



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2011)1956 final

Brussels, 4 May 2011

MINUTES
of the 1956th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 13 April 2011
(morning)

PV(2011)1956 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 13 April 2011 (morning)

The sitting opened at 09.07 with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair.

Present:

Mr BARROSO	President	
Baroness ASHTON	High Representative/Vice-President	Items 12 to 14
Ms REDING	Vice-President	
Mr ALMUNIA	Vice-President	
Ms KROES	Vice-President	
Mr POTOČNIK		
Mr REHN		Items 1 to 12
Mr PIEBALGS		
Mr BARNIER		Items 12 (in part) to 14
Ms VASSILIOU		
Mr ŠEMETA		
Mr DE GUCHT		Items 12 (in part) to 14
Ms GEOGHEGAN-QUINN		
Mr LEWANDOWSKI		Items 1 to 14 (in part)
Ms DAMANAKI		
Mr OETTINGER		
Ms HEDEGAARD		
Mr FÜLE		
Mr ANDOR		
Mr CIOLOŞ		

Absent:

Mr KALLAS	Vice-President
Mr TAJANI	Vice-President
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President
Mr DALLI	
Ms GEORGIEVA	
Mr HAHN	
Ms MALMSTRÖM	

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

Mr FITCH	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr KALLAS	Items 12 (in part) to 14
Mr BALDINATO	A member of Mr TAJANI's staff	
Mr NOCIAR	Chef de cabinet to Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	
Ms DARMANIN	Chef de cabinet to Mr DALLI	
Mr DELPHIN	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms GEORGIEVA	
Mr GAMBS	Chef de cabinet to Mr HAHN	
Ms ÅSENIUS	Chef de cabinet to Ms MALMSTRÖM	Items 1 to 14 (in part)

The following also sat in:

Mr LAITENBERGER	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr SØRENSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr DOENS	Head of the Commission Spokesperson Service	Item 14 (in part)
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Commission Spokeswoman	
Mr THEBAULT	Head of the Bureau of European Policy Advisers	
Ms MARTÍNEZ ALBEROLA	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 14 (in part)
Mr SOBRAL	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 14 (in part)
Ms SUTTON	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Item 13
Mr PESONEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr REHN	Items 1 to 12
Mr RITTER	A member of Mr REHN's staff	Items 13 and 14
Ms JORNA	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr BARNIER	Item 13
Mr VANHEUKELEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr DE GUCHT	Items 1 to 12 (in part)

Secretary: Ms DAY, Secretary-General, assisted by Mr AYET PUIGARNAU, Director in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2011)1956/3; SEC(2011)454/2)

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

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET

(SEC(2011)1956)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 11 April.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF THE 1954TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION AND THE MINUTES OF THE 1955TH MEETING (30 MARCH AND 5 APRIL)

(PV(2011)1954; PV(2011)1954, PART II; PV(2011)1955)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1954th and 1955th meetings.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

4.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Action to be taken on Parliament's legislative opinions

(SP(2011)3046)

The Commission decided to empower the Commission Members responsible for the sectors in question, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr ŠEFČOVIČ and, if necessary, with the other Members concerned, to adopt the amended proposals for transmission to Parliament and the Council, as set out in SP(2011)3046, drawn up following Parliament's part-session of 4-7 April, the contents of which were noted.

ii) Access by fishing vessels flying the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the exclusive economic zone off the coast of the French department of Guyana (Council Decision) – RIVELLINI report – 2010/0392 (NLE)

(SI(2011)109 to /3)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2011)109/3.

4.2. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

iii) Programming of Council business

(SI(2011)110)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2011)110 on the Council meetings between 14 and 27 April.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

iv) Results of the April part-session of Parliament

(SP(2011)2945 to /3)

The Commission took note of the information in SP(2011)2945 to /3 on the proceedings of the part-session of Parliament held in Strasbourg from 4 to 7 April.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

5.1. *WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED* ***(SEC(2011)455 ET SEQ.)***

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 8 April.

5.2. *EMPOWERMENT* ***(SEC(2011)456 ET SEQ.)***

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 8 April.

5.3. *DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS* ***(SEC(2011)457 ET SEQ.)***

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 4 and 8 April, as archived in e-Greffe.

5.4. *SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES* ***(SEC(2011)458 AND /2)***

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 11 and 15 April.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2011)459/2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2011)42/2)

6.1. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 PRINCIPAL ADVISER
(PERS(2011)20 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Adviser (IT governance) in the Secretariat-General (PERS(2011)20).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 18 February and 10 March (PERS(2011)20/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr François KODECK to the post.

This decision would take effect on 16 May 2011.

6.2. LEGAL SERVICE – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 PRINCIPAL LEGAL ADVISER
(PERS(2010)136 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Legal Adviser responsible for the 'Agriculture and Fisheries' team in the Legal Service (PERS(2010)136).

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It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 9 February and 3 March (PERS(2010)136/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Ms Karen BANKS to the post.

This decision would take effect on 16 April 2011.

6.3. *LEGAL SERVICE – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 PRINCIPAL LEGAL ADVISER*
(PERS(2010)137 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Principal Legal Adviser responsible for the 'CFSP and External Relations' team in the Legal Service (PERS(2010) 137).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 24 January and 17 February (PERS(2010)137/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Lucio GUSSETTI to the post.

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

6.4. *DG RESEARCH AND INNOVATION – TERMINATION OF THE SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR AN AD14 DIRECTOR POST*
(PERS(2011)17 AND /2)

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms GEOGHEGAN-QUINN, the Commission decided to terminate – without making any appointment – internal selection procedure COM/2010/10305 for

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the post of Director of the European Research Council Executive Agency.

This decision would take effect immediately.

6.5. *DG MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES – APPOINTMENT OF AD15 DIRECTOR*

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms DAMANAKI, the Commission decided to fill the post of Director ‘International Affairs and Markets’ in DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries by transferring in the interest of the service under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations Mr Stefaan DEPYPERE, an AD15 official and currently Director ‘Trade Defence’ in DG Trade.

This decision would take effect on 16 May 2011.

6.6. *DG CLIMATE ACTION - INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL (GRADE AD14/15) AND EXTERNAL (GRADE AD14 - EU-27) PUBLICATION OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR A PRINCIPAL ADVISER (PERS(2011)43)*

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms HEDEGAARD, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Articles 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), 29(1)(b) and 29(2) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2011) 43 for the post of Principal Adviser in DG Climate Action.

This decision would take effect immediately.

6.7. *DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – SECONDMENT IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE OF AN AD15 OFFICIAL*

On a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission approved the secondment in the interest of the service to the European External Action Service under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff

Regulations of Mr Frank ASBECK, an AD 15 official and currently Principal Adviser in DG Human Resources and Security.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7. COMMISSION DECISION ON A PROCEEDING UNDER ARTICLE 101 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ARTICLE 53 OF THE EEA AGREEMENT (CASE COMP/39579 – CONSUMER DETERGENTS) (C(2011)2528 TO /8; SEC(2011)508)

The Commission:

- took note of the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions of 11 April in C(2011)2528/7;
- took note of the final report of the Hearing Officer of 12 April in C(2011)2528/8;
- adopted in the authentic language (English) the decision in C(2011)2528/4 finding that the companies to which the decision was addressed had infringed Article 101 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 53 of the Agreement on the European Economic Area, requiring them to put an end to the infringements and imposing on some of these companies fines totalling EUR 315 200 000;
- decided that the decision in C(2011)2528/5 would be notified to the companies concerned, together with the final report of the Hearing Officer;
- decided that the key parts of the decision, together with the Advisory Committee's opinion and the Hearing Officer's final report, would be published in the official languages of the Union in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (with business secrets and other confidential information removed);

- decided also to publish the decision on the internet (with business secrets and other confidential information removed).

8. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING ENHANCED COOPERATION IN THE AREA OF THE CREATION OF UNITARY PATENT PROTECTION

(COM(2011)215 TO /3; SEC(2011)482 AND /2; SEC(2011)483; SEC(2011)484; SEC(2011)485; SEC(2011)486)

9. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL REGULATION IMPLEMENTING ENHANCED COOPERATION IN THE AREA OF THE CREATION OF UNITARY PATENT PROTECTION WITH REGARD TO THE APPLICABLE TRANSLATION ARRANGEMENTS

(COM(2011)216 TO /3; SEC(2011)482 AND /2; SEC(2011)483; SEC(2011)484; SEC(2011)485; SEC(2011)486)

The Commission adopted the two proposals for Regulations set out in COM(2011)215/3 and COM(2011)216/3, for transmission to the European Parliament and the Council, and to national parliaments, together with the impact assessment and the summary thereof in the staff working papers distributed as SEC(2011)482 and /2 and SEC(2011)483 respectively, the contents of which were noted.

It also took note of the opinion of the Impact Assessment Board on the above proposals for Regulations, as set out in SEC(2011)484.

10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE - SMARTER ENERGY TAXATION FOR THE EU: PROPOSAL FOR A REVISION OF THE ENERGY TAXATION DIRECTIVE

(COM(2011)168 TO /3; SEC(2011)416; SEC(2011)424)

11. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DIRECTIVE AMENDING DIRECTIVE 2003/96/EC RESTRUCTURING THE COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR THE TAXATION OF ENERGY PRODUCTS AND ELECTRICITY

(COM(2011)169 TO /3; SEC(2011)409; SEC(2011)410; SEC(2011)411; SEC(2011)416; SEC(2011)424)

The Commission approved the communication and adopted, subject to final revision, the proposal for a Directive set out in COM(2011)168/3 and COM(2011)169/3, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, and to national parliaments, together with the impact assessment and the summary thereof in the staff working papers distributed as SEC(2011)409 (volumes 1 and 2) and SEC(2011)410 respectively, the contents of which were noted.

It also took note of the opinion of the Impact Assessment Board on the above proposal for a Directive, as set out in SEC(2011)411.

12. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

(SI(2011)116)

The PRESIDENT introduced the presentation of recent economic developments. He regretted that certain information disclosed at the Commission meeting the previous week had been reported in the press, and moreover reported erroneously. He drew attention to the confidentiality rules concerning Commission meetings, stressing that it was these rules that allowed the disclosure of full information and the holding of in-depth and open exchanges.

Mr REHN, too, emphasised that the confidentiality of debates must be respected and warned against the risks of distortion of information before going on to report on the general economic situation.

On the macroeconomic front, he highlighted the European Central Bank's decision, which had been expected by the markets, to increase its key interest rate by 25 basis points owing to the rapid rise in inflation and exceptionally low interest rates. Turning next to the recent fluctuations in oil prices and the consequences of recent events in Japan, he said that these consequences might be felt longer than initially expected, although it was not possible to draw final conclusions as to their impact on the prospects for the world economy.

He also noted that the Portuguese authorities' decision to request financial assistance had had no effect on other countries or markets or on the performance of the euro. He emphasised, too, that this decision had not had an adverse effect on interest rate spreads, which had in fact continued to fall in the case of Ireland, reflecting the market perception that the Irish authorities were resolved to put in place appropriate measures to address the situation of the country's banking system. Using a graph distributed during the meeting, he also highlighted the positive situation of Spain with regard to interest rate spreads.

He told the meeting that the Commission would publish its next economic forecasts on 13 May and referred to the OECD and IMF growth forecasts, which he presented in a table which was also distributed at the meeting.

Returning in more detail to the situation of Portugal, Mr REHN reminded members that the Eurogroup had invited the Commission, the European Central Bank, the IMF and the Portuguese authorities to put in place a programme to guarantee financial stability. He explained that the financial assistance granted to Portugal would be based on a programme of fiscal consolidation and reform accompanied by strict conditions. This programme would be negotiated with the Portuguese authorities with the involvement of the main political parties in government and the opposition. Preparations had begun at once and a technical mission had been sent to Lisbon on 12 April to be followed next week by further in-depth meetings.

Mr REHN then presented the indicative timetable of the next stages concerning Portugal, pointing out that the negotiations would probably be concluded at the end of April and that the programme of measures would be adopted around mid-May in preparation for the Economic and Financial Affairs Council on 16 May. He stressed the need, highlighted by the Eurogroup, for as broad an agreement as possible to be reached with all the political forces in Portugal in order to implement the recovery programme as soon as possible once a new government had been formed.

The Commission took note of this information.

13. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – SINGLE MARKET ACT – TWELVE LEVERS TO BOOST GROWTH AND STRENGTHEN CONFIDENCE

(COM(2011)206 TO /4; SEC(2011)467; SEC(2011)468)

By way of introduction to the text presented to the Commission for approval, the PRESIDENT pointed out that at the start of his second term he had expressed the desire, in his political guidelines, to make relaunching and deepening the single market in favour of growth and employment one of the new Commission's priorities and one of the major chapters in the Europe 2020 strategy.

He also referred to the report 'A New Strategy for the Single Market', which he had commissioned from Mario Monti and which Mr Monti had delivered in May 2010, and thanked Mr BARNIER for having been an effective chair of the Commissioners' group on the single market.

The single market was more relevant than ever and was demonstrating its ability to help Europe successfully tackle the crisis and develop a highly competitive social market economy based on solid foundations. However, it had to adapt to the new European and global realities in order, in particular, to exploit its full potential to create strong, sustainable growth conducive to job creation.

He welcomed the balanced nature of the text before the Commission, including the choice of the twelve key actions that were strongly geared towards obtaining tangible results in terms of promoting growth, employment and confidence. He again thanked Mr BARNIER and the other Members of the Commission who had contributed to the smooth preparation of the communication. He was delighted that, following the policy debate held by the Commission in March, Mr BARNIER had continued the work with the other Members of the Commission concerned, their

cabinets and their departments with a view to presenting a robust text, which had now achieved broad consensus in the Commission.

Lastly, the PRESIDENT stressed how important it was, now that the communication had been adopted, for the Members of the Commission responsible for each of the key actions identified to commit themselves to taking the necessary steps to ensure that the initiatives in question would be presented by the end of the year, with a view to them being adopted by Parliament and the Council before the end of 2012.

Since there were no outstanding points concerning the text itself, he called on Mr BARNIER to give a short presentation of the main thrust, stressing the importance of meticulous communication on this initiative, which was a central plank of the action by the Commission and the other European institutions.

Mr BARNIER thanked the PRESIDENT, the Secretary-General and the Members of the Commission who had helped to prepare the communication.

He highlighted the importance and relevance of previous discussions, which had resulted in the twelve levers to boost growth and modernise the internal market, with a new and effective key action for each lever, in respect of which the Commission could fulfil its commitments. In this context, he referred to two initiatives adopted during the meeting: first, the two legislative proposals concerning unitary patent protection (see items 8 and 9 above) and, second, the communication and legislative proposal concerning taxation of energy products (see items 10 and 11 above).

It was also important for each Member of the Commission concerned to take responsibility for the priority action(s) falling within their remit, and he suggested that the Commissioners' group on the internal market meet regularly to ensure the necessary coordination, based in particular on an up-to-date scoreboard of action taken.

Mr BARNIER noted that Parliament and the Council were heavily involved in relaunching the single market. He was more than willing to work, alongside others,

on exploring further opportunities for growth in the single market and on the forthcoming study on the cost of non-Europe.

The Commission then held an exchange of views, during which the following points were highlighted:

- the importance for the economy and growth in Europe of relaunching the single market;
- the complex issues that would have to be addressed soon, for example intellectual property rights, orphan works, digital strategy, and pension portability;
- the importance for the single market of questions concerning mobility and posting of workers;
- the usefulness of having developed ideas for access to financing by small and medium-sized enterprises, including in rural areas, and the possibilities of using the structural funds;
- the importance, in communication campaigns, of making a clear distinction between key actions and flanking or related actions, in particular in terms of adoption times.

In response to comments, Mr BARNIER stressed in particular that the internal market was the platform of the European economy and that it was now a question of finding the resources to enable it to function more effectively, in accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy.

The PRESIDENT agreed, noting that the single market was not just a platform but a veritable ‘eco-system’ for growth and employment in Europe.

Although these priority initiatives, for example concerning standardisation, public procurement, intellectual property rights, access to finance, and the implementation of rules on posted workers, did not at first sight appear very attractive to the general public, they were nonetheless essential components on which the Commission had

been working for a long time, which would enable the single market to be relaunched effectively.

Furthermore, some of these actions had been specifically identified by the European Council in its conclusions from March; all these initiatives taken together resulted in a great degree of synergy. He also welcomed the fact that most of the proposed actions did not require any specific new financing; in these time of austerity, it was especially important to release existing energy and potential.

He stressed again the need for each Member of the Commission to be fully and determinedly committed to this cross-cutting initiative. More specifically, he referred to the communication intended for the other institutions and European citizens on the general communication approved at the meeting, at the same time as other issues of importance for the internal market presented by Mr ALMUNIA on compliance with the rules on competition, by Mr ŠEMETA on taxation of energy and by Mr BARNIER on the European patent, all of which supported the European growth strategy.

He added that the Commission now had to work on the second stage of relaunching the single market. He concluded by highlighting the amount of work still to be done.

Following this exchange of views, the Commission approved, subject to final linguistic revision, the communication in COM(2011)206/4, for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and to the national parliaments, together with the staff paper distributed as SEC(2011) 467, the contents of which were noted.

14. RELATIONS WITH NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL POLICY

The PRESIDENT reported on his visit to the Western Balkans from 7 to 9 April, accompanied by Mr FÜLE. The main purpose of the visit had been to reaffirm the Commission's commitment to a European perspective for the countries in the region and to begin the political preparations for the assessment reports on progress towards accession which the Commission would adopt in October. He had been pleased to note, in his meetings with the leaders and heads of opposition parties in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, that they were aware of the importance for the stability and prosperity of their countries of the process of integration into the Union and appreciated the work done by the Commission; he thanked Mr FÜLE for this work.

He went on to report on the meetings he had held in each of the four countries visited, the progress they were making with their respective reform processes, and their general situation.

In the case of Croatia, he stressed the major efforts on the part of the government to conclude accession negotiations and welcomed the fundamental reforms on which they had embarked, although he did not commit himself on a precise date for the end of these negotiations. On his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina he had invited the federation's political players for a constructive dialogue designed to help them emerge from the current political crisis, stressing that this was a precursor to the measures that would have to be taken if they were to move towards closer ties with the EU. Moving on to Montenegro, he spoke with satisfaction of the encouraging trend within the country and the positive spirit in which the government, the political class and civil society were embracing the process of accession to the Union. He concluded his presentation with a reference to the situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, noting that internal political problems had delayed the reform process and that more remained to be done with regard to the Copenhagen political criteria in particular. He pointed out that the country would

have to try to find a solution to the question of its name, on the one hand, and to seize the opportunity offered by the accession process to continue the reforms, on the other.

Mr FÜLE finished off the presentation by drawing attention to the efforts of the Croatian government to bring the Chapter 23 negotiations on the judicial system and fundamental rights to a successful conclusion in the next few weeks. Regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, he commented on the dialogue on accession conditionality. On Montenegro, he welcomed the positive development of the process currently under way and set out the timetable for missions and other measures planned for the period up to July. On the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, he said it had been agreed that high-level talks would be organised to monitor the progress of key reforms and examine certain strategic choices in this regard.

He then touched briefly on the latest developments in Iceland, notably in connection with the referendum on the conditions for compensating the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in the Icesave case. He said that the Commission was following the situation closely, and noted that Iceland was required to meet the obligations resulting from its status as a member of the European Economic Area and that the European Free Trade Association Surveillance Authority had responsibility in this respect. He also said that the talks on Iceland's accession to the EU were proceeding in accordance with the Council's negotiating brief.

The PRESIDENT then spoke about his meetings the previous day with the Tunisian authorities and civil society. He explained that the purpose of his visit had been primarily to reaffirm the Commission's support for the successful democratic transition process in Tunisia and its desire to establish a new partnership based on the principles set out in its communication in March. His secondary aim had been to convey to the transitional leaders the Union's concern about the influx of migrants.

The PRESIDENT welcomed the progress made by Tunisia and the involvement of all stakeholders in the democratic transition process. He mentioned in particular the gender equality measures. He said that there were economic problems to be

overcome, and explained that he had informed the Tunisian authorities of the Union's willingness to step up political dialogue, negotiate advanced status, increase European economic development aid and financial assistance, and also to make it possible for Tunisia to obtain loans from the European Investment Bank.

On the question of migration, he said that he had called on the acting President and Prime Minister to step up their efforts to remedy the current situation, while acknowledging Tunisia's own problems in dealing with 200 000 people who had fled there from Libya. He concluded by stressing the need to maintain close contacts with Tunisia and offer it support, asking Baroness ASHTON to set the earliest possible date for an association council and urging the Members of the Commission concerned to follow the situation closely.

Baroness ASHTON rounded off the presentations by saying that, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the PRESIDENT's visit had been a very important political signal, and adding that she was preparing to fill the post of Head of the EU delegation in Sarajevo. She returned to the situation in Tunisia, stressing the need for the Union to examine the resources that could be mobilised to help that country.

She then reported on the latest developments in a number of countries, including Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Côte d'Ivoire.

The Commission then held an exchange of views, covering the following points:

- the need for an in-depth debate on the Union's strategy with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- the question of aid to Côte d'Ivoire, stressing the need to act quickly in view of the present circumstances in that country;
- the need for an in-depth discussion of the risks likely to affect the situation of certain Central Asian countries and the EU's relations with those countries;
- a reference to the request from Turkmenistan for a framework agreement with the Union on the supply of gas, which would have to be accompanied by substantial safeguards;

- a question on the planning, responsibility and implications (including for the Commission) of the military operation to accompany the humanitarian mission of delivering aid to Libya;
- the test of the Union's credibility represented by its response to developments in neighbouring North African countries and the challenge of establishing a common diplomacy.

Baroness ASHTON replied to the various points raised, especially concerning the operations and situation in Libya. She also reported on a recent mission by representatives of the European External Action Service to Benghazi and the informal contacts with the Chairman of the Libyan Transitional Council during the Foreign Affairs Council on 12 April. Referring to Côte d'Ivoire and other conflict zones, she paid homage to the commitment of the Heads and staff of the diplomatic missions and the European External Action Service on the ground.

The PRESIDENT wrapped up the discussion, noting the benefits of the Turkmen initiative and thanking the Members of the Commission for their contributions to this discussion.

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 10.56.