



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2019) 2319 final

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

Brussels, 29 January 2020

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2319th meeting of the Commission
held in Strasbourg
(Winston Churchill building)
on Tuesday 17 December 2019
(afternoon)**

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

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Single sitting: Tuesday 17 December 2019 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.00 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair. Item 14 was chaired by Mr TIMMERMANS.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	Items 1 to 13
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 13
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	Items 1 to 13
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative/ Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	Items 1 to 13
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr HOGAN	Member	Items 1 to 13
Ms GABRIEL	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	Items 1 to 13
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	Items 1 to 13
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	Items 1 to 13
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Ms LENARČIČ	Member	Items 1 to 13
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Ms VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	

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Absent:

Mr SINKEVIČIUS

Member

Ms CUJO A member of Mr SINKEVIČIUS's staff

Mr SEIBERT	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms RISO	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 1 to 13
Mr FLOSDORFF	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 1 to 13
Mr SAMPEDRO MARCOS	PRESIDENT's Office	Item 14
Ms FURNIERE	PRESIDENT's Office	Item 13
Mr HULICIUS	A member of Ms JOUROVÁ's staff	Items 13 and 14
Mr BELET	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms ŠUICA	Item 13
Mr KRISTÓFFY	Chef de cabinet to Mr VÁRHELYI	Items 13 (in part) and 14
Mr BARNIER	Head of the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom	Item 8
Mr HEMMELGARN	Secretariat-General	
Ms WIECZOREK	Commission Spokesperson's Service	Items 1 to 9/12

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The PRESIDENT opened the sitting with a few announcements to the College concerning the coming days and weeks.

The meeting of the College of Wednesday 8 January 2020 would probably be postponed, barring unforeseen circumstances. The Commission would present its New Year wishes to the Belgian Sovereigns on the morning of 9 January 2020 and, following this ceremony, would travel to Zagreb for two days in order to meet the Croatian Government, which would be taking over the rotating presidency of the Council from 1 January 2020 for six months.

The PRESIDENT also announced that the College would travel to Luxembourg on 13 January, when the Members of the Commission would take their formal oath of office before the Court of Justice of the European Union. Lunch would take place at 13.00, before the official ceremony scheduled for 15.00, which would be followed by a reception. She added that the family members of the Members of the Commission were also invited to participate in part of the ceremony.

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1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2019) 2319/FINAL; SEC(2019) 2319/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) 2319)

The Commission considered the Acting Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 16 December 2019.

**3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2317TH AND 2318TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (4 AND 11 DECEMBER 2019)
(PV(2019) 2317)**

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2317th meeting and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2318th meeting for a later meeting.

**4. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2019) 129)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2019) 129 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 11 December 2019 (RCC(2019) 129).

5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2019) 432 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 9 and 13 December 2019.

**5.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2019) 433 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 9 and 13 December 2019.

**5.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2019) 434 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 9 and 13 December 2019 archived in Decide.

5.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2019) 435)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 16 and 20 December 2019.

6. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2019) 127)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 13 December 2019 (RCC(2019) 127).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

6.1. HORIZONTAL MATTERS

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

- Asylum and Migration Fund (Regulation) – DALLI report – 2018/0248 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 763.

- Reform Support Programme (Regulation) – GARDIAZÁBAL RUBIAL & PÎSLARU report – 2018/0213 (COD) / Governance framework for the budgetary instrument for convergence and competitiveness for the euro area (Regulation) – PÎSLARU report – 2019/0161 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 770/2.

6.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

ii) Trilogues

(Point 3.1 of the IRG Record)

- Establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment (Regulation) – PIETIKÄINEN & EICKHOUT report - 2018/0178 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 760/2 and /3, further to document SI(2019) 746, which it had already taken note of on 11 December 2019.

- ‘Mobility Package I’ – Amendment of Directive 2006/22/EC as regards enforcement requirements and laying down specific rules with respect to Directive 96/71/EC and Directive 2014/67/EU for posting drivers in the road transport sector (Directive) – KONEČNA report – 2017/0121 (COD) / Amendment of Regulation (EC) 561/2006 as regards minimum requirements on maximum daily and weekly driving times, minimum breaks and daily and weekly rest periods and Regulation (EU) 165/2014 as regards positioning by means of tachographs (Regulation) – VIRKKUNEN report – 2017/0122 (COD) / Amendment of Regulation (EC) 1071/2009 on access to the occupation of road transport operator and Regulation (EC) 1072/2009 on access to the international road haulage market with a view to adapting them to developments in the sector (Regulation) – ERTUG report – 2017/0123 (COD)

At the PRESIDENT’s request, the Acting Secretary-General reported that the Heads of Cabinet had, at their weekly meeting, discussed the provisional agreement arrived at by the European Parliament and the Council following the fourth trilogue on 11 and 12 December 2019 on the proposals concerning market access and social rules relating to the road transport sector. She

explained that, while they welcomed the significant progress on the social front, they regretted the introduction into the provisional agreement of two new measures, namely the mandatory return of vehicles every eight weeks and the restrictions applicable to combined transport operations.

The Heads of Cabinet had therefore agreed that it would be appropriate for the Commission to present a statement to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) at its meeting on 18 December, in which the Commission would undertake to carry out a thorough assessment of the social and environmental consequences of the two measures, as well as their impact on the functioning of the single market. These new measures had, by definition, never been the subject of an impact assessment and did not appear to be compatible with the targets of the European green deal.

Since one of the Heads of Cabinet had issued a reservation on the text of the statement at the weekly meeting, she explained that it was proposed to indicate in the statement that the Commission would exercise its right of initiative if necessary, after its impact analysis, by presenting a targeted legislative proposal before the two provisions in question entered into force. She also noted that it was proposed to make explicit acknowledgement in the statement of the social improvements brought about by the provisional agreement.

The revised text of the statement was distributed to the Members of the Commission at the meeting.

The PRESIDENT noted that the provisional agreement reached by the European Parliament and the Council necessarily constituted a compromise. She pointed out that there were three possible options available to the Commission, the first being to accept the compromise, the second to oppose it, at the risk of negating the efforts made throughout the long and difficult negotiations, and the third to issue the proposed statement, which enabled it to let the co-legislators know that the two new measures were unsatisfactory

without, however, jeopardising the undeniable social progress achieved or endangering several years' worth of work.

Ms VÅLEAN also said that the Commission had tried hard to convince the European Parliament and Finnish Presidency of the Council of the inappropriateness, for a number of reasons, of the two measures in question, while maintaining the package of proposals.

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

- a certain scepticism towards the provisional agreement reached by the co-legislators;
- at the same time, repeated references to the need to safeguard the undeniable and hard-won social progress contained in the provisional agreement, which had already been welcomed by certain Member States;
- the advantages of rapidly assessing the impact of the disputed measures, in particular with respect to the European Green Deal and the single market, in line with the Commission's repeated wish to make any new substantive measure introduced during the course of interinstitutional negotiations subject to an impact analysis;
- a call not to let the wait for the results of the impact analysis take precedence over the emphasis on the social progress achieved on this matter;
- the responsibility of the Commission to exercise its right of initiative if these measures were justified as a result of the impact analyses;
- the appropriateness of the Commission's statement to COREPER as a response to an unfortunate situation, without negating the considerable effort that had already been put into the negotiation of the 'Mobility

Package I', which had achieved an admittedly partial but relatively unexpected success;

- the possibility of continuing negotiations on the package and of excluding the two measures at issue pending the impact analyses;
- the impossibility for the Commission, at this stage of interinstitutional negotiation, to add a review clause on the measures at issue.

The PRESIDENT confirmed that, after the analysis by the Legal Service, the exclusion of the two measures at issue from the negotiation was not possible. She therefore held that the proposed statement was the only appropriate avenue open to the Commission to communicate its position without *de facto* quashing any realistic hope of seeing the 'Mobility Package I' adopted.

She also said that she wanted to send out a clear message, calling on the Institutions to work hand in hand, constructively, in the common interest of the European Union.

The PRESIDENT wound up the discussion by noting the agreement of the Commissioners on the revised text of the Commission's statement as distributed to them during the meeting.

The Commission took note of this information and approved the line set out in SI(2019) 762/2, including the revised text of the Commission's statement.

iii) European Parliament dossiers – December II 2019 part-session

(point 3.2 of the IRG record)

Implementing acts and measures

- Extension of the approval periods of the active substances amidosulfuron, bifenox, chlorpyrifos, chlorpyrifos-methyl, clofentezine, dicamba, difenoconazole, diflubenzuron, diflufenican, dimoxystrobin, fenoxaprop-p, fenpropidin, lenacil, mancozeb, mecoprop-p, metiram,

nicosulfuron, oxamyl, picloram, pyraclostrobin, pyriproxyfen and tritosulfuron dimoxystrobin and mancozeb (D064213/02 – 2019/2925(RSP) – Objection pursuant to Rule 112 of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure

The Commission took note of SP(2019) 714.

iv) Council dossiers

(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

- Amendment of Directive 2009/103/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 September 2009 relating to insurance against civil liability in respect of the use of motor vehicles, and the enforcement of the obligation to insure against such liability (Directive) – CHARANZOVÁ report – 2018/0168 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 761/2.

- Measures concerning the implementation and financing of the general budget of the Union in 2020 in relation to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union (Council Regulation) – VAN OVERTVELDT report – 2019/0186 (APP)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 762.

- Minimum requirements for water reuse (Regulation) – BONAFÈ report – 2018/0169 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2019) 771.

6.3. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

v) Programming of Council business

(SI(2019) 773)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2019) 773 on the Council meetings between 19 and 23 December 2019.

6.4. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

vi) Non-legislative dossier

(point 5.1 of the IRG record)

- Oral question O-000041/2019 – Conflict of interest and corruption affecting the protection of the EU's financial interests in the Member States

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2019) 712/2.

vii) Action taken on legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its November I and II 2019 part-sessions

(point 5.6.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2019) 706/2 on the action taken on the legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its November I and II 2019 part-sessions, for transmission to Parliament.

viii) Results of Parliament's December I 2019 part-session

(point 5.8.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission took note of the information on Parliament's part-session held in Brussels on 11 December 2019, set out in SP(2019) 715.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2019) 436/2 AND /3)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2019) 116/2 AND /3)

Regarding the proposals for Commission Decisions on authorising the internal publication of vacancy notices for Director-General posts, concerns were expressed about the restrictive conditions for filling these posts that were set out in the proposals, ruling out officials of certain nationalities from being represented, which could have an impact on the highest levels of management of the institution in the long term. It was asked if it would not be possible also to authorise the external publication of these vacancy notices.

Mr HAHN replied that there were indeed several options available when publishing management posts to be filled in the institution, but that the basic rule in Article 7(1) of the Staff Regulations was that each official was assigned by appointment or transfer to a post in his or her function group which corresponded to his or her grade solely in the interest of the service and without regard to nationality.

Specifically, he highlighted the fact that by virtue of this rule, a Director could not be directly promoted to Director-General. He also noted that the scope of application of a vacancy notice for a Director-General or Deputy Director-General post could be extended to Director grade where this was justified by the level of experience within the Commission to fill the post. These vacancy notices could also, in certain situations, be published interinstitutionally or externally if the level of experience required was not available within the Commission.

In any case, Mr HAHN, addressing all the Members of the College, stated very clearly that Commission officials were European officials and urged Members not to pursue a ‘flag policy’ which would be contrary to the very spirit of the European civil service.

He noted that all the Member State nationalities should be adequately represented at all levels of the institution and that the efforts deployed to achieve this should continue, while stressing that appointment decisions for middle and senior management took numerous factors into consideration, including gender balance.

Mr HAHN concluded by announcing that at the end of the next year he would be presenting to the College a plan that would make it possible to correct any delays detected.

7.1. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF AD16 DIRECTOR-GENERAL

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr GENTILONI, the Commission decided:

- to repeal its decision of 4 December 2019 on the transfer of Mr Maarten VERWEY, currently Director-General at the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) in DG Structural Reform Support;
- to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Maarten VERWEY to the post of Director-General of DG Economic and Financial Affairs.

The latter decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

7.2. DG TAXATION AND CUSTOMS UNION – APPOINTMENT OF AD14 DIRECTOR

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr GENTILONI, the Commission decided:

- to repeal its decision of 4 December 2019 on the transfer of Mr Benjamin ANGEL, currently Director of the ‘Treasury and Financial Operations’ Directorate in DG Economic and Financial Affairs, to DG Budget;
- to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the

Staff Regulations, Mr Benjamin ANGEL to the post of Director of the 'Direct Taxation, Tax Coordination, Economic Analysis and Evaluation' Directorate in DG Taxation and Customs Union.

These decisions would take effect on 1 January 2020.

7.3. DG JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS – INTERNAL PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD15/16 DIRECTOR-GENERAL (PERS(2019) 117)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr REYNDERS and Ms DALLI, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2019) 117 for the post of Director-General of DG Justice and Consumers.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.4. DG STRUCTURAL REFORM SUPPORT – INTERNAL PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR AN AD15/16 DIRECTOR-GENERAL (PERS(2019) 118)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms FERREIRA, the Commission decided to authorise the publication, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2019) 118 for the post of Director-General of DG Structural Reform Support.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.5. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – LAUNCH OF THE ANNUAL APPRAISAL EXERCISE FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS

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

- to authorise the launch of the appraisal exercise for senior management officials for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019 in line with the rules applied during the previous exercise;
- to authorise a derogation from the last sentence of the rules on postponement by authorising a second postponement of the appraisal report for 2017.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.6. ACTIVITIES OF FOUR MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION AFTER LEAVING OFFICE

(C(2019) 9005; C(2019) 9006; C(2019) 9007; C(2019) 9008)

The Commission adopted the Decisions set out in C(2019) 9005, C(2019) 9006, C(2019) 9007 and C(2019) 9008.

The Commission specifically decided that the activities envisaged by Ms MOGHERINI, Mr MOSCOVICI, Mr STYLIANIDES and Mr MOEDAS after leaving office as Members of the Commission were compatible with Article 245(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and with the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, subject to certain specific conditions and obligations.

7.7. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – LAUNCH OF THE 13TH PROMOTION EXERCISE FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS

The Commission took note of the decision of Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, on the 13th promotion exercise, adopted in accordance with the provisions of the Commission Decision of 10 May 2007 on the system of promotion of senior management officials (SEC(2007) 605). Under the Commission Decision, the 13th promotion exercise would be carried out on

the basis of the following criteria: the promotion rate would be a maximum of 15% of eligible senior management officials; it would apply to posts at Director level or equivalent (grades AD14 and AD15) and posts at Director-General level or equivalent (grades AD15 and AD16); the eligibility conditions would have to be met by 1 January 2020 at the latest, the date on which the promotions would come into effect.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr BARNIER reported on the latest developments in the process of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

9. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2020 – COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK – ANNUAL SUSTAINABLE GROWTH STRATEGY 2020

(COM(2019) 650 TO /3; SWD(2019) 444; RCC(2019) 128)

10. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2020 – RECOMMENDATION FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON THE ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE EURO AREA

(COM(2019) 652 TO /3; SWD(2019) 631 TO /3; RCC(2019) 128)

- 11. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2020 – REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE – ALERT MECHANISM REPORT 2020
(COM(2019) 651 AND /2; SWD(2019) 630; RCC(2019) 128)**
- 12. EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY POLICY COORDINATION FOR 2020 – PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT EMPLOYMENT REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION AND THE COUNCIL ACCOMPANYING THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION ON THE ANNUAL SUSTAINABLE GROWTH STRATEGY 2020
(COM(2019) 653 AND /2; RCC(2019) 128)**

The PRESIDENT asked Mr DOMBROVSKIS to present to the College new elements of the European Semester of economic and budgetary policy coordination for 2020, the first to be conducted entirely under the mandate of the present Commission.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS began by reminding the meeting that the European Semester of economic and budgetary policy coordination was a tool governed by Articles 121 and 148 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which reflected the fact that the Member States regarded their economic and employment policies as matters of common concern; it allowed the European Council to endorse specific recommendations made by the Commission to each Member State.

He also pointed out that the European Semester followed an annual cycle with well-defined stages. First, the Commission gave its opinion on the broad economic policy guidelines to be followed over the year ahead. This was the purpose of the documents being presented that day. In the second stage, over the next few months and culminating in spring 2020, the Commission would examine the results for each Member State in its country reports and consider the national reform plans and country-specific recommendations.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS then turned to the content of the two main documents in the package being tabled for approval that day, namely (i) the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 and (ii) the Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area. These documents were accompanied by a proposal for a joint employment report, a report on macroeconomic imbalances and, for the first time, a report on the performance of the single market.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS explained that the **Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020** was based on the current economic situation, in which the European economy had grown for the seventh consecutive year and posted a record employment rate thanks to the 17.4 million jobs created since the beginning of 2013, while the debt to GDP ratio had fallen from 95.2% in 2014 to 87.9% in 2018 in the euro area. However, the strategy also took account of the fact that the outlook was deteriorating and the decades ahead would be marked by three fundamental trends – climate change, an ageing population and technological progress. The Union would therefore have to tackle these long-term challenges, starting now by making a determined effort to implement sound reforms.

Accordingly, the Union's economic strategy must, in his view, incorporate the European Green Deal, which was why it had been renamed the 'sustainable growth strategy'. It was based on four main priorities – stability, productivity, sustainability and fairness.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS regarded the first priority, **stability**, as a prerequisite for growth and the economic transition. He explained that fiscal policies must be responsible and differentiated so that the public finances were well managed, in accordance with the rules adopted by common agreement.

He also argued that debt reduction increased confidence in the economy and strengthened resilience to crises, while also cutting the cost of borrowing, which served to boost the volume of funds available for public investment.

He stressed, however, that national reforms were not enough to guarantee stability and that it was necessary to complete the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in order to provide the Union with all the tools it needed to cope with an economic downturn. A stronger EMU would also have the effect of increasing the euro's international role, which was a vital factor in the Union's influence on global markets.

Turning to the second priority, **productivity**, he said that this had to be achieved through technological progress and digitalisation so that Europe could be at the forefront of future economic growth and become a global leader in an increasingly digitalised world.

To achieve this, the Union would have to carry out ambitious structural reforms in order to improve the business environment and the quality of its institutions. It would also have to promote a research and innovation policy geared towards the future, as discussed in the annual Single Market Performance Report.

The third priority of the sustainable growth strategy was **sustainability** itself, which was now integrated in the European Semester and hence in the formulation of economic and social policies. He noted that the transition towards climate neutrality would require substantial investment in a wide range of areas from transport to agriculture.

In this context he pointed out that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were also incorporated in the European Semester and the Commission would monitor their implementation by the Member States. He also mentioned the preparations under way for a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan to mobilise the funding needed for sustainable investments throughout the Union.

Finally, he presented the fourth priority of the Union's economic strategy, **fairness**, which put people at the heart of the green and digital transition so that no region or individual would be left behind. He stressed that, well managed, this transition would not only improve working and living conditions but also create jobs. There

had been considerable improvements in the social and employment situation over the last few years, but these efforts had to be continued, as was analysed in detail in the proposal for a Joint Employment Report.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS ended his presentation by asking the Members of the Commission to play an active part in communicating the Union's new economic strategy in order to encourage ownership of it at a technical and political level. In this spirit he would coordinate joint efforts on the ground, in close cooperation with the Member States and stakeholders from the economic and social sphere.

Mr GENTILONI felt that today the annual sustainable growth strategy was on the right track and had the right economic priorities, whereas the coordination of economic and budgetary policies under the European Semester had long been focused solely on budgetary and macroeconomic concerns. He explained that, at the initiative of the outgoing Commission, the European Semester had been changed by incorporating the European Pillar of Social Rights, precisely in order to widen its focus to cover inclusive growth. He was pleased that the new Commission was now demonstrating that the European Green Deal could become the Union's new growth strategy by ensuring that environmental protection was taken fully into account in the equation and by making it an additional priority alongside fairness, productivity and macroeconomic stability.

This meant that the picture was now complete and the Commission was presenting a strategy that was tailored to the long-term challenges, sending a clear signal that it wanted an economy that worked for people. At the same time, he stressed that the set of elements being presented that day in the context of the European Semester responded to some of the short-term challenges facing the Union.

Regarding the substance of the analysis, Mr GENTILONI acknowledged that the economic outlook was one of modest growth and still subject to numerous risks. Nevertheless, he noted a certain degree of stabilisation in the cyclical indicators. The immediate risks to world trade appeared to be diminishing, as the first step had been taken towards an agreement between the United States and China, and, for

better or for worse, the clarification of the political situation in the United Kingdom regarding its withdrawal from the Union was seen by the markets as a positive development.

On a general point, he stressed the political message that should accompany the current European Semester cycle, i.e. that of a new model of sustainable growth, while pointing out that this was only the beginning of a long process of economic and social adaptation.

He added that the combination of sustainable growth and the European Pillar of Social Rights made the European Semester more relevant in the eyes of the Member States. At the same time, however, he felt that the macroeconomic surveillance mechanisms should remain in place, in particular for the euro area.

Mr SCHMIT took the floor and confirmed that many aspects had to be taken into consideration with regard to social stability, and that the European Semester was a valuable tool in this respect. In particular, he underlined the importance of fairness, which was the objective of the European Pillar of Social Rights and was measured by the 14 indicators of the Social Scoreboard.

He noted an overall improvement in the social parameters, in particular in terms of unemployment and poverty levels, but observed that a lot remained to be done to address the major challenges of the future, starting with the transition to a greener European economy. He conceded that around half of the Member States had a long way to go to ensure that the skills that would be required in the jobs of the future linked to sustainable growth were made available to the labour market.

Mr SCHMIT concluded by supporting the need for a social approach to macroeconomic policy.

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

- highlighting of the outstanding work carried out by those jointly responsible for the European Semester, and the inclusive approach taken in drawing up this comprehensive set of analyses and guidelines;
- the importance of the inclusion for the first time in the European Semester cycle of the Single Market Performance Report, a significant new feature that reflected the clear desire to protect this flagship of the Union at a time of transition and to harness its full potential;
- satisfaction that the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (i) placed social fairness and sustainable development at the heart of the formulation of the EU's economic policies from now on, (ii) enshrined the concept of sustainable competitiveness in the aim of building an economy for people and the planet, (iii) included references to the rule of law and equality as factors that had a positive impact on the business environment, and, lastly, (iv) integrated the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in the European Semester for the first time;
- a reminder of the EU Semester's economic governance function, and a recommendation not to lose sight of this aspect by adding, over time, too many new parameters for analysis to the general matrix;
- in view of the current macroeconomic situation, which was marked by a number of geopolitical uncertainties, the need to remain alert and to bear in mind that more difficult times lay ahead, particularly since the economic forecasts might need to be revised downwards as it had not been possible to factor in the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the Union;
- hence the imperative need for solidarity and unity among the Member States to address these contingencies;
- the urgent need to deepen the Economic and Monetary Union and avoid the segmentation of capital markets in order to give the Union more weight on the international stage;

- likewise, the need to strengthen the international potential of the euro, particular by encouraging the drawing up of contracts in euros and by supporting Africa, which wished to use the euro as a currency for international payments;
- a call to reflect on how the Member States could improve their performance in certain indicators in the scoreboard used to detect imbalances in the Member States for which measures might need to be adopted;
- the observation that time would be needed to correct the discrepancies between Member States' indebtedness levels, particularly in the euro area;
- the crucial importance for the EU of remaining a driver for cohesion and of 'greening' the Structural Funds;
- the urgent need to counter arguments against migration that dwelt solely on negative aspects, and to restore the link between migration and the skills needed by the EU economy;
- a question about whether it was desirable to continue the use of the term 'structural reforms', which could have a negative connotation in some Member States;
- the recognition by the Member States of the work being carried out by the Commission under the European Semester cycle, particularly thanks to the methodology used, and the resulting boost to the Union's credibility;
- however, a warning against the shift in approach that would consist of making choices in place of the Member States, at the risk of jeopardising their support for the process;
- the need to put all the documents presented that day in the context of the negotiations currently under way under the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, which showed the significant losses of budgetary resources caused by tax fraud and tax evasion.

The PRESIDENT commented on certain points raised during the discussion. First, she said she was convinced that ‘greening’ the European Semester exercise was all the more justified since the transition to a sustainable economy would have a considerable impact on the way Europeans lived and consumed. She also noted that only a few years ago the issue of migration was viewed in term of the ageing of the European population and illegal migration. Today, as had been pointed out, she felt that it needed to be associated with positive arguments, particularly the subject of skilled migration, even if time was needed to change perceptions.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS also responded to some comments. He stressed that the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy highlighted the issue of the skills to be promoted in the jobs of the future linked to the greening of the European economy, and that the answer to this issue would be delivered by the European Pillar of Social Rights. In his opinion, the same applied to the integration of migrants in labour markets. On this point, he also noted the need to improve the functioning of the EU Blue Card.

As regards the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union and the international role of the euro, he said that these issues were addressed in the set of documents presented that day and that progress had been made on the work relating to them. He stressed that these matters were still on the Commission’s agenda.

Lastly, coming back to an observation on the sovereign debt of the euro area Member States, he said that a ‘triple A’ rating was not the answer to everything and that the global monetary position of a particular economy should be considered in relation to the US dollar. In the long term, Greece was borrowing at a lower cost than the U.S.A. itself in US dollars, and in the short term it was borrowing at negative interest rates.

Following these presentations and the discussion that ensued, the Commission:

- approved the Communication on the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 set out in COM(2019) 650/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the

Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank, and, for information, to the national parliaments, together with the 2019 Single Market Performance Report presented in the form of a staff working document (SWD(2019) 444), the contents of which were noted;

- adopted the Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area set out in COM(2019) 652/3, for transmission to the Council and, for information, to the European Parliament, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2019) 631/3, the contents of which were noted;
- approved the 2020 Alert Mechanism Report in COM(2019) 651/2, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank and the European Economic and Social Committee and, for information, to the Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2019) 630, the contents of which were noted;
- approved the draft Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council in COM(2019) 653/2, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank, and, for information, to the national parliaments.

13. POLICY DEBATE ON THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE (SEC(2019) 449)

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Ms ŠUICA opened the College's policy debate on the preparation of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which she considered to be the start of a long and ambitious journey.

She pointed out that the aim of holding a conference on the future of Europe was to begin a process of ongoing, open, interactive and inclusive debate, involving citizens regardless of their location and giving them the opportunity to express their opinions on the policies and decisions that would have repercussions for their own lives.

In her view, this ambitious project marked a new approach and its success relied on collective and innovative efforts to support it. That was why she wanted all the Members of the College to be involved right from the start of the process in order to gather their ideas and define a common approach. She also thanked those Members of the Commission who had contributed to the initial discussions of the group of Commissioners set up to coordinate the conference preparations.

Ms ŠUICA reminded the College that the European elections the previous spring had seen the highest levels of participation in the last 20 years as well as the first rise in voting numbers ever recorded since the first European election was held in 1979. She saw this as a clear message from European citizens who were expressing their desire to be listened to and to help shape the future of Europe, but it was also, and conversely, a warning of sorts if their voices were not heard.

She explained that the EU had to seize this opportunity to build a more modern, accessible, effective and solidarity-focused Europe, which would see citizens playing a more active role in determining their own future, beyond voting in the elections. This ought to be the role and the aim of the process of preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Ms ŠUIČA felt that the preparations needed to begin as soon as possible, at a symbolic event such as the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration on 1 May 2020.

She also felt that the Conference should begin with a joint declaration by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission setting out, by mutual agreement, the process and the objectives. In her view, this would put the Conference on the right track and prevent long institutional discussions on its design.

Having followed the many discussions that had taken place in the previous two weeks, she was aware of the differences of opinion between the European Parliament and the Council with regard to the priorities for the debate and the reasons behind holding it. She noted that the latest European Council conclusions on this matter provided excellent input and that the upcoming Croatian Council presidency was keen to move forward with the process.

She noted that, for its part, the European Parliament was focusing more on the institutional aspect and the governance of the Conference, and remarked in passing that all the political groups were currently competing to manage the organisation of the event. She reminded the College that the Parliament would set out its approach to the matter at its January part-session.

She felt that a joint declaration by the three institutions would be an excellent communication tool, which could also be signed by other organisations, such as the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, national parliaments and other organisations.

Ms ŠUIČA also highlighted the importance of focusing the content of the conference on what mattered most to citizens, on their aspirations and concerns. She explained that the six headline ambitions for Europe set out by the PRESIDENT in her political guidelines and the European Council's strategic agenda for 2019-2024 would be useful tools to help focus the debate, but without restricting its scope in

order to encourage citizens to raise the issues that were of most interest to them. This flexible but structured approach should ensure that the Conference better reflected Europe's rich cultural diversity.

She added that the Commission would need to coordinate and feed into the process by closely monitoring discussions with citizens, civil society and institutional partners at local, regional, national and European level. To do so, the Commission would need to bridge the outcome of these consultations with the EU's policy-making process. The Commission would also need to manage expectations, as it was not always possible to follow through on all ideas.

Ms ŠUIČA issued a reminder that, in parallel to this process, thought needed to be given to institutional issues. She noted that the European Parliament and the Council, in close cooperation with national and regional parliaments, were probably best placed to do this.

Lastly, she pointed out that it would be necessary to set out the rationale and procedure for organising a Europe-wide debate, as well as its audience, tools and main deadlines. She added that, to achieve this ambitious objective, the Commission would need to have sufficient financial and human resources to be able to rise to the challenge.

She also pointed to the fundamental role that communication would play in this exercise and to the importance of ensuring coherence in terms of messages and the strategy for these discussions. It was in this spirit of involving all the members of the Commission that she invited them to travel to the least-visited regions and towns to discuss the EU with civil society and economic stakeholders, as they were also an integral part of the debate on the future of Europe.

Lastly, Ms ŠUIČA highlighted the fact that the Conference on the Future of Europe was an opportunity for the EU to play a pioneering role in terms of participatory democracy by strengthening ties between European citizens and the institutions that served them. She finished by answering a question about her expectations for the

Conference on the Future of Europe, saying that she hoped to be pleasantly surprised.

Mr ŠEVČOVIČ observed that the European Parliament had quickly seized on the institutional component of the Conference, hence the importance of ensuring that the interinstitutional dimension was taken into account when preparing the event, as well as the need to define a common approach for the EU's institutions. He considered that the success of the operation would be determined by selecting topics that were relevant to European citizens, ensuring close cooperation with the partners involved in the discussion process and being able to draw operational conclusions from the discussions held with civil society.

Against this backdrop, he mentioned the possibility of drawing inspiration from the 'Give feedback on Commission initiatives' online consultation platform, which enabled the Commission to listen to citizens and other stakeholders by giving them the opportunity to contribute to the EU's law-making process thanks to hundreds of online consultations.

He also suggested taking the 'emotional pulse' of the EU in cooperation with the Joint Research Centre and the DG Communication services responsible for the Eurobarometer.

Ms JOUROVÀ expressed her desire for the interinstitutional strand of the Conference to be shaped by a joint declaration by the EU's institutions. She felt that the Commission ought to play the role of impartial mediator during the discussions, bearing in mind that the European Parliament appeared to be willing to take the initiative with regard to this strand, which could cover the issue of the European political parties' lead candidate system for the Commission presidency.

The citizen-focused strand of the Conference could, in her opinion, be one of the great successes of this exercise. That was why she felt that the topics for discussion needed to be accessible to as many people as possible, but also formulated in an

appealing way so as to generate concrete input and clear answers to the questions asked.

In conclusion, she highlighted the importance of developing a working relationship with local figures such as mayors, which would ensure that citizens' concerns could be gathered locally and their aspirations expressed as clearly as possible. She considered that Commission representations in the Member States would also have a leading role to play, as would mobilising a sufficient budget in line with the level of ambition.

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

The conference deliverables and the pitfalls to be avoided

- the dangers inherent in organising a conference on this scale, and in particular the risk that the discussions might be limited to the microcosm of the EU institutions and their traditional partners;
- the call to ‘de-Brusselise’ the debates by closely involving a wide range of civil society actors at local, regional and national level;
- the case, for some, for drawing lessons from the past, and in particular the failure of the Convention for a European Constitution, which was originally envisaged as a project capable of motivating citizens but in the end was perceived as an objective promoted by elites;

The methodology and objectives

- the Commission's catalyst role as impartial mediator in the debates;
- the need to take account of the different sensitivities present in the Member States with regard to the future of Europe;

- for some, the case for making the idea of Europe a narrative that spoke to emotions, which the Commission could not deliver alone;
- the importance of reflecting on the fundamental question of the Union's role in the world in order to clearly define its identity as a global player;
- the need to devise a method for returning to the foundations of European integration by redefining the objectives and reasons for that process;
- the importance of precisely defining the objectives, audience and resources of the Conference on the Future of Europe and ensuring that each group consulted could decide on its own contribution;
- the possibility for the Commission to mobilise suitable tools in order to reach out to each audience;

The citizen aspect of the conference

- recognition of the interest of European citizens in debating with each other on the broad themes of society, rather than with the representations of the EU institutions; hence the need to encourage reflection among citizens and within civil society;
- the relevance of the citizens' dialogues which each Member of the College had had the opportunity to take part in during the Commission's previous mandate; regret, however, that lessons had not been systematically learned from those dialogues;
- the appeal not to prejudge the results of the consultations which would be organised and genuinely to listen to citizens;
- the importance of engaging with citizens on their own concerns, not those of the Union;

- the opportunity to give priority to discussions with younger people in order to establish a relationship of trust and to give them a role in shaping the future of the Europe they would live in;

The institutional aspect

- the need, if this were the case, to explicitly announce the intention to reflect on the system of lead candidates from European political parties for the position of President of the Commission;
- the importance, for some, not to consider the possibility of amending the Treaties at this stage and not to restrict the reflection to the lead candidate system alone;
- integration of the neighbourhood policy into the overall reflection of the Conference on the Future of Europe, without in any way suggesting that future enlargements would depend on its success.

The PRESIDENT concluded the discussion by recalling that this policy debate was only the first step in a broader discussion aimed at defining the guidelines for the Conference on the Future of Europe. She pointed out that while the fundamental aim of this conference was to establish a dialogue with and within civil society, it was nevertheless necessary for the EU institutions to agree on a common approach to the objectives and methodology to be followed. She supported the organisation of citizens' dialogues, which had proved their worth and should continue in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Finally, she noted that the European Parliament was also holding policy debates, the conclusions of which would be published in January 2020, and which would provide useful input for the discussions on the organisation of the conference.

The Commission took note of the contributions to the debate and its results and of the background note in SEC(2019) 449.

14. OTHER BUSINESS (CONTINUED)***COMMISSION DECISION ON THE ADMISSIBILITY OF THE PROPOSED CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'STOP FINNING – STOP THE TRADE' (C(2019) 9203)***

At the invitation of Mr TIMMERMANS, who was chairing the meeting, Ms JOUROVÁ presented a draft decision subject to approval by the Commission concerning the registration of a proposal for a European citizens' initiative entitled 'Stop finning – Stop the trade', in the authentic language (English) which, in essence, called on the Commission to take measures to end the trade of shark fins in the EU including the import, export and transit of fins other than if naturally attached to the animal's body.

She pointed out that, in accordance with the working methods established by the PRESIDENT and in accordance with the practice established under the previous mandate, the Commission's decisions on proposals for citizens' initiatives were brought directly to the attention of the College, given the importance of this instrument for ensuring the participation of as many citizens as possible in the democratic decision-making process of the Union.

She reminded the meeting that in accordance with the conditions for admissibility provided for in Regulation (EU) 211/2011 on the European citizens' initiative, the proposed actions must, in order to be registered, manifestly fall within the Commission's powers to submit proposals for legal acts for the purpose of implementing the Treaties, and fulfil the other conditions set out in Article 4(2) of that Regulation.

Ms JOUROVÁ noted that the request made by the proponents of the European citizens' initiative 'Stop finning – Stop the trade' fell within the Commission's powers to propose legal acts for the purpose of implementing the Treaties, under Article 43(2) – common fisheries policy – and Article 207(2) – common commercial policy – of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

In any case, she stressed that the College's task that day was to decide only on the legal admissibility of the proposal and not at this stage to analyse its substance or political expediency. If, in the space of twelve months, the proposal gathered the minimum support required, i.e. at least one million signatures from citizens of at least a quarter of the Member States, the Commission would then analyse the substance of the proposal.

She stated that, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/788, which would repeal and replace Regulation (EU) 211/2011 from 1 January 2020, proposals for initiatives registered after that date would benefit from more user-friendly arrangements for organisers to gather support and easier access for European citizens. She also added that, for those initiatives registered after 1 January 2020, the Commission would have a period of six months in which to submit its reasoned decision on whether or not to take action.

The Commission confirmed that the admissibility criteria under Article 4(2) of Regulation (EU) 211/2011 were fulfilled for the proposed citizens' initiative entitled 'Stop finning – Stop the trade'. The Commission therefore decided to register the initiative, in accordance with document C(2019) 9203, and authorised Ms JOUROVÁ to sign the decision on its behalf, applicable with effect from 2 January 2020, to notify the organisers of the initiative thereof in the authentic language (English), and to publish it, for information, in the Official Journal of the European Union.

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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 15.54.