EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

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Brussels, 6 October 2020

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2349th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Tuesday 15 September 2020

(afternoon)

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Single sitting: Tuesday 15 September 2020 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.08 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 7 to 15
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	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	Items 1 to 8
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Ms VĂLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	

Absent:

Mr LENARČIČ	Member

The following sat in to represent an absent Member of the Commission:

Mr MALGAJ	Chef de cabinet to Mr LENARČIČ

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	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	
Mr LEARDINI	Deputy Secretary-General	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 14
Mr VANDENBERGHE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8 to 10
Mr WHELAN	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 11, 12/13
Ms CABRAL	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 14
Ms VILA NUÑEZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Ms MICELI	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 7
Ms REN	A member of Ms VESTAGER's staff	Item 11
Ms NIKOLAY	Chef de cabinet to Ms JOUROVÁ	Item 14
Ms PERIGNON	A member of Mr REYNDERS's staff	Items 8 to 15
Mr KERR	Chef de cabinet to Ms DALLI	Item 14
Ms CHAPUIS	Expert in Ms SIMSON's Office	Items 8 to 10
Ms SPINANT	Commission Spokesperson's Service	
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Secretariat-General	
Mr VALERO	Secretariat-General	

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, assisted by Ms DEPREZ, Director in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2020) 2349/FINAL; SEC(2020) 2349/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(2020) 2349)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 14 September 2020.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2348TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION (9 SEPTEMBER 2020)

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2348th meeting for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2020) 137)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 11 September 2020 (RCC(2020) 137).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

4.1. HORIZONTAL ITEM

i) 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework – Council dossier
(point 1.1.3 du IRG record)

– Recovery and Resilience Facility (Regulation) – MUREŞAN & GARDÍAZABAL RUBIAL & PÎSLARU report – 2020/0104 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 268.

4.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

ii) Trilogues
(point 3.1 of the IRG record)

– Transitional provisions for the support by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) in the year 2021, and amendment of Regulations (EU) No 228/2013, (EU) No 229/2013 and (EU) No 1308/2013 as regards resources and their distribution in respect of the year 2021 and amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013, (EU) No 1306/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013 as regards their resources and application in the year 2021 (Regulation) – KATAINEN report – 2019/0254 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 262/3.

– Rail passengers’ rights and obligations (Regulation – recast) – LIBERADZKI report – 2017/0237 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 263.

iii) European Parliament dossiers – September 2020 part-session
(point 3.2 of the IRG record)

Ordinary legislative procedure – First reading

– Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 715/2007 on type approval of motor vehicles with respect to emissions from light passenger and commercial vehicles (Euro 5 and Euro 6) and on access to vehicle repair and maintenance information (Regulation) – DE LANGE report – 2019/0101 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2020) 412.

Implementing acts and measures

– Amendment to specifications for titanium dioxide (E171) as food additive as regards inclusion of particle size parameters and lowering the maximum levels for heavy metals – Objection pursuant to Rule 112(2), (3) and (4)(c) of Parliament's Rules of Procedure – D066794/03 – 2020/2713 (RPS)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2020) 408.

– Maximum residue levels for cycloxydim, flonicamid, haloxyfop, mandestrobin, mepiquat, Metschnikowia fructicola strain NRRL Y-27328 and prohexadione in or on certain products – Objection pursuant to Rule 112(2), (3) and (4)(c) of Parliament's Rules of Procedure – D063880/06 – 2020/2734 (RPS)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2020) 409.

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

– 'Encryption' – Commission services note on end-to-end encryption in criminal investigations and prosecution

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 259.

– Granting to Belgium of temporary support under Council Regulation (EU) 2020/672 to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE) following the COVID-19 outbreak (Council Implementing Decision) – 2020/0225 (NLE)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 238.

– Access of the United Kingdom to the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 261.

– Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems and Regulation (EC) No 987/2009 laying down the procedure for implementing Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 (Regulation) – BISCHOFF report – 2016/0397 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 265.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

v) Non-legislative dossier
(point 4.1 of the IRG record)

– Draft Council Decision establishing a European Peace Facility – HR(2018) 94

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2020) 267.

4.4. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

vi) Action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions – April 2020 part-session
(point 5.6.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2020) 360/3 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its April 2020 part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2020) 102)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2020) 102 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 9 September 2020.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2020) 275 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 7 and 11 September 2020.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2020) 276 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 7 and 11 September 2020.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2020) 277 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 7 and 11 September 2020 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2020) 278 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 14 and 18 September 2020 and of the finalisation written procedures initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on Monday 14 September 2020.

6.5. COMMISSION DECISION GRANTING AN EMPOWERMENT RELATING TO BORROWING OPERATIONS UNDER COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2020/672 (C(2020) 6308)

The Commission adopted the decision in C(2020) 6308. Specifically, it decided to empower the Member of the Commission in charge of Budget and Administration to adopt, on behalf of the Commission and under its responsibility, the borrowing decision necessary to implement the Council Implementing Decision and the loan agreement respectively referred to in Article 6(1) and Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2020/672, subject to the conditions laid down in Articles 2 to 5 of this Decision.

7. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, 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 2021 (COM(2020) 575 TO /3; RCC(2020) 143)

The PRESIDENT invited Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Mr GENTILONI to present the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy – formerly called the ‘Annual Growth Survey’ – traditionally opened the European Semester of economic and fiscal policy coordination by setting out the major common economic and social policy priorities for the following year.

He emphasised that 2021 was a very particular year. The general priorities set out at the beginning of the present Commission's mandate, and reaffirmed in the growth strategy for 2020, remained unchanged and fully valid: long-term environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness and macro-economic stability. However, there were two new additional aspects this year. They were, first, meeting the challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and, secondly, rolling out the *NextGenerationEU* recovery plan and putting in place the European Recovery and Resilience Facility, which would grant more than EUR 670 billion to the Member States to undertake a coherent set of reforms and investments in the coming years.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 incorporated those two new dimensions. First, it guided the Member States in their pandemic response strategies, which had to continue to support national economies while at the same time ensuring medium-term macroeconomic sustainability. Secondly, it addressed guidelines to the Member States to help them prepare their national recovery and resilience plans, the preliminary drafts of which they would be able to submit to the Commission next October.

With regard to the European Semester cycle, the Communication explained the targeted adjustments made to the 2021 exercise to focus efforts on the implementation of the European Recovery and Resilience Facility. Thus, the usual Commission country reports would be replaced by assessments of the national plans, which would no longer be published together, but in batches. Although the surveillance exercised by the Commission under the Stability and Growth Pact and the macroeconomic imbalances procedure would of course remain in place, it was planned not to issue new country-specific recommendations in 2021, except for fiscal recommendations. Those adjustments were temporary.

He also highlighted the six flagship initiatives that the Commission was proposing to the Member States for inclusion in their national investment and reform plans because they were relevant for all Member States, required significant investment and could have spin-offs for each of them in terms of job creation, growth and benefits to be gained from the green and digital transitions.

He explained that the flagship initiatives aimed at (i) giving priority as far as possible to future-proof clean technologies and accelerating the development and use of renewables, (ii) improving the energy efficiency of buildings, (iii) putting in place ambitious sustainable transport plans, (iv) rapid deployment of broadband services, in particular fibre optics and 5G networks, (v) digitalisation of public administration and services, including also the justice and healthcare systems, and finally, (vi) adapting education systems so that they contributed to the development of digital skills and educational and vocational training.

The Commission was determined to introduce a quantitative target of 20% of investment to be devoted to the digital transition under *NextGenerationEU*, which meant that it must rapidly define a methodology allowing effective monitoring by the Commission and the Member States.

Finally, Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that the Communication was accompanied by additional guidance to help the Members States to prepare their recovery and resilience plans and to explain how the Facility would operate in practice, as well as a standard framework to guide them.

Mr GENTILONI said that the Member States were waiting for the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 and all the elements accompanying it, in particular the Commission’s guidance. He confirmed that there had been a sharp contraction in economic activity in the EU; however, it should be slightly below the initial forecasts for 2020, but higher for 2021. If a rebound took place, it must be exploited in the context of *NextGenerationEU*.

He said that the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy maintained in 2021 the fiscal support policy in place since the pandemic and did not retreat from the recourse to the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact made in March 2020. According to the European Central Bank, it would probably take until 2022 for the Member States to return to the fiscal positions they had at the time the COVID-19 crisis erupted. However, the measures to support the economy must not be converted into a permanent right, and that issue would have to be addressed in the context of the national plans for recovery and resilience. Moreover, he supported the idea of having a discussion, in due course, on updating the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact to adapt them to the new circumstances. For the time being, the important thing was for the Commission to focus on the Member States' recovery plans by engaging with them in a dialogue as soon as possible.

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

– confirmation of the expectations of the Member States, which wanted clear guidelines and a common framework as a basis for national targets and mapping out their recovery paths;

– appreciation of the links created between the common recovery strategy and the green and digital transitions;

– the advantage of this strategy being financed from different sources and its being justified by the need to restore the macroeconomic fundamentals of the Member States while fostering convergence;

– for some, the comment that the target of 20% of investment to be devoted to digitalisation under *NextGenerationEU* would be welcomed, would act as a powerful engine and promote inclusion; for others, emphasis of the difficulties which a quantified target could entail for the Member States that were still at the stage of investing in infrastructure;

– the fact that many national recovery projects were waiting for the final adoption of *NextGenerationEU*;

– support for the flagship initiatives proposed by the Commission, which were clearly future-oriented;

– with regard to the digital transition, support for the idea that everyone in Europe should have rapid access to secure connectivity and networks, and for the objectives of supporting the equipping of SMEs with digital tools, ensuring that the acquisition of digital skills in the EU was encouraged and investing in advanced technologies;

- the considerable uncertainty still hanging over economic recovery, now that the pandemic was experiencing a rebound and a real weariness was palpable;
- mention of a study launched by the Commission in order to quantify the State aid granted by the Member States; the difficult question to be addressed with them, at the appropriate time, of the gradual elimination of the relaxation of the rules on State aid which had been decided on at the height of the pandemic;
- the need to set a timetable clearly indicating when the relaxation would be ended, taking into account the unequal resources available to the Member States to grant such aid and the variable effects of these measures from one Member State to another;
- approval of the reference in the Communication to the need for the EU to strengthen the resilience of its critical supply chains, especially for agricultural products;
- the fact that respect for the rule of law contributed to the sound economic health of the Member States and attracted investment to them; in this context, satisfaction that the Communication mentioned the role of the media, which needed support in these times of crisis.

The PRESIDENT praised the considerable work that had made it possible to define the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021. She welcomed the setting of a quantified target for investments to be made in the digital transition, as had been done for the European Green Deal. That objective would guide the Member States' efforts through the national recovery and resilience plans and make those efforts measurable. Similarly, the flagship initiatives would highlight the added value of the European level and promote both synergies and a coordinated economic recovery of the EU.

The Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, agreed to formally adopt the Communication in COM(2020) 575/3 by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Wednesday 17 September 2020 (PE/2020/6492).

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – STEPPING UP EUROPE'S 2030 CLIMATE AMBITION – INVESTING IN A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL FUTURE FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR PEOPLE
(COM(2020) 562 TO /3; SWD(2020) 176 TO /3; SWD(2020) 177; SWD(2020) 178 AND /2; SEC(2020) 301; RCC(2020) 140)

9. AMENDED PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON ESTABLISHING THE FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING CLIMATE NEUTRALITY AND AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2018/1999 (EUROPEAN CLIMATE LAW)
(COM(2020) 563 AND /2; RCC(2020) 140)

10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – AN EU-WIDE ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL ENERGY AND CLIMATE PLANS – DRIVING FORWARD THE GREEN TRANSITION AND PROMOTING ECONOMIC RECOVERY THROUGH INTEGRATED ENERGY AND CLIMATE PLANNING
(COM(2020) 564 TO /3; RCC(2020) 140)

11. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION – GUIDELINES ON CERTAIN STATE AID MEASURES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SYSTEM FOR GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION ALLOWANCE TRADING POST 2021
(C(2020) 6400 TO /3; SWD(2020) 190; SWD(2020) 191; SWD(2020) 192;

SWD(2020) 193; SWD(2020) 194; SWD(2020) 195; SEC(2020) 320; RCC(2020) 141)

The PRESIDENT asked Mr TIMMERMANS and Ms SIMSON to present Europe's climate ambitions for 2030.

Mr TIMMERMANS said that those ambitions must live up to the historic determination shown by the EU in setting itself the target of achieving climate neutrality by 2050.

In its proposal for a European climate law of 4 March 2020, which made the target binding, the Commission had already identified the need to increase the EU's 2030 target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to bring it into line with the 2050 target. It had announced that by September 2020 it would examine the possibility of setting a new target of a 50-55% reduction in emissions by 2030. That is what the College was being asked to do that day with the proposed plan and the amended proposal for a European climate law.

An in-depth analysis had shown that reducing greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 by at least 55% compared with 1990 levels was an essential prerequisite for net zero emissions in Europe in 2050. If the current reduction target of at least 40% by 2030 were maintained, it would result in a reduction of 60% at most in 2050.

Mr TIMMERMANS then explained how the upward revision of the 2030 target was firmly rooted in reality. The impact assessment underpinning the proposal was robust and of outstanding quality. The elements it contained also confirmed that the revised target, although ambitious, was feasible.

While technology and societal awareness were major assets in effectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions as envisaged by 2030, the considerable amount of additional investment that would be needed was not to be underestimated. Hence the importance of ensuring that funds were effectively channelled towards contributing to that climate goal. He also highlighted the major added value of the synergies sought by the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy for 2021, also presented that day, between the European goals and the national recovery and resilience plans.

An ambitious goal for 2030, which was nevertheless fully in line with the target of climate neutrality by 2050, provided economic operators with predictability to encourage them to undertake or continue with confidence the massive investment and far-reaching transformation involved in the transition to a new economic model of sustainable growth.

The EU's influence on the international stage and the global competitiveness of European companies were also at stake.

Pointing out that the green transition would only be successful if it was fair, Mr TIMMERMANS drew the College's attention to the need for redistribution, the adjustment of powers and the support to be given to those who would have to make the most effort.

Lastly, he stressed the dynamic nature of the process under way. Greenhouse gas emission levels had to be monitored in the light of the speed of global warming. Adjustments to the trajectory needed to achieve climate neutrality in 2050 could not therefore be ruled out. The target set that day for 2030 should certainly not be seen as a ceiling but, like all the objectives in this area, more as a reference point to guide efforts so that, twenty years later, emissions were offset by absorption.

Ms SIMSON considered that the EU should turn the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity to increase investment in a climate-neutral economy and the energy transition by channelling the recovery funds wisely.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 was an objective that was not only achievable but also beneficial, since it would help boost productivity and growth and generate revenue to pay for the recovery.

This was demonstrated by the robustness of the impact assessment accompanying the proposed plan and the picture painted by the 27 national energy and climate plans, which the Member States were sending the Commission for the first time.

One of the lessons learned from these national plans was that overall there was significant expansion of renewable energy, to the extent that the related targets would be exceeded in 2020 and possibly also in 2030.

The plans also showed that Europe was phasing out coal sooner than expected, with renewable electricity projected to account for 60% of electricity generated in Europe by 2030. Only four Member States had not yet planned this phasing out.

Without denying the efforts needed to improve energy efficiency, there were some very encouraging trends, which could even be strengthened through the national recovery and resilience plans. This was clear evidence that the transition was already under way and that the higher 2030 target was not out of reach.

As regards the important role citizens would play in making the transition a success, it was vital to ensure the transition was fair, so that nobody and no region was left behind.

However, the efforts made to achieve the target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 could have an impact on the cost of energy and consumer prices.

Special attention had to be paid to the support that could be provided to low-income households and to the most vulnerable regions; the dialogue with certain local communities to facilitate a smooth transition having proved its worth. For her part, she was committed to addressing the issue of energy poverty.

Before opening the discussion on all the proposals tabled that day in the context of the European Green Deal, the PRESIDENT asked Ms VESTAGER to briefly present the State aid guidelines completing the set of initiatives.

Ms VESTAGER presented the guidelines, which concerned certain State aid measures in the context of the European emissions trading system (ETS) and had to be revised to enable the EU to achieve its new emissions reduction targets for 2030. They set out the conditions under which the aid in question could be granted to certain sectors with a high risk of carbon leakage, without creating any distortion between Member States. Member States would thus be able to offer compensation to electricity-intensive companies operating in a sector exposed to international trade. The compensation would cover part of the increase in electricity costs expected to arise from the revised ETS Directive. The Directive, applicable from 2021 to 2030, was intended to ensure that the sectors concerned continued to reduce their emissions to enable the EU to achieve its 2030 objectives.

European industry was of course keen to see the proposal. The Commission had followed the usual process, by consulting widely, and had used a methodology based on objective criteria to determine the eligible sectors, in the light of the extent of the carbon leakage risk they were exposed to and their degree of exposure to international trade, as well as of proven and reliable data to measure the indirect intensity of their greenhouse gas emissions. The guidelines also took into account the specific circumstances of small and medium-sized enterprises and imposed proportional obligations on large companies.

Ms VESTAGER added that the guidelines would be subject to a mid-term review in five years, which would allow the list of geographical areas to be amended if necessary and encourage the creation of interconnections.

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

– the overwhelming support for the proposal to raise the greenhouse gas emission reduction target for 2030 to at least 55% compared with 1990 levels, to ensure Europe was firmly on track to achieve climate neutrality by 2050;

– the need for the EU to reaffirm loud and clear its determination to achieve its ambition in spite of the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, and even to see this crisis as a call and an opportunity to redouble efforts to fight global warming;

– the need to recognise, however, that the efforts required to achieve the more stringent climate objectives would be in addition to those made necessary by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis; hence the call to take into account the associated risks in terms of competitiveness on the international stage, and thus in geopolitical terms;

- in view of this, encouragement to share the Commission's excellent impact assessment with stakeholders in order to better safeguard against potential resistance;
- the need to increase the target for 2030 and the realistic nature of this ambition;
- the usefulness of the impact assessment, which made tangible the investment required by this change to the overall target;
- the question of how the new 2030 target would apply to different sectors and a reference to the particular difficulties that the agricultural sector might experience;
- the clear signal that the EU was sending the international community by reaffirming its ambitious goal to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050;
- the need for the EU, whose emissions represented only a small share of global emissions, to lead the way for its partners on the path to a climate transition in order to meet the pressing challenge of global warming;
- the observation that the EU's competitiveness, as it would be shaped by the ongoing green transition, was liable to be affected by the choices made by third countries; a reminder, therefore, of the importance of climate diplomacy;
- the vital role that the carbon border adjustment mechanism would play in achieving the EU's ambitious climate goals;
- a warning regarding the impact this tax could have on trade flows;
- the key role that the Commission needed to play to channel investment wisely

into initiatives that supported the green transition; the importance of the synergies that the Commission was seeking to create between the various tools at its disposal, such as the recovery and resilience plans and the Horizon Europe research programme;

– the crucial importance of adapting the regulatory framework in order to create synergies between different policies, covering all sectors of the European economy, and to identify levers to further efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions;

– emphasis of the crucial need to ensure that the transition was fair and left nobody behind, be it people with a low income, rural, outlying or disadvantaged areas, or companies, particularly SMEs; a call, therefore, to consider carefully the question of redistribution and to take account of the varying situations in the Member States;

– the severity of the issue of energy poverty, mainly for citizens, but also for businesses;

– the role of research and innovation in the climate transition, particularly in terms of its social dimension, and the need to create the right conditions to allow it to flourish; an announcement that the Commission would soon launch a European Green Deal call as part of Horizon Europe to mobilise research and innovation in order to encourage an inclusive transition;

– the key role that citizens would play in ensuring a successful climate transition and the usefulness, therefore, of the discussions that would take place on this issue during the Conference on the Future of Europe;

– a question regarding the possibility of organising more consultation within the Commission prior to the adoption of policy initiatives as wide-ranging as the current plan.

Coming back to the importance of adapting the regulatory framework to ensure that all EU policies, across all sectors, contributed to cutting emissions by at least 55% by 2030, Ms SIMSON noted that the corresponding initiatives would be presented by June 2021 and would undergo impact assessments.

Since global warming could only be tackled effectively at global level, she confirmed the importance of climate diplomacy, and referred to the role of the G20 in this respect.

Mr TIMMERMANS acknowledged the fact that the intense efforts required as a result of the COVID-19 crisis came at the same time as those required by the green transition. However, the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic had not eliminated the absolute urgency of the climate situation, as acknowledged by all. He stressed the considerable cost of doing nothing; for example, the loss of biodiversity caused by global warming would threaten the very survival of the agricultural sector if no action were taken.

Furthermore, he felt that the aim of channelling the huge amount of funding mobilised for the recovery into the green transition was entirely appropriate as a means of shaping the world that would emerge from the pandemic around a sustainable growth strategy.

Also, he considered it the Commission's responsibility to raise the greenhouse gas emission reduction target for 2030 to at least 55% to ensure the EU was on track to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. He was convinced that the credibility of the commitment made by the EU was at stake, as was the future of subsequent generations.

In conclusion, for all of these reasons, the risks linked to increasing this target were, in his view, clearly preferable to the risks of a passive climate policy.

The PRESIDENT underlined this view. She stressed the urgent need to take action on global warming and pointed to the fact that, in the space of only a few months, the aim of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent had secured the backing of the Member States, which were well aware of the impact and the cost of failing to take action. She felt that the next decade would be decisive in the fight against global warming.

Without downplaying the huge efforts that economic operators would need to make, she pointed out that they themselves were calling on the EU to stick to its ambitious aim so that they could make the investment and changes required in a sufficiently clear and stable context. In addition, under pressure from consumers, companies were being pushed to become active players in the climate transition. In her view, the target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% in ten years' time was fully aligned with these trends.

With regard to the process of preparing files as referred to during the discussion, she noted that the process was designed in such a way as to allow the Members of the College to focus fully on the policy impact of Commission initiatives, with the more technical questions having been resolved beforehand in the Commission departments or cabinets, under the authority of the Commissioners.

By showing clear determination and leading from the front in the climate fight, the EU hoped its international partners would follow suit. The EU could exert influence using climate diplomacy tools, which were already bearing fruit; in addition, the carbon border adjustment mechanism could also act as an incentive.

Furthermore, she forcefully reiterated the importance of ensuring that nobody was left behind by the climate transition. She referred to the various instruments that were available or envisaged for that purpose. She invited the College to reflect on the idea of potentially creating 'model regions' in the future, under the auspices of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

In conclusion, increasing the greenhouse gas emission reduction target for 2030 was necessary in order to bolster confidence and certainty for businesses, workers, investors and consumers, and, ultimately, to improve quality of life for this generation and those to come.

On a proposal from the PRESIDENT, the Commission confirmed that its proposals would be formally adopted by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 17 September 2020 for the proposals currently set out in COM(2020) 562/3, COM(2020) 563/2 and COM(2020) 564/3, and at 10.00 on 21 September 2020 for the proposal in C(2020) 6400/3 (PE/2020/6393, PE/2020/6397, PE/2020/6391 and PE/2020/6491 respectively).

12. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL REGULATION ON ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN HIGH PERFORMANCE COMPUTING JOINT UNDERTAKING
(COM(2020) 569 AND /2; SWD(2020) 179 AND /2; RCC(2020) 142)

13. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON A COMMON UNION TOOLBOX FOR REDUCING THE COST OF DEPLOYING VERY HIGH CAPACITY NETWORKS AND ENSURING TIMELY AND INVESTMENT-FRIENDLY ACCESS TO 5G RADIO SPECTRUM, TO FOSTER CONNECTIVITY IN SUPPORT OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN THE UNION
(C(2020) 6270 AND /2; RCC(2020) 142)

Ms VESTAGER outlined two initiatives designed to enable the Union to develop the equipment, network and service capabilities needed for a successful transition to a digital economy and society. They were (i) the proposal for a Council Regulation on establishing the European high performance computing joint undertaking, and (ii) the Commission Recommendation on a common Union toolbox for reducing the cost of deploying very high capacity networks and ensuring timely and investment-friendly access to 5G radio spectrum, to foster connectivity in support of economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis in the Union.

Expanding high performance computing capability would allow the development of numerous modelling applications and offer powerful tools to the Union's research and innovation sector. For example, digital simulation of the human body or planet earth by high performance computers could model future developments based on selected parameters. The European high performance computing joint undertaking was an open system in which no fewer than 32 countries (Member States and associated third countries) cooperated closely to achieve this shared objective.

Mr BRETON explained that there were two strands to the package of measures proposed, first, boosting Europe’s strategic autonomy in terms of computing power and, second, developing a toolbox to encourage Member States to remove barriers to private investment in connectivity across the continent.

He stressed the consensus that existed within the Union on establishing the joint undertaking, not least because it would provide the means for achieving autonomy in computing power, which was fundamental to the sovereignty of the Union and to the digital transformation of its economy and society. High performance computing was important in numerous fields, such as meteorological forecasting or modelling in a wide range of sectors.

Supercomputers could perform a very high number of operations per second, thereby resolving complex problems in science, such as performing the calculation needed for the discovery of gravitational waves, or in more applied fields, such as identifying the molecules that could have an impact on COVID-19. High performance computing was therefore vital to strategic, industrial, technological and scientific success.

Since 2018 the Union had had in place a joint undertaking, EuroHPC, which brought together 32 participating countries (26 EU Member States and 6 associated countries under Horizon 2020), with an overall budget of 1.5 billion euros, 500 million of which came from the EU budget.

This joint undertaking would provide the Union with the means in 2021 to acquire three computers among the top five in the world, in Italy, Finland and Spain, and five computers among the top fifty in the world, in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic and Portugal, and also to fund centres researching supercomputing technologies across Europe.

The Commission was today proposing to continue the mission of the existing joint undertaking and to expand it in the light of new technological realities.

On the technological front, the challenge was to move to ‘exascale’ computers that could perform 10^{18} operations per second and, in particular, to start integrating quantum accelerators that would allow the development of hybrid computers and place the Union in a strong position with respect to this technology of the future.

To this end, the Union would need to invest between EUR 3.4 and 3.8 billion from its Digital Europe programme, Horizon Europe and the Connecting Europe Facility, with the Member States matching this amount.

The role of supercomputers was vital to the EU’s digital sovereignty, forming as they did part of a strategic value chain, with processors upstream and megadata and cloud computing downstream, and with the constituent elements of this chain concentrated in the hands of a few players, often non-European.

Mr BRETON moved on to the Commission Recommendation on a common Union toolbox for reducing the cost of deploying very high capacity networks and ensuring timely and investment-friendly access to 5G radio spectrum, to foster connectivity. The COVID-19 epidemic had clearly demonstrated the importance of connectivity for work, study, social interaction and entertainment. It had also triggered a marked slowdown in investment, in particular in very high-speed networks such as the rollout of fibre and 5G.

It was therefore in parallel with the Commission’s invitation to Member States to include connectivity projects in their recovery and resilience plans that it was calling on them to develop a toolbox to speed up procedures and foster private investment.

In particular, the aim was to simplify administrative permit-granting procedures, allow access to existing public infrastructure and to speed up the assignment of the 5G spectrum, on which the Member States were very behind.

This toolbox would also serve to improve spectrum use for cross-border projects, in particular as regards 'mobility' corridors for smart cars, which would be impossible to set up if Member States did not cooperate on the granting of joint permits.

He concluded by stressing that, with these two initiatives, the Commission was proposing a framework that would allow very rapid deployment of measures to support flagship digital transition projects, and sending a message of pragmatism and urgency to Member States.

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

– the example of European leadership represented by the strategic high performance computing initiative;

– the importance of ensuring access to supercomputers for EU researchers and small and medium-sized enterprises;

– whether the energy produced by high performance computing data centres might usefully be recycled and used in the context of developing a circular economy.

On a proposal from the PRESIDENT, the Commission confirmed that the texts currently set out in COM(2020) 569/2 and C(2020) 6270/2 would be formally adopted by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Friday 18 September 2020 (PE/2020/6463 and PE/2020/6411 respectively).

14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – A UNION OF EQUALITY – EU ANTI-RACISM ACTION PLAN (COM(2020) 565 TO /3; RCC(2020) 139)

The PRESIDENT said that the Commission had taken the initiative of preparing the anti-racism action plan tabled for approval that day following the policy debate on racism on 24 June.

Ms JOUROVÁ thanked the PRESIDENT for having been one of the main initiators of this action plan, which she had announced on 17 June in a speech to the European Parliament.

She pointed out that this strategic action plan had been the subject of internal consultations as well as consultations with stakeholders and the population groups most affected. The results of these consultations informed the main elements of this initiative.

She stressed the need to act, as shown in the surveys carried out, which highlighted a level of discrimination within the Union that was still high. She said that the EU intended to reaffirm its commitment to fighting racism by proposing specific measures to combat individual and structural racism and to consider ways of enhancing diversity among the staff of the institutions. She pointed out in particular the fact that although the Member States were invited to play a full part in the implementation of the strategy, the action plan included a section addressed to the EU institutions, which would have to verify that existing legislation was still fit for purpose and fill the gaps, for example in the field of law enforcement or with regard to the role of equality bodies.

She announced that the Commission would take a systematic approach and launch infringement procedures against Member States if the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia was not fully and correctly transposed and implemented. The Commission would also ensure that new technologies did not further entrench prejudices or create new ones.

Furthermore, she said that the Commission would strengthen its dialogue with the population groups affected by racism and put in place a new coordination structure with the stakeholders in order to establish a regular dialogue with civil society, in particular through the appointment of an anti-racism co-ordinator who would be in close contact with people belonging to minority groups and interact with internal and external partners.

Lastly, Ms JOUROVÁ announced the organisation of a European summit against racism during the course of the following year and work on reforming the procedures for selecting the staff of the EU institutions with the aim of increasing diversity within the institutions.

Ms DALLI confirmed that the proposed action plan recognised the continuing problems of individual and structural racism, which needed to be addressed through decisive action by the EU and its Member States.

She pointed out that while the action plan took stock of the EU's robust legislation for combatting racial hatred and discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnic origin, it was important to ensure it was implemented in full.

She explained in particular the need to consider whether it was necessary to extend existing legislation to other sectors, such as law enforcement, whilst strengthening equality bodies.

The document also presented the measures for combatting racial and ethnic discrimination in all areas of life such as employment, education, health and housing, and considered the risks that new technologies might entail in that respect.

She also stressed the importance of addressing structural racism in the national curricula and of combatting more strongly disinformation and stereotypes.

She added that the Commission would measure progress in the implementation of the strategy by collecting disaggregated statistics. It would also encourage the Member States to adopt national anti-racism action plans, in collaboration with the private sector, by integrating equality into all EU policies and financing programmes.

Lastly, Ms DALLI drew attention to the fact that the text also included a positive measure as regards employment in the EU institutions, where efforts would be made to increase staff diversity and thus better reflect European diversity.

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

– the numerous efforts that still needed to be made to encourage more diversity in all sectors of the economy and society;

– the complementarity of the proposed action plan with the EU's anti-semitism strategy which would be the subject of initiatives under the German Presidency in order, in particular, to establish a process for evaluating the national anti-semitism plans implemented by the Member States;

– the crucial role of education in combating racial stereotypes and that of young people as ambassadors for diversity and tolerance;

– the case for combating stereotypes conveyed by the media in particular in the context of the next action plan for the digital sector;

– the particular attention to be paid to the Roma community present in many EU Member States and whose interests must be protected in all EU policies.

The Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed the formal adoption of the Communication in COM(2020) 565/3 by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Friday 18 September 2020 (PE/2020/6428).

15. OTHER BUSINESS

15.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL gave a quick overview of the latest developments in external action policy.

He began by saying that on 14 September a meeting had been held by video conference between the PRESIDENT, Charles Michel, Angela Merkel, for the

Germany Presidency of the Council, of the one part, and the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, of the other. They had discussed both the progress achieved on important aspects of EU-China relations and the matters on which further progress needed to be made.

He went on to mention other topical issues, in particular the review of relations with Russia, the situation in Libya and the question of sanctions against both Belarus and Turkey. All of these items would be on the agenda of the next Foreign Affairs Council on 21 September.

The discussions among Member States had not made any progress on possible sanctions against a number of persons responsible for acts of violence, repression and falsification of the results of the election in Belarus. One Member State wanted to link this measure to sanctions against Turkey. The President of the European Council, for his part, hoped that an agreement would be reached on the sanctions against Belarus before the extraordinary summit of EU leaders on 24-25 September, when the discussions on external relations might also focus on Turkey.

Lastly, Mr BORRELL briefly described the first boarding operation carried out under Operation Irini off Libya, with the help of a German navy vessel. He reiterated the need for greater engagement by the Member States in this operation.

The Commission took note of this information.

15.2. SITUATION IN THE MORIA REFUGEE CAMP IN GREECE AND PACT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

The PRESIDENT asked Mr SCHINAS to brief the College on his recent visit to Greece, a few hours after the outbreak of the fire which had destroyed the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos.

Mr SCHINAS reviewed the circumstances of this disaster, as a result of which the 13 000 refugees in the camp had been made homeless in a few hours. He reported on the measures taken by the Greek Government, with the help of the EU, its Member States and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to come to the assistance of those affected and set up new structures to relocate them. A new provisional camp was now ready and vessels had been mobilised in case of need. Over 400 unaccompanied minors had been relocated to ten EU Member States in record time. This meant that no unaccompanied minors now remained in Lesbos.

As a result of this tragic event, there had been many calls for the EU to equip itself with the common asylum and migration management system it needed, based on the principles of solidarity and burden sharing. It was therefore a particularly appropriate time for the presentation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, which would take place the following week.

Ms JOHANSSON returned to the question of the emergency assistance provided by the EU and the Member States, through the Civil Protection Mechanism, to deliver essential supplies in Greece. The new tent camp that had been set up could accommodate 9 000 people, but there were not yet more than a thousand, since many refugees were afraid of ending up there for a long time and preferred to be relocated in the EU. The new more modern reception centre being built by the Greek authorities in the interior of the island of Lesbos, the last of the five centres being financed by the EU, was expected to be ready in time for winter.

By and large, she too hoped that the Member States would give more support to the relocation of refugees. A debate on this issue would take place in the European Parliament on 17 September, in which she would take part.

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

– recognition of the Commission’s extremely rapid reaction to the fire in the Moria camp;

- the considerable work done in the last year to reduce the number of refugees in the camp from 20 000 to 13 000;

- a request for clarification of the concept of shared management and the hope that these arrangements would not determine in advance the provisions of the forthcoming Pact on Migration and Asylum;

- a question about the allegations that vessels transporting refugees had recently been turned back from Greek territorial waters and returned to Turkey without the asylum applications being processed;

- the hope that other Member States would follow the example of Germany, which had agreed to take in over one thousand refugees from the Moria camp; acknowledgement, however, of the difficulties this would cause in some Member States, where extremist movements were poised ready to attack such initiatives;

- recognition of the huge efforts made by the Commission to improve the reception of refugees, but also of the difficulty for the EU as a whole to demonstrate solidarity in relocating them;

- a question on the practical implementation of the mechanism for sending refugees refused the right to asylum in Greece back to Turkey, and on the use of the EUR 2 billion granted to the Greek authorities to deal with the influx of refugees since 2015;

- the high expectations around the forthcoming Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Ms JOHANSSON said that in order to show solidarity and increase their participation in relocations of refugees, the Member States were waiting for a more robust framework, which would be provided by the Pact on Migration and Asylum to be presented by the Commission on 23 September.

On the question of the shared management of the future new reception centre in Lesbos between the EU and its agencies, on the one hand, and the Greek authorities, on the other, a number of legal and practical points were still being clarified.

Regarding the allegation that refugee boats in Greece and other Member States were being returned to Turkey without asylum applications being examined, she stressed the obligation to respect a fundamental right and said that the Pact on Migration and Asylum would propose a new follow-up mechanism.

Replying to a remark made during the discussion, Mr SCHINAS stressed that European citizens did not necessarily distinguish between the EU institutions when judging the outcome of EU policies and often regarded the institutions *en masse*.

Rather than talking about shared management of the future refugee camp in Lesbos, what was actually needed was to make EU solidarity more tangibly visible and effective on the basis of a memorandum of understanding with the Greek authorities.

Concerning the allegations that refugees were being returned, he recommended trusting the EU agencies working on the ground, in particular the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

He also pointed out that the EUR 2 billion that the EU had granted to Greece since the start of the migrant crisis in 2015 were not intended solely for the Lesbos camp, but for the tens of reception centres in the country and the thousands of refugees who were still there.

In conclusion, he confirmed that as regards encouraging the other Member States to follow Germany's example by showing solidarity in taking in relocated refugees, the EU governments were waiting to see how the new Pact on Migration and Asylum would work. This was an opportunity that the Commission intended to seize.

Ms JOHANSSON said that under the 2016 joint EU-Turkey statement on management of migration flows, the EU had resettled 28 000 refugees from Turkey and had returned less than 1 000 persons who had been refused the right to asylum in the EU. She emphasised that this mechanism had been starting to bear real fruit at the beginning of 2020, just as the pandemic struck the EU. She also pointed out that Greece had adopted new legislation on the right to asylum which significantly speeded up the handling of asylum applications.

The PRESIDENT noted that the EU agencies had been highly visible in Lesbos in recent days, and that despite good cooperation from a number of Member States, the EU was being reproached for being absent.

She recommended negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the Greek authorities, clearly setting out the division of tasks between the EU level and the national level for managing the future new refugee camp in Lesbos.

With regard to the Pact on Migration and Asylum, she noted the interest of the Member States but hoped for a tangible and much more resolute demonstration of solidarity from them. The Commission's much-awaited proposal would follow the usual process of preparation in the Commission departments before being presented to the College.

The Commission took note of this information.

15.3. FUTURE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ reported to the College on the latest developments in the negotiations on the future partnership between the Union and the United Kingdom.

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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 16.21.