



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2364 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 17 February 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2364th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 27 January 2021
(morning)**

PV(2021) 2364 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 27 January 2021 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.11 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
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
Ms DALLI	Member
Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Mr LENARČIČ	Member
Ms VÁLEAN	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member

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	
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 6
Mr SMITH	PRESIDENT's Office	Item 9
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2021) 2364/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2364/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(2021) 2364)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 25 January 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2361ST, 2362ND AND 2363RD MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (15/24 DECEMBER 2020, 14 AND 19 JANUARY 2021)

(PV(2020) 2361; PV(2020) 2361, 2ND PART)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2361st meeting, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2362nd and 2363rd meetings until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 4)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 22 January 2021 (RCC(2021) 4).

It paid particular attention to the following points.

4.1. HORIZONTAL ITEMS

i) 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework – Trilogues

(point 1.1.1 of the IRG record)

- Amendment of Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Decision) – ANDROULAKIS report – 2020/0097 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 22/3.

- European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (Regulation) – CASA report – 2018/0206 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 18/2.

4.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

ii) Trilogues

(point 3.1 of the IRG record)

- European Institute of Innovation and Technology (Regulation – recast) – MATIAS report – 2019/0151 (COD) / Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) 2021-2027: boosting the innovation talent and capacity of Europe (Decision) – CARVALHO report – 2019/0152 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 8.

iii) Council dossiers

(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

- Amendment of Council Regulation (EEC) No 95/93 as regards temporary relief from the slot utilisation rules at Community airports due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Regulation) – 2020/0358 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 19.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

iv) Action to be taken on Parliament's legislative resolutions and other resolutions of a legal nature

(SP(2021) 12)

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(2021) 12, drawn up following the January 2021 part-session of Parliament, the contents of which were noted.

v) Action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its November I 2020 part-session

(point 5.6.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2021) 32/2 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its November I 2020 part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

vi) Action taken on the legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its December 2020 part-session

(point 5.6.2 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2021) 34 on the action taken on the legislative opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its December 2020 part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

vii) Results of Parliament's January 2021 part-session

(point 5.8.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission took note of the information on Parliament's part-session held from 18 to 21 January 2021 in Brussels, set out in SP(2021) 22.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION

(RCC(2021) 12)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 12 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference on Wednesday 20 January 2021.

6. MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF EUROPEAN UNION LAW

INFRINGEMENTS – URGENT INDIVIDUAL CASE

(SEC(2021) 58)

INFR(2020) 2182 – Poland – Violation of EU law by the legislative changes affecting the judiciary

Decision: additional reasoned opinion under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

At the PRESIDENT's request, Ms JOUROVÁ reported to the College on the continuing and growing fears raised by the new reform of the Polish judicial system introduced in December 2019, which came into force on 14 February 2020.

On 29 April and 30 October 2020, respectively, the Commission had sent Poland a letter of formal notice and a reasoned opinion, expressing its serious concerns about the compatibility of the reform in question with EU law, starting with the rules on the independence and impartiality of the justice system.

At the same time that these steps were being taken, the activity of the Disciplinary Chamber of the Polish Supreme Court observed as part of this reform had only aggravated these concerns. Poland had therefore been asked to provide explanations addressing these concerns in reply to an additional letter of formal notice sent on

3 December 2020.

She briefly explained the reasons for that letter. She referred in particular to the powers conferred on the Disciplinary Chamber with regard to the lifting of immunity of judges and also with regard to labour law, social security and the retirement of judges. By allowing the Chamber to rule on these matters, which had a direct bearing on the conditions under which judges carried out their judicial activities, Poland was jeopardising the right to an effective remedy as required by Article 19(1) second subparagraph of the Treaty on European Union.

Since the reply received from Poland on 4 January 2021 had not dispelled the Commission's concerns, Ms JOUROVÁ suggested that the College send Poland an additional reasoned opinion to which it would have to reply within one month.

Ms REYNDERS pointed out that the Disciplinary Chamber in question had been set up under the 2017 Law on the Supreme Court, which had entered into force on 3 April 2018 and been amended by the new reform.

At the Commission's request, on 8 April 2020 the Court of Justice of the European Union had ordered Poland to suspend immediately, as an interim measure pending the judgment on the substance of the infringement case, the application of the provisions of the 2017 law constituting the basis of the jurisdiction of the Disciplinary Chamber of the Polish Supreme Court to take decisions, both at first instance and on appeal, in disciplinary cases concerning judges, on the grounds that a lack of independence and impartiality on the part of that Chamber could cause serious and irreparable harm to the Union's legal order.

He regretted the fact that despite this order, the activities of the Disciplinary Chamber had clearly continued.

He stressed that the Commission was continuing with persistence and determination to seek a dialogue with the Polish authorities, without deviating from its consistent approach whereby open, respectful and constructive dialogue was the preferred

means of remedying the situation.

In conclusion, Ms JOUROVÁ and Mr REYNDERS emphasised that the Commission must act with all the diligence and firmness that the seriousness of the situation demanded. What was at stake was not merely the disciplinary regime for Polish judges but the issue of the independence of the justice system of a Member State and therefore the legal order of the EU, as well as the democratic framework within which European citizens enjoyed their rights.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the decision in SEC(2021) 58.

7. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

7.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2021) 48 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 18 and 22 January 2021.

7.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2021) 49 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 18 and 22 January 2021.

7.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

SEC(2021) 50 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 18 and 22 January 2021 archived in Decide.

7.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2021) 51 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 25 and 29 January 2021.

8. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2021) 52)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2021) 9)

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr HAHN presented two proposals for administrative decisions that were being submitted directly to the College for approval.

He explained that it was proposed (i) to appoint Ms Genoveva RUIZ CALAVERA to the post of Director-General of DG Interpretation and (ii) to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Ms María Angeles BENITEZ SALAS to the post of Head of the Commission's Representation in Madrid, Spain.

He highlighted the great skills, outstanding career and recognised expertise of Ms Genoveva RUIZ CALAVERA and Ms María Angeles BENITEZ SALAS, which would be valuable assets in their new posts.

He also informed the College of the appointment of Ms Zane PETRE and Ms Jerneja JUG JERSE to the posts of Heads of the Commission's Representations in Riga, Latvia, and Ljubljana, Slovenia, respectively.

**8.1. DG INTERPRETATION – APPOINTMENT OF AD15/16
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
(PERS(2020) 84 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director-General of DG Interpretation (PERS(2020) 84 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 11 and 12 January 2021 (PERS(2020) 84/3 and /4).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Ms Genoveva RUIZ CALAVERA to the post.

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

**8.2. DG COMMUNICATION – AMENDMENT OF ORGANISATION CHART
AND APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION'S REPRESENTATION IN MADRID**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to fill the post of Head of the European Commission's Representation in Madrid by transferring in the interest of the service under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations Ms María Angeles BENITEZ SALAS, an AD15 official and currently Deputy Director-General of DG Agriculture and Rural Development.

Consequently, by derogation from the Commission Decision on middle management staff (C(2016) 3288 final), the post of Head of the European Commission's Representation in Madrid, Spain, would be upgraded to the level of senior management for the duration of Ms María Angeles BENITEZ SALAS's posting.

This decision would take effect on 1 April 2021.

8.3. DG COMMUNICATION – APPOINTMENT OF TWO HEADS OF COMMISSION REPRESENTATION

The Commission took note of the decision of the Appointing Authority to appoint:

- Ms Zane PETRE as Head of the Commission Representation in Riga, Latvia;
- Ms Jerneja JUG JERSE as Head of the Commission Representation in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

These decisions would take effect on 16 April 2021.

9. GREEN PAPER ON AGEING – FOSTERING SOLIDARITY AND RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN GENERATIONS (COM(2021) 50 A/3 ; RCC(2021) 9)

The PRESIDENT opened the discussion on the Green Paper proposed by the Commission that day with a view to launching a broad political debate on the challenges of an ageing society to be addressed by the EU, as well as the opportunities to be seized in this context.

She explained that this initiative, under the heading ‘Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations’, took as its starting point the economic and social consequences of a major trend within the EU, that of its ageing population, and invited the public to express their views on the actions to be taken to tackle them.

Demographic studies of global population development over the coming thirty years confirmed the gradual ageing of the populations of northern countries, while the opposite trend would be seen in southern countries.

The EU should therefore address this trend through a demographic policy that would respond to the major challenges of caring for people and the reduction of the working population, with the macroeconomic and social consequences that this entailed.

The PRESIDENT stressed that this would be a long-term task, and one that would have to be examined in depth.

Ms ŠUICA observed that ageing affected each of the portfolios for which Members of the College were responsible.

She added that ageing was probably the defining demographic trend in Europe, with a median age that had been steadily increasing and was now more than double that of Africa. She pointed out that the Report on the impact of demographic change in the EU approved by the Commission in June 2020 had highlighted three main elements, namely: the increase in life expectancy at birth, the fall in the birth rate and the steadily ageing population, which made it possible to estimate that by 2070 almost a third of the population would be 65 or older. These trends meant that the working-age population was shrinking, and that ageing was profoundly changing Europe's demographic landscape.

However, she wished to avoid conflating old age with ageing, explaining that, whereas old age was one stage of life, ageing was a continual process that began at birth and therefore concerned all individuals, ages and generations, at all stages of life, and that it affected society and the economy.

With this in mind, Ms ŠUICA set out the main reasons for having a broad debate on the issue of the ageing population.

She considered that the fact that people were living longer and in better health constituted a remarkable achievement for society and could be attributed to health and social protection systems, the social market economy and awareness about healthier lifestyles. She nonetheless underlined the considerable challenges inherent in ageing for each individual and for society as a whole, since it affected people in numerous ways throughout their life-cycle. It also raised a number of questions: how did an ageing population affect care and pensions? How could active ageing be encouraged? How could social protection systems be adapted to meet the needs of ageing societies? How did the phenomenon affect young people and older people today? Finally, what did it mean for the economy and society in the future?

Ms ŠUICA explained that this first Green Paper of the current Commission's mandate was intended precisely to raise all of those questions in the context of a broad public consultation on the challenges of ageing and the opportunities to be seized throughout the life-cycle.

Of the key elements to be addressed, she began by citing the early, most formative years of life, during which it was important to encourage an approach that would prepare citizens for a longer, more active life, spent in good health and with economic opportunities.

Next, in order to sustain growth and ensure that social protection systems were maintained, the EU would have to include more people in labour markets, while improving productivity and innovation and promoting the silver economy. This approach involved addressing other key issues such as longer working lives in line with increased life expectancy, care responsibilities and gender equality.

Ms ŠUICA commented that, when people retired, many were still in good health and continued to play an active role in society through volunteering, the economic as well as social value of which she underlined. She also drew attention to the challenges of old-age poverty and to the need to redesign pension systems in order to make them fair, adequate and sustainable.

Finally, she saw old age as a stage of life at which individuals had growing needs and became more frail, as the COVID-19 pandemic had made clear. She noted that long-term care systems would have to be prepared to meet increasing demand as regards access, quality, affordability and qualified workforce.

She underlined that the issues to be addressed could additionally involve a regional dimension. Some regions were ageing much more quickly, losing their working age population and often lacking sufficient care infrastructure or facilities that were appropriate for an older population.

The Green Paper invited interested parties to submit their contributions to this broad debate over the course of the next twelve weeks in order to feed into the Commission's work.

Firstly, the responses would inform initiatives already in preparation such as the EU's long-term vision for rural areas, the EU Strategy on the rights of the child or the rights of vulnerable adults in cross-border situations.

Secondly, they would feed into reflections on the initiatives currently being considered but which were at an early stage, as was the case of the work on long-term care or the social, economic and health consequences of loneliness.

Thirdly, they would allow new initiatives to be considered, such as the Council's call to encourage voluntary work among older people. She noted that Member States appeared to be well aware of the many common challenges posed by the ageing population and of the need to respond appropriately at EU level.

Ms ŠUIČA welcomed the discussion of the ageing population issue at global level, as evidenced by the initiative launched by the World Health Organization in autumn 2020, initiative designating the period from 2020 to 2030 as the 'Decade of Healthy Ageing'.

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

- the Commissioners’ support for the Green Paper and its contents, which attested to the significance that the EU accorded to the issue of the ageing population and acknowledgement of the effects that this major demographic trend would have on the ground, as seen elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere;
- the timeliness of its publication, at the beginning of the budget period, when Member States were drawing up their recovery and resilience plans and the lessons of the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic needed to be learnt;
- the need for a global approach that fostered synergies between the policy areas concerned by the ageing of the population;
- the need to take account of the multifaceted nature of this demographic trend in putting together policies, in the structural reforms to be considered and in the efforts to develop support services for older and disadvantaged people as an alternative to institutionalisation;
- the emphasis placed on the fact that ageing was a process that began at birth and, consequently, affected all citizens, whatever the age and generation;
- hence the relevance of addressing the issue from a life-cycle perspective;
- the utility, therefore, of combating inequalities, discrimination and certain social phenomena from an early age through public health prevention campaigns;
- the appropriateness of also taking into consideration specific issues of direct concern for older age groups;
- the significance of population ageing for the labour market, where its effects were already being felt and for which changes would be necessary in order to gain maximum benefit;
- the need to encourage to this end all economic actors to draw up strategies taking account of the change in workers’ skills over time and to develop a

workforce management culture over time;

- the vital need to increase productivity to offset the labour shortages that most Member States would face over the decade to come;
- against this backdrop, the role that legal migration was to play;
- the fundamental role of education and lifelong learning so as to enable each person to retrain and adapt to changes, in particular the digital transformation, though care should be taken to avoid this leading to excessive depersonalisation;
- recognition of the increasing needs of the healthcare sector, in terms of both prevention and care;
- the importance of mobilising cohesion policy, social policy and rural development policy;
- the added value of inter-generational solidarity;
- the fact that the outcome of the 12-week public consultation launched by the Green Paper was pending, and that it, along with other forthcoming initiatives, should enable strategic choices viable in the long term to be made based on the European values of equality and solidarity, without leaving anyone behind;
- the observation that the issue of population ageing would be addressed at the June 2021 social summit.

Ms ŠUIČA welcomed the broad support of the College for the Green Paper.

She reiterated her wish that the public consultation, through prospective analysis, would provide a number of pointers to make the most of the ageing of the population.

She shared the Commissioners' viewpoint that the world of work, productivity and lifelong learning were essential factors to be considered, and confirmed that legal migration was undoubtedly part of the answer to the challenges in question.

She also confirmed the objective of promoting inter-generational solidarity and responsibility.

The PRESIDENT emphasised the quality of the Green Paper.

While acknowledging the difficulties caused by the current demographic situation in Europe and the need to take into account the ageing of the population, she focused on the factors that could enable the EU to move forward.

In particular, she was of the opinion that the situation called for the qualification and training of young people to be encouraged with a view to boosting productivity.

She also pointed to the merit of exploiting synergies between the energy of young people and the experience of their elders.

In addition, she felt that pursuing a better work-life balance, for both women and men, could have an effect on the figures for the working population in the long term.

She called for an informed debate on legal migration in this context.

She ended by drawing attention to the technological advances that encouraged the ageing of the population.

Following this exchange of views, the Commission approved the Green Paper in COM(2021) 50/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRESIDENT asked Mr BORRELL to brief the College on the latest developments in external relations.

Mr BORRELL's presentation focused on the items discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council which he had chaired on 25 January.

He began by referring to the EU's relations with **Russia**, which would be on the agenda of the European Council meeting on 25 and 26 March. The Council had not decided to adopt additional sanctions against Russia in response to the Navalny case. With a view to preparing an exchange of views of EU leaders, he would visit Moscow next month if the public health situation allowed.

He had cancelled his visit to Mali in view of the serious situation there in terms of both public health and security.

In general, the public health situation was very worrying in Africa. Travel there was advised against for the time being.

Mr BORRELL said that the Council had taken note of the clear ongoing improvement in relations with **Turkey**. He referred to the discussions he had held this month with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who had also met the PRESIDENT and the President of the European Council, Charles MICHEL, during his visit to Brussels. He welcomed the launch of exploratory talks between Turkey and Greece, the willingness shown by the Turkish authorities to cooperate more with the EU in general and the announcement that negotiations on Cyprus would resume under the auspices of the United Nations by the end of February.

He also referred to **EU-Japan** relations, on which an exchange of views had been held via videoconference between EU foreign ministers and their Japanese counterpart. He took the opportunity to underline the importance for the EU of strengthening its ties with the fast-growing Indo-Pacific region and with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in particular.

Turning to the **Horn of Africa**, he reported on the tragic situation in Ethiopia, which was affected by war and ethnic violence. Between 4 and 5 million people living in the Tigray area were completely isolated and had been abandoned to their fate in the face of indifference on the part of the international community. The conflict threatened to spread to the wider region, including Sudan. He welcomed the Commission's decision to suspend European budget support to the Ethiopian authorities but noted that some Member States were continuing with their own payments.

With regard to **climate and environmental diplomacy**, greater attention should be given to Africa. Although the continent accounted for only 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions, its economic growth could generate a sharp increase in its energy consumption.

In addition, trade agreements had to reflect the climate and environmental ambitions that the EU had set itself. Accordingly, a declaration on climate and environmental protection should be added to the draft trade agreement with Mercosur so that it could be finalised. The declaration would spell out what the EU expected the Mercosur countries to do in this area.

Mr BORRELL then turned to relations with the **United Kingdom**, which had decided not to grant the EU delegation in London the diplomatic status granted under the Vienna Convention to the 143 EU delegations worldwide. The United Kingdom was the only country in the world which had not agreed

to grant the EU delegation the diplomatic status to which it was entitled. He hoped the UK authorities would reverse their decision.

Lastly, the Foreign Affairs Council had discussed the **vaccine doses** that Member States would be able to donate to lower to middle-income third countries. With a few exceptions, national governments were not ready to make these donations yet, but several Member States had expressed a willingness to give a share of their vaccine allocations not just to the countries in the EU neighbourhood but also to the African continent.

The PRESIDENT returned to the UK authorities' refusal to grant the London delegation the diplomatic status usually reserved for EU delegations. She was confident that the UK authorities would change their attitude in the near future, given that it was in the interest of both sides to cooperate in as positive a manner as possible. In addition, implementation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement was causing significant disruption on the other side of the Channel, making the difference between Member State and third-country status increasingly tangible.

As a general point, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ welcomed the fact that the European foreign ministers had demonstrated their commitment to maintaining a common approach to the United Kingdom.

On the subject of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, it was possible that the Council would submit a request for the ratification deadline to be postponed until mid-March or even early April. Any such request would be based on the time needed for the agreement to be authenticated, reviewed by lawyer-linguists and translated into all the EU languages. For its part, the European Parliament was committed to the current deadline (end-February). Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said he would discuss all aspects of the matter with the Legal Service on that day.

The PRESIDENT strongly recommended maintaining the initial ratification deadline for an agreement which had been concluded after such difficult, lengthy negotiations. She urged Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to do everything in his power to that end. Extending the deadline by a few weeks would come at a political cost. The United Kingdom would immediately complain that bureaucracy was to blame.

During the brief discussion which ensued, Commission Members raised the following points:

- regarding relations with **Turkey**, a call to use the current easing of tension to intensify and move forward discussions on migration management issues and the review of the 2016 EU-Turkey Joint Statement, possibly exploring new avenues in terms of target refugee populations, migratory routes and funding channels; similarly, a call for increased security cooperation with Turkey; the impact that the new US presidency could have on Turkey's geopolitical attitude and ambitions;
- regarding **Ethiopia**, the situation in the Tigray region was very serious indeed, with murder, rape and looting widespread. This was taking place far from the media spotlight, and around 4.5 million people were facing famine; condemnation of the obstacles placed in the way of humanitarian aid and a call for pressure to be brought to bear on the Ethiopian authorities to allow EU humanitarian aid full access to the populations most affected by the conflict; support for the Commission's decision to suspend EU budget support to Ethiopia; the desirability of increased support for Sudan, which had been weakened by this conflict;
- on **climate and environmental diplomacy**, Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr John KERRY, the new US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, had recently been in touch; the return of the United States to the global fight against climate change was welcome; its willingness to cooperate

with the EU in this area was a positive development; in the run-up to COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021, three key questions had to be addressed, namely (i) how to meet the demands of developing countries, notably in terms of mitigation measures, and fulfil the promises made, (ii) the shape of relations with China, and (iii) how to protect biodiversity; a suggestion to take advantage of current momentum to protect the oceans; the desirability of finalising the trade agreement with Mercosur, which would mean clarifying whether it complied with the EU's sustainable development and climate protection objectives;

- As regards relations with the **United Kingdom**, the signal sent by the UK authorities when they granted financial services equivalence to the European Economic Area rather than the European Union.

The PRESIDENT wound up the discussion by noting that the EU's climate neutrality strategy had given rise, in less than a year, to a global race for leadership in this area. She welcomed this development and the new US administration's commitment to tackling climate change.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.2. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

The PRESIDENT reported on the latest developments concerning the epidemiological situation and the conduct of the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 in the Union.

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The Commission's other discussions on certain agenda items are recorded in the special minutes.

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The meeting closed at 11.16.