EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2015) 2129 final

- English language version of the French text which is authentic -

Strasbourg, 9 June 2015

TEXTE EN

<u>MINUTES</u>

of the 2129th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 3 June 2015

(morning)

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Single sitting: Wednesday 3 June 2015 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.20 with Mr JUNCKER, President, in the chair. Items 9 and 10 were chaired by Mr TIMMERMANS.

Present:

Mr JUNCKER	President	Items 1 to 8
Mr TIMMERMANS	First Vice-President	
Ms GEORGIEVA	Vice-President	
Mr ANSIP	Vice-President	
Mr KATAINEN	Vice-President	
Mr OETTINGER	Member	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Ms MALMSTRÖM	Member	
Mr MIMICA	Member	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr ARIAS CAÑETE	Member	
Mr VELLA	Member	
Mr ANDRIUKAITIS	Member	
Ms THYSSEN	Member	
Mr MOSCOVICI	Member	Items 1 to 8
Mr STYLIANIDES	Member	Items 9 (in part) and 10
Mr HOGAN	Member	
Ms BULC	Member	
Ms BIEŃKOWSKA	Member	
Mr NAVRACSICS	Member	
Ms CREȚU	Member	
Ms VESTAGER	Member	

<u>Absent</u>:

Ms MOGHERINI	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Vice-President
Mr AVRAMOPOULOS	Member
Lord HILL	Member
Ms JOUROVÁ	Member
Mr MOEDAS	Member

<u>The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission:</u>

Mr MANSERVISI	Chef de cabinet to Ms MOGHERINI	Items 1 to 7 (in part)
Ms VANNINI	Adviser in Ms MOGHERINI's Office	Items 7 (in part) to 10
Mr NOCIAR	Chef de cabinet to Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	
Mr LAHTI	Chef de cabinet to Mr DOMBROVSKIS	
Mr ADAMIDIS	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr AVRAMOPOULOS	
Ms DE BASALDÚA	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Lord HILL	
Mr BRAUN	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms JOUROVÁ	
Mr VICENTE	Chef de cabinet to Mr MOEDAS	

<u>The following also sat in:</u>

Mr SELMAYR	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 8
Ms MARTÍNEZ ALBEROLA	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Mr PESONEN	Acting Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr SCHINAS	Head of the Spokesperson’s Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms METTLER	Head of the European Political Strategy Centre	
Ms KRAMER	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8
Mr ROMAKKANIEMI	Chef de cabinet to Mr KATAINEN	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Mr LIIMATAINEN	A member of Mr KATAINEN's staff	Item 10
Mr BAILLY	Chef de cabinet to Mr MOSCOVICI	Items 1 to 6
Ms CHRISTOPHIDOU	Chef de cabinet to Mr STYLIANIDES	Items 1 to 9 (in part)

Mr ANDREEVA	Commission Spokesperson's Service

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

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2015) 2129/FINAL; SEC(2015) 244/2)

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(2015) 2129)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 1 June.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF THE 2127TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION (19 MAY) AND THE MINUTES OF THE 2128TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION (27 MAY)
(PV(2015) 2127 AND /2; PV(2015) 2127, PART II)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2127th meeting.

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2128th meeting for the following week.

4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

4.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2015) 245 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 26 and 29 May.

4.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2015) 246 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 26 and 29 May.

4.3. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2015) 247 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 26 and 29 May, as archived in Decide.

4.4. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2015) 248)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 1 and 5 June.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2015) 249)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (PERS(2015) 49)

5.1. DG TRADE – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR (PERS(2015) 11 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘Asia and Latin America’ Directorate in DG Trade (PERS(2015) 11).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 6 and 26 March (PERS(2015) 11/2 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 Ms GEORGIEVA, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms MALMSTRÖM and also Ms MOGHERINI and Mr KATAINEN, it decided to appoint Ms Maria Helena KÖNIG to the post.

This decision would take effect on 16 June 2015.

5.2. DG TRADE – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR (PERS(2015) 13 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘WTO, Legal Affairs and Trade in Goods’ Directorate in DG Trade (PERS(2015) 13).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 23 February and 12 March (PERS(2015) 13/2 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 Ms GEORGIEVA, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms MALMSTRÖM and also Ms MOGHERINI and Mr KATAINEN, it decided to appoint Mr Denis REDONNET to the post.

This decision would take effect on 16 June 2015.

5.3. DG INFORMATICS / DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHARTS

The Commission took note of the information in point 3 of PERS(2015) 49 and, on a proposal from Ms GEORGIEVA, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and having consulted Mr OETTINGER and also Mr ANSIP and Mr KATAINEN, decided:

– to approve the transfer of DIGIT.A.1.004 'DTS – DIGIT Training Services' to DG Human Resources and Security, with its corresponding staff and post quotas, for integration in HR.B.3 'Learning and Development';

– to take note of the fact that the definitive transfer of the establishment plan posts would be regularised with the final decision on allocation of resources for 2016 and that the corresponding administrative appropriations would continue to be managed by DG Informatics until the definitive transfer of responsibility for financial management to DG Human Resources and Security.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

5.4. DG BUDGET – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART OF DG BUDGET (SEC(2015) 258)

On a proposal from Ms GEORGIEVA, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided:

- to approve the creation of a Principal Adviser post directly attached to the Director-General of DG Budget. The Principal Adviser would be in charge of the ‘Budget Focused on Results’ Task Force, initially created for a duration of two years;
- to adopt the new organisation chart set out in SEC(2015) 258.

These decisions would take effect on 16 June 2015.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

ECONOMIC SITUATION IN GREECE

The Commission was informed of the progress of the negotiations aimed at finding a response to the economic situation in Greece.

7. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2015) 48)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 29 May (RCC(2015) 48).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

7.1. HORIZONTAL ITEM

i) European Fund for Strategic Investments and amendment of Regulations (EU) 1291/2013 and (EU) 1316/2013 (Regulation) – FERNANDES / BULLMANN report – 2015/0009 (COD)
(point 1 of the IRG record; INFO(2015) 49)

The PRESIDENT paid tribute to the negotiating skills of Ms GEORGIEVA and Mr KATAINEN and congratulated them on the agreement reached with Parliament on the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which created the prospect of concluding the legislative procedure before the summer.

Mr KATAINEN, for his part, thanked Ms GEORGIEVA, Ms BULC and Mr MOEDAS, and the members of their cabinets and the PRESIDENT's cabinet, for their excellent cooperation that had facilitated the successful conclusion of the discussions with Parliament on the EFSI. He confirmed that the Council could now adopt its position as soon as possible.

He warned, however, that some stakeholders were still hesitant about the viability of the Fund. There had been only two realistic options: the first was to grant €8 billion in the form of subsidies and the second, as envisaged under the EFSI, was to use this amount to stimulate investment, by guaranteeing better coverage of the risks, and to attract more investors. An understanding of this mechanism by the investors would be crucial to their recourse to the EFSI and to its success.

With the conclusion of the legislative procedure now within sight, it was time, according to Mr KATAINEN, to consider moving on to the implementation stage of the investment plan. He urged the Members of the Commission to continue to cooperate closely to ensure that full use was made of the opportunities which the EFSI offered in a wide range of sectors, such as energy, the digital economy, research, transport and education, and to remove obstacles to investment, whether of a financial nature or specific to each sector.

The conclusion of the agreement was excellent news for the Commission, in that the mechanisms of the investment plan had not been challenged and the timetable set out the year before had been fully respected.

Summarising the main features of the agreement reached with Parliament, he noted that the final financing structure complied with the Commission's parameters in terms of solidity, credibility and predictability. The principle of independence in the selection of projects on their merits and without any quotas had also been retained. Finally, the amendments which had been made increased accountability to Parliament, but without making the Fund's operational arrangements too complex.

Mr KATAINEN reminded Members that an information note about the main features of the final agreement had been distributed. The proposal would be put to the vote in the plenary session of Parliament on 24 June, and the EFSI, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Directory would become operational after the summer.

He then turned to the next stages of the implementation of the EFSI, namely (i) the imminent completion of the legal work and the preparations with the EIB (establishment of the EFSI's governing bodies, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Directory); (ii) continued efforts, with the support of Members of the Commission, to promote the EFSI and explain the opportunities it offered to all interested parties; (iii) the completion of the analysis of complementarity between European Union programmes and the EFSI, adapting the way the Structural Funds were used; (iv) the advice to be given to Member States on ways of contributing to EFSI investments through their national development banks or other bodies involved, and through the creation of co-investment platforms; (v) the nature and the scope for participation in the investment plan by non-EU countries, particularly China; and (vi) the finalisation of the most important part of the investment plan aimed at removing obstacles to investment and promoting the single market.

Mr KATAINEN strongly encouraged Members of the Commission to support the process, citing the example of the Capital Markets Union, under the responsibility of Lord HILL, and the Single Market Strategy, under the responsibility of Ms BIEŃKOWSKA. He also stressed the need to continue to promote structural reforms in close cooperation with Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Mr MOSCOVICI and to identify specific obstacles to the completion of the internal market that could be eliminated in the short term.

He concluded by saying that this project demonstrated what the Commission was capable of. It was now important to keep up this momentum and implement the investment plan in the interests of European citizens.

Ms GEORGIEVA emphasised the need for a major information effort to raise awareness of the EFSI, explain the rationale behind it and present the opportunities it offered. The intensive negotiations with Parliament under the legislative procedure had given her a better understanding of the main concerns raised by the creation of the EFSI, and particularly the fear that the Commission would neglect the Horizon 2020 research programme and the Connecting Europe Facility. The rapid process for adopting the EFSI had highlighted the Commission's role as mediator and also the need to carry the

Council and Parliament with it and to act more quickly on priority dossiers by adapting working methods.

During the discussion that followed, the Commission mentioned the following matters:

- the need to envisage using the Structural Funds in a way that complemented the investment projects covered by the EFSI, while at the same time continuing to clear the backlog of payments due under ongoing programmes;

- the importance of ensuring legal certainty for investors by guaranteeing, through fast-track procedures, that projects were compatible with State aid competition rules and the social legislation in force;

- the possibility of incorporating the assessment of the conformity of projects covered by the EFSI with Union law, particularly in the areas of competition and social policy, in the JASPERS instrument, which advised Member States preparing major projects and seeking to obtain European co-financing;

- the need to ensure procedures appropriate to public-private partnerships;

- the possibility that EFSI intervention might not be sufficient to eliminate all risks to investors in the long term, or in sectors like the digital economy where the allocation of powers and responsibilities had not yet been clearly established.

The PRESIDENT again thanked the Members of the Commission responsible for this dossier for their excellent teamwork, which would allow the rapid adoption, as envisaged, of the Regulation creating the EFSI. He called upon them to continue their efforts to promote the Fund among all the interested parties.

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 221/2 and took note of this information and the note distributed under the authority of Mr KATAINEN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms GEORGIEVA as INFO(2015) 49.

7.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

ii) Trilogue meetings
(point 3.1 of the IRG record)

– Measures concerning the European single market for electronic communications and to achieve a Connected Continent, and amending Directives 2002/20/EC, 2002/21/EC and 2002/22/EC and Regulations (EC) 1211/2009 and (EU) 531/2012 (Regulation) – DEL CASTILLO VERA report – 2013/0309 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 209/4.

– Establishment of a European Union agency for law enforcement training (CEPOL), repeal and replacement of Council Decision 2005/681/JHA (Regulation) – GÁL report – 2014/0217 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 210.

– Limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from medium combustion plants (Directive) – GRZYB report – 2013/0442 (COD)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2015) 215.

– Reporting and transparency of securities financing transactions (Regulation) – SORU report – 2014/0017 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 216/2.

iii) European Parliament dossier – June I part-session
(point 3.2 of the IRG record)

Ordinary legislative procedure – First reading

– Amendment of Directive 2007/36/EC as regards the encouragement of long-term shareholder engagement and Directive 2013/34/EU as regards certain elements of the corporate governance statement (Directive) – COFFERATI report – 2014/0121 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2015) 325.

iv) Council dossiers
(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

– Fourth Railway Package (market pillar) – Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1370/2007 concerning opening the market for domestic passenger rail transport services (Regulation) – VAN DE CAMP report – 2013/0028 (COD) / Amendment of Directive 2012/34/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 November 2012 establishing a single European railway area, concerning opening the market for domestic passenger rail transport services and governance of the railway infrastructure (Directive) – SASSOLI report – 2013/0029 (COD)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2015) 205/3.

– Fourth Railway Package (technical pillar) – European Union Agency for Railways and repeal of Regulation (EC) 81/2004 (Regulation) – ZĪLE report – 2013/0014 (COD) / Interoperability of the rail system within the European Union (Directive – recast) – BILBAO BARANDICA report – 2013/0015 (COD) / Railway safety (Directive – recast) – CRAMER report – 2013/0016 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 220.

– Amendment of Directive 2006/112/EC on the common system of value added tax as regards a standard VAT return (Council Directive) – STREJČEK report – 2013/0343 (CNS)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 211.

7.3. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

v) Programming of Council business
(SI(2015) 222)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2015) 222 on the Council meetings between 4 and 17 June.

vi) Non-legislative dossiers
(point 4.1 of the IRG record)

– African Peace Facility – Funding Perspectives 2015/2016 and beyond – Follow-up to the strategic discussion of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) of 10 March 2015

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 212.

– International Maritime Organization – 95th session of the Maritime Safety Committee (London, 3 to 12 June) – Commission statement on the statement concerning non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 225.

vii) Signing, on behalf of the European Union, and provisional application of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Kazakhstan (Council Decision) – 2015/0110 (NLE)
(SI(2015) 228)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2015) 228.

7.4. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

viii) Action taken on non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its March I part-session
(point 5.6.2 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved documents SP(2015) 344 and /2 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its March I part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

xi) Action taken on non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its March II part-session
(point 5.6.3 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2015) 345 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its March II part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

x) Preparations for the 29th session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Union (ACP-EU) (Suva, Fiji, 15 to 17 June) – Replies to oral questions
(point 5.9 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved the replies to the oral questions from the Joint Parliamentary Assembly set out in SP(2015) 343, for transmission to the Assembly.

xi) Results of the May II part-session of Parliament
(SP(2015) 347)

The Commission took note of the information on Parliament's part-session held on 27 May in Brussels, set out in SP(2015) 347.

8. REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE COURT OF AUDITORS – SYNTHESIS OF THE COMMISSION'S MANAGEMENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2014 (COM(2015) 279 AND /2; SEC(2015) 259)

The PRESIDENT invited Ms GEORGIEVA to present the report on the synthesis of the Commission's management achievements in 2014, which was being tabled for approval by the Commission that day, and to recap its scope.

Ms GEORGIEVA noted that by adopting this synthesis report, thereby launching the discharge procedure, the Commission was taking full overall political responsibility for the management of its departments and making an important political statement. Noting that the report summarised the 49 annual activity reports produced by the Commission departments, she thanked everyone who had contributed to its preparation, in particular the Secretary-General and her department.

The report comprised three parts, the first relating to the measures taken by the Commission to strengthen the performance management framework. In relation to this point, she noted the objective set by the PRESIDENT of developing a performance culture and explained that the report described both the efforts made and the future initiatives planned to further improve the Commission's capacities in this field and their added value for EU citizens. In the same vein, she referred to the setting up of a group of Commissioners tasked with providing the political steer and coordination of the measures to improve the performance of the EU budget; the second meeting of the group would take place after the meeting of the Commission.

She focused on two aspects of the second part of the report, which addressed the resources management challenges facing the Commission. First, with regard to the shortage of payment appropriations, which had been particularly acute in 2014, the Commission departments had monitored the situation very closely and had taken a series of measures to ensure prudent use of available resources which would have the least possible impact on the Commission's essential activities, but also in terms of late payment interest and the risk to the institution's reputation.

With regard to the assessment of the amounts at risk, she also highlighted the more detailed analysis carried out for the first time during the 2014 financial year and the effect of the expected financial corrections. The best estimate of the overall amount at risk for 2014 was between € 3.7 and € 5 billion, which was lower than in previous years.

Finally, Ms GEORGIEVA addressed the third part of the report on management assurance, which was based on the declarations of assurance by the Directors-General and the overall opinion of the Commission's Internal Audit Service. Although the total of 25 reservations entered by the Directors-General in relation to

2014 was higher than the previous year, the total amount of expenditure affected had decreased.

She ended her presentation by encouraging the Members of the Commission to take ownership of this important tool for the institution's political responsibility. She considered that the report presented a clear overview of the efforts made by the Commission during 2014 to improve its management and internal control, and therefore recommended that the College adopt it.

The PRESIDENT thanked Ms GEORGIEVA for this information and invited the Members of the Commission to prepare carefully for the next stages of the discharge procedure for 2014, in particular the examination of the report by Parliament and the Council.

At the end of this presentation, the Commission:

– approved the report on the synthesis of the Commission's management achievements in 2014, set out in COM(2015) 279/2, together with the technical annexes, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors, and, for information purposes, to the national parliaments, indicating a link giving access to all the activity reports;

– took note of the fact that each Member of the Commission had been made aware of the annual activity report and declaration presented by his or her Director(s)-General or Head(s) of Service, and that a reference to this dialogue was specifically mentioned in each annual activity report;

– took note of the fact that the declarations of assurance contained in the annual activity reports did not cover the Members' private offices and their expenditure;

- authorised Ms GEORGIEVA, the Member of the Commission with responsibility for the budget and human resources, to present the synthesis report to the discharge authority;

- took note of the three documents available in Decide as supporting documents: (i) the Annual Report of the Audit Progress Committee for the period from May 2014-April 2015, distributed as SEC(2015) 259; (ii) the overall opinion of the Internal Auditor for 2014 and the annual report on internal audit for 2014, reference Ares(2015) 1899530; and (iii) the overview of the state of internal control in the Commission, reference Ares(2015) 1930721.

9. RELATIONS WITH NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES

9.1. RESULTS OF THE 23RD EU-JAPAN SUMMIT (TOKYO, 29 MAY)

Ms MALMSTRÖM briefed the meeting on the 23rd EU-Japan summit which had taken place on 29 May in Tokyo in the presence of Mr Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister, and, representing the European Union, the PRESIDENT, Mr Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, and Ms MOGHERINI, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

She evoked the main subjects discussed at the summit, focusing on regional security issues of particular concern to Japan, which was very sensitive to the tensions and recent developments in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

She spent slightly longer discussing progress with negotiations on an EU-Japan free trade agreement, which would consolidate cooperation between the two sides and represented very significant bilateral economic potential. At the same time, the Japanese Government was negotiating an agreement with the United States within the framework of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The EU and Japanese negotiators had been mandated to seek consensus on all the key points of a future free trade agreement by end-2015, although that was a somewhat ambitious objective in her view.

She ended with the observation that the PRESIDENT would meet the Japanese Prime Minister again in the margins of the G7, which would take place at Elmau, Germany, on 7 and 8 June.

The Commission took note of these points.

9.2. POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Mr HAHN reported on the political crisis facing the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in the wake of the wire-tapping scandal and the mass protests which had ensued. He briefed the meeting on the discussions he had brokered in Skopje on 2 June with the Prime Minister, Mr Nikola Gruevski, and representatives of the other three main political parties, on the commitment to organise an early general election not later than April 2016 and on the return of the opposition to parliament, in order to end the current crisis. The four parties had agreed that the interim period should be used to ensure that democratic and transparent elections were held. Work was required to bring the electoral code into line with the international standards laid down by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

In this context, commitments had been made to implement the Commission's recommendations on the rule of law, which included sending a team of experts to help with work on the independence of the judiciary. The decision to base future work on the framework laid down in chapters 23 and 24 could set a dynamic in motion enabling tangible results to be achieved more rapidly.

Discussions would resume in Brussels the following week with a view to finalising the last outstanding point of the agreement (organisation of the reshuffled government), which should coincide with the opposition's return to parliament.

Mr HAHN wound up by noting that while FYROM's Euro-Atlantic prospects had now been confirmed by all the parties concerned, and the impending agreement would be a major step forward, much work remained to be done. Governments in the region had been alerted by the recent instability, and various high-level contacts were in the process of being set up.

During a brief exchange of views, the Members referred to (i) the role of honest broker played by the Commission to bring about a solution to the political crisis and their support for Mr HAHN's efforts to that end, (ii) other countries in the western Balkans were in favour of cementing FYROM's European prospects, (iii) the devastating effect of the current political crisis on FYROM's growth outlook and the important role of the private sector in getting the country's economy back on track, and (iv) the opportunities that European funding mechanisms like the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) represented for FYROM and for the political integration of the region in general.

Mr TIMMERMANS thanked Mr HAHN for this information and for the part he had played in resolving the current political crisis. The Commission had played a crucial role in this process.

The Commission took note of this information.

10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION ON THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE *'STOP VIVISECTION'* (C(2015) 3773 AND /2)

Mr KATAINEN presented the communication on the third Citizens' Initiative submitted to the Commission, namely the '*Stop Vivisection*' initiative forwarded to it on 3 March 2015 after being signed by 1 170 000 citizens.

The initiative called upon the Commission to: firstly, repeal Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes; secondly, put forward a new proposal aimed at phasing out the practice of animal experimentation; thirdly, make compulsory the use – in biomedical and toxicological research – of data directly relevant for the human species.

He reported that, acting on behalf of the Commission, he had met the organisers of the initiative on 11 May, the same day as a public hearing on the initiative at the European Parliament.

Turning to the proposed response setting out the Commission's political and legal conclusions and the actions it intended to take, Mr KATAINEN felt that it struck a good balance between concern for animal welfare and safeguarding health and the environment. He also reported that it clearly explained what had been and would be done in these areas at EU level.

He reiterated that the 2010 Directive in force already stated that the purpose of this legislation was to phase out animal testing entirely while acknowledging that the use of animals remained necessary until this ultimate goal had been achieved. This Directive modernised and harmonised the rules applicable to the use of animals in the EU on the basis of the most ambitious international standards and had already had the effect of improving animal welfare in experimentation and in scientific research. In addition, the Directive mandated the application of scientifically valid alternative solutions and established mechanisms to accelerate their development, validation and uptake.

For that reason, he emphasised that the Commission's conclusion to its communication shared the same conviction as the Citizens' Initiative that animal testing should be gradually phased out, in keeping with the ultimate goal of EU legislation in this area.

On the other hand, the Commission did not share the view that scientific principles invalidated the 'animal model' or that animal testing represented a barrier to developing alternative research tools.

In addition, the Directive was necessary in order to safeguard a high level of animal protection in accordance with Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Mr KATAINEN therefore underlined that the Commission would implement four actions designed to accelerate the development and use of methods not involving animal testing in research and experimentation, namely (i) accelerate progress towards compliance with the obligation to replace, reduce and refine (the 'Three Rs' obligation) the use of animals through knowledge sharing, (ii) develop, validate and implement new alternative approaches, (iii) control the enforcement of the 'Three Rs' obligation and harmonise the relevant legislation in the sector, and finally (iv) initiate a dialogue with the scientific community on vivisection.

He ended by thanking the Members of the Commission who had helped produce this dossier, their Cabinets and the Commission departments for their constructive cooperation.

Mr VELLA noted that two out of the total of three Citizens' Initiatives submitted to the Commission involved the environment, reflecting the interest in environmental issues among EU citizens and their expectations of the EU in this area.

He also felt that the proposed response was balanced in the sense that it explained the EU legislation's goals in the area referred to in the Citizens' Initiative and gave a clear indication that the ultimate goal was to replace animal testing with alternative methods. He also noted that the communication set out clearly and simply why it was not possible to end animal testing immediately and why it was still necessary for scientific purposes. Finally, he underlined that the communication proposed a number of actions that should lead to a further slight reduction in the use of animal testing in direct response to the concerns of EU citizens.

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

– the suggestion that the Commission should organise a conference on animal welfare, as called for by the Citizens' Initiative *'Stop Vivisection'*;

– the importance of conveying to the public and the media the Commission's response to the Citizens' Initiative, which should clearly highlight the fact that the EU fully shared the initiative's goals and that substantive measures were being implemented in order to end animal testing as quickly as possible.

Mr TIMMERMANS thanked Mr KATAINEN for his presentation and the Members of the Commission who had contributed to proceedings and the discussion. He confirmed the line to be followed in terms of public communication, as summarised below.

The Commission decided:

– to adopt the communication in document C(2015) 3773/2;

– to notify the organisers of the Citizens' Initiative under Article 10(2) of Regulation (EU) 211/2011;

– to send the communication 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.

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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 10.44.