



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2366 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 3 March 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2366th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Tuesday 9 February 2021

(afternoon)

PV(2021) 2366 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Tuesday 9 February 2021 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.04 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 1 to 9
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	

Attended by videoconference:

Mr LENARČIČ

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	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Mr FLOSDORFF	Executive Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr HAUGAARD	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 8
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8 to 11
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
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) 2366/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2366/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) 2366)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 8 and Tuesday 9 February 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2362ND, 2363RD, 2364TH AND 2365TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (14, 19 AND 27 JANUARY, AND 3 FEBRUARY 2021)

(PV(2021) 2362)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2362nd meeting, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2363rd, 2364th and 2365th meetings until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 61)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 5 February 2021 (RCC(2021) 61).

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)

- Common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument (Regulation) – NOVAKOV & KREHL report – 2018/0196 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 34/2.

- Public sector loan facility under the Just Transition Mechanism (Regulation) – HAHN & VAN OVERTVELDT report – 2020/0100 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 35/2.

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

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 33.

- Exchange, assistance and training programme for the protection of the euro against counterfeiting for the period 2021-2027 (Pericles IV Programme) (Regulation) – DALY report – 2018/0194 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 27.

ii) 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework – Council dossiers

(point 1.1.3 of the IRG record)

- Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 609/2014 of 26 May 2014 on the methods and procedure for making available the traditional, VAT and GNI-based own resources and on the measures to meet cash requirements (recast)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 38.

4.2. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

iii) 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) 39/2.

- Conditions for accessing the other EU information systems and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 and Regulation (EU) yyyy/xxx [ECRIS-TCN] (Regulation) – LENAERS Report – 2019/0001 (COD) / Conditions for accessing other EU information systems for ETIAS purposes and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1240, Regulation (EC) No 767/2008, Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 and Regulation (EU) 2018/1861 (Regulation) – LENAERS report – 2019/0002 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 40.

iv) European Parliament dossiers – February 2021 part-session

(point 3.2 of the IRG record)

Ordinary legislative procedure – First reading

- Specific and temporary measures in view of the COVID-19 outbreak concerning the renewal or extension of certain certificates, licences and authorisations and the postponement of certain periodic checks and periodic training in certain areas of transport legislation, for reference periods subsequent to those referred to in Regulation (EU) 2020/698 (Regulation) – 2021/0012 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2021) 73.

v) Council dossiers

(point 3.3 of the IRG record)

- Respect for private life and protection of personal data in electronic communications and repeal of Directive 2002/58/EC (Regulation) SIPPEL report – 2017/0003 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 36/2.

- Amendment of Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of income tax information by certain undertakings and branches (Directive) – BAYET & REGNER report – 2016/0107 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 41.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

vi) Non-legislative dossiers – Preparation for the February 2021 part-session

(point 5.1.1 of the IRG record)

- Oral question O-000006/2021 – European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2021) 45/2.

- Oral question O-000004/2021 – Safety of nuclear power plant in Ostrovets (Belarus)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2021) 68.

- Oral question O-000074/2020 – The impact of COVID-19 on young people and on sport

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2021) 82/2.

4.4. OTHER BUSINESS

- vii) Conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other part, and of the Agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning security procedures for exchanging and protecting classified information (Council Decision) – 2020/0382 (NLE)**

The Commission approved the line set out in SI(2021) 29/3.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 14 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 14/2 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference on Thursday 4 February 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

SEC(2021) 60 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 1 and 5 February 2021.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

SEC(2021) 61 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 1 and 5 February 2021.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

SEC(2021) 62 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 1 and 5 February 2021 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2021) 63 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 8 and 12 February 2021 and of the finalisation written procedures initiated following the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet on Monday 8 February 2021.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2021) 64 AND /2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2021) 15)

**7.1. DG FINANCIAL STABILITY, FINANCIAL SERVICES AND CAPITAL
MARKETS UNION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR BY THE
TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE
STAFF REGULATIONS**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms McGUINNESS, the Commission decided to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Ms Paulina DEJMEK HACK, currently Director of the ‘Strategy and Overall Coordination’ Directorate in the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, to the post of Director of the ‘General Affairs’ Directorate at DG Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union.

This decision would take effect on 16 February 2021.

**7.2. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION
CHART AND TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7
OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS**

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

- to create a temporary post of Principal Adviser, reporting to the Deputy Secretary-General responsible for Interinstitutional and External Relations; this post would be abolished upon the 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 Richard SZOSTAK, an AD14 official and currently Adviser for Digitalisation - Smart mobility at DG Mobility and Transport;
- that Mr Richard SZOSTAK would temporarily occupy the post of Director of the ‘Service for the EU-UK Agreements’ (SG.UKS) until the Director was appointed and took up his or her duties.

These decisions would take effect on 1 March 2021.

7.3. 2021 RISK MANAGEMENT EXERCISE

(SEC(2021) 46 AND /2)

Mr HAHN wished to draw the College’s attention to the information note on the annual risk management exercise for 2021 (SEC(2021) 46).

He pointed out that this risk identification and assessment process was an essential management activity of the Commission and formed part of its governance arrangements. Thus, each year its Directorates-General and services were asked to identify the risks that might affect the achievement of their objectives, and to ensure that the requisite mitigation measures were in place. All the risks considered critical were notified to the Secretariat-General and DG Budget and were then examined with the Member of the Commission responsible.

He mentioned the six critical risks identified for this year, namely (i) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of budgetary policies and performance, (ii) the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union and the risks of disruption due to the expiry of the transition period, (iii) IT security, (iv) the physical security of Commission staff and assets, (v) possible delays in implementing the Multiannual Financial Framework, and (vi) data protection.

He concluded by pointing out that risk management was a continuous process, of which the Members of the Commission needed to be aware, and that updates would take place over the year.

The Commission took note of this information and of the note in SEC(2021) 46/2.

8. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – RENEWED PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – A NEW AGENDA FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN
(JOIN(2021) 2 TO /4; SWD(2021) 23 TO /4; RCC(2021) 63)

The PRESIDENT opened the College discussion on the Communication ‘Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new agenda for the Mediterranean’. This was the last of a trio of measures, which also comprised the new strategy on the Eastern Partnership, adopted by the Commission in March 2020, and the new strategy on the EU’s relations with the Western Balkans, presented in October of the same year. The initiative was aimed at revitalising the EU’s partnership with its Southern Neighbourhood.

She clarified that the Staff Working Document annexed to the Communication in no way prejudged the outcome of the ongoing interinstitutional negotiations on the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

Mr BORRELL pointed out that 25 years after the Barcelona Declaration and 10 years after the Arab Spring, the challenges facing the Southern Mediterranean countries remained considerable. In particular, the economic and social situation in the Southern Neighbourhood had deteriorated in many respects and it was in the EU’s interest to help its partners meet these challenges. It was therefore particularly important for the proposed strategy to provide hope and offer a positive vision for

the future, focusing on the green and digital transformation of the countries in the region.

This new agenda for the Mediterranean was the result of successive discussions held in 2020 by EU foreign ministers and leaders, leading to the European Council's conclusions in December. More broadly, the EU had also consulted each of its southern partners to make this offer of a renewed partnership the culmination of a joint effort designed to benefit both parties.

Under the new EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, up to EUR 7 billion could be allocated for the period 2021 to 2027 to implement the new strategy, mobilising up to EUR 30 billion in private and public investment in the Southern Neighbourhood over the next decade.

Above all, the EU was determined to work together with its southern partners on a new agenda that would focus on people, especially youth, and help them realise their hopes for the future, exercise their rights and build a peaceful, secure, more democratic, greener, prosperous and inclusive Southern Neighbourhood.

Furthermore, this new partnership remained based on the universal values of fundamental rights guaranteed by the rule of law, which were essential for the implementation of shared management of migration flows, as provided for in the European Pact on Migration and Asylum. Hence the importance in his view of a coherent link between the intergovernmental method and the Community method in the EU's external policy framework.

Mr BORRELL ended his presentation by noting that the wealth gap and the demographic gap between the EU and its partners in the Southern Neighbourhood had steadily increased in recent years. It was therefore particularly important for the EU to be able to provide financial support to the countries in the region in order to implement the numerous actions proposed under this new Mediterranean programme.

Mr VÁRHELYI noted that the EU remained the Southern Neighbourhood's leading economic and political partner, but that in order to perpetuate this privileged relationship, the EU needed to offer more tailored support to the countries concerned. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, which had hit those same countries hard, had done much to alter the situation, justifying a reshaping of the EU's strategy towards them.

For example, it would be appropriate in particular to focus on two main concerns common to both sides of the Mediterranean, namely economic recovery and security. The suggested approach was based on the priorities and challenges shared by all partners, the outcome of regular consultations and a detailed analysis of the realities on the ground.

In terms of economic recovery, the region today was experiencing great instability. In particular, its reliance on tourism had been highlighted by the pandemic, resulting in a significant fall in Gross Domestic Product. He therefore called for a diversification of the economies of the countries concerned through a strategy of long-term economic modernisation and a green and digital transformation that would also strengthen their resilience.

Security issues relating to terrorism, the fight against trafficking in human beings and organised crime offered an opportunity for positive and constructive cooperation in order to bring about real change on the ground, in the common interest. On migrant smuggling, for example, the EU's southern partners were committed to concrete actions supported by and in cooperation with the EU.

In general, it was also necessary to respond to the needs of youth in the Southern Neighbourhood, who represented a significant proportion of those countries' populations, and to offer them prospects for the future, starting with education, training and employment opportunities.

The new Mediterranean programme therefore mobilised all EU instruments and proposed that the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood countries join forces in five

main areas.

The first involved human development, good governance and the rule of law, and consisted in renewing the shared commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and responsible governance.

The second focused on resilience, prosperity and the digital transition, and aimed to foster resilient, inclusive, sustainable and connected economies that created opportunities for all, especially women and young people.

The third related to peace and security, and aimed to provide support to the Southern Neighbourhood countries to address the challenges they faced in these areas and to seek a resolution of ongoing conflicts.

The fourth encompassed migration and mobility, and provided for a joint effort to combat forced displacement and irregular migration.

Lastly, the fifth focused on the green transition, in particular climate resilience, energy policy and environmental protection, in order to take advantage of low carbon intensity over time, protect the region's natural resources and contribute to green growth.

The renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood would be supported by a specific economic investment plan, through flagship initiatives to strengthen the resilience of the southern neighbours, build prosperity and boost trade and investment to increase competitiveness and inclusive growth. Respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law were an integral part of the partnership with a view to strengthening citizens' trust in institutions.

In conclusion, the new programme for the Mediterranean took full account of the specific characteristics of each country in the Southern Neighbourhood, in all their political, economic and social diversity. Europe was thus demonstrating its desire to contribute to a long-term vision for prosperity and stability in the region, especially in the context of economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

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

- the case for and merits of a new ambitious and innovative partnership to revive and strengthen strategic cooperation between the EU and its partners in the Southern Neighbourhood, at a time when the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched at the Barcelona Conference in 1995 was losing momentum;
- recognition of the positive tone in the Communication and the right balance it struck between vision and pragmatism, and support for the intention to establish a stronger, open and mutually beneficial partnership for both parties, which faced common issues;
- the importance of the proposed multi-dimensional approach, based on close dialogue with partners in the region to anticipate risks and seize opportunities, thereby contributing to a long-term vision, using all the leverage available to the EU;
- the fact that the partners in the Southern Neighbourhood were now ready to work with the EU in the fight against illegal migration and smuggling, in the mutually understood interest of all parties;
- the importance of continuing, through the renewed partnership, to promote good governance and the rule of law, the EU's 'hallmark', while keeping the EU firmly rooted in the complex geopolitical game being played out in the region;
- the key role of youth in the region; hence the importance of creating jobs and economic opportunities for young people in the Southern Neighbourhood, who were disillusioned owing to the lack of prospects matching their often advanced qualifications;
- the need to take into account that the countries in the region were fearful of losing their young talent to Europe;

- hence the need to redesign training to create different job opportunities;
- the powerful influence the EU could exert, especially by spreading its values to a large proportion of the region’s youth that aspired to them;
- the pressing need to prevent its pool of young talent from drifting into radicalisation out of disappointment or being tempted by it;
- hence the planned commitment to education, which was seen as very promising, especially since new technologies would offer fresh opportunities;
- similarly, the call not to neglect the cultural dimension of the future partnership;
- a reference to the green and digital transitions as a common thread to be used to galvanise the partnership for the benefit of all;
- in this regard, a reminder of the Southern Neighbourhood’s inclination towards climate, energy and environmental issues and the impact that the EU’s greenhouse gas emission reduction strategy would necessarily have on the volume of exports of certain natural resources from the region to Europe;
- hence the call to make this shift into a virtuous circle, where the Southern Neighbourhood countries would develop their own clean energy capacities thanks to their favourable climate, helping them to create green jobs and enabling them to export clean energy, which could only boost stability in the region;
- a reminder of the platform to be set up at the meeting on 27 April in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean to support job creation in the clean energy sector and reaffirm the EU’s commitment in this area;
- the importance of also strengthening industrial cooperation with the countries in the region in the field of green energy, taking advantage of their undeniable expertise, particularly in science;

- the case for increasing digital cooperation with them to maximise the digital skills of highly qualified young people who only wished to find a job in this field, and to share European standards;
- however, a reminder of the diverse nature of the region and of the particular geopolitical challenge posed by Tunisia, together with Morocco the country geographically closest to the EU in the neighbourhood; encouragement for Commissioners to visit the region as soon as the health situation allowed;
- the usefulness of a smart link between this Joint Communication and the Communication also put before the Commission for approval that day to strengthen cooperation on return and readmission under the EU's migration policy, which was being overhauled;
- lastly, as regards the Commission's internal working methods, the importance of allowing enough time to draw up proposals as important as that day's, which were also duly incorporated into the planning of the institution's work.

The PRESIDENT thanked the Commissioners involved in drafting the Communication. While implementing the new vision for the partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU should also facilitate the supply of vaccines to the region.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Joint Communication in JOIN(2021) 2/4 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, and, for information, to the national parliaments, together with the Staff Working Document distributed as SWD(2021) 23/4, the contents of which were noted.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRESIDENT asked Mr BORRELL to report on his visit to Moscow on 4 and 5 February, before being heard by the European Parliament on this subject.

**10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL – ENHANCING COOPERATION ON RETURN AND READMISSION AS PART OF A FAIR, EFFECTIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE EU MIGRATION POLICY
(COM(2021) 56 AND /2; RCC(2021) 64)**

**11. REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL – ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF COOPERATION OF THIRD COUNTRIES ON READMISSIONS IN 2019
(COM(2021) 55 AND /2; RCC(2021) 64)**

The PRESIDENT opened the discussion on the Communication aimed at enhancing cooperation on returns and readmissions as part of a fair, effective and comprehensive EU migration policy and on the Report entitled ‘Assessment of the level of cooperation of third countries on readmissions in 2019’ which had been tabled for approval by the Commission and were to be formally adopted by finalisation written procedure on Wednesday 10 February at 10.00.

Mr SCHINAS noted that the Migration and Asylum Pact adopted in September 2020 focused on three areas, namely the external dimension, border management and solidarity. He explained that the proposal on the table concerned the first area and was aimed at enhancing the management of migration flows within the framework of the partnership agreements signed by the EU with 39 third countries. He pointed out that an effective system for returns and readmissions and for

sustainable reintegration constituted a central part of comprehensive, balanced, tailor-made and mutually beneficial migration partnerships with third countries.

The Communication assessed the general aspects of cooperation with partner countries and in and between Member States that might be improved, while the Report looked into compliance by the third countries concerned with the EU's readmissions policy.

In addition to data on return operations and the number of irregular arrivals, he stressed that the Report examined certain common challenges in cooperation on readmissions, such as the obstacles to identifying people, delayed issuing of travel documents, non-compliance with stipulated deadlines and refusals to accept charter flights.

Mr SCHINAS said that once the Justice and Home Affairs Council had debated the matter, the Commissioners could decide on specific measures to adopt on returns and readmissions, taking account of the compliance rates of Member States and partner third countries.

He concluded by emphasising the fact that the effective instrument available to the EU to enhance the return and readmission situation had been designed with a view to being beneficial to both parties in the migration partnerships.

Ms JOHANSSON pointed out that with that day's Communication, the Commission's aim was not to propose a more restrictive visa policy, but to improve the results posted by the 39 partner countries in terms of readmitting their nationals.

In order to draft this first annual report under the revised Visa Code which had come into force exactly one year ago, the Commission had worked in close cooperation with the Member States, which had shared their data with it. For this reason, she drew attention to the confidential nature of the report.

There was a considerable difference in the results from one partner country to another and the levels of cooperation varied according to the Member State. In

addition, the quality of cooperation did not always correspond to the historical ties existing between certain third countries and certain Member States.

Overall, the rate of returns posted by Member States was around 30% and they did not systematically issue return decisions. The countries of origin, meanwhile, might take several months to respond to these decisions. It was therefore possible to make significant improvements on both sides.

To conclude, she pointed out that the lack of or non-recognition of travel documents and absconding by people issued with return decisions constituted the most frequent obstacles to returns.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr SCHINAS and Ms JOHANSSON for their work.

Following these presentations, the Commission, on a proposal by the PRESIDENT, confirmed the adoption of the Communication and the Report in COM(2021) 56/2 and COM(2021) 55/2, respectively, by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Wednesday 10 February 2021 (PE/2021/771 and PE/2021/786).

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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 14.44.