



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2026) 2553 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 4 March 2026

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2553rd meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Thursday 29 January 2026

(morning)

PV(2026) 2553 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: 29 January 2026 (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 11 (in part)
Ms VIRKKUNEN	Executive Vice-President	
Mr SÉJOURNÉ	Executive Vice-President	
Mr FITTO	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Member	Items 8/10 (in part) to 12
Ms ŠUICA	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 1 to 12 (in part)
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	
Ms KOS	Member	Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Mr SÍKELA	Member	Item 12 (in part)
Mr KADIS	Member	
Ms ALBUQUERQUE	Member	
Ms LAHBIB	Member	
Mr BRUNNER	Member	
Ms ROSWALL	Member	
Mr SERAFIN	Member	
Mr JØRGENSEN	Member	
Ms ZAHARIEVA	Member	
Mr HANSEN	Member	
Mr MICALLEF	Member	Items 8/10 (in part) to 12

Absent:

Ms KALLAS	High Representative / Vice-President
Ms MÎNZATU	Executive Vice-President
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Member
Mr KUBILIUS	Member
Mr McGRATH	Member
Mr TZITZIKOSTAS	Member

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr DE GREGORIO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms PINHO	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms ERIKSSON WATERSCHOOT	Deputy Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr ADAM	Deputy Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 8/10
Mr PIERGIOVANNI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Item 11
Ms SEMLALI	Policy Assistant in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr CHARLES	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	
Mr TAQUET-GRAZIANI	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2026) 2553/FINAL; SEC(2026) 2553/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(2026) 2553)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Tuesday 27 January 2026.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2547th, 2548th, 2549th, 2550th, 2551st and 2552nd meetings of 3, 10 and 16 December 2025, and 14, 20 and 23 January 2026 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2026) 153)

The Commission took note of the outcome of the written exchange of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) that took place between 19 and 23 January 2026 (RCC(2026) 153).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Amendment of Directives (EU) 2009/65/EC, 2009/138/EC, 2011/61/EU, 2014/65/EU and (EU) 2016/97 as regards the Union retail investor protection rules (Directive) – YON-COURTIN report – 2023/0167 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2026) 2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Scrutiny of delegated and implementing acts and related empowerments (DG HOME)**

Information set out in SPI(2026) 13/2.

- **Scrutiny of delegated and implementing acts and related empowerments (DG CNECT and DG DIGIT)**

Information set out in SPI(2026) 15.

- **Scrutiny of delegated and implementing acts and related empowerments (DG ENEST)**

Information set out in SPI(2026) 18.

- **Scrutiny of delegated and implementing acts and related empowerments (DG GROW)**

Information set out in SPI(2026) 17.

- **Establishment of the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2023/955 and Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 (Regulation) – RESSLER & NOVAKOV & KATAINEN report – 2025/0240 (COD)**

Information set out in SPI(2026) 20.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2026) 203)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2026) 203 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Friday 23 January 2026.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2026) 30 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 19 and 25 January 2026.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2026) 31 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 19 and 25 January 2026.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2026) 32 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 19 and 25 January 2026 archived in Decide.

**6.4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED
(SEC(2026) 33 AND /2)**

The Commission took note of the written procedures specifically identified for which the time limit expired between 26 and 30 January 2026, and of the finalisation written procedures.

6.5. GRANTING OF AN AD HOC EMPOWERMENT TO THE MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR FISHERIES TO ADOPT PROTECTIVE MEASURES IN THE EVENT OF THE COUNCIL'S FAILURE TO FIX FISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CERTAIN FISH STOCKS, APPLICABLE IN UNION WATERS AND, FOR UNION FISHING VESSELS, IN CERTAIN NON-UNION WATERS (C(2026) 450)

The Commission decided to grant an ad hoc empowerment to the Member of the Commission with responsibility for fisheries to adopt, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, protective measures for fish stocks in the event of the Council's failure to fix fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters, subject to the conditions laid down in Articles 2 to 8 of the Decision.

The Commission adopted the Decision in C(2026) 450.

**7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2026) 34/2 AND /3)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2026) 5/2, /3 AND /4)**

During the meeting, Mr SERAFIN presented an additional proposal for an administrative decision, which was tabled directly to the College for approval. It was proposed to approve the appointment of Ms Géraldine MAHIEU to the post of Deputy Director-General of DG Economic and Financial Affairs.

**7.1. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF A
DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL AT GRADE AD15
(PERS(2026) 7 AND /2)**

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 responsible for ‘Coordination of Economic Policies of Member States (in charge of Directorates E, F and G)’ in DG Economic and Financial Affairs (PERS(2026) 7).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 30 November 2025 and 9 January 2026 (PERS(2026) 7/2).

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 Mr DOMBROVSKIS, it then decided to appoint Ms Géraldine MAHIEU to the post.

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

**7.2. DG DEFENSE INDUSTRY AND SPACE – APPOINTMENT OF A
DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14
(PERS(2025) 27 TO /3)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 2 of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘Defence Policy’ Directorate in DG Defence Industry and Space (PERS(2025) 27 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 18 December 2025 and 22 January 2026 (PERS(2025) 27/3).

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 Mr KUBILIUS, it then decided to appoint Mr Tomasz HUSAK to the post.

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

7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (AT GRADE AD9/14) (PERS(2026) 6)

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to approve the list of candidates, in PERS(2026) 6, for the post of Head of the European Union Delegation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (at grade AD9/14).

The competent authority of the European External Action Service would make the final appointments on the basis of this list.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.4. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL ADVISER

The Commission took note of the information set out in point 3 of PERS(2026) 5/2 and, on a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms MÎNZATU, decided:

- to appoint Ms Ylva JOHANSSON as Chair of the European Skills High-Level Board;
- to appoint Ms Ylva JOHANSSON as a Special Adviser under the authority of Ms MÎNZATU;
- that Ms Ylva JOHANSSON would be remunerated for her services. Her

Special Adviser contract would be concluded for an initial period of two years, for a maximum of 60 working days across its duration, and would take effect from the date of closure of the notification to the Budgetary Authority, under Article 123(2) of the Conditions of Employment of other servants of the European Union. The contract could be renewed;

- 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 carrying out the necessary contractual arrangements on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

Unless indicated otherwise, these decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.5. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – EUROPEAN COMMISSION DECISIONS
ON POST TERM-OF-OFFICE ACTIVITIES OF FORMER MEMBERS
OF THE COMMISSION
(C(2026) 9001; C(2026) 9002)**

The Commission decided that the professional activities envisaged by Ms Elisa FERREIRA and Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES after leaving office as Members of the Commission were compatible with Article 245(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and with the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, subject to certain conditions and obligations.

The Commission adopted the Decisions set out in C(2026) 9001 and C(2026) 9002.

**7.6. DG RESOURCES AND SECURITY – ADOPTION OF A PENALTY
DECISION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A DISCIPLINARY**

PROCEDURE

(C(2026) 645)

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

- to adopt the decision in C(2026) 645, with the date of entry into force indicated therein;
- to instruct the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security to communicate this decision to the person concerned and to implement it.

This decision would take effect immediately.

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL – EUROPEAN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

(COM(2026) 45 TO /3; RCC(2026) 7)

9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL ON EU VISA POLICY STRATEGY

(COM(2026) 43 TO /3; RCC(2026) 6)

10. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON ATTRACTING TALENT FOR INNOVATION

(C(2026) 462 AND /2)

The PRESIDENT welcomed that day's presentation of the Migration and Asylum Strategy, noting that, in the past, the Member States had often been divided on the issue of migrants. She stressed that illegal migration was a European challenge requiring a European solution, and that the Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted by the co-legislators in May 2024, established a common legal framework,

irrespective of the point of entry into the EU.

She also referred to the progress made on cooperation with neighbouring countries and countries of origin, which had been made aware of their responsibility for managing their borders and their citizens. This progress was reflected by a reduction in the number of irregular migrants. However, she noted that challenges remained, as criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling were constantly finding new ways of circumventing the rules. This meant that efforts to tackle the issue could not be relaxed.

Lastly, the PRESIDENT highlighted the importance of legal migration, given the demographic context and the situation on the EU labour market, arguing that such migration must be orderly and targeted at skilled workers.

Ms VIRKKUNEN then presented the first European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, pointing out that it was the result of a collective effort on the part of the Commission and the Member States, and that it was a response to both a legal obligation and political necessity. The strategy was based on existing rules and practices which had proven to be effective, since greater cooperation between Member States and partner countries had brought illegal migration numbers down. Challenges remained, however, and the question of migration was still a major policy issue in the public debate.

The proposed strategy set out the way forward to achieve three main objectives: (i) prevent illegal migration and stop the criminal smuggling networks, (ii) protect people fleeing war and persecution while preventing abuse of the system, and (iii) attract the talented and skilled people the EU needed to boost its competitiveness.

On the issue of preventing illegal migration, Ms VIRKKUNEN felt it was necessary to engage more in proactive migration diplomacy that promoted the EU's interests and values. The Commission would therefore step up its efforts, working together with the Member States, to boost cooperation with international partners by

promoting comprehensive and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Regarding legal migration, she believed that a paradigm shift was needed given the skills and labour shortages in the EU. With that in mind, she welcomed the fact that, in parallel to the negotiations on the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, the Commission had successfully negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding on skilled labour, focusing on the ICT sector in particular.

Moreover, she considered that the Pact on Migration and Asylum should now be implemented without delay, as this would provide concrete proof that the EU and its Member States were taking control of the migration situation. She noted that artificial intelligence (AI) could also help make migration management systems more effective. In that connection, she stressed the need to strike the right balance between upholding European values and assertively defending European interests.

Ms VIRKKUNEN then presented the first-ever European Visa Policy Strategy and the Recommendation on attracting talent for innovation. The strategy set out a unified European framework for a more strategic visa policy that promoted the EU's long-term interests, in line with European values. The strategy covered security, competitiveness and the EU's position as a trusted partner on the international stage. She noted that, given the reluctance of some Member States, European solutions needed to be put forward for Schengen visas, entailing a review of the Visa Code and the adoption of restrictive measures, if necessary, in close cooperation with all the Member States.

Lastly, to boost Europe's competitiveness, it was important to support businesses and attract the talent and skills that they needed. To achieve this, procedures needed to be simplified, operational assistance provided, and the existing legal framework strengthened, while also making use of more efficient digital solutions and considering the option of 'fast-track visas' to meet the needs of European start-ups and scale-ups. Ms VIRKKUNEN concluded by reiterating the importance of keeping the right balance between a more assertive visa policy and upholding

European interests.

Mr BRUNNER felt that the EU was at a turning point on migration and asylum. In 2025, the EU had shown that it could follow through on its commitments on migration, with a 55% reduction in illegal border crossings compared with 2023 and a 21% reduction in asylum applications. He stressed the importance of the ‘safe country’ concept for returns and welcomed the fact that many Member States now shared the same vision as the Commission in this area.

He believed that it was important to better communicate the benefits of implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Pact would make it possible to secure the EU’s external borders, have swift and efficient procedures and put in place an effective system of solidarity and responsibility. He stressed that it was vital to tackle people-smugglers and criminal organisations. As regards the application of return decisions, the proposal for a Regulation establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union, adopted by the Commission in March 2025, was due to be examined by the co-legislators during Cyprus’ Presidency of the Council.

He stressed that the strategy being proposed that day stated for the first time that immigration figures had to fall and remain low, whereas previously only migration management had been discussed. He also referred to diplomatic engagement with third countries, which needed to shoulder their responsibilities, the need for cooperation with international organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the establishment of a toolbox. In his view, all possible leverage needed to be used to control who entered EU territory and who had to leave it.

Mr BRUNNER felt that it was also crucial to attract the talent and skills of citizens from third countries. He noted that cooperation between Members of the College was essential in this regard, as the issue affected many European policies. The aim

was to improve the EU's attractiveness, for example with access points or 'legal portals' similar to those agreed with India alongside the Free Trade Agreement.

He then referred to the European Visa Policy Strategy, pointing out that 40% of international travellers had Europe as their destination, and that 10 million visas were issued each year by the Member States. He added that many countries were currently exempt from visas, but that this exemption should remain a privilege, subject to certain obligations based on objective criteria. As regards the countries for which a visa was required, the plan was to strengthen the link between the issuing criteria and European requirements on border protection, security and the fight against illegal migration.

Mr BRUNNER concluded his presentation by expressing his hope that the new European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) would generate increased revenue for the European budget. He added that the procedures for issuing visas should be paperless in 2028 within the European Union and that further thought was being given to the possibility of issuing multiple-entry visas for longer periods than the current five years.

During the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- a reminder that border control and the fight against illegal migration were priority objectives for the EU and its Member States;
- satisfaction with the figures showing a decrease in the arrivals of irregular migrants, but the need for continued efforts;
- the importance of properly communicating the fundamental differences between legal and illegal migration;
- a reminder that at least 90% of irregular migrants were brought into the EU by criminal networks, and the need to step up the fight against these smuggling organisations;

- a mention of the controversial solution of setting up return centres for migrants in third countries;
- the importance of a robust strategy to attract and retain talent, by implementing all the tools of existing legislation and facilitating the required procedures;
- in this context, the value of initiatives such as Choose Europe in attracting the best talent to the EU;
- the importance of not discouraging talent through cumbersome procedures, and in this regard the need to simplify procedures for entering and residing in Europe;
- the need for qualified people, in particular engineers and IT specialists, as part of a more structured migration policy, but also a reminder of the importance of having a workforce willing to carry out tasks requiring few qualifications and for which demand exceeded supply in the EU;
- the issue of the integration of migrants within the EU and its political implications, which required pragmatic solutions in the short and longer term;
- the importance in this context of creating integration pathways and a balanced approach, while respecting the right to asylum and individual rights;
- the necessary support of all Commissioners during the negotiations on the EU budget, which proposed in particular a budget envelope for IT systems and cooperation with third countries;
- the need to clarify the provisions of Article 25a of the EU Visa Code as regards the measures that could be taken to restrict the granting of visas for nationals of third countries that did not cooperate sufficiently on the readmission of their irregular migrants;

- a reminder of the potential revenue from the ETIAS system, expected from 2026 onwards;
- the importance for the EU's image and credibility of a migration policy that met citizens' expectations;
- the fact that some Member States had been advocating tough migration policies for several years.

Following the discussions, the PRESIDENT stressed that the next Multiannual Financial Framework provided for more than EUR 80 billion for internal security, borders, visas, asylum and migration. She considered that financial support to third countries should be in line with EU political objectives and in particular the management of migration flows. She noted that irregular migrants worked in Member States undocumented and therefore did not pay contributions or receive benefits, which placed them in a highly vulnerable situation. Legal channels of migration should therefore be prioritised, as was the case, for example, under an agreement with the Philippines.

She felt that the matter of returns should also be given full importance. She noted that when an asylum application was refused, 80% of the foreigners concerned nevertheless remained on European soil and only 20% returned to their country of origin, a proportion which should at least be reversed. She concluded by stressing that the right to asylum must be respected, as Europe must not forget its history. However, where international protection was not justified, legal migration was the only way forward, as it was safe and regulated by law.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2026) 45/3 for transmission to the European Parliament and the Council and, for information, to the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments;

- approved the Communication in COM(2026) 43/3 for transmission to the European Parliament and the Council and, for information, to the national parliaments;
- adopted the Recommendation in C(2026) 462/2 and decided to transmit it, for information, to the European Parliament and the Council.

11. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: THE 2026 ANNUAL SINGLE MARKET AND COMPETITIVENESS REPORT (COM(2026) 46 TO /3; SWD(2026) 30 TO /3 ; RCC(2026) 8)

Mr SÉJOURNÉ presented the 2026 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report, stressing that the report was an exclusively factual exercise that took stock of the functioning of the internal market and the state of EU competitiveness in a context of heightened geopolitical tensions, growing economic fragmentation and strong external pressure on European industry. He noted that the overall assessment was worrying, with most key performance indicators suggesting either stagnation or deterioration. The main conclusion to be drawn from the report was that there was a need to speed up the implementation of the Single Market Strategy in order to unlock its full potential.

Mr SÉJOURNÉ stressed the importance of reviewing the narrative and communication relating to the development of the internal market. For many years, the EU narrative had been mainly technical and procedural, focusing on instruments, compliance and the removal of barriers. In his view, this approach should be abandoned in favour of a clearer statement of the economic objectives and expected outcomes, notably in terms of growth, employment, investment and long-term economic prospects. He felt that communication on the single market currently did not put enough emphasis on these benefits and did not use language that was

clear and accessible to all citizens. He also pointed out that the intention was to avoid a discussion that was too general on the internal market.

He then set out the overall vision, which enabled progress to be made simultaneously along three lines of action. The first focused on deepening the single market to create a market of 450 million consumers as a way of generating gains in terms of productivity and growth. The second consisted of an active trade policy, which would enable the EU to diversify its exports and imports and reduce strategic dependencies through the conclusion of trade agreements. The third was related to industrial policy, aiming to direct public investment towards strategically important sectors and strengthen the resilience of the EU's industrial base. He stressed that these three lines of action were mutually reinforcing and should be presented as such, in order to address the various sensitivities of the Member States.

With regard to the implementation of the internal market, Mr SÉJOURNÉ explained that work was now moving from a phase centred on strategic orientation to one centred on results and execution, structured around two complementary strands. The first strand concerned action at national level. In this regard, he referred to the mapping and detailed analysis of the most harmful barriers to the internal market, in particular the 'Terrible Ten'. An assessment must be carried out on a country-by-country basis, using a methodology designed to identify concrete obstacles and raise collective awareness of the situation in the capitals. The second strand concerned action at EU level, through the drawing up of a roadmap by the Commission. He reminded the College that a significant proportion of the obstacles stemmed from national practices that went beyond what was required to transpose and implement EU legislation.

At the same time, Mr SÉJOURNÉ highlighted the areas in which the Commission had a direct role to play, notably telecommunications, energy and capital markets, as well as the development of a 28th legal regime to enable innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups to overcome the fragmentation of the internal market. Progress in these areas required close coordination between EU

policies and with Member States, along with commitment at the highest national level.

Finally, he stressed the importance of fully involving the European Parliament and the Council from the beginning of the process. He underlined the need for a joint commitment on the part of the institutions to complete, by 2028, the Single Market Roadmap announced by the PRESIDENT.

During the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- a broad consensus on the central role of the single market as the main lever for competitiveness, growth and economic resilience in the current geopolitical context;
- the observation that progress was still insufficient, together with a call for faster implementation, better prioritisation, and clear and credible timetables;
- the importance of a strong political commitment on the part of all EU institutions in order to ensure that the agreed objectives were achieved and deadlines met, on the basis of precise mandates from the political leaders;
- the need to strengthen the monitoring of compliance with internal market rules, in particular through more systematic use of infringement procedures, as the lack of effective implementation and enforcement of the common rules weakened the EU's credibility and caused economic losses;
- support for a more pragmatic and structured approach, based in particular on identifying the most harmful obstacles ('Terrible Ten'), combined, where appropriate, with a cross-cutting approach to reconciling divergent interests between Member States;
- the need to address persistent obstacles, notably national over-transposition, restrictions on the movement of services, burdensome procedures for temporary

posting of workers, as well as fragmented rules, in particular with regard to the labelling of agricultural products;

- recognition of the potential of the single market to support the circular transition, in particular through the creation of a genuine internal market for waste regarded as a resource;
- the role of the capital market as a key component of the internal market, with a call for ambitious and operational wording in the conclusions of the European Council in order to ensure concrete progress;
- support for enhanced cooperation arrangements, including the idea of a two-speed ‘coalition of the willing’ approach if not all Member States wish to move forward at the same pace;
- the importance of an active trade policy to diversify EU imports and exports;
- lastly, the importance of improving the narrative and communication concerning the internal market by putting greater emphasis on its concrete economic benefits and successes.

At the end of the discussion, the PRESIDENT pointed out that the Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report constituted a diagnostic exercise based on figures, trends and key performance indicators, and was therefore neither a strategic nor political document. She highlighted some areas of progress noted in the 2026 report, in particular, recognition of professional skills and qualifications, the increasing use of artificial intelligence by businesses, and the growing share of renewable energy production. At the same time, she pointed out that the results differed across Member States and that intra-EU trade remained below its potential, therefore demonstrating that the single market was not yet delivering its full benefits.

As regards the increase in infringement procedures, the PRESIDENT took a positive view of this development, noting that it reflected a more assertive approach in the application of EU law and greater vigilance in ensuring compliance with single market rules.

She then referred to key performance indicators on the shortage of skilled workers, and to educational outcomes, including school performance as measured by the PISA programme. These areas fell largely within the remit of national competences, particularly as regards education systems, however, she deemed it important that these challenges be clearly highlighted and brought to the attention of the Member States, given their impact on competitiveness.

Finally, the PRESIDENT reminded the College that its seminar on 4 February would focus on competitiveness, in preparation for the Leaders' retreat on 12 February.

Following these presentations, the Commission agreed, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, that the Communication in COM(2026) 46/3 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set for Friday 30 January 2026 (PE/2026/472).

12. OTHER BUSINESS

12.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION, PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'STOP FUNDING RUSSIA'S WAR: PHASE OUT HARMFUL AND USELESS RUSSIAN IMPORTS INTO THE EU'
(C(2026) 460)

In the absence of Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, the Secretary-General presented to the College the request for registration of the citizens' initiative entitled, in the authentic language (English), 'Stop Funding Russia's War: Phase Out Harmful and Useless Russian Imports into the EU'.

The aim of the initiative, as expressed by the organisers, was to call on the Commission to propose firm and immediate measures to end the EU's remaining import dependencies on Russia and Belarus by introducing sectoral bans or decisive phase-outs.

The Secretary-General noted that no part of this citizens' initiative manifestly exceeded the scope of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties. Consequently, this initiative could be considered admissible, and she therefore proposed to register it.

She concluded her presentation by pointing out that the organisers would now have to start collecting the necessary number of signatures, i.e. at least one million signatures in seven Member States. It was only after the signatures had been collected that the Commission would give its opinion on the substance of the initiative.

Following this presentation, the Commission confirmed that the citizens' initiative 'Stop Funding Russia's War: Phase Out Harmful and Useless Russian Imports into the EU' met the conditions needed for it to be registered. In accordance with C(2026) 460, the Commission therefore decided to inform the organisers and authorised Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to sign the reply on behalf of the College, to send it to the organisers, and to publish it, for information, in the Official Journal of the European Union.

12.2. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRESIDENT informed the College about the conclusion of negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and India, noting that it encompassed two billion people and two economies that together produced 25% of global gross domestic product (GDP). The agreement would reduce tariffs on European imports into India to 10% for the automotive sector, 20% for spirits and 0% for olive oil. At the same time, some sensitive European agricultural products would be fully protected, such as beef, chicken meat, rice and sugar, which were excluded from the agreement.

She noted that the European and Indian economies were complementary, which reinforced the positive effect of the agreement. The agreement also included a security and defence partnership component. Finally, she highlighted the political message that the agreement sent to the whole world, namely that rules-based trade was possible and that trade agreements were beneficial for all partners.

During the brief discussion that followed, the Commission referred to the long road that had led to the conclusion of the agreement, the expected positive effect on the European agricultural sector, and the relevance for the EU of continuing to conclude free trade agreements with other global partners.

Ms LAHBIB then informed the College of the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Following the continuation of Russian strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, in exceptionally harsh weather conditions, the Commission had recently mobilised 447 emergency generators from the RescEU strategic reserves to restore power supplies to hospitals, shelters and critical services.

She drew attention to the resulting impact on RescEU stock levels in the fields of energy and preparedness against nuclear, radiological, biological or chemical (NRBC) risk. She stressed the need for stocks to be replenished as

soon as possible, if possible using the budgetary reserves of the current Multiannual Financial Framework.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 10.48.