EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2013) 2034 final

Brussels, 27 February 2013

<u>MINUTES</u>

of the 2034th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 13 February 2013

(morning)

PV(2013) 2034 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 13 February 2013 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.10 with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair.

Present:

Mr BARROSO	President	
Ms REDING	Vice-President	
Mr ALMUNIA	Vice-President	
Mr TAJANI	Vice-President	Items 1 to 12
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Mr REHN	Vice-President	Items 1 to 12
Mr POTOČNIK	Member	
Mr PIEBALGS	Member	
Ms VASSILIOU	Member	
Mr ŠEMETA	Member	
Ms GEOGHEGAN-QUINN	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Mr LEWANDOWSKI	Member	
Ms DAMANAKI	Member	
Ms GEORGIEVA	Member	
Mr OETTINGER	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)
Mr HAHN	Member	Items 12 (in part) and 13
Ms HEDEGAARD	Member	
Mr ANDOR	Member	
Mr BORG	Member	Items 1 to 13 (in part)

<u>Absent</u>:

Baroness ASHTON	High Representative/ Vice-President
Mr KALLAS	Vice-President
Ms KROES	Vice-President
Mr BARNIER	Member
Mr DE GUCHT	Member
Mr FÜLE	Member
Ms MALMSTRÖM	Member
Mr CIOLOŞ	Member

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

Mr BANNERMAN	Adviser in Baroness ASHTON's Office	
Ms RUUDA	A member of Mr KALLAS's staff	Items 1 to 12 (in part)
Ms CHAPUIS	A member of Mr KALLAS's staff	Items 12 (in part) and 13
Mr WHELAN	Chef de cabinet to Ms KROES	
Mr ARBAULT	A member of Mr BARNIER's staff	
Mr VANHEUKELEN	Chef de cabinet to Mr DE GUCHT	Items 1 to 12 (in part)
Mr HOFFMEISTER	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr DE GUCHT	Items 12 (in part) and 13
Mr MORDUE	Chef de cabinet to Mr FÜLE	
Ms ÅSENIUS	Chef de cabinet to Ms MALMSTRÖM	
Mr MADRE	A member of Mr CIOLOŞ's staff	

The following also sat in:

Mr LAITENBERGER	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr PAULGER	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr DOENS	Head of the Commission Spokesperson Service	
Mr BAILLY	Commission Spokesperson Service	Items 1 to 12
Mr THEBAULT	Head of the Bureau of European Policy Advisers	Items 1 to 12
Mr SOBRAL	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 12

Secretary: Ms DAY, Secretary-General, assisted by Mr GENISSON, Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2013) 2034/FINAL ; SEC(2013) 91/2)

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

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET
(RCC(2013) 2034)

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

3. MINUTES OF THE 2033RD MEETING (5 FEBRUARY)
(PV(2013) 2033)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2033rd meeting.

4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

4.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2013) 92 ET SEQ.; SEC(2013) 81/6)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 8 February, and of the corrigendum to the day note SEC(2013) 81/2 of 29 January. This corrigendum is set out in SEC(2013) 81/6.

4.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2013) 93 ET SEQ.)

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

4.3. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2013) 94 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 February, as archived in e-Greffe.

4.4. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2013) 95 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 11 and 15 February and of the finalisation written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on 11 February.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2013) 96)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2013) 30)

5.1. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR A HEAD OF EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION POST (PERS(2013) 34)

The Commission took note of the information in point 1 of PERS(2013) 30 and, on a proposal from Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided to approve the list of candidates for the AD13-14/AD13 post of Head of the EU Delegation in Israel in PERS(2013) 34, which would serve as a basis for the competent authority of the European External Action Service to make a final appointment.

This decision would take effect immediately.

5.2. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY / OFFICE FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOGISTICS - LUXEMBOURG – FRAMEWORK CONTRACT CONCERNING THE PREFINANCING, CONSTRUCTION, ACCEPTANCE AND SALE OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX TO REPLACE THE JEAN MONNET BUILDING IN LUXEMBOURG-KIRCHBERG (C(2013) 850)

The Commission took note of the information in point 2 of document PERS(2013) 30 and, on a proposal from M. ŠEFČOVIČ, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and following the agreement of the budgetary authority under Article 179(3) of the Financial Regulation, decided:

– to adopt the decision on the framework contract concerning the prefinancing, construction, acceptance and sale of an administrative complex to replace the Jean Monnet building in Luxembourg-Kirchberg set out in C(2013) 850;

– to authorise Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, on behalf of the Commission, to sign the framework contract with the Luxembourg authorities.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

6. ORGANISATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMISSIONERS (C(2013) 763)

The Commission took note of the decision by the PRESIDENT on 11 February on the organisation of responsibilities of Commission Members. as set out in C(2013) 763 amending in part the Annex to the PRESIDENT's decisions of 10 February 2010 and 27 October 2011 distributed as C(2010) 1000 and C(2011) 8000/2, respectively.

7. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE – MORE PRODUCT SAFETY AND BETTER MARKET SURVEILLANCE IN THE SINGLE MARKET FOR PRODUCTS
(COM(2013) 74 AND /2; RCC(2013) 15)

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE – 20 ACTIONS FOR SAFER AND COMPLIANT PRODUCTS FOR EUROPE – A MULTI-ANNUAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE SURVEILLANCE OF PRODUCTS IN THE EU
(COM(2013) 76 AND /2; RCC(2013) 15)

9. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY AND REPEALING COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 87/357/EEC AND DIRECTIVE 2001/95/EC
(COM(2013) 78 TO /3; SWD(2013) 33; SWD(2013) 34; SEC(2013) 99; RCC(2013) 15)

10. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON MARKET SURVEILLANCE OF PRODUCTS AND AMENDING COUNCIL DIRECTIVES 89/686/EEC AND 93/15/EEC, AND DIRECTIVES OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL 94/9/EC, 94/25/EC, 95/16/EC, 97/23/EC, 1999/5/EC, 2000/9/EC,

2000/14/EC, 2001/95/EC, 2004/108/EC, 2006/42/EC, 2006/95/EC, 2007/23/EC, 2008/57/EC, 2009/48/EC, 2009/105/EC, 2009/142/EC AND 2011/65/UE, AS WELL AS REGULATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL (EU) 305/2011, (EC) 764/2008 AND (EC) 765/2008
(COM(2013) 75 TO /3; SWD(2013) 33; SWD(2013) 34; SEC(2013) 99; RCC(2013) 15)

11. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REGULATION (EC) 765/2008 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL OF 9 JULY 2008 SETTING OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCREDITATION AND MARKET SURVEILLANCE RELATING TO THE MARKETING OF PRODUCTS AND REPEALING COUNCIL REGULATION (EEC) 339/93
(COM(2013) 77 TO /3; SWD(2013) 35; SWD(2013) 36; RCC(2013) 15)

The Commission:

– approved the Communications set out in COM(2013) 74/2 and 76/2, for transmission to Parliament, the Council and the Economic and Social Committee, and, for information, to the national parliaments;

– adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2013) 78/3, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the national parliaments, together with the impact assessment and the summary thereof in staff working documents SWD(2013) 33 and SWD(2013) 34, the contents of which were noted;

– adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2013) 75/3 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee, the European Data Protection Supervisor and, for information, to the national parliaments, together with the impact assessment and the summary thereof in staff working documents SWD(2013) 33 and SWD(2013) 34, the contents of which were noted;

– took note of the opinion of the Impact Assessment Board on the above proposals for Regulations, as set out in SEC(2013) 99;

– approved the report set out in COM(2013) 77/3, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and, for information, to the national parliaments, together with staff working documents SWD(2013) 35 and SWD(2013) 36, the contents of which were noted.

12. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

12.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Amendment to Directive 2003/98/EC on the re-use of public sector information (Directive) – KALFIN report – 2011/0430 (COD)
(SI(2013) 37 and /2)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2013) 37 and /2.

ii) Imposition of a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain prepared or preserved citrus fruits (mandarins, etc.) originating in the People's Republic of China (Council Implementing Regulation) – 2013/0017 (NLE)
(SI(2013) 39)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2013) 39.

iii) Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) …/… supplementing Regulation (EU) 648/2012 with regard to regulatory technical standards on indirect clearing arrangements, the clearing obligation, the public register, access to a trading venue, non-financial counterparties, and risk mitigation techniques for OTC derivatives

contracts not cleared by a CCP
(SP(2013) 94)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2013) 94.

iv) **Commission declaration, pursuant to Article 55(3)(c) of Regulation (EC) 1987/2006 and Article 71(3)(c) of Council Decision 2007/533/JHA on the establishment, operation and use of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II), on the successful completion of the comprehensive test of SIS II**
(SI(2013) 44)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2013) 44.

v) **Draft Council Conclusions on the Commission Communication on establishing appropriate relations between the EU and the European Space Agency**
(SI(2013) 40)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2013) 40.

vi) **Action to be taken on Parliament's legislative opinions and resolutions of a legal nature**
(SP(2013) 106)

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(2013) 106, drawn up following the February part-session of Parliament, the contents of which were noted.

12.2. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

vii) Programming of Council business
(SI(2013) 43)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2013) 43 on the Council meetings between 14 and 27 February.

viii) Results of the European Council meeting (Brussels, 7 and 8 February)
(SI(2013) 45; SI(2013) 46)

The PRESIDENT reported to the Commission Members on the terms of the agreement concerning the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework that had emerged from the European Council meeting on 7 and 8 February. He thanked Mr LEWANDOWSKI and Mr ŠEFČOVIČ for their contributions to these very lengthy negotiations, as well as the Commission team who had provided the necessary technical support from the wings.

He pointed out that he had repeatedly underlined how important it was for the Heads of State or Government to reach agreement at this European Council meeting as this would send out a positive signal not only in political terms but also in economic and institutional terms. Fortunately the European leaders had also grasped the importance of this challenge.

As regards the substance, the PRESIDENT regretted the fact that agreement had been obtained at the cost of a net reduction in the overall amount of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework compared with the Commission's initial proposal (EUR 960 billion in appropriations for commitments and EUR 908.4 billion in appropriations for payments) compounded by cuts unequally distributed among the various budget headings. However, these figures were the result of a compromise between quite disparate positions which had been reached after tough negotiations and against a tense economic background. He felt that this situation should be taken into account, adding that it had been necessary to take this first step, however imperfect in the eyes of the Commission, in order to make progress towards obtaining a final agreement between the European Council and Parliament.

The PRESIDENT went on to underline a number of positive aspects, in particular the support for growth, competitiveness and job creation in Europe. He welcomed the fact that the agreement retained innovative instruments proposed by the Commission, for instance the Connecting Europe Facility, and increased the allocations for programmes such as Horizon 2020 in the field of research and innovation, Erasmus for All in higher education and COSME relating to the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The PRESIDENT was particularly happy with the European Council's agreement on introducing a new initiative for youth employment which would make it impossible to tackle this huge political and social challenge at European level, for instance by helping to finance the youth guarantee initiative. He was also satisfied with the fact that, despite the reservations expressed by some Member States, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived had been maintained.

Referring to the relatively big budget allocations set aside for agricultural policy, especially rural development, and for cohesion policy, he urged the Commission to ensure that the programmes within this framework were designed in such a way as to guarantee a maximum return in terms of growth. The solidarity dimension had been enhanced by adapting the rules on cofinancing and prefinancing in order to take account of the most vulnerable regions and Member States.

As regards heading 5 of the Multiannual Financial Framework relating to administrative expenditure, he acknowledged the fact that Member States had exercised considerable pressure to obtain very significant concessions and that, while the reduction finally agreed amounted to an additional billion euros over and above the savings the Commission had already set out in its initial proposal and those which the European Council President, Mr Herman Van Rompuy, had put forward at the extraordinary meeting in November 2012, it could have been much higher. He confirmed that in addition to the measures proposed by the Commission, the resulting burden would mean in particular a two-year freeze on salaries and pensions in all the Union’s institutions, agencies and bodies. What was important now was to make headway in the negotiations on the reform of the Staff Regulations.

He regretted the fact that the lack of unanimity on these issues at the European Council would mean no change in relation to the revenue side, although it had been agreed that work on the VAT proposal would continue and that the Member States involved in enhanced cooperation would examine the financial transaction tax to see to what extent it could be used as a basis for a new own resource for the Union. As for the correction mechanisms, he explained that the "rebates" on Member States' contributions to the European budget had essentially been maintained: some had been adjusted and a new one had even been granted to Denmark.

In the light of these results, the PRESIDENT drew the meeting’s attention to the next stage in the final adoption of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, which would take place in the European Parliament. Parliament, he observed, had every intention of exercising the new powers conferred on it by the Treaty. While he thought it unlikely that the overall amounts agreed by the European Council would be called into question, he listed the important aspects on which Parliament wanted to make adjustments, such as flexibility between annual budget exercises and headings, management of the gap between commitments and payments, reform of the system of EU own resources, and a mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework going far beyond the review of allocations for the cohesion instruments planned by the European Council for 2016.

So while the ball was now in the European Parliament’s court, the President stressed the importance of the tasks remaining in the weeks and months ahead, including the work to push ahead with the sectoral budget proposals, which would be conducted under the leadership of the Irish Presidency of the Council. In this connection, he felt that the Commission should act as a mediator between the Council and the European Parliament in order to reach a satisfactory agreement, while at the same time ensuring that the modernisation and simplification called for by the Commission were not lost as the negotiations went on.

Mr LEWANDOWSKI pointed out that, although the overall allocation was down compared with the 2007-2013 financial framework, the proposed allocations for certain key policy areas had increased in percentage terms. The budget for EU competitiveness would thus amount to 15% of the total budget in future, compared with 10% at present, which would make it possible to boost investment in areas such as research. He also pointed out that the amounts provided for in heading 3 (‘Security and citizenship’) and heading 4 (‘Global Europe’) were also higher than in the current financial framework. In addition, he noted that the inclusion of the Connecting Europe facility in the budget had been approved, and that the budgetary developments in the fields of agriculture and cohesion policy were in line with the approach proposed by the Commission. The next stage – negotiations with the European Parliament – would be very important. Greater flexibility was needed to ensure that the budget was used in the best possible way in the interests of the beneficiaries. He also pointed out the desirability of reaching a satisfactory agreement on the ‘outstanding commitments’ to avoid an abnormal carryover in 2014.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, for his part, raised the matter of the negotiations on heading 5 of the Multiannual Financial Framework (‘Administration’). He said first of all that the agreement reached by the Heads of State or Government confirmed the reform proposed by the Commission two years earlier. He went on to say that, apart from the two-year freeze on salaries and pensions resulting from this agreement, the outcome could have been much worse given the tone of the discussions. He concluded by reminding the meeting of the link between the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework and those on the Staff Regulations, stressing the need to make internal adjustments in order to implement the changes arising from the future 2014-2020 financial framework. Finally, he said that the social dialogue was continuing within the Commission and underlined the importance of communication with the staff during this period.

The following points in particular were raised in the ensuing discussion:

– all in all, the result was what had been expected, since the European Council agreement was considered to be the result of a difficult compromise which, realistically, had to be acknowledged;

– the emergence nonetheless of a degree of mismatch between, on the one hand, the financial amounts covered by the European Council agreement and, on the other, the possibility of meeting citizens' expectations and achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; similarly, in view of the substantial cuts proposed in the overall level of the budget, doubts as to the real possibility of achieving the new tasks conferred on the Union in general and the Commission in particular, notably by the Lisbon Treaty;

– questions about the Commission's room for manoeuvre in influencing the negotiations between Parliament and the Council, in particular as regards flexibility between budget headings;

– concerns regarding the discrepancy between commitment appropriations and payment appropriations;

– the importance for the Commission in this context of concentrating its efforts on the quality, effectiveness and transparency of expenditure so that every euro invested contributed genuine added value and served more than one objective; the need for a coordinated approach by Members of the Commission during the negotiation of the final agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework and the sectoral budget proposals;

– with regard to cohesion policy, the regret that certain aspects of the agreement, in particular the 'N+3' rule, were in contradiction with the objectives of modernising the budget and better managing expenditure; the attendant risk of an increase in outstanding commitments and a delay in implementing a number of investments for growth;

– the appreciation for the positive direction taken in relation to the Horizon 2020 programmes, Erasmus for all and support for the most deprived persons; likewise, the welcome emphasis by the European Council on promoting youth employment, in particular through the Youth Employment Initiative;

– the advisability of examining, under the review clause for the financial framework, the possibility of 'rewarding' the most effective policies.

The PRESIDENT closed the discussion by noting that the compromise on the 2014-20 multiannual financial framework, as it stood, was certainly not as ambitious as the Commission would have wished. Nonetheless, he stressed the need, first, to play by the rules in a Union of twenty-seven Member States and to await the outcome of discussions in Parliament, with which decision-making powers now lay and, second, to acknowledge the improvements made in relation to the current situation. With regard to the question of flexibility, he wanted the current round of negotiations to result in as much leeway as possible for transfers between headings and financial years, thereby ensuring more effective implementation of the budget and a reduction in the gap between commitment appropriations and payment appropriations. He called on the Commission to provide its full support to positive negotiations between the Council and Parliament on this crucial point. With regard to the review of the financial framework, he noted that Parliament wished to promote the idea of a more open clause than the one in the agreement reached at the European Council.

While stressing that there was still a long way to go and that realism and pragmatism were required, he concluded by encouraging the Members of the

Commission to adopt a coordinated approach to ensure that, through contacts with Parliament, what could still be improved was improved and the best possible multiannual financial framework was obtained, thereby allowing Europe to invest in its future.

The Commission took note of this information.

ix) Results of the Eurogroup meeting and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (Brussels, 11 and 12 February)

The PRESIDENT invited Mr REHN to report to the Members of the Commission on the progress and outcome of the meetings of the Eurogroup and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council held on 11 and 12 February respectively, and on the latest economic developments.

In relation to the discussions on the financial assistance to be provided to Cyprus, Mr REHN noted that a balanced solution had to be found that ensured the sustainability of the debt and the financial viability of the Member State in question, while refuting inaccurate information that had been circulated in the press about a possible restructuring of the debt.

He welcomed the decision taken by the Irish authorities on the issue of promissory notes, which he regarded as an important step that brought Ireland closer to its objective of exiting the assistance programme in line with the timetable, which also demonstrated increased financial market confidence in this Member State.

The discussions had also addressed the instrument for direct recapitalisation of banks proposed under the European Stability Mechanism: technical discussions were under way and should be concluded by June. He was pleased that the co-legislators had taken further steps towards a final agreement by completing the trialogues with a view to adopting two proposals to strengthen budget supervision in the euro area (two-pack).

On the question of fiscal multipliers used to quantify the impact of budget consolidation on the slowdown in growth, the current debate and exchanges of views on this issue between different institutions had not resulted in any decisive elements that could justify a relaxation of the budget discipline followed by the Member States of the European Union. When defining the 'correct dose' of budget consolidation, other factors should be taken into account, including renewed confidence in the robustness of the public finances of a particular Member State. He noted that the most vulnerable Member States were enjoying this renewed confidence, which was based on the pursuit of long-term budgetary consolidation, prudent fiscal policies and structural reforms.

He referred briefly to the meeting of the G20 Finance Ministers which would take place in Moscow and to one of the topics it would examine, namely the role of exchange rates in ensuring the stability of the international financial system.

He ended by welcoming the favourable response given by the Council to the Fiscal Sustainability Report 2012 and by announcing that the winter forecasts would be published the following week.

The Commission took note of this information.

12.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

x) Results of Parliament's February part-session

(SP(2013) 89 ; SP(2013) 90)

The Commission took note of the information in SP(2013) 89 and SP(2013) 90 on the proceedings of the part-session of Parliament held in Strasbourg from 4 to 7 February.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

13.1. DISCOVERY OF HORSEMEAT IN PROCESSED FOOD PRODUCTS LABELLED AS BEEF

The PRESIDENT called on Mr BORG to brief the Commission on the recent discovery, in the course of checks carried out by the health authorities of a Member State, of processed food products containing horsemeat but labelled as beef. The processing and distribution chain for these products was such that this was a matter with implications for several Member States.

Mr BORG began by noting that the European Union had legislation governing the labelling of foodstuffs and that primary responsibility for implementing the legislation lay with the Member States. With a view to protecting the internal market, the Commission had set up an efficient rapid alert system which informed the twenty-seven Member States immediately whenever a situation came to light in the EU which could pose a food safety risk.

At the current stage of the investigation, the fact that various prepared foods had been found to contain horsemeat, instead of beef as indicated, suggested that this was a labelling problem. There was no risk to food safety, which was why the Commission had not deemed it necessary to impose a ban or to withdraw the meat from the European market. It remained to be seen whether fraud had taken place at any stage of the processing or distribution chain. Investigations were ongoing.

He then explained what action would now be taken at European level, referring in particular to the meeting of health ministers of the Member States directly concerned, which had been organised that day by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the extraordinary meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, due to take place on 15 February ahead of the Council of Health Ministers on 25 February. He ended with an assurance that the Commission would continue to monitor the situation closely and would provide for political and technical coordination to help the Member States re-establish consumer confidence as soon as possible.

The Commission took note of this information.

13.2. STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN EUROPE

Ms REDING gave a brief introduction to a document handed out to the meeting, which set out the findings of opinion polls carried out on citizens of the 27 Member States and Croatia between 17 November and 2 December 2012.

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 11.30.