



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2025) 2526 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 25 June 2025

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2526th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 21 May 2025

(morning)

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PV(2025) 2526 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 21 May 2025 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.01 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 MÎNZATU	Executive Vice-President	
Mr FITTO	Executive Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Member	Items 8/11 (in part) and 12
Ms ŠUICA	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	
Mr KUBILIUS	Member	
Ms KOS	Member	
Mr SÍKELA	Member	
Mr KADIS	Member	
Ms ALBUQUERQUE	Member	
Mr BRUNNER	Member	
Ms ROSWALL	Member	
Mr SERAFIN	Member	Items 8/11 (in part) and 12
Mr JØRGENSEN	Member	
Ms ZAHARIEVA	Member	
Mr McGRATH	Member	
Mr HANSEN	Member	
Mr MICALLEF	Member	

Absent:

Ms KALLAS	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Member
Ms LAHBIB	Member
Mr TZITZIKOSTAS	Member

The following also sat in:

H.E. MATTARELLA	President of the Italian Republic	Item 12
H.E. TAJANI	Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Italian Republic	Item 12
H.E. CELESTE	Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Italy to the European Union	Item 12
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	
Mr ADAM	Deputy Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 8/11
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms BELLONI	Adviser for defence matters in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Item 12
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) 2526/FINAL; SEC(2025) 2526/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) 2526)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Tuesday 20 May 2025.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2523rd, 2524th and 2525th meetings of 16 April, and 6 and 14 May 2025 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2025) 175)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) held on Thursday 15 May 2025 (RCC(2025) 175).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Laying-down of additional procedural rules relating to the enforcement of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (Regulation) – GREGOROVÁ (ex-LAGODINSKY) report – 2023/0202 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 130.

- **Amendment of Directive 2013/11/EU on alternative dispute resolution for consumer disputes, as well as Directives (EU) 2015/2302, (EU) 2019/2161 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Directive) – BALLARÍN CEREZA report – 2023/0376 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 131.

- **European Maritime Safety Agency and repeal of Regulation (EC) No 1406/2002 (Regulation) – HUMBERTO (ex-MONTEIRO DE AGUILAR) report – 2023/0163 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 133.

- **Compulsory licensing for crisis management and amendment of Regulation (EC) 816/2006 (Regulation) – VÁZQUEZ LÁZARA report – 2023/0129 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 134.

- **Temporary derogation from certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 and Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards a progressive start of operations of the Entry/Exit System (Regulation) – KANKO report – 2024/0315 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 136.

- **Framework for Financial Data Access and amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1093/2010, (EU) No 1094/2010, (EU) No 1095/2010 and (EU) 2022/2554 (Regulation) – VAN OVERTVELDT report – 2023/0205 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 137/2.

- **Establishment of the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) through the reinforcement of European defence industry instrument (Council Regulation) – 2025/0122 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2025) 140/2.

- **Relations between the EU and the United Kingdom – Draft Common Understanding concluding the bilateral exploratory talks on the future of relations between the EU and the United Kingdom**

Line set out in SI(2025) 138.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2023/956 as regards simplifying and strengthening the carbon border adjustment mechanism (Regulation) – DECARO report – 2025/0039 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2025) 186.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 575/2013 on prudential requirements for credit institutions as regards requirements for securities financing transactions under the net stable funding ratio (Regulation) – FERNÁNDEZ report – 2025/0077 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2025) 184.

- **Union procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human use and establishing rules governing the European Medicines Agency, amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1394/2007 and Regulation (EU) No 536/2014 and repeal of Regulation (EC) No 726/2004, Regulation (EC) No 141/2000 and Regulation (EC) No 1901/2006 (Regulation) – WÖLKEN report – 2023/0131 (COD) / Union code relating to medicinal products for human use, and repealing Directive 2001/83/EC and Directive 2009/35/EC (Directive) – MONTSERRAT report – 2023/0132 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2025) 132/2.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2025) 217)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2025) 217 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 14 May 2025.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2025) 135 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 12 and 18 May 2025.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2025) 136 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 12 and 18 May 2025.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2025) 137 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 12 and 18 May 2025 archived in Decide.

**6.4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED
(SEC(2025) 138 AND /2)**

The Commission took note of the written procedures specifically identified for which the time limit expired between 19 and 23 May 2025.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2025) 139 AND /2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2025) 51 AND /2)

In Mr SERAFIN's absence, Ms JUHANSONE presented an additional proposal for an administrative decision which was tabled directly to the College for adoption. It was proposed to appoint Mr Michael KARNITSCHNIG as Deputy Director-General of DG Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf.

7.1. DG MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA AND THE GULF –
APPOINTMENT OF A DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL AT GRADE
AD15/16
(PERS(2024) 88 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Deputy Director-General of DG Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (PERS(2024) 88 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 21 February and 3 April 2025 (PERS(2024) 88/3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms ŠUICA, it then decided to appoint Mr Michael KARNITSCHNIG to the post.

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

7.2. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – SECONDMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE SERVICE, UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS, OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr DOMBROVSKIS, the Commission decided to approve the secondment, in the interest of the service, under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, of Mr Tuure Taneli LAHTI – currently Principal Adviser for Sustainable Growth and the European Semester – to the European External Action Service, for a period of four years from 1 June 2025 to 31 May 2029. For the duration of his secondment, all costs would be covered by the European External Action Service.

This decision would take effect immediately.

**7.3. DG BUDGET – APPOINTMENT OF A PRINCIPAL ADVISER AT GRADE AD14
(PERS(2024) 84 TO /3)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Adviser for the Future Financing of the European Public Administration in DG Budget (PERS(2024) 84 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 8 April and 8 May 2025 (PERS(2024) 84/3).

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 Kai WYNANDS to the post.

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

7.4. DG COMMUNICATION – AUTHORISATION OF THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14, OF A DIRECTOR POST (PERS(2025) 52)

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication, at grade AD14/15, and external publication, at grade AD14, of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2025) 52 for the post of Director of the ‘Political Communication’ Directorate in DG Communication, 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.

7.5. DG ENERGY – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART (SEC(2025) 159)

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr JØRGENSEN, the Commission decided to amend the organisation chart of DG Energy, as set out in SEC(2025) 159. The amendments concerned:

- the conversion of the temporary Energy Platform Task Force into a permanent Directorate ‘Energy Security and International Relations’, and, consequently, the conversion of the temporary units ‘Diversification Strategy and Joint Purchasing’ and ‘Relations with the Member States and the Energy Community’ into permanent units;
- the conversion of the post of Head of the temporary Energy Platform Task Force – currently held by Ms Cristina LOBILLO BORRERO – into a permanent post of Director. Ms Cristina LOBILLO BORRERO was confirmed in this post.

These decisions would take effect on 1 June 2025.

**7.6. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF LISTS OF CANDIDATES FOR POSTS OF HEAD AND DEPUTY HEAD OF DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
(SEC(2025) 53)**

The Commission took note of the information in point 5 of PERS(2025) 51 and, on a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided to approve:

- the list of candidates for the post of Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva, at grade AD14/15;
- the list of candidates for the post of Head of the Delegation of the European Union in Iraq, at grades AD9-14;
- the list of candidates for the post of Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union in Ukraine, at grades AD9-14.

The competent authority of the European External Action Service would make the final appointments on the basis of these lists, as set out in PERS(2025) 53.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – THE SINGLE MARKET: OUR EUROPEAN HOME MARKET IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD – A STRATEGY FOR MAKING THE SINGLE

MARKET SIMPLE, SEAMLESS AND STRONG

(COM(2025) 500 TO /3; RCC(2025) 35)

9. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON THE DEFINITION OF SMALL MID-CAP ENTERPRISES

(C(2025) 3500 AND /2; RCC(2025) 34)

10. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATIONS (EU) 2016/679, (EU) 2016/1036, (EU) 2016/1037, (EU) 2017/1129, (EU) 2023/1542 AND (EU) 2024/573 AS REGARDS THE EXTENSION OF CERTAIN MITIGATING MEASURES AVAILABLE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES TO SMALL MID-CAP ENTERPRISES AND FURTHER SIMPLIFICATION MEASURES

(COM(2025) 501 AND /2; SWD(2025) 501 AND /2; RCC(2025) 34)

11. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING DIRECTIVES 2014/65/EU AND (EU) 2022/2557 AS REGARDS THE EXTENSION OF CERTAIN MITIGATING MEASURES AVAILABLE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES TO SMALL MID-CAP ENTERPRISES AND FURTHER SIMPLIFYING MEASURES

(COM(2025) 502 AND /2; SWD(2025) 501 AND /2; RCC(2025) 34)

The PRESIDENT introduced the package of measures presented that day by pointing out that the European single market was a major strategic asset for the EU. She stressed the need to remove the obstacles that were still holding back achievement of its full potential. She indicated that this set of measures is the fourth simplification ‘omnibus’ package presented by the European Commission under this mandate, in a resolute effort across the entire institution to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and create a regulatory environment that drives innovation, growth, quality jobs and investment.

Mr SÉJOURNÉ presented the proposed measures, putting them in their geopolitical context. He stressed that the single market, with its 450 million consumers, was one of the few competitiveness drivers that Europeans had direct control over, thus constituting a source of autonomous and sovereign leverage for the EU.

He pointed out that the enhanced integration sought was part of an overall balanced approach. The focus was not only on making the most of the single market, but also on protecting it more effectively from external threats. In this connection, he emphasised the complementarity between the single market strategy and reform of the customs union, which needed to be implemented more quickly. He added that, in a context of uncertainty, the single market was both the safest haven for the European economy and an economic imperative, with barriers within the EU market being equivalent to 50% tariffs on products and 110% on services, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

While he welcomed the results of the cross-cutting approach taken for more than 15 years, he felt a new method was now necessary. He therefore proposed a pragmatic sectoral approach by Member State and occupation to remove the specific obstacles to business prosperity in the EU.

Mr SÉJOURNÉ explained that this approach was more practical for businesses, as it focused on the ten main barriers they faced, as identified in consultation with all stakeholders. It was a more ambitious approach for the services that had the greatest impact on the European economy as a whole. It was a simpler approach for SMEs and small mid-caps, as the rules were tailored to company size to boost their output and growth. It was also an approach that was more consumer-friendly through the digitalisation of the single market, which allowed product information to be accessed via QR codes, and more protective, through better enforcement of rules, especially for imported products. Finally, it was a more responsible approach for the Member States, which needed to become the co-pilots of the single market once again. Specific recommendations would be issued for each Member State and a ‘Single Market Sherpa’ would have to be appointed within each national

government. If this cooperation was not successful, more rigorous and systematic infringement procedures would be used.

Mr SÉJOURNÉ then illustrated his remarks with several specific examples of solutions to the barriers identified.

He began with the recognition of professions, pointing out that there were some 5 700 regulated professions in the EU, of which only seven were currently harmonised at European level. He called for recognition to be speeded up, simplified and digitalised, by setting up a coalition of volunteer Member States, which could subsequently be expanded. He anticipated a ripple effect that would eventually lead to the creation of European qualifications for certain key professions, such as physiotherapists and engineers.

He then highlighted the diversity of labelling rules, which required companies to print different labels for each country. Harmonisation was needed not only to reduce business costs but also to improve the readability of information for consumers. The same logic applied to toxic waste recycling, with a proposal to harmonise definitions, treatment methods and the extended producer responsibility scheme, with a view to creating a genuine European reuse and second-hand market.

Mr SÉJOURNÉ also raised concerns regarding the obstacles faced by companies seeking to establish a presence in other Member States, highlighting the complexity, delays and costs still hampering business expansion within the European market. He announced that, by the first quarter of 2026, a 28th European regime would be introduced to provide a single, voluntary and simplified framework making it easier for businesses to enter the single market, while at the same time making Europe more attractive to foreign investors. Similarly, he confirmed the desire to gradually adopt ‘100% digital’ approaches across the board, starting with the digitisation of certificates of conformity and user instructions.

He then turned to the issue of European standardisation bodies, whose decision-making was currently too time-consuming for business needs. He proposed that, in

the absence of consensus on a common standard in certain sectors, the Commission could be empowered to formulate a relevant standard, in close consultation with the parties concerned.

Before concluding, Mr SÉJOURNÉ announced a long-awaited step forward, namely the definition of a European framework for small mid-cap enterprises with fewer than 750 employees. He described them as the ‘gems’ of the European economy, often among the most innovative and dynamic, but also among the most vulnerable when looking to scale up. He stressed their key role in local economies, notably in rural areas, where they formed part of a much larger ecosystem well beyond their sole business activity. In his view, they were both potential future European multinationals and an essential part of the living fabric of local communities.

However, he regretted that these companies might be hampered by inappropriate administrative thresholds, such as the threshold of 250 employees, and stated that the proposed new definition would allow them to benefit from specific, tailor-made support. This approach would, on the one hand, produce an alignment with the simplifications planned for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in terms of data protection or access to financial markets and, on the other, yield measures tailored to the size and specific characteristics of small mid-caps.

Mr SÉJOURNÉ concluded by noting that this strategy followed up on the recommendations contained in the reports of Mr Letta and Mr Draghi. It aimed to create a more predictable, equitable and integrated business environment and to restore clarity, simplicity and strength to the single market.

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

- full support for the proposed package and its strong message on the importance, in the current geopolitical context, of boosting the productivity and prosperity of the European economy, in particular through the removal of persistent barriers and the rigorous implementation of the rules of the single market;

- the recognition of the differences between national legal systems applicable to businesses, which constituted a barrier to the proper functioning of the single market, and the resulting need to introduce a 28th regime with a sufficiently broad scope to meet the expectations of economic actors;
- in this context, a reminder of the public consultation which the Commission intended to launch in the near future on the creation of this 28th regime and its sectoral scope;
- the opportunity presented by the current international trade climate to encourage Member States to overcome their reluctance to remove the remaining barriers in the single market in the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises, innovative businesses and European citizens;
- the key role of the single market in the circular economy and the need to ensure compliance with EU rules, including on plastics recycling by large importers, in order to create a level playing field for European companies;
- the importance of further developing large cross-border physical infrastructure projects that could facilitate trade and effectively contribute to reducing barriers within the single market;
- the inclusion this year, for the first time, of compliance with single market rules in the Rule of Law Report;
- the importance of the simplification measures proposed, in particular the first targeted amendment of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), welcomed for the balance achieved between the protection of personal data and the reduction of the administrative burden on businesses;
- appreciation for the planned simplification regarding the compliance of small companies importing or exporting fluorinated greenhouse gases, which was in

line with the simplification of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM);

- reference to the limited recognition of professional qualifications and the binding rules for posting workers in low-risk sectors as among the ten most harmful barriers to the single market reported by companies;
- the importance of ensuring adequate protection of social rights in order to avoid any form of social dumping;
- the need to extend the single market approach and the principle of free movement to the defence industry, so as to reduce the current national fragmentation in this field.

The PRESIDENT wound up the debate by stressing the need to transform the proposed strategy into concrete actions on the ground. In this regard, she proposed that the College report on the implementation of this strategy twice a year. She also announced that the Commission would be organising a conference this summer dedicated to the first year of implementation of the recommendations of Mr Draghi's report on the future of EU competitiveness.

Lastly, she reminded the College of the need for the Commission to continue working closely with European leaders and their ministers to remove together the remaining barriers to the realisation of the full potential of the single market.

Following this presentation, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2025) 500/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments;

- adopted the Commission Recommendation in C(2025) 3500/2 for transmission to the Member States and for publication, for information, in the *Official Journal of the European Union*;
- adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2025) 501/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Data Protection Board, the European Data Protection Supervisor and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2025) 501/2, the contents of which were noted;
- adopted the proposal for a Directive set out in COM(2025) 502/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2025) 501/2, the contents of which were noted.

12. VISIT TO THE COLLEGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC

The PRESIDENT warmly welcomed the President of the Italian Republic, H.E. Sergio Mattarella, who was invited to the College for an exchange of views during his state visit to the European institutions. She praised Italy's role as a founding country of the EU and highlighted the remarkable progress made together since the beginning of the process of European integration.

She pointed out that H.E. Sergio Mattarella was the President who had held the longest term of office in the history of the Italian Republic and that, throughout that term of more than ten years, he had consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to Europe and a strong desire to place Italy at the heart of the joint project.

She then referred to the Italian President's recent call for the EU to be more ambitious, be it in the economic field or standing with Ukraine, as illustrated through his reference to Puccini's famous '*Nessun dorma*'. She assured him that the Commission had heard this message and would take action along these lines, with a focus on strengthening the EU, increasing its competitiveness and preserving the planet for future generations.

The PRESIDENT concluded by recalling their meeting in 2023 in Palermo, the Italian President's home town, where she had been moved by how warmly he was welcomed by his fellow citizens, especially younger people.

H.E. Sergio Mattarella thanked the PRESIDENT and the Members of the College for their welcome. He considered this to be a historic moment for the EU and was proud of the progress made in European integration over the decades. Faced with shifts in the international order, he called for a collective awareness, as he considered that the time had come to take concrete action to protect the EU. He believed that social consensus would only be sustainable if the EU was able to demonstrate its effectiveness.

He mentioned several priority areas for action, such as ensuring economic prosperity, guaranteeing that the rule of law was respected, better managing migration and strengthening social welfare systems. With regard to the external threats that were fuelling instability, in particular Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East and the recent tensions between India and Pakistan, he stressed the urgent need to overcome the obstacles to the implementation of a common defence policy, as provided for in Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

In this context, H.E. Sergio Mattarella encouraged the EU to exert greater global influence, building on strong partnerships with all regions, in particular with the Southern Neighbourhood and the African continent. He stressed the need to translate political commitments into concrete measures in key areas such as energy,

migration and development. He also saw trade agreements as a key lever for anchoring the EU in an international trade network where it would play a leading role.

With regard to enlargement, he called for the accession process of the candidate countries to be speeded up, warning that a prolonged delay could weaken momentum in the EU and expand areas of instability. In his view, the aim had to be that of a larger, more resilient and more cohesive EU.

In conclusion, H.E. Sergio Mattarella hoped that the current policy cycle would be used to take a decisive step forward in the overall reform of the EU to improve its competitiveness and internal cohesion. He recalled the importance of the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed in Gothenburg in 2017, as the basis for fair growth that would generate quality jobs. Lastly, he called for the method of budgetary negotiation to be reconsidered, for the EU to be given greater resources and for the single market to be completed.

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

- the honour and inspiration of having H.E. Sergio Mattarella at a meeting of the College, and the appreciation of his continued commitment to the European project;
- the EU's ability to reinvent itself in the face of crises by turning them into opportunities and the need to act decisively to counter the dangers that would result from inaction;
- the Commission's central role, as the institution safeguarding the European general interest, in providing concrete answers to the current challenges, in accordance with the Treaties and in close cooperation with the other institutions and the Member States;

- the importance of respect for the rule of law and justice as a basis for the credibility and unity of the EU, both internally and internationally;
- Italy’s valuable contribution to discussions on the institutional development of the EU, with reforms often supported across political divides, and the need to speed up their implementation in the current context;
- the symbolic significance of the first European Cultural Capital 2025 resulting from the twinning of two cross-border cities, Gorizia in Italy and Nova Gorica in Slovenia, to celebrate the idea of a united Europe, where culture blurs borders;
- the need, in the same spirit, to heal past wounds in the Western Balkans in order to move forward together, following the logic of former Italian President Luigi Einaudi, according to which European countries must ‘exist united or disappear’;
- the fact that enlargement went beyond simple geographical extension, and represented a real historic opportunity to pursue European unification;
- the opportunity to move towards a genuine defence union, as well as the conviction that European defence policy could not be allowed to fail;
- the recognition of the complexity of the current international environment, and the appreciation of Italy’s support in defending the EU’s economic interests, including in trade discussions with the US;
- the need to continue to defend the European tradition of openness and rules-based trade;
- the importance of bolstering the EU’s international presence by diversifying its range of partnerships, in a spirit of equality and mutually beneficial cooperation, through the Global Gateway strategy and using a Team Europe approach;

- in particular, the advisability of deepening ties with North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf countries to strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy, and Italy's commitment in this regard;
- the possibility of gradually reducing dependence on unreliable and hostile energy suppliers by improving connectivity with Mediterranean countries and through major infrastructure projects, such as interconnectors;
- the need to effectively tackle trafficking and irregular forms of migration, while developing legal pathways for mobility and talent partnerships;
- the need to prioritise competitiveness and clean growth, building on Europe's capacity to innovate and its industrial capabilities, and Italy's crucial role in helping to drive this forward, as a founding member with a strong industrial and scientific base;
- mention of Italy's specific economic model, structured around mid-sized companies that were highly export-focused, a model which could be further strengthened by the EU's competitiveness agenda;
- the role of critical technologies, such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors and quantum computing, in shaping European competitiveness, security and democracy;
- the importance of finalising the financial union, with the entry into force of the revised Treaty establishing the European Stability Mechanism (ESM);
- recognition of the contribution made by the Letta and Draghi reports to the strategic discussion on European competitiveness;
- the need to combine economic ambition with a commitment to societal issues by consolidating the European pillar of social rights, ensuring that, for posted workers, the right balance was struck between allowing freedom of movement

and safeguarding social standards, and by focusing on solidarity, skills and the sustainable management of natural resources;

- the quality of the partnership with Italy on social issues, education policies, skills development, and children’s mental health and well-being;
- the importance of Erasmus+ as a pillar of European identity, with Italy being one of the favourite destinations for Erasmus students;
- the major challenge posed by the demographic transition, requiring a coordinated response at European level, particularly by using the Team Europe method to drive action on social, educational and territorial policies;
- the need for a sustainable and joined-up approach to water management, which was considered a strategic challenge for the future of the EU, and Italy’s contribution given its experience with water infrastructure and climate resilience;
- recognition of the vital role of oceans and fisheries for coastal and island communities and, with that in mind, the importance of the upcoming European Oceans Pact;
- a reminder that the common agricultural policy, the first concrete tool to have made European integration a tangible reality, remained essential for food security and cohesion, and the need to strengthen it by means of a unity safety net in times of crisis.

Following this exchange of views, H.E. Sergio Mattarella praised the wide range of topics discussed, which had provided ample food for thought. He pointed out that periods of crisis had often been catalysts for progress for the EU, and stressed the importance of not wavering on commitments, particularly with regard to protecting the environment and the oceans. He referred to the natural disasters that had had a severe impact on the EU and Italy in recent years, such as droughts, fires and floods.

Turning to the issue of energy, he stressed the urgent need to finish building common infrastructure at EU level, as this was an essential means of ensuring energy security and reducing people's energy bills.

On defence, H.E. Sergio Mattarella noted that, although collective EU spending on defence stood at between one third and half of the US defence budget, its deterrent effect remained limited. He called for better coordination of the armed forces across Europe, and for their interoperability and mobility to be improved.

On agriculture, he pointed out that the Treaties of Rome still provided the framework for agricultural policy, but felt it was now necessary to consider how this policy could be modernised to adapt it to current challenges.

He also referred to the completion of the Capital Markets Union, which, in his view, was a complex but crucial issue. Ahead of any enlargement, it was essential to carefully consider what institutional reforms and changes to sectoral rules might be needed.

H.E. Sergio Mattarella also pointed to two flagship projects for young people in Europe, namely Erasmus+ and Schengen. He stressed the importance of guaranteeing that the generations to come would be free to travel and study anywhere in Europe, and considered this an essential requirement for securing the future of the European project. In that regard, he congratulated the PRESIDENT on the agreement signed with the United Kingdom that week.

He concluded by saying that this exchange of views would feed into future discussions, reaffirming that Italy and its government remained fully committed to working with the Commission on all these priorities.

The PRESIDENT warmly thanked H.E. Sergio Mattarella for having participated to the College meeting, stating that his visit was greatly appreciated. She was pleased to note the significant amount of convergence between the ideas he had expressed and the Commission's political guidelines.

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The meeting closed at 11.12.