EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

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Brussels, 10 July 2019

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2301st meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Tuesday 25 June 2019

(morning)

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Single sitting: Tuesday 25 June 2019 (morning)

The sitting opened at 10.15 with Mr JUNCKER, President, in the chair.

Present:

Mr JUNCKER	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	First Vice-President	
Ms MOGHERINI	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 1 to 7 (in part)
Mr ANSIP	Vice-President	Items 1 to 7 (in part)
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Mr KATAINEN	Vice-President	
Mr OETTINGER	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms MALMSTRÖM	Member	
Mr MIMICA	Member	
Mr VELLA	Member	
Ms THYSSEN	Member	
Mr MOSCOVICI	Member	
Mr STYLIANIDES	Member	
Mr HOGAN	Member	
Ms BULC	Member	
Ms BIEŃKOWSKA	Member	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Member	
Ms VESTAGER	Member	Items 7 (in part) to 10
Mr MOEDAS	Member	
Ms GABRIEL	Member	

Absent:

Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Vice-President
Mr HAHN	Member
Mr ARIAS CAÑETE	Member
Mr ANDRIUKAITIS	Member
Mr AVRAMOPOULOS	Member
Mr NAVRACSICS	Member
Ms CREȚU	Member
Sir Julian KING	Member

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

Mr SUARDI	Chef de cabinet to Mr DOMBROVSKIS
Mr KARNITSCHNIG	Chef de cabinet to Mr HAHN
Ms LOBILLO BORRERO	Chef de cabinet to Mr ARIAS CAÑETE
Mr VINCIUNAS	Chef de cabinet to Mr ANDRIUKAITIS
Ms ASTERIADI	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr AVRAMOPOULOS
Ms KIRALY	Chef de cabinet to Mr NAVRACSICS
Ms RUS	Chef de cabinet to Ms CREȚU
Mr MORRISON	Chef de cabinet to Sir Julian KING

The following also sat in:

Ms MARTÍNEZ ALBEROLA	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Ms ANDREEVA	Commission Spokesperson’s Service	
Ms METTLER	Head of the European Political Strategy Centre	
Mr LEARDINI	Deputy Secretary-General	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr SZOSTAK	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr THOLONIAT	Adviser in the PRESIDENT’s Office	Items 1 to 7 (in part)
Mr DELVAUX	Adviser in the PRESIDENT’s Office	Item 7 (in part)
Ms CANENBLEY	Adviser in the PRESIDENT’s Office	Items 8 to 10
Ms BARA	Adviser in the PRESIDENT’s Office	Items 9 and 10
Mr REMY	PRESIDENT’s Office	
Mr KLEINER	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr OETTINGER	Items 8 and 9
Mr BAILLY	Chef de cabinet to Mr MOSCOVICI	Item 7 (in part)
Mr DELL	Adviser in Mr MOSCOVICI’s Office	Items 1 to 7 (in part)
Ms JUUL-JØRGENSEN	Chef de cabinet to Ms VESTAGER	Items 1 to 7 (in part)

Mr SNELS	Secretariat-General	
Mr KRAFF	Director-General, Internal Audit Service	Items 1 to 9
Mr THYGESEN	Chairman, European Fiscal Board	Item 7 (in part)
Mr LARCH	Head of Secretariat, European Fiscal Board	Item 7 (in part)

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

On his own behalf and on behalf of the College, the PRESIDENT opened the meeting by thanking Mr ANSIP and Ms CREȚU[1] very warmly for their excellent cooperation over the five years of the current Commission's term of office. They would be leaving to take their seats in the European Parliament, to which they had been elected on 26 May. He stressed the important contribution that they had made to achieving the Commission's political priorities in their respective fields of the Digital Single Market and Cohesion Policy. He wished them all the best for the rest of their career and welcomed the fact that they would soon be carrying out new functions to further European integration and that Parliament would be benefiting from their wide-ranging experience at national and European levels.

Mr ANSIP thanked the PRESIDENT and the Members of the College for their support and cooperation over the past five years, which made it possible for him to lead the important project of the Digital Single Market. He was proud that internet neutrality had now become a reality and made it possible for each European citizen to have access to an open internet, with a free choice of content and services. He noted that out of the approximately 30 legislative proposals presented by the Commission in the digital field, 28 had already been adopted and the two remaining ones were on their way to being adopted by the co-legislators. He considered that, together, the Members of the College had changed Europe. He concluded by informing the College that he would be taking his seat in the European Parliament from the following week, when it would be assembled for its first part-session after the elections. He assured the Members of the College of his friendship and expressed his gratitude to the PRESIDENT for doing him the honour of appointing him Member and Vice-President of the Commission.

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[1] Ms CREȚU was absent owing to her participation in the General Affairs Council which was held on the same day.

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2019) 2301/FINAL; SEC(2019) 2301/FINAL)

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(2019) 2301)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 24 June 2019.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2299TH AND 2300TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (12 AND 18 JUNE 2019)

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2299th and 2300th meetings for a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2019) 75)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 21 June 2019 (RCC(2019) 75).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

4.1. HORIZONTAL ITEM

i) 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework
(point 1.1.3 of the IRG record)

– Commission Services Non-Paper on 'Own Resources and Potential New Sources of Revenue'

The Commission took note of document SI(2019) 501.

4.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

ii) Council dossier
(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

– Amendment of Directive 2014/65/EU on markets in financial instruments (Directive) – NAGTEGAAL report – 2018/0047 (COD) / European Crowdfunding Service Providers (ECSP) for Business (Regulation) – FOX report – 2018/0048 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 492/2.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

iii) Programming of Council business
(SI(2019) 502)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2019) 502 on the Council meetings between 27 June and 10 July 2019.

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

– Position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Joint Committee established by the Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of the Philippines, of the other part, as regards the adoption of decisions on the rules of procedure of the Joint Committee and the terms of reference of the specialised subcommittees (Council Decision) – 2019/0098 (NLE)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 491 and /2.

– Position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the World Customs Organization (WCO) Council in relation to a World Customs Organization Article 16 Recommendation amending the Harmonised System (Council Decision) – 2019/0129 (NLE)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 493.

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2019) 254 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 17 and 21 June 2019.

5.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2019) 255 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 17 and 21 June 2019.

5.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2019) 256 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 17 and 21 June 2019 archived in D*e*cide.

5.4. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2019) 257 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 24 and 28 June 2019 and of the finalisation written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on Monday 24 June 2019.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2019) 258/2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2019) 59/2)

6.1. DG COMPETITION – TERMINATION OF THE INTERNAL, INTERINSTITUTIONAL AND EXTERNAL SELECTION PROCEDURES FOR A POST OF AD14/15 - AD14 PRINCIPAL ADVISER (PERS(2018) 88 TO /4)

On a proposal from Mr OETTINGER, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms VESTAGER, and also Mr ANSIP, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ and Mr KATAINEN, the Commission decided to terminate the internal, interinstitutional (at grade AD14/15) and external (at grade AD14) selection procedures (references COM/2018/3494 and COM/2018/10382 respectively) for the post of ‘Ex-post economic evaluation’ Principal Adviser in DG Competition, without making an appointment.

This decision would take effect immediately.

6.2. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – COMMISSION DECISION APPOINTING THE MEMBERS OF THE INDEPENDENT ETHICAL COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED BY COMMISSION DECISION C(2018) 700 (C(2019) 5200; PERS(2019) 60)

The Commission adopted the decision set out in C(2019) 5200 appointing

Ms Dagmar ROTH-BEHRENDT, Mr Christiaan TIMMERMANS and Mr Heinz ZOUREK as members of the Independent Ethical Committee established by Commission Decision C(2018) 700 of 31 January 2018, for a three-year term from 13 July 2019 .

The Commission also took note of the reference documents in PERS(2019) 60.

6.3. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPRESENTATION IN CROATIA

The Commission took note of the decision taken by the Appointment Authority to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Ognian ZLATEV, currently Head of the European Commission Representation in Bulgaria, to the post of Head of the European Commission Representation in Croatia, with effect from 1 July 2019.

Mr Branko BARICEVIC, who would finish his term as Head of the European Commission Representation in Croatia on 30 June 2019, would continue to work within the Commission as an adviser to the PRESIDENT on issues relating to the preparation of Croatia’s presidency.

6.4. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE APPLICATION OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION IN 2018 (SEC(2019) 266)

The Commission took note of the annual report on the application of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the Commission set out in SEC(2019) 266.

6.5. EPSC – DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT ON THE MISSION, TASKS AND ORGANISATION CHART OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL STRATEGY CENTRE (C(2019) 5201)

The Commission took note of the Decision of the President set out in

C(2019) 5201, which amended and replaced Decision C(2018) 6088 of 19 September 2018.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

7.1. REPORT FROM THE EUROPEAN FISCAL BOARD – ASSESSMENT OF THE FISCAL STANCE APPROPRIATE FOR THE EURO AREA IN 2020
(SEC(2019) 267)

The PRESIDENT warmly welcomed Niels THYGESEN, the Chairman of the European Fiscal Board, who was visiting the Commission that day, as he now did regularly, in order to outline the conclusions of the Board's annual report on the fiscal stance appropriate for the euro area in 2020.

Mr THYGESEN thanked the PRESIDENT for his welcome and for the privilege of being able to meet the College of Commissioners and brief them on the conclusions of the annual report.

He began by reminding them of the role played by the European Fiscal Board in the European Semester of economic and budgetary policy coordination in the Union, which was to indicate an appropriate fiscal stance for the euro area before the euro area Member States prepared their draft budgets for the following year.

He described the steps that would follow now that the Board had just produced its report. In October 2019 the euro area Member States would present their draft budgetary plans for 2020 to the Commission. In November the Commission would issue draft recommendations for the euro area in 2020, and in January 2020 these recommendations would be adopted by the Council.

He also noted that the independent European Fiscal Board was responsible for examining the fiscal dimension of the euro area, which, as such, was not specifically provided for in the initial budgetary framework of the Union, but played a secondary role compared with the national dimension. However, the combination of national budgetary policies did not always add up to an appropriate fiscal stance for the euro area as a whole.

As regards the macroeconomic outlook, Mr THYGESEN described the central scenario which the Board had used as a basis, i.e. the start of a recovery in economic activity from mid-2019 that would continue in 2020, with a growth rate of between 1.2% and 1.5% of GDP. He noted that activity was likely to correspond to the level of potential growth of the euro area economies considered as a whole and to be reflected in both a fall in unemployment rates and an increase in job creation.

He explained the neutral stance recommended by the European Fiscal Board as appropriate for the euro area in 2020, with differentiation between countries. This recommendation was based on developments since the height of the financial crisis, namely a rather neutral stance since 2014 and a more expansive stance in 2019 and 2020, albeit within a reasonable band of 0.3% of GDP. This trend towards fiscal expansion arose from two thirds of the euro area Member States having a high level of public debt. He felt that a neutral fiscal stance was warranted when activity in the economies concerned was at around their potential level of output. In the context of the Stability and Growth Pact, it was recommended for the sake of prudence that heavily indebted Member States should try to adopt such a stance, whereas those countries that had fiscal space were encouraged to use it.

He admitted that these growth prospects could be threatened by a number of risks such as a disorderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union and trade tensions between the United States and China.

Mr THYGESEN ended by mentioning the levers that could be used at Union level to address the possibility of a serious slowdown in growth. The first was to let the automatic stabilisers play their role; the second was to take advantage of the opportunities for flexibility provided for by the Stability and Growth Pact itself – the matrix of requirements, waivers or even the escape clause; and the third was, as the Commission was proposing, to create a central fiscal capacity to absorb major shocks that might be common to the euro area.

Mr MOSCOVICI praised the quality of the analysis presented in the report by the independent European Fiscal Board, which the Commission would draw on for its autumn recommendations on the Member States' draft budgetary plans for 2020.

He began by noting that, compared with the report for 2019, this year the Board's views were broadly in line with the positions held by the Commission, recommending a neutral fiscal stance for the euro area in 2020, with differentiated budgetary policies at national level. He endorsed, on the one hand, the need for the most indebted Member States to step up their fiscal efforts, and on the other the recommendation that those countries that overshot their medium-term adjustment objective in 2019 use at least some of their budgetary margins, which would bolster the resilience of the euro area if the slowdown in growth were to be sharper than expected.

He stressed that the Member States must continue to comply with the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact and that the existence of a central fiscal capacity would make their task easier as well as cushioning the effect of any drop in growth in the most vulnerable States. Although the analysis of the stability and convergence programmes in spring 2019 justified recommending an overall neutral fiscal stance in 2020, he nevertheless noted that its application at national level was not always in line with the requirements of the Pact and that some Member States would have to undertake extensive reforms in order to meet the objective.

Lastly, Mr MOSCOVICI made the general point that a certain degree of prudence should be exercised in the recommendations, given the inevitable margin for error in the forecasts on which they were based.

A brief discussion ensued, during which the Commission considered (i) what approach should be taken in the event of a serious slowdown in growth, since it took time to pass on macroeconomic data and the measures to be adopted in such an eventuality required a response time that could not be reduced, and (ii) the effect of the views expressed by certain renowned economists that reducing the Member States' public debt was not an absolute dogma and that in certain specific cases deficits were necessary.

Mr THYGESEN reiterated that in a neutral fiscal stance scenario, instruments did exist that were operational and perfectly suited to dealing with a sharp drop in growth. He was sure that automatic stabilisers could play this role on their own, with the other possible option being to apply the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact flexibly.

On the second point, he recognised that the analysis referred to was based on sound empirical data, but that although it was of interest, it should not be interpreted over-zealously. He explained that it was not justified in all situations to regard ensuring long-term public debt sustainability as a secondary consideration. If the European Central Bank maintained low interest rates, the debt of the euro area Member States would be kept in check, but an increase in interest rates would cause the debt of the heavily indebted Member States to rocket. In conclusion, he said it was necessary not to harbour illusions and not to relax efforts to reduce public debt in order to ensure that it remained sustainable in the long term.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr THYGESEN for sharing the analysis and conclusions of the European Fiscal Board with the College. He stressed the Board's independence and congratulated Mr THYGESEN on his outstanding work.

The Commission took note of this information.

7.2. ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY SITUATION IN ITALY

The Commission raised the latest developments concerning the possible opening by the Council of an excessive deficit procedure against Italy for non-compliance with the debt criterion for the 2018 budgetary year.

7.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN TRADE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MERCOSUR COUNTRIES

The PRESIDENT asked Ms MALMSTRÖM and Mr HOGAN to update the meeting on the ongoing trade negotiations with the Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay).

Ms MALMSTRÖM welcomed the significant progress made in the negotiations thanks to the efforts on both sides. She also welcomed the imminent conclusion of the negotiations, which would open up very important markets to EU exports at a time when multilateral trade was being undermined. She stressed the urgent need to reach an agreement, given that some of the Mercosur partner countries would soon be entering election campaign periods.

The ministerial negotiations would therefore continue in the coming days on the last points still to be settled, namely the agricultural aspects of the agreement, in particular certain geographical indications and trade volumes for rice, sugar and poultry. She added that significant improvements had been made to the chapter on the sanitary and phytosanitary rules, sustainable development and the precautionary principle in order to take account of the various parties’ concerns.

She concluded her presentation by thanking the College for its support.

Mr HOGAN endorsed Ms MALMSTRÖM’s words and stressed that the discussions had made good progress. As regards the agricultural aspects of the agreement, he pointed out that the Union had already made significant efforts, but that it also had expectations and, in particular, did not intend to secure an agreement with the Mercosur countries at any cost. However, he said that he was optimistic and felt sure that the final agreement would be balanced.

The Commission took note of this information.

8. 2018 ANNUAL MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE EU BUDGET FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE COURT OF AUDITORS (COM(2019) 299 TO /3; SEC(2019) 260; RCC(2019) 77)

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr OETTINGER, in the presence of the Commission's internal auditor, Mr Manfred KRAFF, presented to the College the Commission's annual report on the management and performance of the EU Budget, which would serve as the basis for the discharge of the 2018 budget by the budgetary authority. This annual report described the way in which the EU budget had contributed to delivering the EU's political priorities, presented the results achieved and highlighted the implementation of the highest standards of financial management. The report itself was based on the Annual Activity Reports of all the Commission departments, which had already been examined by the College, while integrating the recommendations of the internal auditor and of the Audit Progress Committee and the decisions of the European Court of Auditors on the discharge.

He observed that this year a special effort had been made to make this report easier to read and more explanatory, in particular the second part on financial management, internal control and protection of the EU budget, which should facilitate the discharge process.

The first part of the report assessed the results already obtained in each of the EU's political priorities, giving specific examples. Despite its relatively modest size, the EU budget supplemented the national budgets and provided real added value in the fields where action was necessary at EU level.

Mr OETTINGER concluded his presentation by thanking the Members of the College for their excellent cooperation in this exercise, which involved all the Commission departments. He pointed out that with this report, the Commission took general political responsibility for the management of the EU budget in 2018, and that the European Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors would examine it under the budgetary discharge procedure for that year.

At the end of this presentation, the Commission:

– approved the 2018 Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU Budget set out in COM(2019) 299/2 and /3, together with the technical annexes, for transmission to Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors, and, for information, to the national parliaments, indicating a link giving access to all the annual activity reports (https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/annual-activity-reports-2018_en);

– took note of the fact that each Member of the Commission had been made aware of the Annual Activity Report and of the declaration presented by his/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 Mr OETTINGER, the Member of the Commission with responsibility for the Budget and Human Resources, to present the report to the discharge authority;

– took note of the documents available in Decide as supporting documents: (i) the Annual Report of the Audit Progress Committee for the period from

May 2018-May 2019, distributed as SEC(2019) 260, (ii) the annual report on the internal audit for 2018, distributed as a meeting document under Ares(2019) 3902301, and (iii) the general opinion of the Internal Auditor for 2018 and the related working document.

9. REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE COURT OF AUDITORS - ANNUAL REPORT TO THE DISCHARGE AUTHORITY ON INTERNAL AUDITS CARRIED OUT IN 2018

(COM(2019) 350; SWD(2019) 300)

The PRESIDENT asked Mr TIMMERMANS, in the presence of the Commission's internal auditor, Mr Manfred KRAFF, to present to the College the annual report from the Commission to the Discharge Authority on internal audits carried out in 2018.

Mr TIMMERMANS began by saying that the Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU budget that Mr OETTINGER had just presented was based on a certain number of assurances, in particular those which the internal auditor, Mr Manfred KRAFF, recorded in an annual report and in the overall opinion he addressed entirely independently to the College. The Commission drew inspiration on this when drafting the annual report on the internal audits carried out that it is required to send to the Discharge Authority under the Financial Regulation.

Mr TIMMERMANS mentioned the different elements of this factual report, which had received contributions from all the Commission's departments, stressing that in this report also, an effort had been made this year to be transparent in order to make it more attractive and easier to read.

He was pleased to note that the internal auditor's overall opinion was positive in 2018, qualified only with regard to the reservations in the management declarations of assurance. Without questioning that assurance, the internal auditor once again made an observation this year about the supervision that the Commission must carry out of the third parties to which it delegates the operational budgetary implementation of certain tasks.

He specified that the Commission was required to ensure the legality and the regularity of the expenditure and to ensure the rigorous management of the Union's financing. It was for that reason that the Commission should equip itself with strategies and tools that allowed it to supervise effectively the third parties to whom part of the financial management was delegated.

Mr TIMMMERMANS also mentioned briefly the annual report of the Audit Progress Committee in which that Committee highlighted the quality and independence of the work done by the Commission's internal auditor in 2018. He pointed out that the Commission's departments had taken over a very high number of recommendations of the internal audit service and had implemented satisfactory action plans. He said that 97% of the recommendations issued between 2014 and 2018 had been implemented and that there were on average only around 15 very important recommendations that were more than six months old over the last two years. Lastly, he mentioned a critical recommendation in 2018 concerning the delegation of tasks to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency which had quickly given rise to corrective measures which were considered sufficient for the internal auditor to have been able to reclassify the recommendation as very important. He also recommended that all the Commission departments should be very strict when following up the activities of the Union's agencies.

He added that the Audit Progress Committee had also intensified, for preventive reasons, the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations made in 2015 by the European Court of Auditors, which would take stock of this in its annual report at the end of the year. It had also followed up the findings of audits carried out by the Court of Auditors concerning the Union's consolidated accounts, as it had been mandated to do by the College the previous autumn.

Mr TIMMERMANS closed by stressing that during the five years he had chaired the Audit Progress Committee, he had been personally able to observe the excellent quality of the work done by the Internal Audit Service.

The PRESIDENT added to this by warmly thanking the internal auditor, Mr Manfred KRAFF, and his team.

On a proposal from the PRESIDENT, the Commission confirmed that the report currently set out in COM(2019) 350 would be adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 12.00 on Tuesday 25 June 2019 (PE/2019/4579).

10. OHER BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

10.1. 41ST MEETING OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS (ROME, 22-29 JUNE 2019)

Mr HOGAN informed the College of the election on 23 June of Qu Dongyu to the post of-Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome. He said the Chinese candidate had received 108 of the 191 votes cast, while the European Union’s candidate, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, former Director of the European Food Safety Agency, had only received 71 votes and the Georgian candidate, supported by the United States, 12 votes.

He reminded the meeting of the expertise that the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations had in policies and projects linked to agriculture and fisheries, in particular in developing countries. He noted, moreover, that the Union and its Member States contributed up to 40% to the organisation's annual budget of 2.6 billion, while China only contributed 8%.

He asked the College to reflect on the reasons why the Union’s candidate had been sidelined despite her unanimously acknowledged skills, while the Chinese candidate had been elected despite his undeniable lack of experience. He also mentioned, among other things, the skilful campaign run by China and the isolation strategy pursued by the U.S., while the Union had deliberately chosen to rely only on its candidate's qualities.

Mr HOGAN deemed it appropriate to express concerns about the lack of support from certain regions of the world to which the Union, however, was providing considerable aid for development. He asked the College to reflect in particular about the perception of Europe in the world and about how it could ensure an influence in international fora more in line with its status as a leading world donor of development aid.

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

– the lack of visibility of the Union's role as a leading world donor of aid to developing countries;

– the importance for the Union of enjoying a suitable level of political influence in an area where it had considerable expertise and a wide range of tools and financing instruments;

– the desirability of a more proactive approach so that the role and commitment of the Union with regard to aid would be recognised and taken into account in international fora.

The PRESIDENT closed the discussion by noting the increasing influence of China in developing countries, in particular in Africa. He said that China's policy in that part of the world was causing certain African countries to become heavily indebted, while the Union had for a long time been offering the African continent development aid in the form of grants.

He therefore asked the Members of the Commission to actively communicate the constructive and important role that the Union played in development aid whenever they had the opportunity, and to give it more visibility by ensuring in particular that the Union was represented at the big international meetings in this field, starting with the African Union summit in Niamey, Niger, on 6 and 7 July.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.2. EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE RULING IN CASE C-619/18.

The Commission mentioned briefly the judgment handed down the previous day by the Court of Justice of the European Union in Case C-619/18 concerning the provisions of Polish law regarding the lowering of the retirement age for Supreme Court judges, following the action for failure to fulfil obligations brought by the Commission on 2 October 2018. The Court of Justice of the European Union concluded that those provisions of Polish law infringed European law.

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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 11.33.