



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

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Strasbourg, 1 April 2025

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2517th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 5 March 2025

(morning)

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Single sitting: Wednesday 5 March 2025 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.05 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Ms RIBERA	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 14 (in part)
Mr SÉJOURNÉ	Executive Vice-President	
Ms KALLAS	High Representative / Vice-President	
Ms MÎNZATU	Executive Vice-President	
Mr FITTO	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 14 (in part)
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Member	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Member	Items 1 to 11, and 12 to 14 (in part)
Ms ŠUICA	Member	
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	
Mr KUBILIUS	Member	
Ms KOS	Member	
Mr SÍKELA	Member	
Mr KADIS	Member	
Ms ALBUQUERQUE	Member	
Ms LAHBIB	Member	
Ms ROSWALL	Member	
Mr SERAFIN	Member	
Mr JØRGENSEN	Member	
Ms ZAHARIEVA	Member	
Mr McGRATH	Member	
Mr TZITZIKOSTAS	Member	
Mr HANSEN	Member	
Mr MICALLEF	Member	

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Absent:

Ms VIRKKUNEN	Executive Vice-President
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Mr BRUNNER	Member

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	
Ms PINHO	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr VAN KEMSEKE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 9 and 10
Mr CALACEAN	Member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Items 11 to 14
Ms MICELI	Member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 1
Ms SEMLALI	Policy Assistant in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr TAQUET-GRAZIANI	Acting Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	
Mr CHARLES	Secretariat-General	

World Bank Group:

Mr BANGA	President of the World Bank Group	Item 1
Ms GEVERS	Chief of Staff	Item 1
Mr KINCAID	Advisor to the President	Item 1
Mr KOPPERUD	Director (ad interim) for Europe	Item 1
Ms JACOBS	Special Representative WB Brussels	Item 1

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

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1. DISCUSSION WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD BANK GROUP

The PRESIDENT welcomed Mr Ajay Banga, President of the World Bank Group. She praised his expertise and extensive career that had spanned both the public and private sectors. In a global context marked by growing challenges, she stressed the importance of closer cooperation between the EU and the World Bank Group to meet the needs of the Global South.

Mr Banga thanked the PRESIDENT and the College for their welcome. He felt that it was a particularly appropriate time to reflect on how international development was progressing, the role of the World Bank Group, and the future opportunities for cooperation with the EU. He highlighted the scale of the ongoing transformations, including demographic changes and technological advances, and said that these transformations required a change of approach. To address these challenges, the World Bank Group had introduced reforms to make its operations more efficient and to increase its capacity to act in collaboration with its partners. In particular, he mentioned the simplification of procedures, which had reduced the approval time for projects from 19 to 14 months, with a target set of 12 months by June 2025, with deadlines adjusted according to risk level.

Mention was made of the structure of the World Bank Group, comprising five separate institutions, which could have potentially made working with partner countries more complex. To address this, the World Bank Group had established unified Country Partnership Frameworks, each under single supervision. First tested in around 20 countries, this model was gradually being expanded following the initial positive feedback. He also mentioned the progress made with regard to cooperation between multilateral development banks, in particular the establishment of an online platform facilitating the sharing and co-financing of projects. The purpose of this tool was to simplify access to finance, particularly for countries with limited capabilities. He also highlighted the strengthening of the World Bank's lending capacity, which required more efficient management of resources and the development of its financing and partnership mechanisms.

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Mr Banga focused on energy, health and employment when addressing the major development challenges and future cooperation opportunities with the EU. He pointed out that the lack of access to electricity for hundreds of millions of people was limiting not only economic growth but also access to essential services. Ensuring affordable and reliable energy supply was a shared goal with the EU, and would be the subject of a comprehensive energy plan to be presented by the World Bank in June.

On health, he stressed the importance of early diagnosis in preventing pandemics and combating non-communicable diseases, which were a growing challenge for many developing countries. To this end, the World Bank was working with the World Health Organization and relevant governments to improve access to healthcare and reduce the cost, with a particular focus on rural and remote areas.

In his view, investment in strategic sectors was a key way to boost employment, which would ensure both income and prospects for the future. Mr Banga cited agriculture as an example, stressing that better integrating smallholders into value chains contributed to both food security and job creation. He warned of the growing gap between the increase in the labour force, with 1.2 billion young people entering the labour market in the next 15 years, and the insufficient number of jobs created, estimated at fewer than 500 million over the same period. Without an adequate response, this imbalance risked accentuating instability and worsening migratory pressures. He thus stressed the urgent need to create sustainable economic opportunities, pointing to the close link between development and stability.

In this context, the World Bank had launched a youth employment initiative, based on a set of necessary conditions. This included access to healthcare, education, training, food security and a healthy environment, as well as the development of connectivity and digital technologies. Mr Banga stressed that these advances also required modern infrastructure, stable regulation and a dynamic private sector. Given that 80% of jobs were created by the private sector, he called for clear and fair rules to attract investment. Finally, he emphasised the role that the World Bank

could play in supporting governments in creating these conditions, in order to establish a framework conducive to sustainable and inclusive development.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr Banga for his presentation and reiterated that prosperity in the Global South was a shared objective, in the interest of both the countries concerned and the EU. As regards migration, she called for legal pathways to be strengthened, as more effective management of legal migration would reduce the pressure of irregular flows. She also stressed the need to create economic opportunities in the countries of origin, enabling everyone to build their future where they wished.

She commended the close cooperation between the World Bank and the EU, in particular as regards the commitment to triple renewable energy capacity and to double energy efficiency by 2030. Finally, she highlighted the convergence between the World Bank's priorities and those of the European Global Gateway initiative, reflecting the alignment of interests and a shared commitment to development.

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

- the perfect timing of this discussion and the importance of the partnership between the Commission and the World Bank as a means of addressing global challenges;
- support for the World Bank's priorities and its ambitious reform agenda, and for mobilising the private sector;
- acknowledgement of the need to set priorities and improve coordination of funding to maximise its impact;
- the need to deepen synergies between World Bank and EU initiatives, in particular the Global Gateway initiative, to better structure investments and foster development;

- the EU’s commitment to multilateral cooperation and a rules-based international order, with the aim of limiting economic fragmentation;
- uncertainties surrounding the financing of development aid, in particular the scaling-back of pledges by some donors and the ensuing impact on available resources;
- the need for broader reform of the international financial architecture to improve access to capital and foster job creation;
- the World Bank’s role in reconstruction efforts in Ukraine, especially in terms of the provision of transparent and rapid financing;
- the damage and needs assessment conducted jointly by the World Bank, the EU and the UN with respect to the Gaza Strip, and the lessons that could be learnt from this approach and applied to other crises;
- support for the multi-dimensional approach to managing debt vulnerabilities adopted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank;
- the need for a sustainable approach to development aid, covering economic growth, job creation and humanitarian response efforts, while promoting the circular economy;
- the conditions that needed to be in place in order to mobilise the private sector, particularly safeguards for regulatory stability and predictability, the rule of law, democracy and human rights;
- the growing impact of climate change on development and the need for an ambitious approach to the environment, biodiversity and access to water, as well as the potential of nature credits;

- the wide energy access gap and the Commission’s commitment to reducing it, in particular through the Africa-Europe Green Energy initiative, which sought to step up production and ensure affordable and reliable access to energy;
- the balance between investment in basic infrastructure and support for advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to encourage development and inspire other countries;
- the demographic changes ahead, as well as their economic and social ramifications;
- the need to strengthen legal migration pathways to address labour requirements in Europe, while controlling irregular flows;
- the fragile situations of some countries, which called for an approach that combined development, stability and security aspects;
- agriculture’s key role in global food security, the importance of Ukrainian agricultural resources in that regard and the contribution made by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in this area.

In response to some of the points raised, Mr Banga stressed the need to ensure optimal use of funding in the light of uncertainties surrounding major donors’ contributions to the International Development Association (IDA). He cautioned against investment fragmentation and called for a more targeted approach focused on a limited number of priorities in order to ensure the operational impact of investments. He also stressed the role of international financial institutions in mobilising the private sector by leveraging their ratings in order to attract capital.

On climate change, Mr Banga said that 45% of World Bank financing was allocated to that area, split between adaptation and mitigation. He stressed the importance of having a pragmatic energy mix, tailored to local situations, to ensure an effective transition to low-emission solutions. Moreover, he highlighted the impact of climate

change on global stability and the need to ensure that development strategies better reflected these issues.

As regards support for Ukraine, the use of digital payments ensured that funds could reach their destination swiftly and transparently, thus minimising the risks of funding being diverted. On Gaza, he referred to the drafting of a report on reconstruction, linking up concessional capital and private-sector mobilisation to deliver more effective funding.

With regard to Africa's agricultural potential, he felt that it was possible for the continent to meet its own needs while contributing to global markets. However, a number of barriers remained, such as the lack of irrigation and a shortage of fertilisers, and he called for coordination to be improved in order to bring down these barriers.

Lastly, he referred to the Mission 300 initiative, which aimed to bring electricity to 300 million people in Africa. He highlighted the fact that leaders were committed to implementing reforms in return for financial support and stressed the need to have an investment-friendly framework in place. He also referred to the development of local currency financing and a plan to structure those loans in the form of negotiable securities to make them easier to mobilise.

The PRESIDENT closed the discussion by warmly thanking Mr Banga for his inspiring presentation to the College.

2. AGENDAS

(OJ(2025) 2517/FINAL; SEC(2025) 2517/FINAL)

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

**3. WEEKLY MEETING OF HEADS OF CABINET
(RCC(2025) 2517)**

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Tuesday 4 March 2025.

4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2514th, 2515th and 2516th meetings of 11, 19 and 26 February 2025 for a later date.

**5. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2025) 161)**

The Commission took note of the outcome of the written exchange of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) for the week from 24 to 28 February 2025 (RCC(2025) 161).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area, amendment of Directive 2012/34/EU and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 (Regulation) – METZ report – 2023/0271 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 37.

- **Amendment of Directive 2011/16/EU on administrative cooperation in the field of taxation (Council Directive) – LALUCQ report – 2024/0276 (CNS)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 38.

– **Oral Question O-000005/2025 – Adoption of the proposal for a Parenthood Regulation**

Line set out in SP(2025) 64.

– **Pact for European Social Dialogue**

Line set out in SPI(2025) 3.

**6. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2025) 208)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2025) 208 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 26 February 2025.

7. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF EUROPEAN UNION LAW

***STATE AID AND OTHER COMPETITION RULES
(SEC(2025) 78; RCC(2025) 17)***

The Commission's decision on this agenda item is recorded in the special minutes.

8. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

***8.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2025) 65 ET SEQ.)***

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 24 February and 2 March 2025.

8.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2025) 66 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 24 February and 2 March 2025.

8.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2025) 67 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 24 February and 2 March 2025 archived in Decide.

8.4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED
(SEC(2025) 68 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the written procedures specifically identified for which the time limit expired between 3 and 7 March 2025, and of the finalisation written procedure.

**9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF
THE REGIONS – INDUSTRIAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE EUROPEAN
AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR**

(COM(2025) 95 TO /3; RCC(2025) 16)

**10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN**

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF
THE REGIONS – DECARBONISE CORPORATE FLEETS
(COM(2025) 96 AND /2; RCC(2025) 15)**

The PRESIDENT introduced the package on the European automotive industry, stressing that this was the first industrial sector the Commission was looking at in depth on the basis of commitments made in the Clean Industrial Deal and the Strategic Dialogue on the future of the automotive industry launched in January. She thanked all the Commissioners involved in that dialogue.

Mr FITTO began by presenting the Communication on decarbonising corporate fleets, which highlighted best practices and encouraged Member States to introduce new measures to make these fleets greener. Corporate fleets accounted for a significant share of new car sales and a fast green transition in this area would thus have an impact on future production in the automotive industry.

The Commission's aim was to accelerate the adoption of zero-emission vehicles in corporate fleets, while strengthening industrial competitiveness and strategic autonomy, and reducing emissions. The automotive industry was at the core of Europe's economic prosperity and its transition to zero-emission mobility had to be accelerated. At the same time, the transition had to be managed carefully to minimise burdens on the private and public sectors.

Mr FITTO concluded his presentation by stressing that the Commission should now assess the impact of the measures to be put in place to achieve these objectives. It was crucial to know how the transition should be carried out, at what pace and for what types of vehicles and infrastructure. The various possible options could affect urban and rural areas or remote and less developed areas in different ways, depending on the current and future availability of charging infrastructure and physical and financial constraints. These options would soon be examined in a detailed impact assessment covering strategic, environmental, economic, territorial and social considerations. This would enable the Commission to propose by the end

of 2025 a robust legal framework for decarbonising corporate fleets supported by both business and the social partners.

Mr TZITZIKOSTAS highlighted the challenges facing the automotive sector and pointed out that the industrial action plan proposed that day was based on intensive consultation. He referred in particular to strategic dialogues with industry players and thematic discussions with stakeholders, including not only car and battery suppliers but also the general public, through an open public consultation.

The proposed action plan focused on five key areas: (i) innovation and digitalisation, (ii) clean mobility, (iii) competitiveness and supply chain resilience, (iv) skills and the social dimension, and (v) a level playing field and the business environment.

Mr TZITZIKOSTAS felt that innovation played a key role and highlighted software advancement, modern battery technologies and new frameworks for deploying autonomous driving. He also stressed the importance of non-discriminatory access to in-vehicle data, in particular for vehicle sellers and repairers. It was now necessary to assess whether the European Data Act, which would enter into force in September 2025, would properly address these challenges.

With regard to clean mobility, he noted that many stakeholders had called for greater flexibility with regard to CO₂ targets. A targeted amendment to the Regulation on CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans would therefore be proposed in the near future. This would allow car manufacturers to meet their compliance targets based on their average performance over a three-year period (2025-2027). In addition, a more in-depth review of the Regulation, drawing on the principle of technological neutrality, was planned by the end of the year. The Communication on corporate fleets was also expected to have a major impact on the deployment of zero-emission vehicles.

Mr TZITZIKOSTAS then stressed that the accelerated roll-out of charging infrastructure was essential for increasing the uptake of electric vehicles, and said

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that the proposed measures would help ensure the sector was competitive and resilient. He also highlighted support for battery manufacturing, with EUR 1.8 billion mobilised from the Innovation Fund to create a secure and competitive supply chain for the raw materials used in the manufacturing process, which would help support the growth of the European automotive industry and avoid strategic dependencies.

Lastly, he emphasised the importance of skills and the social dimension for implementing the action plan. In this connection, he referred to a Fair Transition Observatory being set up to ensure a level playing field, as well as longer-term initiatives to facilitate access to third-country markets.

Mr TZITZIKOSTAS concluded his presentation by stating that the action plan would now be presented to the European Parliament and the Council, which would be invited to swiftly adopt the proposed amendments to CO₂ emission standards. The Strategic Dialogue with the automotive sector would continue, with the next meeting scheduled for June 2025.

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

- the considerable added value of the dialogue with the automotive sector and the significant contribution of the industry and other players in the sector in that regard;
- the political challenge of adjusting the legislative framework for CO₂ emissions and, with that in mind, the importance of closely monitoring interinstitutional discussions to prevent the Commission's original proposal from being distorted;
- the sector's need for long-term predictability to foster innovation and investment;

- questions about subsidies for buying electric vehicles, their potential impact on the competitiveness of European manufacturers and the development of the second-hand electric vehicle market;
- the urgent need to step up battery manufacturing efforts in Europe;
- the automotive industry’s strategic role in the European economy;
- the potential opportunities offered by trade agreements and free trade agreements to access new markets;
- support for professional transition, which had to be guaranteed, while respecting working conditions and social dialogue;
- the twin transformation in the automotive sector, with the switch from combustion engines to electric motors and the expected growth in autonomous driving over the subsequent 10-15 years;
- the priorities expressed by automotive industry representatives during the Strategic Dialogue with the Commission, including circularity as a cost-effective solution, the need to set pragmatic emission reduction targets while taking into account the diversity of the sector and the importance of preserving value chains that were open to the rest of the world;
- the need to direct future legislation on decarbonising the automotive sector towards fostering the competitiveness of European battery and clean vehicle production;
- funding opportunities for innovative battery manufacturing projects under the Innovation Fund.

The PRESIDENT wound up the debate by noting that the global competitiveness of Europe’s automotive industry relied on the transition to clean and digital mobility. With regard to CO₂ emissions, she said that some vehicle manufacturers had already

met the targets, while others faced more difficulties, and confirmed that these different circumstances had been fully taken into account in drafting the action plan.

As regards battery production in Europe, she felt that an in-depth discussion with this new industry was necessary to find ways of making it more competitive. The agreed emission reduction standards would be maintained, but with a pragmatic and flexible approach that was more focused on innovation and the technologies needed to implement the standards. The shared goal was a European automotive industry that was sustainable, competitive and innovative for the benefit of Europe's people, economy and environment.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2025) 95/3 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;
- approved the Communication in COM(2025) 96/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments.

**11. 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 – THE UNION OF SKILLS
(COM(2025) 90 TO /3; RCC(2025) 14)**

12. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF
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THE REGIONS ON THE ACTION PLAN ON BASIC SKILLS**(COM(2025) 88 AND /2; RCC(2025) 14)****13. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – A STEM EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN: SKILLS FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION****(COM(2025) 89 AND /2; RCC(2025) 14)**

The PRESIDENT asked Ms MÎNZATU to present the three initiatives on the Union of Skills, emphasising that this was one of the major commitments announced in the context of the Commission's first 100 days.

Ms MÎNZATU stated that the Communication on the Union of Skills was a comprehensive initiative to improve skills across the European Union in response to the changing needs of the European labour market. The Communication was accompanied by a Basic Skills Action Plan and an Education Strategic Plan to improve skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Other initiatives would follow, notably on vocational training, education and the professional development of teachers and trainers.

Ms MÎNZATU then presented the architecture behind the Union of Skills, which was based on four key pillars supported by two essential horizontal enablers. The first pillar aimed to strengthen basic skills, in response to concerns about the lack of proficiency among European teenagers, one third of whom had difficulties in mathematics and a quarter in basic digital skills. The main measures included broadening the definition of basic skills to integrate digital and civic literacy, including media literacy. She also announced the launch of a support scheme for the acquisition of basic skills, which would be gradually extended to schools in difficulty. The scheme would focus on early-detection tools, personalised coaching and the introduction of learning networks to promote better educational outcomes.

The second pillar focused on work-based learning as an essential lever to improve European competitiveness in key sectors such as the automotive, steel and construction industries and healthcare. Moreover, a collective change of mindset needed to be encouraged by promoting continuous upskilling and reskilling for people throughout their working lives. The introduction of a Skills Guarantee pilot was one of this pillar's key elements. This scheme would offer workers in sectors undergoing restructuring or at risk of unemployment the opportunity to develop further their careers in other sectors and/or companies. It would first be tested in the automotive industry before being extended to other strategic sectors such as health and cybersecurity. In parallel, the EU would simplify and reinforce the EU Skills Academies to respond more effectively to the needs of businesses, notably in the context of the green transition and the Clean Industrial Deal.

The third pillar aimed to facilitate mobility within the EU's internal market by guaranteeing the recognition of qualifications, diplomas and skills. Ms MÎNZATU highlighted the crucial role of the initiative on skills transfers, which would remove barriers to the recognition of learning outcomes and help bridge skills gaps in various sectors. She also highlighted the creation of a European degree in engineering, which would make the profession more attractive and improve the mobility of engineers across the EU, thus helping to make talent available where it was most needed.

Finally, the fourth pillar of the Union of Skills aimed to address demographic challenges and labour shortages by enhancing the EU's attractiveness to international talent. Under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, the Commission would launch a pilot call, 'Choose Europe', with a budget of EUR 22.5 million, to attract the world's best researchers by offering them competitive working conditions and career prospects. In addition, an EU Talent Pool would be set up as soon as the relevant proposal had been adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in order to facilitate the recruitment of skilled workers outside the EU, with the priority of targeting sectors facing critical shortages. A Visa Strategy would also be

presented in 2025 in order to support the arrival of top students, researchers and highly-qualified professionals.

Ms MÎNZATU then emphasised that, despite substantial funding, investment in education and skills remained patchy across the EU. To counter this, two horizontal enablers were being proposed.

Firstly, the Union of Skills would be governed on the basis of a European Skills Intelligence Observatory. The Observatory would provide data and forecasts on the evolution of the required skills and allow skills shortages in critical or strategic sectors to be identified quickly.

Secondly, a European Skills High-Level Board would be set up. The Board would bring together education and training providers, business leaders and social partners and provide policymakers with a coordinated vision and strategic recommendations to strengthen human capital.

Finally, in recognition of the vital role played by education and skills in EU competitiveness, Ms MÎNZATU noted that the Commission was planning to propose, as part of the European Semester cycle, a new recommendation on education and skills to guide the Member States and relevant stakeholders in their related actions.

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

- overall support for the set of measures and their objectives;
- recognition of human capital as a key factor in EU competitiveness, and the need to address labour shortages and skills gaps;
- the importance of education and training in adapting skills to a changing labour market, and the key role of adult education and reskilling;

- the need to simplify access to funding for skills development;
- the importance of informing young people about the skills sought, in particular through labour market data;
- the EU's potential to attract talent from its neighbourhood, including through partnerships with the countries of the Mediterranean region;
- the role of the European Semester in shaping education and training policies.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2025) 90/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the national parliaments;
- approved the Communication in COM(2025) 88/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments;
- approved the Communication in COM(2025) 89/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments.

**14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS –
A ROADMAP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS
(COM(2025) 97 AND /2; RCC(2025) 13)**

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Ms MÎNZATU highlighted the strong message of this Communication in a global context marked by worrying trends of backsliding on women's rights. Through this Roadmap and the Declaration set out in the annex thereto, the Commission was reaffirming its commitment to women's rights and equality, which it considered to be core values, establishing clear principles and calling on the other institutions to come on board in order to collectively strengthen the defence of these fundamental rights.

Ms LAHBIB stressed the importance of this Roadmap for building a future based on equality. In the face of conflicts, economic challenges and geopolitical upheavals, she underlined the need to make human rights, in particular women's rights, a top priority.

She warned about the major impact of crises on women and girls, who had key responsibilities in households, communities and the economy while often being the most affected. She also pointed out that gender inequalities persisted, including in Europe, where women earned on average 13% less than men, were under-represented in some sectors, such as medical research, and received medical treatments and diagnoses based on predominantly male data.

As well as being an issue of social justice, these disparities had a considerable economic cost. Violence, discrimination and the gap in access to employment led to losses of hundreds of billions of euros each year for the EU. Ms LAHBIB also pointed out that women's rights were inextricably linked to peace and security and were a fundamental pillar of European values.

In this connection, she welcomed the major legislative progress made by the previous Commission, particularly in the fight against violence against women, pay transparency and representation in leadership roles. Thirty years after the Beijing Declaration, she stressed the urgent need to translate these advances into concrete action, to ensure their full implementation and to protect these achievements in the face of backsliding observed at international level.

The Roadmap being presented that day was a key step, reaffirming the EU's position as a global leader and a driving force for a fairer and more inclusive society. The Roadmap set out a long-term vision, based on key principles and policy goals to boost gender equality. It placed these rights at the heart of EU policies and ensured that they were fully integrated in all policy areas. Equality benefited society as a whole, by promoting a better work-life balance, more suitable working conditions and sustainable economic growth.

Building on existing European principles, this Roadmap and the Declaration in the annex aimed to guide action by the EU and its partners on women's rights in the face of current social, economic and technological challenges. It would also form the basis of the upcoming Gender Equality Strategy. Ms LAHBIB noted that this Declaration was based on eight key principles, namely protection against gender-based violence, access to quality healthcare, equal pay and economic empowerment, equal employment opportunities, inclusive and quality education, representation and political participation, work-life balance, and the establishment of appropriate institutional mechanisms.

Ms LAHBIB concluded by calling for collective mobilisation to make this Roadmap a reference framework on women's rights and encouraged all the European institutions to come on board. She announced that she would present the Roadmap as a vision for the future at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York the following week. Finally, she called on everyone to take ownership of this ambition and work together to make it a reality.

The PRESIDENT also stressed the importance of these rights, pointing out that they were never guaranteed and that it was essential to continue to defend them and keep them as a key priority.

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

- strong support for this initiative in a context of increasing pressure on fundamental rights, in particular women’s rights, in Europe and worldwide;
- the fact that gender equality was enshrined as a founding principle of the EU, already laid down in the Treaty of Rome and included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union for 25 years;
- the attractiveness of the EU as a community of values, in particular for candidate countries;
- the role of the EU in promoting these principles globally, by mobilising its delegations to step up its engagement with partner countries;
- the need to consolidate progress on women’s rights to boost the EU’s international action, including by ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- the stepping up of the fight against gender-based violence, with the revision of the Victims’ Rights Directive, the guarantee that women could testify without negative repercussions, and the High-Level Forum on the Future of EU Criminal Justice to improve how the crime of rape was dealt with;
- the key role played by women in the prosperity of societies, the well-being of future generations and the strengthening of democracy, peace and security;
- the economic impact of equality, particularly in the scientific and technological sectors, where greater inclusion of women could stimulate European growth;
- persistent inequalities in the EU, including the under-representation of women in national parliaments, leadership positions and higher education, despite their majority among higher-education students;

- the importance of increasing women’s participation in key sectors such as agriculture, by facilitating their access to finance and supporting generational renewal, particularly for young female farmers.

The PRESIDENT concluded by recalling the progress made over the past 60 years. Although significant progress had been made, major challenges remained. She emphasised the role of men in promoting equality and the need to adapt the world of work to family realities. She also noted that responding to demographic challenges would require the commitment of all.

Following this presentation, the Commission agreed, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, that the Communication in COM(2025) 97/2 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set on Friday 7 March 2025 (PE/2025/1421).

15. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Ms KALLAS reported on the latest developments in the EU’s external relations against the backdrop of the new US administration setting out its initial positions. The European Union was increasingly recognised as a reliable partner and a pillar of multilateralism, particularly as regards its commitment to Ukraine.

In this connection, she referred to the constructive exchanges that had taken place at the summit on Ukraine held in London on 2 March and at the meeting of G20 foreign ministers on 20 and 21 February in Johannesburg, highlighting the EU’s growing role in defence and security partnerships.

She then referred to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The EU Foreign Affairs Council had agreed on further restrictive measures, including

targeted sanctions against those responsible for the conflict. She concluded by stressing the importance of closely monitoring developments.

Coming back to the war in Ukraine, the PRESIDENT felt that a peace agreement could only be sustainable if Ukraine was in a position of strength. She also highlighted the urgent need for the EU to strengthen its own defence capabilities, a topic that would be at the heart of the discussions at the extraordinary European Council meeting on 6 March.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The Commission's other discussions on certain agenda items are recorded in the special minutes.

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The meeting closed at 12.10.