



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2020) 2332 final

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

Brussels, 22 April 2020

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2332nd meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 1 April 2020
(morning)**

PV(2020) 2332 final

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

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Single sitting: Wednesday 1 April 2020 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.01 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President
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The following members attended by videoconference or teleconference:

Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President
Mr HAHN	Member
Mr HOGAN	Member
Ms GABRIEL	Member
Mr SCHMIT	Member
Mr GENTILONI	Member
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member
Mr BRETON	Member
Ms FERREIRA	Member
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member
Mr REYNDERS	Member
Ms DALLI	Member
Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Mr LENARČIČ	Member
Ms VÁLEAN	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member

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Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms RISO	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr FLOSDORFF	Executive Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8 (in part)
Mr HEMMELGARN	Secretariat-General	
Ms SPINANT	Commission Spokesperson's Service	

The following also sat in by videoconference or teleconference:

Mr ROMERO REQUENA	Director-General, Legal Service
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Director-General, DG Communication
Mr LEARDINI	Deputy Secretary-General
Ms GAUER	Deputy Secretary-General
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office
Ms VILA NUÑEZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Secretariat-General
Mr JOOS	Secretariat-General

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, present, assisted by Mr AYET PUIGARNAU, Director in the Secretariat-General, attending by videoconference.

**1. AGENDAS, AND LIST OF ITEMS RELATING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS
SCHEDULED FOR ADOPTION BY THE COMMISSION
(OJ(2020) 2332/FINAL; SEC(2020) 2332/FINAL; SEC(2020) 1019)**

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings, and of the list of items relating to the COVID-19 crisis prepared for adoption by the Commission.

**2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET
(RCC(2020) 2332)**

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 30 March 2020 by videoconference and teleconference.

**3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2326TH, 2328TH, 2329TH, 2330TH AND
2331ST MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (19 FEBRUARY, 4, 10, 18 AND
25 MARCH 2020)**

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2326th, 2328th, 2329th, 2330th and 2331st meetings.

**4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2020) 49)**

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference and teleconference during the week of 23 and 27 March 2020 (RCC(2020) 49).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

4.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

i) Council dossiers

- Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 654/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the exercise of the Union's rights for the application and enforcement of international trade rules (Regulation) – VEDRENNE report – 2019/0273 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 106.

- Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1838 as regards certain fishing opportunities for 2020 in the Baltic Sea and other waters, and correction and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2020/123 as regards certain fishing opportunities for 2020 in Union and non-Union waters (Council Regulation) – 2020/0037 (NLE)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 111.

4.2. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

- ##### **ii) Action to be taken on Parliament's legislative resolutions and other resolutions of a legal nature**
- (SP(2020) 134)

The Commission decided to empower the Members of the Commission responsible for the sectors in question, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and, if necessary, with the other Members concerned, to adopt the amended proposals for transmission to Parliament and the Council, as set out in SP(2020) 134, drawn up following the part-session of Parliament of 26 March 2020, the contents of which were noted.

iii) Results of Parliament's March II 2020 part-session

(SP(2020) 135 and /2)

The Commission took note of the information on Parliament's part-session held on 26 March 2020 in Brussels, set out in SP(2020) 135/2.

iv) Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the application of Directive (EU) 2015/2302 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2015 on package travel and linked travel arrangements, amending Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 and Directive 2011/83/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directive 90/314/EEC

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2020) 113.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION

(RCC(2020) 52)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2020) 52 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference and teleconference on Wednesday 25 March 2020.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2020) 125 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 23 and 27 March 2020.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2020) 126 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 23 and 27 March 2020.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2020) 127 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 23 and 27 March 2020 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2020) 128 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 30 March and 3 April 2020, and of the finalisation written procedure initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on Monday 30 March 2020.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2020) 129/2 AND /3)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2020) 18 AND /2)

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr HAHN presented two additional proposals for administrative decisions which he was submitting directly to the College for approval.

Mr HAHN explained that it was first proposed to appoint Mr Marc BECQUET, currently Director of the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Luxembourg (OIL), to the post of Director of the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels (OIB), which would take effect on a date to be determined.

Mr HAHN highlighted the great skills, outstanding career and recognised expertise of Mr Marc BECQUET, which would be valuable assets in his new post.

Mr HAHN added that it was also proposed to approve the list of candidates for the posts of Heads and Deputy Heads of EU delegations, and also the list of candidates for Head and Deputy Head of Representation posts. These decisions would take effect immediately.

Mr HAHN reminded the College that, following the formal approval of these lists by the Commission, the final decision on appointment would be taken by the competent authority at the European External Action Service (EEAS). He also took the opportunity to draw attention to the merits of ensuring gender balance in the next appointments.

**7.1. OFFICE FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOGISTICS, BRUSSELS –
APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR
(PERS(2019) 123 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 Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels (PERS(2019) 123).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 8 November and 12 December 2019 (PERS(2019) 123/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On

a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Mr Marc BECQUET to the post.

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

7.2. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART AND APPOINTMENT OF AN AD14 PRINCIPAL ADVISER (SEC(2020) 147)

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

- to create a temporary post of principal adviser responsible for the Clearing house for medical equipment (COVID-19), reporting directly to the Secretary-General; this post would be abolished upon departure of the job-holder;
- to transfer to this newly created post, in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Peter WAGNER, an AD14 official and currently Head of the Support Group for Ukraine in DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations;
- to adopt the new organisation chart set out in SEC(2020) 147.

These decisions would take effect on 1 April 2020.

7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL ADVISER (PERS(2020) 19)

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

- to appoint Mr Peter PIOT as a special adviser to the PRESIDENT;
- to authorise the Member of the Commission responsible, Mr HAHN, by way of derogation from point 6(2) of Commission Decision C (2007) 6655, to amend the contract of Mr Peter PIOT in the event of urgent and duly justified needs, subject to the availability of sufficient budgetary appropriations;
- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement this decision by signing the contract on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.4. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – MEASURES TO REACH GENDER EQUALITY AT ALL LEVELS OF MANAGEMENT BY THE END OF 2024
(PERS(2020) 146)

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

- to adopt the medium-term objectives for the first female appointments at middle-management level by Directorate-General and by service no later than 31 December 2022 as set out in SEC (2020) 146;
- to approve the rule according to which an additional objective for a first appointment of a woman at middle-management level is assigned to a Directorate-General or a service whenever a female middle manager is reassigned or appointed to a non-management post, and to instruct DG Human Resources and Security to inform the Directorate-General or service concerned of their adapted objective;

- to instruct the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security to:
 - ensure that vacancy notices for management posts are drafted using gender-neutral language;
 - extend the publication period of a vacancy notice for a management post if an insufficient number of women have applied;
 - send middle-management appointments to the Consultative Committee on Appointments if the progress made by the Directorate-General or service concerned is not sufficient to achieve the assigned objective;
 - follow up the progress made by the Directorates-General or the services and carry out a mid-term review by January 2023, including a proposal to adapt the Directorate-General's specific objectives for the remaining period (2023-2024);
 - deploy talent development measures aimed at women in order to enable them to perform middle and senior management duties.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

The Member of the Commission responsible for Budget and Administration would inform the College each year about the progress made.

7.5. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF LISTS OF CANDIDATES FOR HEAD OF EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION POSTS OR DEPUTY HEAD OF EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION POSTS, AND FOR HEAD OR DEPUTY HEAD OF REPRESENTATION POSTS
(PERS(2020) 20 TO PERS(2020) 32)

The Commission took note of the information in point 2 of PERS(2020) 18/2 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided to approve:

- the four lists of candidates for the Head of European Union Delegation posts in Afghanistan, Egypt and Turkey, and to the African Union (at grade AD14-15/AD14), as set out in PERS(2020) 20 and PERS(2020) 21;
- the 26 lists of candidates for Head of European Union Delegation posts in Angola, Cameroon, Liberia, South Sudan, Togo (at grades AD9-14/AD12), Barbados, Chili, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica (at grades AD9-14/AD12), South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal (at grades AD9-14/AD12), Iceland, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Switzerland, Uzbekistan (at grades AD9-14/AD12), the Holy See, to the Order of Malta, and the United Nations organisation in Rome (at grades AD9-14/AD12), and in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia (at grades AD9-14/AD12), as set out in PERS (2020) 20 and respectively in PERS(2020) 22 to 27;

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- the 11 lists of candidates for the post of Deputy Head of European Union delegations in Canada, Afghanistan, Japan, the Pacific, Pakistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Kingdom, to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva, in Egypt, and in Lebanon (at grades AD9-14/AD12), as set out in PERS (2020) 20 and PERS (2020) 28;
- the list of candidates for the Head of Representation post in Hong Kong (AD9-14/AD12), as set out in PERS(2020) 20 and PERS(2020) 29;
- the list of candidates for the Deputy Head of Representation post in the West Bank and Gaza (AD9-14/AD12), as set out in PERS(2020) 20 and PERS(2020) 30;
- the two lists of candidates, outside the 2020 rotation exercise, for the Head of European Union Delegation posts in Canada (AD14-15/AD14) and the Philippines (AD9-14/AD12), as set out in PERS(2020) 20 and PERS(2020) 31;
- the list of candidates, outside the 2020 rotation exercise, for the post of Head of the European Union Delegation to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna (at grades AD9-14/AD12), as set out in PERS (2020) 20 and PERS (2020) 32.

The competent authority of the European External Action Service would make the final appointments on the basis of these lists, as set out in PERS(2020) 20 to PERS(2020) 32.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

**7.6. 2019 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD
(SEC(2020) 149)**

The Commission took note of SEC(2020) 149.

**7.7. 2020 RISK MANAGEMENT EXERCISE
(SEC(2020) 150)**

The Commission took note of SEC(2020) 150.

**8. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS
(COVID-19) PANDEMIC AND THE EUROPEAN UNION'S RESPONSE
(INFO(2020) 16)**

The President opened the discussion on the measures taken or to be taken by the Commission to support Member States faced with the need to provide an urgent response to the multiple consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. She suggested organising the discussion into three parts, namely (i) the current response to the crisis, (ii) the exit strategy, and (iii) the future recovery plan, and she asked the Commissioners to report on the steps they had taken in their respective areas of responsibility.

Before going any further, she wished to express her heartfelt thanks to each of them for the considerable amount of work carried out under their responsibility over the past three weeks and the efforts sustained day after day to add to the Commission's concrete response to a crisis on an unprecedented scale. She was grateful to all of the institution's staff, in the cabinets and departments, including the IT teams, who were all working tirelessly, sometimes day and night, in difficult conditions. She expressed her gratitude and that of the College as a whole to them.

She then moved on to the first section of the discussion on **the current response to the crisis**.

On **the medical aspects**, she noted the progress made in terms of the production and supply of equipment, as well as the equally demanding challenges that remained, bearing in mind that the end of the tunnel in terms of the pandemic was not yet in sight. She emphasised the considerable work carried out by the Commission to avoid the knock-on effects of national measures halting the supply chain within the single market and closing internal borders, while stressing the high price that had to be paid to do so.

As for **the economic and social consequences** of the COVID-19 crisis, the most dramatic experienced since the Second World War, she acknowledged that they had only just begun to make themselves felt and nothing, within the context of this unprecedented crisis, made it possible to determine yet when it might come to an end. The Commission had therefore put forward a first battery of urgent measures over the previous two weeks to support the European economy, in terms of (i) a temporary framework on State aid, allowing for rapid, flexible measures and granting Member States some latitude to invest in their economic fabric and aid undertakings during mandatory mothballing, (ii) making use, on 20 March, of the general escape clause under the Stability and Growth Pact, and (iii) the launch of the Corona Virus Response Investment Initiative (CRII+). These measures were in addition to the EUR 750 billion emergency plan adopted by the European Central Bank and the support measures of the European Investment Bank.

The PRESIDENT explained that more had to be done to step up management of the economic and social aspects of the crisis, as had been discussed by the Eurogroup at its meeting on 24 March, which had dealt with additional forms of coordinated support, to be debated again on 7 April. She informed that the Eurogroup had discussed the possibility of joint borrowing ('corona bonds') and the Enhanced Conditions Credit Line (ECCL), a precautionary instrument under the

European Stability Mechanism (ESM). These discussions had been difficult in view of the sharp differences in Member States' positions and they had reopened the deep and still painful wounds left by the 2008 financial crisis.

She emphasised that the Commission, for its part, was looking to put forward proposals capable of bringing these positions closer together with a view to a positive outcome. That was the reason for one of the three major measures on the day's agenda, which were for adoption on Thursday 2 April by urgent written procedure, measures to be outlined by her, but which the members of the Commission responsible for them would present in detail.

Firstly, concerning **the European Structural and Investment Funds**, the PRESIDENT explained that the idea was to respond to the Member States which had said, at the European Council meeting of 26 March, that they did not have sufficient financial resources to ensure certain co-financing commitments and had emphasised the very high cost for them of borrowing in the financial markets. That was why the Commission was prepared to adopt a proposal under which it would, for a period of one year, grant maximum leeway to support them and consequently stressed the importance of maintaining the possibility of 100% funding for programmes under the cohesion policy instead of the co-financing provided for.

Secondly, with respect to the employment market and the situation of undertakings, the Commission would also propose on Thursday 2 April, relying on the legal basis provided by Article 122(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the establishment of **the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency**, to subsidise short-time work schemes in the undertakings themselves to lower their payroll costs and enable them to hold on to their employees, and thus to facilitate their recovery once the crisis had ended. This was the proposal for a regulation referred to under the acronym 'SURE' (Proposal for a Regulation on the establishment of a European Instrument for temporary Support mitigating Unemployment Risks in an Emergency following

the COVID-19 virus outbreak). She explained that this measure, for implementation in the final year of the current multiannual financial framework, implied solidarity on the part of all Member States and guarantees from them.

Thirdly, she spoke about activation of **the Emergency Support Instrument** which also provided for a great degree of flexibility and made it possible to respond immediately through targeted humanitarian support.

In her view, the Commission had done everything in its power at that point to put before the Council a significant set of measures which would have a very real effect in the Member States.

The PRESIDENT then turned to the second part of the discussion, **the exit strategy**.

She did not underestimate the difficulty of the task and noted that the Member States were preparing for it in an uncoordinated way. She stressed the fact that, according to the views expressed by scientists, two criteria would make it possible to begin to exit the crisis, the first being capacity in terms of available beds in intensive care units and the second being the rate of infection in the population, which, once it fell below one, would indicate a stabilisation of the situation, at which point measures to relax the lockdowns could be envisaged. The Commission's group of scientific advisers was looking into the possibility of adding to the criteria, with a view to a scientific framework that the institution would unveil shortly to guide Member States.

The difficulty for the Commission, however, she noted, of coordinating future moves to exit the COVID-19 crisis both in health and in economic and social terms, with the restarting of supply chains, lay, on the one hand, in the numerous unknowns related to the virus itself and, on the other, to the very different situations from one Member State to another.

As for the third part of the discussion, **the recovery plan**, the PRESIDENT outlined what might be the way forward, with the support of the European Central Bank and

the European Investment Bank. Firstly, she spoke about the multiannual financial framework for the 2021-2027 period, which would provide a sizeable guarantee, amounting to around one thousand billion euros. In this context, she argued in favour of a substantial investment plan, stressing that discussion was under way as to the advantages of launching it as of the first few years of implementation of the multiannual financial framework. In addition she held that the financial framework should cover seven full years. She added that finally it was up to the Member States to decide whether they wanted some form of Marshall Plan for all 27 of them or if they planned to stimulate their economies separately. In any event, she wanted the investment plan to emphasise clearly the Commission's major priorities, especially digitisation, the importance of which had been further highlighted by the ongoing crisis, and the European Green Deal, of which the section focused on the circular economy would help to reduce the European Union's dependence on global supply chains while reducing the exploitation of essential resources.

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

***Health aspects, including in the context of international cooperation
(Ms KYRIAKIDES and Mr LENARČIČ)***

- recognition that, from an epidemiological point of view, the overall persistence of the upward trend in the number of new cases of COVID-19 infection generally remained steady, although some Member States appeared to be starting to show signs of relative stabilisation;
- the need for similar scientific criteria for assessing the advisability of lifting lockdown measures in the Member States and launching the strategy for exiting the crisis;
- a mention of two very important preconditions for any exit strategy, namely (i) the availability of ample screening test capacities and (ii) the availability of

adequate personal protection equipment, which is why the Commission was going to launch a new joint procurement;

- the fear of a risk of a shortage of some essential medicinal and pharmaceutical products, in particular anaesthesia products, due firstly to national self-interest, which led the Member States to stockpile those products for themselves, and secondly to current bottlenecks in the transport of goods, which made it very difficult to transfer stocks between the Member States;
- the importance of raising the profile of the measures coordinated by the Commission in order to demonstrate to citizens that European industry was capable of responding and innovating in order to provide, in the short term, personal protection equipment and to overcome any shortages of essential medicinal products;
- the announcement of the signing of the first European stockpile contract put in place under ‘RescEU’ in Romania, which should be receiving medical equipment the following week, such as ventilators and masks for an amount equivalent to EUR 10 million, and other equipment in the following weeks;
- the discussions in progress with some Member States on speeding up the establishment of the European stockpile and its full financing by the Commission;
- the advisability of reconsidering the EU’s competences in the field of health in the future, taking into account the lessons learned from managing the pandemic and the need to improve coordination of the strategies for managing and exiting pan-European epidemiological crises;

The joint calls for tenders and the production and supply of medical equipment and devices (Mr BRETON)

- the recognition that there had been an unprecedented mobilisation in the Member States to convert factories into production lines for medical equipment, which should allow the EU to become self-sufficient as rapidly as possible, and in particular to supply personal protective equipment for the whole EU in the coming four to five months;
- the mention of the participation of big groups in this conversion effort, which had allowed rapid and decisive progress to be made, particularly with regard to the production of respirators, to cope with the explosion of needs;
- a reminder of the constant objective of ensuring that the EU could meet all the needs linked to combating the COVID-19 pandemic on its own, while maintaining good relations with third-country suppliers;
- the priority to be accorded from then on to the supply of COVID-19 screening tests, which would be an essential element of the strategy for exiting the pandemic and the large-scale production of which must be planned immediately;
- the importance of monitoring needs in order to rapidly identify risks of shortages, as was currently the case for certain sedatives;

Mobility, the functioning of the internal market, the management of borders, the protection of consumers and the repatriation of EU citizens (Mr BORRELL, Ms JOUROVÁ, Mr BRETON, Mr REYNDEERS, Ms JOHANSSON, Mr LENARČIČ and Ms VÁLEAN)

- the highlighting of the considerable efforts made by the Commission to restore mobility in the trans-European transport networks, in particular through the opening of ‘green lanes’ and ‘transit corridors’ and providing skeleton services to users along those lanes and corridors;

- a reminder of the emergency measures taken in air transport to ensure that airlines did not lose their slots at airports, passengers could be compensated for flight cancellations and cargo companies had guidelines, the contribution of which to the establishment of good practice had been underlined by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO);
- the mention of the major cash-flow problems that were currently being encountered by airlines and the intensive work done on passenger rights, an important issue which entailed a political choice to be made between a refund for each flight cancellation and compensation in the form of vouchers to be used once air traffic has been re-established;
- the listing of the work already in progress to immediately define tools to support each of the modes of transport with a view to economic recovery following the pandemic, and the importance of making the most of the relaxation of the regulatory framework applicable to State aid in the sector, which allowed national authorities to take all appropriate measures to support their undertakings;
- the need to take into account the specific situation of the outermost regions, as well as the islands, and to examine the possibility of strengthening public service obligations there in line with the needs created by the fight against COVID-19;
- the recognition of the lifting of export restrictions in the internal market by a large majority of the Member States following the intervention of the Commission, which would continue to monitor the situation closely;
- the advisability, however, of extending the restrictions applied at the EU's external borders in order to contain the spread of COVID-19;

- the importance of continuing to ensure freedom of movement for workers, in particular when they contributed directly to managing the pandemic;
- the need to pay the utmost attention to the special situation of the refugees concentrated in reception facilities and to continue the policy of returning illegal migrants to their countries of origin, in particular through the publication of guidelines on the implementation of asylum and immigration policy in the context of the health crisis;
- recognition of new forms of crime that had appeared under cover of the pandemic and of the intensification of cybercrime in the context of the massive use of digital tools, which required a coordinated response under the auspices of Europol;
- the need to safeguard consumer rights, which had been threatened by the impact of the crisis in many sectors, such as aviation and tourism, while undertakings were rightly receiving protection in cases of insolvency;
- hence the importance of a balanced approach that enabled European consumers to assert their rights while protecting operators in order to safeguard their viability pending the resumption of their commercial activities;
- the fact that there had been a considerable and steady increase in the number of requests for repatriation from EU nationals, which had risen from 100,000 at the start of the pandemic to 400,000 to date;
- the information that approximately 11,000 repatriations, on 47 flights, had been made possible by activating the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, leaving a significant number of repatriations still to be carried out, with more than 170 flights scheduled for this purpose;
- the wish for the Member States to contribute to the repatriation of EU nationals who were still stranded in third countries, regardless of their nationality;

- the extreme pressure still facing the Emergency Response Coordination Centre, which occupied a central place in organising repatriations of EU citizens;

Economic, budgetary and social consequences of the pandemic, and certain sectoral aspects, as well as the first outline of the strategy for recovery (in particular Mr DOMBROVSKIS, Ms ŠUICA, Mr SCHINAS, Mr HAHN, Mr HOGAN, Mr SCHMIT, Mr GENTILONI, Mr BRETON, Mr REYNDEERS and Ms SIMSON)

- the importance of defining, as of now, a strategy for economic recovery based on the integrity of the internal market in order to take account of the integration of production chains which, at EU level, linked numerous undertakings established in different Member States;
- the usefulness of evaluating over time the macroeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EU economy, which was still unknown, but in all likelihood would be considerable and would entail major economic, budgetary and social efforts on the part of the Union and the Member States;
- the validity of the European Semester governance framework for coordinating economic and budgetary policies in order to coordinate the recovery plans, adapt them to the specific needs of each Member State and ensure their compatibility with EU rules, thereby preventing fragmentation of the single market;
- recognition of the asymmetric economic impact of the symmetrical shock caused by the pandemic in the Member States; therefore, the case for the Member States defining their recovery plans as soon as possible, in close cooperation with the Commission, which should ensure their overall consistency and compatibility with the functioning of the internal market;
- the advisability of assessing, on the basis of national economic recovery plans, the overall budget necessary to implement an EU-wide recovery strategy, which

could account for not less than 10% of the gross domestic product of the 27 Member States;

- consequently, the case for considering all possible sources of financing, in particular the European Investment Bank, but also private banks, and for examining the possibility of issuing bonds covering, for example, sectoral aspects of the recovery strategy, such as the digital transition or the European Green Deal;
- the relevance of this approach in a context which had greatly encouraged the massive use of digital tools, thus achieving a significant milestone in the digital transition;
- the importance of ensuring that each Member State had the tools and funding needed to implement its economic recovery plan;
- in this regard, mention of speeding up the work in progress within the Eurogroup in order to define the tools under the European Stability Mechanism and the conditions for access to its credit lines, in particular to cover the necessary guarantees for access to finance from the banking sector;
- the advisability of setting up a reserve of funds, which could serve as a mechanism for balance-of-payments assistance to non-euro area Member States, in order to assist these States if they sought help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which would only provide them with loans if the Union made a significant contribution;
- the priority to be given in response to the pandemic to safeguarding employment, in particular through the use of subsidies, but as a first step by ensuring the survival of firms that were at risk of losing their credit rating and being denied access to loans at sustainable rates;

- the usefulness of continuing the analysis of the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to identify the needs of each sector and ecosystem in turn as closely as possible and provide appropriate responses;
- the need to pay particular attention to safeguarding the skills that could be lost over time in a context of a strong cyclical rise in unemployment, while taking into account the profound changes that would be brought about by the pandemic, particularly with regard to digitalisation; this in turn, would require the acquisition of new skills, which the Commission should take into account as it updated its strategy in this area;
- the importance of the Union’s political message on safeguarding employment, particularly for the youngest and most vulnerable, who would be hit hardest by the economic downturn;
- the spirit of solidarity which the Member States had to show in the face of a crisis which called for a coordinated response, given the high level of integration between the EU economies and their industrial fabric;
- the call to ensure that the Member States showed concrete and effective solidarity and that this founding principle of European integration should be placed at the heart of the recovery strategy as one of its key added values;
- the central role that the Commission had to play in this context in order to encourage compromise between the positions of the Member States, which differed considerably at times, on which tools to favour, particularly with regard to the issuing of bonds, possibly assigned for specific purposes, in the context of the EU’s economic recovery strategy;
- for some, the advisability of considering the sharing of a common debt of the Member States that had been incurred as a result of the economic crisis triggered

by the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby expressing the solidarity which was the *raison d'être* of the European integration project;

- otherwise, the risk of the EU losing credibility and exacerbating anti-EU sentiment in certain currents of public opinion fuelled by nationalist and populist arguments or misinformation campaigns;
- the urgent need for the speedy adoption of the next multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 to enable the Union to mobilise its policies, tools and programmes in order to plan and implement the recovery strategy, as well as its political priorities;
- reference to the resilience of the internal market in the energy sector, in which no supply shortages had been reported, against the backdrop of volatility in oil prices but relative stability in renewable energy prices;
- the lessons to be learnt from the economic and social crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave very clear evidence of the need to pursue the EU's policy objectives with regard to energy efficiency, climate change and the digital transition, in the overall context of developing a circular economy;
- a reference to the devastating repercussions of the current health crisis on the tourism industry, particularly in some of the Member States hardest hit by the epidemic;
- hence the need to set out a constructive approach protecting the interests of both tourists and operators in the sector; to that end, the advisability of envisaging the widespread use of coupons or vouchers, which would at the same time protect the economic prospects for the summer tourist season;

Strengthening measures already taken (in particular Ms VESTAGER, Mr DOMBROVSKIS, Mr BORRELL, Mr HAHN, Mr SCHMIT, Mr GENTILONI, Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI, Mr BRETON, Ms FERREIRA, Ms JOHANSSON, Mr LENARČIČ, Ms VÁLEAN, Mr VÁRHELYI, Ms URPILAINEN and Mr SINKEVIČIUS)

- in view of the unprecedented scale of the ongoing health, humanitarian, social and economic crisis, the desirability of complementing the flexibility and support measures already taken by adopting extraordinary measures to ensure that healthcare systems had all the resources required and that companies had access to liquidity, and to protect jobs;
- the need to continue to propose these measures on the basis of the principle of solidarity, the only possible way to overcome the crisis and safeguard the proper functioning of the single market;
- the presentation of the three main features of the new package of measures due to be adopted on 2 April:

Firstly, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+);

- the significant room for manoeuvre created by these temporary and exceptional measures, which complemented those adopted on 13 March, in order to allow the Member States to be as responsive as possible when dealing with the current crisis;
- the explanation that this room for manoeuvre should, in particular, make it possible to (i) mobilise as many unused resources as possible from the European Structural and Investment Funds, (ii) reduce the administrative burden, (iii) enable transfers between the three cohesion policy funds and between the different region categories, and (iv) provide a certain amount of

flexibility in terms of compliance with the thematic concentration requirement;

- an announcement regarding the possibility of envisaging, for the 2020-2021 financial year, an EU financing rate of 100%, rather than the usual co-financing, of the measures linked to the crisis under for cohesion policy programmes;
- without calling into question the need for the initiative or the urgent nature of the situation, a mention, nevertheless, of the budgetary impact for the EU of the latter measure, which, on the face of it, would use up the existing margins and compromise the funding of any new initiatives; a reminder of the principle whereby the EU, unlike the Member States, was not permitted to run up debts and that any amendment of this principle would require the agreement of the European Parliament and the Member States in the Council, not forgetting that this would entail a long ratification process in the national parliaments;
- the fear that these measures might not help those Member States that had already used all the available funds;
- a call to exercise caution when communicating information on these measures to avoid creating expectations among the Member States that could not be met;
- the need to emphasise that the measures envisaged under the CRII+ initiative would also give support to the most vulnerable through food aid and by providing personal protective equipment to protect against the risk of contracting COVID-19;
- the justification for and appropriateness of the measures proposed under the CRII+ initiative to support the fisheries and aquaculture sector, farmers and rural areas;

- a reference to the exemption from customs duties and VAT on imports of certain goods needed in the fight against COVID-19 that would also be included in the set of measures being envisaged;

Secondly, the proposal regarding temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency situation (European Instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency following the COVID-19 outbreak – SURE), under Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union:

- highlighting of the support that SURE would provide for short-time work schemes or similar schemes that had been established in the Member States, so as to prevent employees being laid off unnecessarily or freelance workers being registered as unemployed, and to maintain household incomes;
- the expression of widespread support for this initiative which, by protecting companies' human capital, would at the same time safeguard their workers' skills, a necessary prerequisite to ensure that European economic operators would be able to compete globally once the crisis was over;
- an indication that this instrument, which was based on the principle of solidarity, would take the form of EU loans, on favourable terms, to the Member States that requested support, with the loans being backed by a system of voluntary guarantees provided by the Member States;
- in parallel to this financial support, the suggestion that this instrument could be used to promote training, retraining, levelling up of skills and upskilling in order to prepare for the recovery and to create additional advantages for young people;
- an invitation to view the scope of this instrument with a certain amount of flexibility to take into account the very wide range of labour markets across the EU and ensure a level playing field;

Thirdly, activation of the EU's Emergency Support Initiative (ESI) for the healthcare sector:

- an indication that, again honouring the principle of solidarity, the Commission intended to give direct support to Member States' healthcare systems in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in order to maximise efficiency gains on the basis of efforts already being made at national level;
- furthermore, the announcement of adjustments made to measures already in place or the possibility of introducing new measures to tackle the crisis depending on how the situation evolved, in particular:
 - the preparation of a second adjustment to the temporary framework for State aid in order to address the current crisis in respect of COVID-19;
 - highlighting of the work undertaken following the use of the general escape clause in the Stability and Growth Pact to simplify as far as possible the European Semester process in view of the current circumstances, without however postponing the deadline for submitting stability and convergence programmes;
 - the announcement of ongoing discussions on the possible adoption of other sectoral measures, in particular (i) the possibility, in the field of transport, of replacing reimbursements of tickets with vouchers, given the cash-flow difficulties created by the very high number of requests for reimbursement from travellers prevented from travelling because of the crisis, (ii) the extension of the restrictions on movement of persons at the external borders, (iii) the preparation of guidelines on asylum, and (iv) guidelines to prevent excessive disruption to waste management services;

International cooperation and emergency humanitarian aid (Mr LENARČIČ and Ms URPILAINEN)

- a mention of the Commission's ongoing work, in collaboration with the EU delegations and the Member States, to define the support that the EU intended to provide for the most vulnerable third countries to help them address the Coronavirus crisis, in the form of a communication to be adopted on 7 April 2020 and subsequently presented to the EU ministers responsible for development cooperation and, a little later, to their counterparts in the G20;
- a reference to the emergency assistance provided to the EU's partner countries to support their health systems and economies as part of the support to address the consequences of the pandemic;
- a call not to underestimate the humanitarian consequences of the pandemic at global level; a mention of the global humanitarian response plan of the UN, which was launching an appeal for contributions of around EUR 2 billion, and the suggestion that the EU should respond swiftly;
- the presentation of the assistance provided to the EU's neighbouring countries through the redeployment of Neighbourhood Policy financing still available to (i) meet the immediate needs, in particular for medical equipment, (ii) help to strengthen the health and social systems of the countries concerned, and (iii) assist them in preparing for the resumption of economic activity; for example, the EUR 450 million in aid granted to the Western Balkans;
- a mention of ongoing contacts with Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and third countries helping to receive migrants, such as Jordan and Lebanon;

General aspects (in particular Ms VESTAGER, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, Ms JOUROVÁ, Ms ŠUIČA, Mr HAHN, Mr HOGAN, Mr SCHMIT, Mr GENTILONI, Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI, Mr BRETON, Mr REYNDEERS, Mr VÁRHELYI and Mr SINKEVIČIUS)

- the importance of giving visibility to the tangible results of the measures taken in the Union. These were measures it could be proud of, starting with the effectiveness of the joint procurement of personal protective equipment, and the impressive ability of European industry to adapt in order to become more self-sufficient;
- the increased visibility of the Commission's work, particularly on social media, but a call to reinforce communication to the general public, which would help to defuse misinformation campaigns of which the Union was a victim;
- a reminder that one of the key challenges in the current crisis was to preserve European integration and the internal market, which was based on solidarity in a highly integrated Europe;
- against this backdrop and given the economic, social and geopolitical issues at stake, the justification for starting to prepare both a crisis exit strategy and an economic recovery plan, and the need to ensure coordination between the Member States;
- the need to structure this recovery around the dual green and digital transition, whose importance was confirmed by the current crisis, which could act as a catalyst for this transition; a call to draw lessons constructively from this crisis to shape the new world that would emerge from it;
- a call to ensure that citizens' fundamental rights and democratic principles were upheld, even in the context of a declared state of emergency which, while

reducing freedoms, must remain in the hands of the national parliaments and respect the independence of the media;

- in line with this approach, the fact that the Commission services maintained an updated mapping of the emergency systems set up in the Member States and were closely monitoring the ways in which they were implemented, so as to have a basis for objective analysis;
- a mention of the concern expressed by many organisations about the state of emergency declared in Hungary, which did not appear either to be limited in time or coupled with the requirement that the measures taken in this context be proportionate; moreover, it appeared that the state of emergency might lead to the suspension of rules guaranteeing fundamental rights and, possibly, to extensive application of the newly-created punishments for misinformation offences;
- the explanation given by a Member of the Commission who said that the state of emergency in Hungary was dependent on the existence of an emergency, that the Hungarian parliament could suspend measures it considered to breach the principle of proportionality in the context of the fight against COVID-19 and that a journalist could not be prosecuted except in a case of intentional misinformation;
- a question, to support the prospect of a gradual return to normality, about the advisability of going ahead with the launch of the conference on the future of Europe on the symbolic date initially envisaged, 9 May 2020, but using digital tools;
- warm thanks to the Commission's cabinets and departments for the substantial work carried out in the last weeks, to tight deadlines and in particularly difficult conditions, especially the IT teams, thanks to whose efforts 95% of Commission staff were now able to work from home full-time.

At the PRESIDENT's request, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ suggested launching a discussion soon on the implementation of the Commission's 2020 Work Programme, given that the management of the current pandemic, the crisis exit strategy and the future recovery plan would dominate the Commission's agenda in the coming months. He proposed merging these two strands of action and holding a meeting very soon with the other Vice-Presidents in order to submit a concrete proposal for an updated work programme to the PRESIDENT as soon as possible. He also announced that the main theme of the first outlook report to be presented in a few weeks' time would be resilience, which seemed particularly appropriate in the present circumstances.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ also referred to the first meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee which had been held by videoconference on 30 March. He reminded the meeting that this Joint Committee was responsible for supervising the implementation of the agreement on the withdrawal of the UK from the Union and that he had been appointed to co-chair it for the EU delegation. The discussions had focused on three aspects: citizens' rights, the protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland and the launch of the work of the specialised committees. The discussions had been positive on the issue of citizens' rights, but more difficult and very detailed on the question of the protocol on the island of Ireland, on which the UK's intentions in terms of implementation were not yet known. At the end of the meeting he had made a separate statement from the UK delegation to explain what had actually taken place at the discussions, and had reported back to the European Parliament.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr ŠEFČOVIČ for this information and stressed the importance of the work of this Joint Committee, which would help to shape the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

The PRESIDENT then wound up the College's in-depth discussion on the management of the COVID-19 crisis by picking up on some of the points raised.

First, she wished the issue of consumers' rights to be treated with extreme care. Next, she asked for the work to be speeded up to ensure that the measure announced

to extend from 15 May to 15 June the deadline by which Member States could request direct payments under the common agricultural policy took effect as quickly as possible. Finally, in her view the new mapping exercise relating to the emergency systems currently introduced to address the COVID-19 pandemic was highly important. She stressed that this was a factual and rigorous analytical exercise aimed at preventing any abuses and at ensuring the proportionality of the exceptional measures adopted in all the Member States. She pointed out that it was being conducted by DG Justice with the assistance of the Legal Service, and that it was based on indisputable objective criteria.

As a general point, she noted that the aim of all the recent measures taken by the Commission was precisely to give the Member States room for manoeuvre in the very short term to deal with the immediate health, economic and social consequences of the pandemic. She sincerely thanked the Members of the Commission, the cabinets and the departments for their constant efforts, which enabled the Commission to fully play its leading role in the service of all the Member States and of citizens. She noted that in the face of this major crisis the Commission had displayed a great capacity to react, a lot of imagination in proposing innovative common European solutions, outstanding motivation and leadership capacity. She welcomed all these indications of a College and European public service working to the best of its abilities and transcending different sensitivities. She called on each person to continue on this path in the area of their specific functions.

The Commission took note of this information and of the note distributed as INFO(2020) 16.

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The meeting closed at 12.07.