OF THE SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR THE POST OF AN AD14/15 DIRECTOR AND TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS

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

- to close with immediate effect the selection procedure for the post of Director of the ‘Compliance, Governance and Support to Member States’ Directorate in DG Environment, without making an appointment;
- to transfer to this post, in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Ms Claudia FUSCO – currently Director of the ‘General Affairs, Knowledge and Resources’ Directorate in DG Environment with effect from 1 August 2024.

7.4. DG INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – SECONDMENT IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms URPILAINEN, the Commission decided to approve the secondment, in the interest of the service, under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, of Mr Mathieu BRIENS – currently Principal Adviser for Emerging Donors in DG International Partnerships – to the European External Action Service for a period of 4 years from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2028. For the duration of his secondment, all costs would be covered by the European External Action Service.

This decision would take effect on 1 September 2024.

7.5. SECRETARIAT GENERAL – SECONDMENT IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE OF AN AD15 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to approve the secondment, in the interest of the service, under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, of Mr Martin SELMAYR – currently *Hors Classe* Adviser in the Secretariat-General and seconded to the

University of Vienna until 31 August 2024 – to the European External Action Service, as Head of the European Commission Delegation to the Holy See, Order of Malta and United Nations organisations in Rome, for a period of 4 years from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2028. For the duration of his secondment, all costs would be covered by the European External Action Service.

This decision would take effect on 1 September 2024, subject to receiving the agreement of the host country.

7.6. *DG ENERGY – EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE AD15 DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR THE COOPERATION OF ENERGY REGULATORS (ACER)*

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

- to propose to the Administrative Board of the European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) to extend the term of office of Mr Christian ZINGLERSEN as Director of ACER, at grade AD15, for a period of 5 years – with effect from 1 January 2025 – in accordance with Article 23(4) of Regulation (EU) No 942/2019;
- to ask Ms SIMSON, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to ACER's Administrative Board.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.7. *EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND SECONDMENT IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS*

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to amend the organisation chart of the European Anti-Fraud Office. The amendments consisted in approving:

- the creation of a temporary post of Principal Advisor, reporting directly to the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office; this post would be abolished upon departure of the jobholder;
- the exercise by the College of the power of the appointing authority in this particular case; the College therefore approved:
 - the transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, of Ms Joanna KRZEMINSKA-VAMVAKA – currently Director of the ‘Expenditure - Operations and Investigations’ Directorate in the European Anti-Fraud Office – to this newly created post;
 - the secondment, in the interest of the service, under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, of Ms Joanna KRZEMINSKA-VAMVAKA to the European External Action Service for a period of 4 years from 16 September 2024 to 15 September 2028, which could be extended. For the duration of her secondment, all costs would be covered by the European External Action Service.

These decisions would take effect on 16 September 2024.

7.8. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – AGREEMENT WITH A VIEW TO A TRANSFER IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE TO FILL THE POST OF DEPUTY HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to approve the transfer, in the interest of the service, of

Mr Michele CERVONE d'URSO to fill the post of Deputy Head of the European Union Delegation in Geneva.

On this basis, the final decision on the transfer would be taken by the competent authority of the European External Action Service.

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

**7.9. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14/15
(PERS(2024) 15 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), (1)(b) and (2) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director/Head of the Commission Representation in Warsaw, Poland (PERS(2024) 15 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 5 June and 4 July 2024 (PERS(2024) 15/3 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 Ms Katarzyna SMYK to the post.

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

7.10. DG MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES – EXTENSION OF THE SECONDMENT IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE, UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS, OF AN AD16 OFFICIAL

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to approve the extension of the secondment in the interest of the service, under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, of

Mr João AGUIAR MACHADO to the European External Action Service for an additional period of 1 year from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025.

For the duration of his secondment, all costs would be covered by the European External Action Service.

This decision would take effect on 1 September 2024.

7.11. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to amend the organisation chart of the Secretariat-General. The amendments consisted in approving:

- the creation of a temporary post of Principal Adviser for Synergies and Efficiencies, reporting to the Deputy Secretary-General – Chief Operating Officer; this post would be abolished upon departure of the jobholder;
- the transfer to this newly created post in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, of Ms Valérie DREZET-HUMEZ, currently Head of the European Commission Representation in Paris;
- the abolition of the post of Principal Adviser for the coordination of the European Semester in the Secretariat-General.

These decisions would take effect on 1 September 2024.

7.12. 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 extend the appointment of Mr Mario DRAGHI as a special Adviser reporting directly to the PRESIDENT and administratively attached to IDEA – Inspire, Debate, Engage and Accelerate Action. The extension of his contract as an unpaid special Adviser would run from 1 August to 30 September 2024, with a maximum of 40 working days, all of which could be mission days;
- to continue to make available to Mr DRAGHI a core team that would support him in his work during his term of office and, where appropriate, other experts as set out in Commission Decision PV(2023) 2468;
- that Mr DRAGHI and his core team would continue to benefit from offices within the premises 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.

7.13. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF A HEAD OF A COMMISSION REPRESENTATION

The Commission had before it applications for the post of Head of the European Commission Representation in Brussels, Belgium. It decided to appoint Mr Thomas de BÉTHUNE to the post.

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

7.14. PROPOSAL FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION FOR A COUNCIL DECISION ON THE NON-REPLACEMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION (COM(2024) 375)

The Commission took note of the proposal from the PRESIDENT for a Council Decision on the non-replacement of Members of the Commission, drawn up in accordance with Article 246(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and distributed as COM(2024) 375.

**7.15. DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION AMENDING
DECISION P(2019) 1 OF 1 DECEMBER 2019 ON THE
ORGANISATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEMBERS OF
THE COMMISSION
(P(2024) 4)**

The Commission was asked to take note of the PRESIDENT's decision amending Decision P(2019) 1 of 1 December 2019 on the organisation of responsibilities of the Members of the Commission, distributed as P(2024) 4.

**8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF
THE REGIONS – 2024 RULE OF LAW REPORT – THE RULE OF LAW
SITUATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**(COM(2024) 800 TO /3; SWD(2024) 801 AND /2; SWD(2024) 802 TO /3;
SWD(2024) 803 AND /2; SWD(2024) 804 AND /2; SWD(2024) 805 AND /2;
SWD(2024) 806 AND /2; SWD(2024) 807 AND /2; SWD(2024) 808 TO /3;
SWD(2024) 809 TO /3; SWD(2024) 810 AND /2; SWD(2024) 811 TO /3;
SWD(2024) 812 TO /3; SWD(2024) 813 AND /2; SWD(2024) 814 AND /2;
SWD(2024) 815 AND /2; SWD(2024) 816 AND /2; SWD(2024) 817 TO /3;
SWD(2024) 818 TO /3; SWD(2024) 819 AND /2; SWD(2024) 820 AND /2;
SWD(2024) 821 AND /2; SWD(2024) 822 AND /2; SWD(2024) 823 AND /2;
SWD(2024) 824 AND /2; SWD(2024) 825 TO /3; SWD(2024) 826 AND /2;**

**SWD(2024) 827 AND /2; SWD(2024) 828; SWD(2024) 829; SWD(2024) 830;
SWD(2024) 831; RCC(2024) 123)**

The PRESIDENT began by stressing the magnitude of the work carried out on this edition of the Rule of Law Report, and warmly thanked the departments and cabinets that had contributed to its preparation. She explained that the report provided a detailed analysis of the state of democracy in the EU, based on precise and documented facts and figures. She also noted how the perception of this instrument had improved since its introduction five years earlier. While it had initially been received with a certain amount of reservation, it was now considered to be a reliable and respected process that served as a reference for supporting reform efforts in the Member States. The recommendations made in the report were thus taken on board as sound advice for strengthening democracy, which was testament to the quality of a now key instrument.

Ms JOUROVÁ considered that the process of preparing the Rule of Law Report had been a Commission success story. She highlighted in particular its truly collaborative nature, which had brought together many departments and cabinets within the Commission. Moreover, the report had benefited from the input of a wide variety of stakeholders – over 900 – in each Member State and at EU level, which further enhanced its credibility. The publicly accessible methodology remained largely the same each year and was applied in the same way to each Member State to ensure equal treatment.

She underlined the collaborative nature of the Member State consultation exercise and the significant contribution that the Member States had made to the report's preparation. Over the previous five years, the country reports had provided the basis for a structured dialogue with the Member States and national parliaments. This dialogue – based on concrete facts – had helped to establish a climate of mutual trust for resolving problems upstream rather than resorting to infringement procedures and penalties further down the line.

This year, the exercise had been expanded to include the four most advanced EU candidate countries: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Ms JOUROVÁ explained that this should help those countries focus their reform efforts and allow the EU Member States to assess the situation using an instrument that they knew well. The report complemented the enlargement process and, on the whole, it had been well received by both the countries concerned and the Member States.

As regards the report's main trends, the situation varied from one Member State to another. Ms JOUROVÁ welcomed the general progress noted concerning the first pillar on national justice systems. She highlighted two success stories: the closure of the Article 7 procedure in Poland and the agreement reached on the Council for the Judiciary in Spain. She also mentioned the progress in the fight against corruption, in particular thanks to digital tools used to monitor public procurement. The situation regarding the third pillar on media freedom and media pluralism was more static, however. This was due, in part, to the pending entry into force of EU legislation on media freedom, scheduled for August 2025. Lastly, as regards the pillar on checks and balances, she expressed concerns regarding the shrinking space for civil society in Europe and underlined the importance of including this aspect in the report.

She concluded by thanking the PRESIDENT for emphasising the importance of democracy in her recent speech at the European Parliament, in which she had provided a concrete vision for the years to come. Ms JOUROVÁ also mentioned that the next Commission would have to examine the impact of the rule of law on the economy and the single market.

Mr REYNDERS noted that the Rule of Law Report was now in its fifth edition and was the current Commission's final report. He referred to the positive evolution of the report during this mandate: it had become the key rule-of-law instrument in the Commission's toolbox. He also pointed out that, in contrast to the first edition,

where the report's chapters had mainly been descriptive, for the third time now the Commission had made recommendations to the Member States and, for the second time, it was assessing their follow-up. He welcomed the continued improvement in this respect: in 2023, 65% of the recommendations made in 2022 had been followed up, whereas in 2024, this figure had increased to 68% for the 2023 recommendations.

He also welcomed the very inclusive approach adopted by the Commission, both during the preparation of the report and during the discussion of the results with the Member States. Last autumn, when the Council had evaluated the rule-of-law dialogue, the Member States had clearly indicated that the Commission's report had served as the basis for that dialogue.

Mr REYNDERS then drew attention to the new aspect introduced this year of including four EU enlargement countries in the report. Consequently, the report was now composed of 31 chapters by country and served as a bridge towards EU enlargement. It would help the candidate countries implement lasting rule-of-law reforms, as they would be placed on an equal footing with the Member States. At the General Affairs Council in September, those four countries would for the first time have a discussion with the 27 Member States based on the report.

The report had also become a driver of major and sometimes difficult reforms on the ground. For instance, during this mandate, fruitful discussions had been held with Luxembourg, Italy and Spain to strengthen their national councils for the judiciary, which were central to the administration of justice. This marked significant progress since the first cycle of this exercise in 2019.

As regards the way forward, Mr REYNDERS referred to the political guidelines set out for the new Commission by the PRESIDENT, which would add a single market dimension to the report and increase the number of candidate countries included

therein. A closer link would also be established between the report's rule-of-law recommendations and the financial support provided to Member States.

Mr REYNDERS then went on to review the main conclusions of this year's report, and more specifically the first pillar on justice systems and the fourth pillar on checks and balances. As regards the first pillar, the report examined developments linked to the independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems. There were two trends in this area.

The first concerned the major reforms initiated by the Member States establishing key safeguards for judicial independence, namely the strengthening of the independence of the councils for the judiciary and the reforms of the judicial appointment systems. For instance, in Spain, following a structured dialogue with the Commission as facilitator, an agreement had been reached to renew the Council for the Judiciary and to initiate – immediately after the renewal – a process to adapt the appointment of its judge-members. Meanwhile, in Greece and Malta, steps had been taken to ensure that the judiciary was involved in high-level judicial appointments, in line with the recommendations of previous rule of law reports. At the same time, however, the report also noted that judicial independence remained a cause for concern in certain Member States.

The second trend was the long-term resilience of justice systems and the attractiveness of judicial professions. The Commission had made several recommendations concerning justice system resources. The Member States had followed up these recommendations and had continued to invest in their justice systems, in particular by improving judges' pay, although, in some cases, this remained a cause for concern. These results showed the tangible impact of the report.

Mr REYNDERS also highlighted three trends concerning the pillar on checks and balances.

Firstly, he pointed out that several Member States had started to improve the quality of the legislative process and to ensure the appropriate involvement of the various civil society stakeholders. He stressed the importance of this trend, including from a single market perspective. Nevertheless, in several Member States challenges remained regarding the lack of formal frameworks for consulting stakeholders or the insufficient involvement of stakeholders in practice. The Commission therefore continued to make a number of recommendations in this regard.

The second trend in this area was the strengthening in some Member States of the status and resources of national human rights institutions, ombudsmen and other independent authorities. Mr REYNDERS pointed out, however, that four Member States had still not set up an accredited national human rights institution, which was why the Commission made several recommendations on this subject.

The third and final trend concerned civil society. Mr REYNDERS expressed his concern that the role of civil society was sometimes called into question, whether through overly intrusive regulation, verbal attacks or a lack of support. Nevertheless, the report showed that there was an enabling environment and timely support for civil society in a majority of Member States, often boosted by renewed efforts to improve the situation.

Ms JOHANSSON then expressed her satisfaction with the quality of the process that had led to this report. Although there was still room for improvement, 11 of the 20 least corrupt countries in the world were EU Member States. Worryingly, however, three Member States scored below 50 out of 100 in terms of corruption.

She pointed out that, although some Member States seemed to be regressing, overall the Rule of Law Report revealed some progress in the fight against corruption, testament, in her view, to the success of the methodology used. She added that preventive measures were generally simpler to implement than repressive measures,

which often required additional resources for the police or the judiciary and which were sometimes undermined by a lack of political will to target high-level officials.

In addition to the report, Ms JOHANSSON also referred to the new Directive on combating corruption proposed by the Commission the previous year. She pointed to the cautious approach taken by the Member States, who wanted to restrict the scope of the Directive, in contrast to the more ambitious position of the European Parliament. She specifically addressed the issue of influence trafficking, in respect of which some Member States preferred to limit legislation to traditional bribes, and the question of limitation periods, which she identified as a key issue that could affect the conduct of complex and prolonged investigations.

Ms JOHANSSON concluded by saying that, although Member States were competent to implement measures that increased transparency, these efforts had to be supported by good practices in terms of media freedom and pluralism. Without a free press to bring this type of information to the attention of the public, the steps taken would not contribute fully to increasing transparency.

Mr BRETON then addressed the issue of media concentration, which could take the form of the involvement of large investors whose main activities had little to do with the media sector, or government influence over certain public media. He added that small media often found it difficult to stay in business, with some having to join forces to survive. He stressed that the media landscape remained crucial for the preservation of democracy and the rule of law, and he felt that greater attention would need to be paid to it in the coming years.

He noted that the rule of law reports of the last five years showed progress on media freedom, although this progress remained modest compared to other aspects covered by the report. He also argued that the governance of public service media still needed to improve in many countries. He noted that some Member States justified their limited progress in the field of media by arguing that they were waiting for the

implementation of the European Media Freedom Regulation scheduled for next year, despite the Commission's encouragement to go ahead regardless.

He considered that, although this Regulation did not address all the problems, its adoption was nevertheless a major step forward, particularly in protecting freedom of the press and editorial independence in the face of capitalist interference. Indeed, it marked the transition from an approach based solely on fundamental but non-binding European instruments to legally binding legislation. Mr BRETON stressed that the efforts of the last five years, notably through the rule of law reports, were consistent with and complementary to this Regulation, enabling the full use of all EU instruments, whether binding or not.

He then reported on pressures and persistent and coordinated hybrid attacks, notably in the form of disinformation. This represented a daily challenge that required constant vigilance, both in Europe and in the rest of the world, especially during elections. He also highlighted the risks posed by online platforms, including those owned by wealthy individuals, who could play a significant role in electoral processes. He hoped that the implementation of binding EU legislative instruments, including the AI Act and the Digital Services Act (DSA), would facilitate a structured dialogue with these actors, and welcomed the EU's pioneering role in creating such tools.

Lastly, Mr BRETON welcomed the holistic approach set out by the PRESIDENT in her speech to the European Parliament, which aimed to strengthen the Union's preventive capacities and the detection of foreign manipulation and interference. In his view, this approach was crucial to protect the foundations of democracy and the rule of law from these continuous challenges.

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

- the degree of detail of the analysis underpinning the report and the potential complexity for Member States of following the recommendations made;
- a question concerning the Commission's assessment, which appeared in some instances to be based more on political intentions than on actual legislative changes, notably as regards Poland.

In response to the points raised, Ms JOUROVÁ explained that a certain level of detail was needed to be able to provide an objective and balanced view of the situation in each country. She added, however, that efforts were continuously made to streamline and simplify the process.

Regarding Poland, she highlighted the change in the situation compared to the previous year, including the recognition by the current government of the structural problems within the judicial system, the commitment to fully implement the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights, and the action plan to address the main legislative concerns.

Mr REYNDERS pointed out that the proceedings against Poland, based on Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union, had been formally closed. Indeed, the Commission had established that, following the explicit recognition by the Polish authorities of the primacy of EU law and the establishment of the action plan to restore the rule of law, there was no longer a serious risk of a breach of the rule of law. He added that the Commission would continue to monitor the implementation of this action plan closely.

The PRESIDENT concluded the discussion by highlighting the positive rule-of-law developments in many Member States. She congratulated all the Members of the College involved in drawing up this report on the progress achieved.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2024) 800/3 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, together with the staff working documents distributed as SWD(2024) 801/2, SWD(2024) 802/3, SWD(2024) 803/2, SWD(2024) 804/2, SWD(2024) 805/2, SWD(2024) 806/2, SWD(2024) 807/2, SWD(2024) 808/3, SWD(2024) 809/3, SWD(2024) 810/2, SWD(2024) 811/3, SWD(2024) 812/3, SWD(2024) 813/2, SWD(2024) 814/2, SWD(2024) 815/2, SWD(2024) 816/2, SWD(2024) 817/3, SWD(2024) 818/3, SWD(2024) 819/2, SWD(2024) 820/2, SWD(2024) 821/2, SWD(2024) 822/2, SWD(2024) 823/2, SWD(2024) 824/2, SWD(2024) 825/3, SWD(2024) 826/2, SWD(2024) 827/2, SWD(2024) 828, SWD(2024) 829, SWD(2024) 830 and SWD(2024) 831, the contents of which were noted.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

9.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION, PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'STOP CRUELTY, STOP SLAUGHTER'

(C(2024) 5280)

9.2. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION, PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'STOP FAKE FOOD: ORIGIN ON LABEL'

(C(2024) 5001)

Ms JOUROVÁ presented to the College the requests to register two European Citizens' Initiatives entitled 'Stop Cruelty, Stop Slaughter' and '*Stop cibo falso: origine in etichetta*' ('Stop Fake Food: Origin on Label').

She explained that the organisers of the 'Stop Cruelty, Stop Slaughter' initiative called for the Commission to introduce incentives for producing plant proteins, including plant-based milk and egg substitutes, as well as cultivated meat. They also asked that the number of farm animals be reduced and that all animal farms be progressively closed down.

The organisers of the 'Stop Fake Food: Origin on Label' initiative asked the Commission to introduce measures to ensure that European consumers had access to transparent information about the food they bought and that their expectations regarding food quality and sustainability were met. The initiative also called for clear and explicit origin labelling of all products and for adherence to environmental, health and labour standards in the internal market.

Ms JOUROVÁ pointed out that no part of the two Citizens' Initiatives manifestly fell outside the scope of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for an EU legal act for the purpose of implementing the Treaties. As the initiatives could therefore be considered admissible, she proposed to register them.

She concluded by pointing out that the organisers would now have to start collecting the required number of signatures, i.e. at least one million signatures in seven Member States. The Commission would need to examine the substance of the initiatives only after those signatures had been collected.

Following these presentations, the Commission confirmed that the Citizens' Initiatives entitled 'Stop Cruelty, Stop Slaughter' and '*Stop cibo falso: origine in etichetta*' fulfilled the conditions for registration. It therefore decided, in

accordance with C(2024) 5280 and C(2024) 5001, to inform the groups of organisers, and authorised Ms JOUROVÁ to sign the replies on behalf of the College, in the authentic languages, to send them to the groups of organisers of the initiatives, and to publish them, for information, in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 9.56.