



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2025) 2512 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 26 February 2025

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2512th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 29 January 2025

(morning)

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PV(2025) 2512 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 29 January 2025 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.03 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President
Ms RIBERA	Executive Vice-President
Ms VIRKKUNEN	Executive Vice-President
Mr SÉJOURNÉ	Executive Vice-President
Ms KALLAS	High Representative / Vice-President
Ms MÎNZATU	Executive Vice-President
Mr FITTO	Executive Vice-President
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Member
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Member
Ms ŠUICA	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member
Mr KUBILIUS	Member
Ms KOS	Member
Mr SÍKELA	Member
Ms KADIS	Member
Ms ALBUQUERQUE	Member
Ms LAHBIB	Member
Mr BRUNNER	Member
Ms ROSWALL	Member
Mr SERAFIN	Member
Mr JØRGENSEN	Member
Ms ZAHARIEVA	Member
Mr McGRATH	Member
Mr TZITZIKOSTAS	Member
Mr HANSEN	Member

Absent:

Mr MICALLEF Member

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	
Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	Items 8 and 9 (in part)
Mr ADAM	Deputy Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms SEMLALI	Policy Assistant in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr TAQUET-GRAZIANI	Acting 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(2025) 2512/FINAL; SEC(2025) 2512/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(2025) 2512)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 27 January 2025.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2510th and 2511th meetings of 17 December 2024 and 15 January 2025 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2025) 155)

The Commission took note of the outcome of the written exchange of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) for the week from 20 to 23 January 2025 (RCC(2025) 155).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Amendment of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA (Directive) – ZARZALEJOS & YAR (ex- ZARZALEJOS & RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS report) –**

2023/0250 (COD)

Line set out in SI(2025) 4.

- **Recommendation for a Council Recommendation endorsing the national medium-term fiscal-structural plan of France – COM(2024) 716 / Recommendation for a Council Recommendation with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive deficit in France – COM(2024) 952**

Line set out in SI(2025) 9.

- **Reply to Iceland on a possible temporary suspension of the exemption from the visa requirement for nationals of Venezuela**

Line set out in SI(2025) 8.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2025) 203)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2025) 203 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 22 January 2025.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2025) 8 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 13 and 26 January 2025.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2025) 9 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 13 and 26 January 2025.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2025) 10 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 13 and 26 January 2025 archived in Decide.

6.4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED

(SEC(2025) 11 TO /3)

The Commission took note of the written procedures specifically identified for which the time limit expired between 27 and 31 January 2025.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2025) 12/3)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2025) 4/3)

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

It was proposed to appoint Ms Elisabetta BELLONI as Chief Diplomatic Adviser, under the authority of the PRESIDENT while being attached administratively to IDEA ('Inspire, Debate, Engage and Accelerate Action'). Mr SERAFIN highlighted Ms BELLONI's rich professional career, as well as her skills and merits in relation to the post to be filled.

**7.1. IDEA – INSPIRE, DEBATE, ENGAGE AND ACCELERATE ACTION –
APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL ADVISER
(PERS(2025) 6 TO /3)**

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

- to approve the appointment of Ms Elisabetta BELLONI as Special Adviser in the role of Chief Diplomatic Adviser, reporting directly to the PRESIDENT while being administratively attached to IDEA ‘Inspire, Debate, Engage and Accelerate Action’. Her contract as Special Adviser would be remunerated and would take effect on the date of closure of the notification to the Budgetary Authority for an initial period of two years, renewable, and a maximum of 220 working days which could all be mission days. For the duration of the procedure laid down in Article 123(2) of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants, an unpaid contract could be concluded;
- that Ms Elisabetta BELLONI would be supported in her work, for the duration of her term of office, by a team in IDEA or seconded to her. The team would work in close coordination with the Secretariat-General and with the support of all the departments concerned;
- to instruct the Director-General of DG Budget to immediately inform the Budgetary Authority of the intention to conclude this Special Adviser contract;
- 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 COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR AT
GRADE AD14/15
(PERS(2025) 5 TO /3)**

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 ‘Strategy and Corporate Communication’ Directorate in DG Communication (PERS(2025) 5).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 22 August and 19 September 2024 (PERS(2025) 5/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants’ qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Stefan DE KEERSMAECKER 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
FIVE POSTS OF MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE
AUTHORITY FOR ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTERING
THE FINANCING OF TERRORISM
(PERS(2025) 6 TO /3)**

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

- to approve the list of candidates, set out in point 2 of PERS(2025) 4/2, for five posts of Members of the Executive Board of the Authority for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLA), and to consider this list as the Commission proposal;

- to ask Ms ALBUQUERQUE, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to the European Parliament and to AMLA's General Board;

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.4. DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – ADOPTION OF A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AT GRADE AD14, OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR RAILWAYS
(PERS(2025) 7 TO /3)**

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

- to approve the list of candidates, set out in point 3 of PERS(2025) 4/2, for the post of Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA), and to consider this list as the Commission proposal;
- to ask Mr TZITZIKOSTAS, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to ERA's Management Board.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.5. DG AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – AUTHORISATION FOR THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD15/16, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD15, OF A DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL POST
(PERS(2025) 8)**

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr HANSEN, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication, at grade AD15/16, and external

publication, at grade AD15, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2025) 8 for the post of Deputy Director-General in charge of Directorates F, H and I in DG Agriculture and Rural Development, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.6. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT TO POSTS OF HEAD OF REPRESENTATION AND HEAD OF REGIONAL REPRESENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The Commission took note of the decisions of the Appointing Authority to appoint Mr Peter POWER to the post of Head of the European Commission Representation in Dublin, Ireland, Mr Patrick LOBIS to the post of Head of the European Commission Representation in Vienna, Austria, Mr Claudio CASINI to the post of Head of the European Commission Representation in Rome, Italy, and Ms Joana SDRINZA to the post of Head of the European Commission Regional Representation in Wroclaw, Poland.

These decisions would take effect on a date to be determined.

**8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – A COMPETITIVENESS COMPASS FOR THE EU
(COM(2025) 30 TO /3; RCC(2025) 3)**

The PRESIDENT introduced the Communication on the Competitiveness Compass for the EU by recalling that, just a few weeks after the previous Commission had taken office, the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared COVID-19 a

global pandemic. Just as the world was beginning to emerge from the health crisis, Russia's invasion of Ukraine had brought war to the EU's doorstep and triggered a serious energy crisis.

The PRESIDENT praised the effectiveness of the European response to these dramatic events, although she noted, with hindsight, that these crises had masked a worrying trend in the EU, namely that it lagged behind its global competitors in terms of productivity growth. This gap was a growing cause for concern and some Member States that were particularly affected were now struggling. Conversely, other countries that had implemented significant reforms in the past were performing better. Given this situation, the PRESIDENT stressed the urgent need to focus the EU's efforts on boosting its competitiveness.

In that connection, she highlighted the EU's major assets, particularly its strong industrial and manufacturing base and its highly skilled workforce. Moreover, the EU was characterised by one of the lowest levels of inequality in the world and had a broad and prosperous middle class, which was essential for democratic stability. The EU was also the world's second-largest economy and biggest trading bloc. However, the PRESIDENT acknowledged that certain challenges remained. In particular, the European economic model had long relied on affordable Chinese labour and cheap Russian energy. Meanwhile, over the last decade, defence investment had increasingly been outsourced.

In the light of these observations, she reminded the meeting that she had tasked Mr Mario Draghi with drawing up a report on European competitiveness at the end of the Commission's previous term of office. Drawing on his expertise, Mr Draghi had put forward an assessment and solutions that had garnered broad support from institutional stakeholders, including the EU Heads of State or Government as well as the European Parliament. The European Competitiveness Compass now being presented was the first major initiative to come from the new Commission and translated the Draghi Report into concrete measures, setting out the strategic framework that would guide the Commission's intervention over the next five years.

The Compass comprised three pillars, namely (i) closing the innovation gap, (ii) adopting a joint roadmap for decarbonisation and competitiveness, and (iii) reducing excessive dependencies and increasing security. It also identified five horizontal enablers on which action was needed to support competitiveness across all sectors: (i) simplifying the regulatory environment, (ii) removing single market barriers, (iii) stepping up funding and creating a Savings and Investments Union, (iv) developing skills and promoting high-quality jobs, and (v) improving policy coordination at EU and national level.

As regards the first pillar focusing on closing the innovation gap, the PRESIDENT highlighted assessments that pointed to the increasingly static nature of Europe's industrial structure. For example, 20 years previously, the economies of both Europe and the United States had been heavily dependent on the automotive sector. Today, the automotive industry remained the dominant force in the EU, while the technology sector had gained the upper hand in the United States. Given this context, she stressed how important digital technologies were to ensure Europe's economy could thrive.

The EU stood out thanks to the excellence of its researchers and innovators. For example, Europe's share of global patent applications was comparable to that of the United States and China. However, this inventiveness and creativity were difficult to translate into something marketable, with only a third of innovations being brought to market successfully. With regard to the adoption of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the PRESIDENT noted that only one in seven European companies used AI in their operations.

To close this gap, the PRESIDENT pointed to a number of promising initiatives referred to in the Communication, such as the European AI Strategy, an Advanced Materials Act, and efforts to ensure that Europe maintained its position in the field of quantum computing. The Compass was a strategic action plan that set out how the EU could support these sectors in order to increase their market competitiveness while also contributing to shared objectives, particularly Europe's aim to become

climate neutral by 2050.

Moreover, one of the main barriers to business development in the EU was the fact that there were still 27 separate legal regimes, limiting the benefits of the European single market. In order to overcome the challenges associated with full harmonisation of these systems, the Commission was proposing to introduce a ‘28th regime’, which would be a simplified and voluntary regulatory framework, accessible to all companies wishing to take part. While acknowledging the scale of this endeavour, the PRESIDENT expressed her optimism regarding the initiative’s potential to encourage innovative companies to expand across Europe.

She then turned to the issue of access to capital, which was a major obstacle for European businesses. Although the single currency had existed for 25 years, the capital market was still highly fragmented, with investment conditions varying significantly from one Member State to another. Currently, the EU was home to only 5% of the world’s venture capital, compared with 52% for the US and 40% for China. However, the issue was not a lack of capital; in 2023, the amount put into savings totalled EUR 1 400 billion in Europe, compared with EUR 800 billion in the United States. Despite this propensity to save more, Europeans invested less and often preferred to send some of their savings across the Atlantic. According to the European Central Bank (ECB), every year Europeans invested EUR 300 billion of their savings abroad rather than in European markets.

The PRESIDENT therefore stressed the need to develop a joined-up and dynamic capital market by looking to create a genuine Savings and Investments Union. She noted that the EU had been working to establish a Capital Markets Union for several years now, but that this could only be achieved if vested interests were set aside. She stressed that the Commission had a crucial role to play in promoting this project and felt that European leaders were now fully aware of the urgency of the situation. She also referred to the warning issued by Mr Draghi, whereby Europe’s economy risked a ‘slow agony’ unless tangible progress was made in this area.

As regards the second pillar of the Compass, which focused on the joint roadmap for decarbonisation and competitiveness, the PRESIDENT reiterated the EU's unwavering commitment to the European Green Deal and its goals of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and reducing emissions by 55% by 2040. She acknowledged, however, that completing the transition towards a clean and digital economy was a task of unprecedented complexity. While the end goal had to be kept firmly in mind, a pragmatic approach needed be taken to achieve this transformation. In this connection, the first Strategic Dialogue with the automotive industry would take place the following day. The future depended on the development of software-powered electric vehicles, and this dialogue would play a determining role in setting the paths to be taken to make these ambitions a reality. This consultation model would then be extended to other sectors, such as the metal and chemical industries, in order to ensure a harmonious and effective transition across the whole economy.

The PRESIDENT also highlighted the world-leading role that the EU had been playing in several clean-technology industrial sectors, including electrolyzers, wind energy and low-carbon fuels. She noted that certain recently-announced US policies could lead to new investment opportunities for market players seeking more favourable environments. The EU was looking to maintain its leading position by providing encouragement to pioneering companies in sectors that were critical for the green transition, including through State aid measures.

In parallel, the PRESIDENT stressed the importance of providing targeted support to traditional sectors, such as the automotive industry and energy-intensive industries, to help them make an effective transition to more sustainable practices. She pointed out that, even before the war in Ukraine, the EU was facing structurally high energy prices, which were partly offset by other benefits. At that time, the EU was highly dependent on Russian gas, which accounted for around 45% of its supply. Russia's threat to cut off the supply led to a spike in energy prices. Thanks to sustained efforts, prices had fallen back to their pre-war levels, but they were still

too high.

The PRESIDENT warned that certain industries were likely to leave Europe because of the combination of a complex business environment and high energy costs. She nevertheless emphasised the progress made in clean technologies and low-carbon solutions, which made these technologies more affordable, thereby not only benefitting the environment but also strengthening local economies and EU energy security.

With regard to the third pillar of the Compass, which was geared towards strengthening resilience and economic security, she welcomed the EU's remarkable achievements in trade policy, where it had signed agreements with over 70 countries worldwide. In the current geopolitical climate, many regions were now turning to the EU, because they considered it to be a reliable partner that respected the rules. This dynamic was illustrated by recent milestones, such as the conclusion of the agreements with Mercosur on 6 December 2024 and Switzerland on 20 December 2024, plus the significant progress made in negotiations with Mexico.

More and more countries were thus recognising the transparency and fairness of the EU's proposals. By way of example, the PRESIDENT referred to the management of critical raw materials, where the EU was ensuring that value chains and processing remained local, in contrast to the strategies employed by certain competitors who sought to bring them under their own control. Even China was showing a growing interest in the EU model and recognised the benefits of local supply chains. She announced that, moving forward, the agricultural sector would no longer be included in trade agreements, in order to reduce certain obstacles that hampered the conclusion of such agreements, and to avoid slowing down the progress made in other areas.

On simplification, she highlighted the significant impact of red tape on companies, in particular concerning delays in obtaining permits. The constant feedback from industry on this issue underlined the urgent need to cut red tape. The PRESIDENT

acknowledged that the EU's credibility was at stake and underlined how important it was to restore the confidence of economic stakeholders. The first package of 'omnibus' measures, intended to streamline these procedures, would therefore be presented in the coming weeks, with a particular focus on sustainable finance and corporate sustainability due diligence. Although the aims remained unchanged, the methods for achieving them had to be made simpler and more efficient. She added that each member of the Commission should be able to identify areas for improvement and simplification within their respective portfolios.

Lastly, the PRESIDENT underlined the vital importance of skills development for ensuring the EU's competitiveness. She drew attention to the growing challenge posed by demographic decline, which raised particular difficulties when it came to skills. Although she welcomed the exceptionally high employment rate of 75% and the historically low unemployment rate of 6%, she warned that a significant skilled-labour shortage was hidden behind these positive figures. In this connection, she welcomed the promising creation of a Union of Skills, which should fully unlock the potential of young people and attract more women into the labour market. She also pointed out that, moving beyond the polarising debates on illegal migration, it was essential to recognise the significant economic contribution made by the EU's 3.7 million legal migrants, which was often underestimated but nevertheless crucial.

The PRESIDENT concluded her presentation by noting that the EU now had a structured plan, a well-defined road map and a strong political will. It was important to make a convincing case when communicating these issues, because the perception of economic stakeholders was key. It was vital to demonstrate that the EU had understood the challenges and would implement concrete solutions, using all available tools. Such a transparent and proactive approach was essential for boosting confidence and for encouraging different economic partners to sign up to this ambitious project.

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

- the strategic importance and quality of the Communication presented, at a time when the EU's historical competitors had already started boosting their industrial and digital competitiveness;
- the value of this key initiative, which should also aim to strengthen Europeans' perception of the EU and belief in its ability to respond to the current challenges;
- questions about the most effective ways and means of creating an environment conducive to European growth and competitiveness, based on both traditional industries and the most innovative technologies, while preserving a regulatory framework and relying on skilled European workers;
- a reminder of the importance of the external dimension, which had allowed the EU to help emerging countries and the local workforce, while also promoting its own industries and defending its universal values and its prosperity model;
- the equally strong expectation on the part of third countries for European aid through partnerships between equals;
- the need to work towards cutting red tape through ambitious initiatives and concrete solutions, attracting private investment and using artificial intelligence (AI);
- the importance of strengthening the links within the EU between industry, research and development, and artificial intelligence, in order to make the European market more attractive;
- a reminder of the value of the future Pact for the Mediterranean, which should make it possible to explore the opportunities in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, particularly in the fields of energy and raw materials;
- the fact that production costs were too high in the EU, particularly as regards compliance costs, and the need to focus on implementation and simplification, with concrete objectives in terms of deadlines and reducing the administrative

burden and reporting obligations, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises;

- the importance of creating greater coherence between the European Semester and the new tools for coordinating competitiveness, without adding to the administrative burden;
- with regard to innovation, the fact that there was a lack of venture capital in the EU and, therefore, the need to develop the Capital Markets Union and to build on existing measures by reviewing current programmes, rather than waiting for the next budgetary programming period;
- the need to remember that climate action and a decarbonised economy went hand in hand with competitiveness, and that the European Green Deal was a genuine growth strategy;
- a reminder that high indebtedness was hampering economic performance and that, as a result, EU Member States were currently spending too little on innovation and investment;
- the satisfaction expressed with the proposal for a ‘28th regime’, while also noting the challenges of implementing it at national level;
- the need to actively protect the EU’s core values, the rule of law and democracy in a world of uncertainty and turmoil;
- a reminder that competitiveness should also benefit EU citizens and that it was essential, in this context, to promote the European social model;
- the fact that the EU was a maritime power with the largest exclusive economic zone in the world, rich in coastlines and seabeds and with a blue economy creating millions of jobs, and hope that the oceans could be leveraged to strengthen European competitiveness;

- a reminder that, in order to effectively implement Mr Draghi's and Mr Letta's reports, difficult political trade-offs and a real 'simplification shock' in favour of European companies would be required;
- the need for cross-cutting and predictable simplification of all policies for everyone involved, with a focus on flagship projects concerning the whole of the EU, such as critical raw materials or energy;
- the need for positive narratives in order to build trust, as was the case with the PRESIDENT's speech during the opening of the 2025 World Economic Forum, and a reminder that the EU was the world's largest trading power, which had been developing free trade agreements and a range of trade defence instruments, with plans to strengthen them further;
- the desire for this Compass to serve as a roadmap of all the actions to be taken by the EU in its various sectoral policies;
- the need to promote the health sector as a global leader combining research, innovation, patents and commercialisation, while actively participating in the AI revolution;
- the importance of seeing EU enlargement and the gradual integration of the economies of the countries concerned as something that would help European competitiveness, in particular through improved supply chains, easier access to certain raw materials and the secure transit of European energy imports;
- the need for political agreement with the Member States on the way forward to strengthen the EU's competitiveness against the background of an internal market that has considerable room for improvement and the additional growth that could come from it;

- a reminder of the importance of not confusing the journey with the destination, as the objectives were well defined and dogmatic attitudes to how to achieve them had to be avoided.

The PRESIDENT concluded the debate by welcoming the commitment of the Members of the Commission under their respective portfolios. She felt that the objectives were clearly defined and that the EU was now well positioned to move forward. Emphasising the importance of the European Green Deal in addressing climate and environmental challenges, she reaffirmed the EU's commitment to decarbonise, protect nature and develop a circular economy. She also highlighted the key role of clean technologies as crucial sectors for the future when it came to maintaining Europe's leading position. Aware of the unprecedented nature of the ongoing green and digital transition, she recognised that this transition required continuous learning and that adjustments might be necessary to ensure European prosperity, security and democracy.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2025) 30/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Ms KALLAS began by noting that the new US administration's recent decisions on development aid had led many countries to turn to the European Union. In this context, she called for an increase in the visibility of the actions of the Union, the world's largest donor of official development assistance; these actions were often overshadowed by their implementation in the framework of international organisations such as the United Nations. The current geopolitical situation was also

a strategic opportunity to deepen partnerships with countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. She highlighted the growing awareness in these regions of the limitations of certain models of cooperation based primarily on the exploitation of natural resources, and pointed out that the EU could offer a credible and balanced alternative based on lasting relations and mutual benefits.

Ms KALLAS then reported on her recent telephone call with the new US Secretary of State, Mr Marco Rubio. Amongst the topics discussed, she highlighted the situation in Ukraine, where they had both reiterated the need to end the war and stressed the importance of the sanctions in place. She had also mentioned the importance of European imports from the United States, noting that more than 50% of liquefied natural gas (LNG) consumed in Europe was of American origin, and stressing the importance of closer cooperation in this area. Finally, both sides had expressed their willingness to work together to improve the situation in the Middle East.

Referring to her recent visit to Türkiye, Ms KALLAS highlighted the willingness expressed by the Turkish authorities to step up their engagement with the European Union; deeper cooperation was also in the European interest. She had emphasised the need for a constructive approach, including on foreign policy and in the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, and had encouraged Türkiye actively to support the UN efforts in this area.

Ms KALLAS then informed the College that an agreement had been reached at the last Foreign Affairs Council on the renewal of sanctions against Russia. Prior to this, a joint statement by the Commission and the High Representative had been issued to reaffirm the EU's energy solidarity with the Member States. The Council had also started work on a 16th package of sanctions against Russia, scheduled for adoption on 24 February 2025, the third anniversary of the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

In addition, the Council had discussed the situation in Syria, agreeing to a gradual relaxation of sanctions in line with a progressive approach to support the reconstruction of the country and its institutions, whilst maintaining the possibility of adjusting this policy in the light of developments. Furthermore, Ukraine had offered to provide aid to Syria in the form of grain and oil, an initiative which demonstrated its willingness to contribute to the humanitarian effort despite the war devastating the country.

Ms KALLAS then drew attention to the situation in Gaza and Israel, welcoming the continued, albeit fragile, ceasefire. In this context, she stressed the need for the European Union to fully exercise its influence in order to support a sustainable peace process and to actively participate in discussions on the governance of Gaza.

Finally, she reported on the encouraging developments in Lebanon, where a new President and Prime Minister had been appointed. She also reported on her exchange with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Volker Türk, who had welcomed the constructive attitude of the Lebanese authorities. The EU had agreed to organise a meeting of the Association Council with Lebanon that year, to support the progress being made.

At the PRESIDENT's invitation, Ms KOS gave an update on the current energy crisis in Moldova, a crisis linked to Russia's instrumentalisation of energy, targeting Transnistria in particular in the run-up to the September elections. Emergency aid amounting to EUR 30 million had been approved by the EU to support both Moldova and Transnistria. This aid was aimed at preventing a humanitarian crisis in Transnistria by financing the purchase and transport of natural gas, thus restoring electricity and heating for more than 300 000 people. It would also help bring electricity from Transnistria to the rest of Moldova; this was expected to lead to a reduction in energy prices, which were currently 60% to 70% higher than normal. Ms KOS would visit Chisinau on 4 February to finalise the arrangements for implementing this emergency aid.

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

- concerns about the United States’ financial disengagement with certain international organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Energy Agency (IEA);
- the advisability of the European Union, as a major international donor, consolidating its influence on the world stage following the US disengagement;
- in this regard, the need to enhance the visibility of Union aid, in particular by highlighting the European flag in places receiving EU humanitarian aid;
- the importance of linking humanitarian aid with development cooperation and with support for industry and competitiveness;
- the message of EU solidarity with Ukraine during the difficult winter period, illustrated by the visit of Members of the Commission to Kyiv;
- the valuable lessons that the EU could draw from Ukraine in crisis preparedness;
- a reference to the EU’s recent efforts to de-escalate tensions between Ukraine and Slovakia regarding the transit of gas;
- regarding Syria, the encouraging conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council;
- in parallel with humanitarian aid to Syria, the EU’s messages on the importance of human rights, gender equality and inclusiveness;
- a warning against premature optimism, given the persistent uncertainty about the evolution of the Syrian political landscape and the potential influence of extremist groups, which made the situation complex and unpredictable;

- the worrying situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), marked by a war of aggression by Rwanda, as well as challenges related to critical raw materials.

In response to some of the points raised during the debate, Ms KALLAS acknowledged the potential risks associated with the new Syrian regime and gave an assurance that the issue of chemical weapons was the subject of monitoring and handling at international level.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT reaffirmed the importance of increasing the visibility of European aid, the EU being a major donor.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 11.13.