



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2377 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Strasbourg, 8 June 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2377th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 12 May 2021

(morning)

PV(2021) 2377 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 12 May 2021 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.13 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	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
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 SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	

Absent:

Ms ŠUIČA	Vice-President
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President

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Ms GABRIEL	Member
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission:

Mr SCICLUNA	Chef de cabinet to Ms ŠUICA	
Ms SPANOU	Chef de cabinet to Mr SCHINAS	
Ms KIRÁLY	Chef de cabinet to Ms GABRIEL	
Mr KRISTÓFFY	Chef de cabinet to Mr VÁRHELYI	
Mr LAHTI	Chef de cabinet to Ms URPILAINEN	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr GRASSI	Chef de cabinet to Ms SIMSON	

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	
Ms SCHULTZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr SMITH	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8 and 9

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, assisted by Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC, Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General.

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2021) 2377/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2377/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) 2377)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 10 May 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2373RD, 2374TH, 2375TH AND 2376TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (14, 21/22 AND 27 APRIL, AND 5 MAY 2021)

(PV(2021) 2373; PV(2021) 2373, 2ND PART)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2373rd meeting, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2374th, 2375th and 2376th meetings until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2021) 107)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 7 May 2021 (RCC(2021) 107).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1367/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 September 2006 on the application of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters to Community institutions and bodies (Regulation) – DOLESCHAL report – 2020/0289 (COD)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 305/3.

- **Amendment of Decision 2008/376/EC on the adoption of the Research Programme of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel and on the multiannual technical guidelines for this programme (Council Decision) – BUŞOI report – 2020/0141 (NLE)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 309/2.

- **Temporary derogation from certain provisions of Directive 2002/58/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the use of technologies by number-independent interpersonal communications service providers for the processing of personal and other data for the purpose of combatting child sexual abuse online (Regulation) – SIPPEL report – 2020/0259 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2021) 131/2.

- **Importance of civil justice for the economic recovery post COVID-19 Oral Question – O-000016/2021**

Line set out in SP(2021) 307/2.

- **Resolutions of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Challenges of sport events’ organisers in the digital environment – DZHAMBAZKI report – 2020/2073 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 308.

The Commission approved the line set out for the following point, for transmission to the Committee of the Regions:

- **Follow-up to opinions of the Committee of the Regions – Plenary session of February 2021**

Line set out in SR(2021) 14/3.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – Creative Europe programme (2021 to 2027) and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 (Regulation) – SMERIGLIO report – 2018/0190 (COD)**

Information in SP(2021) 299, further to Communication COM(2021) 184, which the Commission had already approved on 16 April 2021.

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – ‘Erasmus+’, the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (Regulation) – ZVER report – 2018/0191 (COD)**

Information in SP(2021) 300, further to Communication COM(2021) 187, which the Commission had already approved on 16 April 2021.

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – European Solidarity Corps programme and repeal of [European Solidarity Corps Regulation] and**

Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 (Regulation) – ŠOJDROVÁ report – 2018/0230 (COD)

Information in SP(2021) 302, further to Communication COM(2021) 210, which the Commission had already approved on 21 April 2021.

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – ‘Fiscalis’ programme for cooperation in the field of taxation – GIEGOLD report – 2018/0233 (COD)**

Information in SP(2021) 303, further to Communication COM(2021) 241, which the Commission had already approved on 11 May 2021.

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – 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)**

Information in SP(2021) 298, further to Communication COM(2021) 179, which the Commission had already approved on 16 April 2021.

- **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – Just Transition Fund (Regulation) – KEFALOGIANNIS report – 2020/0006 (COD)**

Information in SP(2021) 318, further to note SI(2020) 470, which the Commission had already approved on 15 December 2020.

- **European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and Network of National Coordination Centres – ANDRESEN report – 2018/0328 (COD)**

Information in SP(2021) 317, further to Communication COM(2021) 225, which the Commission had already approved on 3 May 2021.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2021) 26)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 26 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference on Wednesday 5 May 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

**6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED
(SEC(2021) 177 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 3 and 7 May 2021.

**6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2021) 178 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 3 and 7 May 2021.

**6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2021) 179 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 3 and 7 May 2021 archived in Decide.

**6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2021) 180 AND /2)**

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 10 and 12 May 2021.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2021) 181 AND /2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2021) 46 AND /2)

**7.1. DG COMPETITION – APPOINTMENT OF AD15/16 DEPUTY
DIRECTOR-GENERAL**
(PERS(2021) 47 TO /3)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Deputy Director-General in charge of mergers in DG Competition (PERS(2021) 47).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 22 March and 23 April 2021 (PERS(2021) 47/2 and /3).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms VESTAGER, it then decided to appoint Mr Guillaume LORIOT to the post.

This decision would take effect on 16 May 2021.

**7.2. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF
AD14/15 DIRECTOR**
(PERS(2020) 94 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 of the 'Economies of the

Member States II' Directorate in DG Economic and Financial Affairs (PERS(2020) 94 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 9 and 15 April 2021 (PERS(2020) 94/3 and /4).

The Commission then examined the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr GENTILONI, it then decided to appoint Mr Luc THOLONIAT to the post.

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

**7.3. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – APPOINTMENT OF
AD14/15 DIRECTOR
(PERS(2020) 93 TO /4)**

The Commission had before it an application under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the 'InvestEU and Financial Institutions' Directorate in DG Economic and Financial Affairs (PERS(2020) 93 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 9 and 15 April 2021 (PERS(2020) 93/3 and /4).

The Commission proceeded to consider the applicant's qualifications for the post. It also considered his ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr GENTILONI, it then decided to appoint Mr Giorgio CHIARION CASONI to the post.

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

7.4. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – EXTENSION OF THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE TASK FORCE

The Commission took note of the information in point 3 of PERS(2021) 46 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to extend the mandate of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force (SG RECOVER) until 31 December 2023;
- to reassess the situation with regard to the Task Force by June 2023.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.5. DG DEFENCE INDUSTRY AND SPACE – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 187)

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of DG Defence Industry and Space set out in SEC(2021) 187.

These decisions would take effect on 16 June 2021.

7.6. DG EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 188)

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion set out in SEC(2021) 188.

These decisions would take effect on 1 July 2021.

7.7. EUROPEAN PERSONNEL SELECTION OFFICE – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 189)

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of the European Personnel Selection Office set out in SEC(2021) 189.

These decisions would take effect on 16 June 2021.

7.8. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 190)

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of DG Migration and Home Affairs set out in SEC(2021) 190.

Unless indicated otherwise, these decisions would take effect on 16 May 2021.

7.9. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 191)

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of the Internal Audit Service set out in SEC(2021) 191.

These decisions would take effect on 1 July 2021.

7.10. JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 192)

(12 May 2021)

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of the Joint Research Centre set out in SEC(2021) 192.

These decisions would take effect on 1 June 2021.

**7.11. DG NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENLARGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS –
AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 193)**

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations set out in SEC(2021) 193.

These decisions would take effect on 16 September 2021.

**7.12. DG REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY – AMENDMENT OF THE
ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 186; SEC(2021) 194)**

Having taken note of the information in SEC(2021) 186, the Commission adopted the new organisation chart of DG Regional and Urban Policy set out in SEC(2021) 194.

These decisions would take effect on 1 July 2021.

**8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS –
PATHWAY TO A HEALTHY PLANET FOR ALL – EU ACTION PLAN:
‘TOWARDS ZERO POLLUTION FOR AIR, WATER AND SOIL’
(COM(2021) 400 TO /3; SWD(2021) 140 AND /2; SWD(2021) 141 AND /2;
RCC(2021) 113)**

The PRESIDENT briefly introduced the College's discussion on the Communication on the EU action plan entitled 'Towards zero pollution for air, water and soil', submitted for approval that day. She noted that pollution was directly linked to the development of chronic diseases that were responsible for large numbers of deaths in the EU and stressed that pollution was a greater and longer-term threat to Europeans' health than the COVID-19 pandemic. It was therefore necessary to take decisive action to fight pollution, especially given its impact on health, the environment, biodiversity and global warming.

Mr TIMMERMANS said that the EU urgently needed to reduce air, water and soil pollution to become truly climate-neutral and prevent the imminent extinction of a million species. This was why the Commission was presenting its Zero Pollution Action Plan, which he considered a key component of the European Green Deal.

He observed that pollution was responsible for one in eight deaths in the EU, while various cancers and other cardiac and respiratory diseases related to pollution hit the most vulnerable members of our society the hardest. Moreover, pollution in the EU and elsewhere in the world was one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss, contributing to the extinction of certain species. If the EU did not deal with pollution now, the cost to future generations would be even greater.

He noted that everyone agreed it was better not to produce pollution at all; this was in fact the philosophy behind the action plan, the general aim of which was to reduce air, water and soil pollution to levels that did not harm health or natural ecosystems and that respected the planet's boundaries, all with a view to creating an environment free from toxic substances by 2050.

To make that happen, the action plan incorporated all the relevant aspects of EU policies, strategies and legislation and joined them together to achieve the aim of bringing pollution down to zero.

He observed that the quality of the air we breathed in Europe depended on the cars we drove, on how we farmed the land, and on the heating, power consumption,

insulation and ventilation in our homes. The quality of our sleep depended on the level of noise around us, and the fate of many species depended on how quickly we cut back pesticide use. In recognition of this, the action plan contained nine flagship initiatives to address all these factors.

Mr TIMMERMANS underlined the urgent need for these measures, noting that the more quickly they were adopted, the more chance Europe's people and the planet would have of living a healthy life.

He ended his presentation by thanking the staff of DG Environment for the passion they had put into preparing this crucial initiative.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS explained that the Zero Pollution Action Plan complemented existing European Green Deal policies; together, they addressed a global crisis whose main facets were climate change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable use of resources, and pollution.

With new policies having been adopted on the first three phenomena, the time had come to tackle pollution, given its tangible impact on Europeans' day-to-day lives and the added value of EU initiatives in this field.

The EU had a moral, social and environmental obligation to act and to build an environment with far lower pollution levels.

Moreover, there was a strong economic case for taking decisive action on pollution, since it was cheaper to avoid pollution than to remedy its effects. Each year, it cost five to ten times more to deal with atmospheric pollution in the EU than it would to improve air quality. Besides, the EU had thriving industrial and innovation capacity for delivering clean technologies and services within and outside the EU.

He explained that the Communication put forward a set of principles – which were also enshrined in the EU treaties – to achieve the aim of having an environment free from toxic substances by 2050. These principles were as follows: (i) pollution had to be prevented, (ii) pollution had to be reduced if it could not be eliminated entirely,

and (iii) the effects of pollution had to be rectified and compensation paid for pollution-related damage.

The five main targets proposed in the Communication were to reduce premature deaths caused by air pollution, cut noise pollution caused by transport, lessen the impact of pollution on biodiversity, decrease nutrient loss and the use of chemical pesticides, and reduce plastic waste and microplastics at sea.

The action plan set out a series of concrete initiatives to be rolled out by 2024. These relied on the EU's legislative framework, which had to be fully implemented and, where necessary, revised to remedy any shortcomings that had been identified.

The Communication aimed to involve stakeholders from the energy, transport, agricultural and industrial sectors and stakeholders from society – citizens, businesses, scientists, regions and towns and cities – in achieving zero pollution.

Moreover, best use would be made of all available tools, especially digital technologies, to develop and implement zero-pollution solutions on the ground. He mentioned applications for reporting environmental pollution to the authorities by means of geolocation, and wastewater monitoring systems that had been used to detect COVID-19 outbreaks.

In conclusion, Mr SINKEVIČIUS highlighted the links between the action plan under discussion and other recent Commission initiatives connected with the European Green Deal, such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Sustainable Mobility Strategy, the Renovation Wave Communication and the Beating Cancer Plan. He also stressed the plan's international dimension, noting that pollution knew no borders and that the EU had to take responsibility for pollution it may generate abroad too, while also offering its partners innovative solutions.

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

- there were strong causal links between pollution and environmental deterioration, on the one hand, and Europeans' health, on the other;
- respiratory disorders caused by pollution had recently been a major factor in the impact of COVID-19;
- it was crucial to avert the estimated 25% increase in pollution-related cancer by 2025, as it could still be prevented;
- the transport sector had a key role in fighting pollution, especially in cities and urban areas, and the EU action plan on sustainable mobility had to be implemented swiftly;
- it was important to systematically launch infringement proceedings against Member States that failed to implement the EU's pollution reduction targets.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS said that the Commission would continue to monitor the application of EU environmental law, in particular by beginning infringement proceedings against any entities not applying it, be they cities or Member States. He said that towns, cities and municipalities could do a great deal at local level to mitigate pollution, especially noise pollution.

He wrapped up the discussion by stressing the importance of taking decisive action on pollution without leaving anyone behind and of prioritising solutions that benefit all Europeans.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr SINKEVIČIUS for their presentations on this matter, which was extremely important for the future of all Europeans.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2021) 400/3 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

documents distributed as SWD(2021) 140/2 and SWD(2021) 141/2, the contents of which were noted.

**9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON A NEW APPROACH FOR A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE EU – TRANSFORMING THE EU’S BLUE ECONOMY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
(COM(2021) 240 AND /2; RCC(2021) 114)**

Mr TIMMERMANS began by pointing out that the blue economy encompassed all industries and sectors related to the oceans, seas and coasts and constituted a very important part of the EU’s economy. Defining a coherent overall vision of what the EU had to do to promote a genuinely sustainable blue economy had called for considerable work. He therefore welcomed the remarkable result presented that day with the communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU entitled ‘Transforming the EU’s blue economy for a sustainable future’. He also noted that the communication was an important element of the European Green Deal and that the oceans, which supported the blue economy, made an essential contribution to the radical transformation that the EU had undertaken.

He stressed the important role of the oceans, which, in addition to their central contribution to climate control, supplied the world with food and medicines thanks to their rich biodiversity and were essential for sectors such as energy production, tourism, transport and trade. Furthermore, a large part of the EU’s population lived in coastal regions and the blue economy currently provided 4.5 million direct jobs in Europe.

However, the blue economy operated in a fragile ecosystem that was increasingly threatened by pollution, overfishing and other factors, many of which stemmed from

the sectors of the blue economy themselves. These sectors must therefore be supported, including through EU policies, in improving their environmental performance. It was also advisable to encourage and support many new innovative sectors of the blue economy to allow them to evolve and thrive alongside the traditional sectors. The innovative companies at the heart of the future blue economy – from renewable energies to green transport solutions and alternative food sources and biotechnology – would make a vital contribution to achieving the EU's objective of climate neutrality and the green transition.

Mr TIMMERMANS highlighted the change in direction suggested by the communication, which consisted in moving from 'blue growth' to 'a sustainable blue economy' by proposing a number of measures relating in particular to energy, the circular economy, marine products and ecosystem services. While not all the measures were new, the idea was now to incorporate them into a comprehensive and coherent plan to support a truly sustainable blue economy.

In conclusion, he noted that the implementation of a sustainable blue economy could not stop at Europe's borders and that the EU's expertise, environmental action and innovative business solutions should be promoted worldwide in order to create a level playing field.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS also noted the importance of the 'blue dimension' in the European Green Deal. He mentioned the essential role of seas and oceans in protecting the planet as they produced half of the world's oxygen and were one of the main natural carbon sinks.

The blue economy covered a wide range of interdependent sectors, both established and emerging. He added that millions of Europeans lived all year round in coastal regions, which were also important tourist destinations of prime importance, so that the blue economy as a whole represented a huge source of jobs and growth.

He justified the need for a new approach to a sustainable blue economy in the EU, firstly, by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and, secondly, by the

European Green Deal, both of which called for a transformation of the European economy, which applied to all sectors of the blue economy. He added that the seas and oceans were under severe stresses linked to climate change and environmental degradation, which jeopardised many blue economy activities that were themselves dependent on them.

He was convinced that the blue economy was an essential element of the equation that would enable the objectives of the European Green Deal to be achieved over time, and in particular the objective of greenhouse gas emission neutrality, and that it would form an integral part of the EU's green recovery. Moreover, many sectors of the blue economy had suffered and were still suffering badly from the pandemic. Reconciling economic recovery and environmental protection was therefore long overdue.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS presented the two main strands of the communication which, firstly, identified the desired transformations in the various sectors of the blue economy in order to guide public and private initiatives and, secondly, defined the guidelines according to which the Commission proposed to step up its efforts by mobilising all its policies and instruments.

He noted that sustainability was the central element of the envisaged strategy and was analysed from three different angles: first, the need to preserve marine natural capital, the very foundation of the blue economy; second, the need for a robust, shock-resistant economy that invested in innovation without depending on public subsidies or tax exemptions; and finally, the importance of creating not only income and jobs but also healthy food, medicines and a good quality of life.

He mentioned a number of concrete actions to be implemented. For example, with the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries, it was proposed to develop the high-quality seafood sector respecting strict environmental requirements, where the EU currently imported 65% of its consumption. Similarly, with regard to maritime transport, it was important to promote green ports which were hubs not only for

transport and distribution but also for energy, communication and industrial supply chains. The resilience of coastal tourism should also be strengthened by diversifying it and investing in eco-tourism. All those sectors were powerful drivers of growth and employment.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS stressed the importance of maritime spatial planning to preserve biodiversity and nature and he announced the future organisation of a ‘Blue Forum’ for all users of the seas and oceans to help resolve tensions, for example between fisheries and renewable energies, and to develop synergies. He also reported that there would be increased investment in skills through partnerships with maritime industries and vocational training institutes to help train a skilled workforce so that the many innovative blue economy companies did not face a shortage of skilled staff in the future. Furthermore, under the EU’s research framework programme ‘Horizon Europe’ a mission on oceans and waters would be prepared shortly to protect the oceans through science and innovation.

Finally, with regard to the question of financing, he mentioned the possibility of using the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, provided that the Member States’ national recovery and resilience plans and their national operational programmes between now and 2027 were geared towards sustainable development. He added that it would be necessary to mobilise private capital and ensure that the principles of sustainability were anchored in every new investment. He announced that, to encourage private, sustainable investment, it had been agreed to cooperate closely with the European Investment Bank. The Commission would also develop its BlueInvest action fund, which combined public money and private venture capital.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS concluded his presentation by stressing his desire to unite all the interested parties around the same vision and to see all blue economy actors respect the same principles in order to replace uncontrolled development with clean, climate-friendly and sustainable activities with a low impact on the marine environment.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr TIMMERMANS and Mr SINKEVIČIUS for their presentation and for the quality of the communication on a new blue economy policy in the European Union.

Following these presentations, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the communication in COM(2021) 240/2 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Monday 17 May 2021 (PE/2021/2958).

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORTS OF COMMISSION DEPARTMENTS FOR 2020

Mr HAHN drew the Members' attention to the Annual Activity Reports of Commission departments for 2020, which were a key component of the accountability chain within the institution.

The information contained in the reports constituted the basis on which the Commission took overall responsibility for the management of the EU budget and drew up its Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU budget, which this year would be presented on 8 June.

To enable the required political ownership of the departments' Annual Activity Reports, the 51 Directors-General, Heads of Service and other Directors of Executive Agencies who signed these documents in their capacity as authorising officers had to inform the Commissioners responsible of their content.

Mr HAHN emphasised the importance of these reports and recommended that Members pay the greatest attention to them and take the initiative to seek information from their departments regarding the various aspects of

EU budget management for which they were responsible.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.2. SPRING 2021 ECONOMIC FORECASTS

The PRESIDENT asked Mr GENTILONI to present the Spring Economic Forecasts, which would be made public that day.

Mr GENTILONI reported that on the whole, these latest forecasts were the most optimistic since the start of the health crisis, although the associated risks were high and would remain so as long as COVID-19 continued to overshadow the economy.

The EU would see growth of 4.2% in 2021 and 4.4% in 2022, and the euro area growth of 4.3% this year and 4.4% next year.

These heartening figures were explained by the positive effects of the recovery policies introduced around the world, but also by the unprecedented budgetary support measures which the EU and the Member States had taken over the course of the past year. They also took into account the grants which the EU was preparing to make to the Member States under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which would contribute 1.2% to the EU's growth in 2021 and 2022.

The budgetary support measures taken by the Member States in 2020 would continue in 2021; this would result in significant levels of national debt and budget deficit. The aggregate public deficit, which reached 7.2% of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, was expected to increase to 8% in 2021 before falling to 3.8% in 2022, both in the EU and in the euro area. The ratio of public debt to GDP in the EU was expected to reach a peak of 94% this year, before falling slightly to 93% in 2022; the same trend was expected in the euro area, with an increase to 102% this year and a drop back to 101% in 2022. In other words, the increase in the deficits and debt levels should

peak in 2021 before beginning to diminish, and the reduction in debt was expected to be slower than the reduction in budget deficits.

Mr GENTILONI also drew the meeting's attention to inflation, which had gone up considerably at the start of the year. For the EU as a whole, inflation would be 1.9% in 2021 and 1.5% in 2022, whereas for the euro area the forecasts were for 1.7% in 2021 and 1.3% in 2022. Economists were considering whether this phenomenon was due in part to the United States' set of recovery measures. In any event, the matter had to be monitored closely, even if the downwards trend was confirmed.

Although Mr GENTILONI was happy to be able to convey an optimistic message that day, he reminded the meeting of the title of the Spring Economic Forecasts, which summarised the mood – let's roll up our sleeves. Even if the effects of the European recovery plan began to be felt that year and the next, the fact remained that there was much still to be done to make the most of this historic opportunity, beginning with maintaining the pace of vaccinations within the EU. The growth forecasts were still lower than the trends recorded prior to the pandemic, and the real challenge would be to ensure that the approximately 4% growth expected in 2021 and 2022 – of which the EU could be proud – was not simply a rebound, but a trend that continued in the longer term.

In any case, the growth and recovery in activity that emerged from the Spring Economic Forecasts could not have been envisaged without the support measures taken from March 2020 onwards and the decisions that followed, such as those concerning State aid and short-time working.

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

- the welcome message of renewed optimism which would be conveyed that day to the general public and the business world with the

announcement of the first signs of an exit from the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, signalling to individuals that they would regain their freedoms, and enabling businesses to organise themselves;

- the evidence from the growth forecasts for 2021 and 2022 that the measures taken in 2020 at EU level to soften the impact of the crisis had borne fruit, including the reprogramming of structural funds, which had enabled around EUR 22 billion to be injected into support for regions earlier than scheduled;
- confirmation of the attention that must be paid to inflation, the increase in which was due in particular to the current shortage of certain supply-chain components, such as semi-conductors;
- the observation that the growth forecasts would not have the same impact depending on the ecosystems, Member States, regions and generations concerned;
- the social ramifications of these differences, particularly in terms of the rate of unemployment, and a reminder of the very difficult situation of young people, who were particularly affected by the crisis, and of some economic sectors where bankruptcy risks were high;
- the need to ensure that sustainable growth remained at the heart of the efforts undertaken in the field of economic policy in the next two years;
- the Member States' level of public debt, which was a matter of concern that would have to be addressed in due course;
- nevertheless, a call not to end the support measures for the Member States too rapidly, and not to revert to austerity policies as had been the case in the past;
- the need to examine, in close cooperation with the Member States, ways

of softening the impact of the forthcoming removal of the scheme for authorising State aid put in place during the pandemic, seeking the appropriate moment to start removal whilst avoiding an abrupt termination;

- a recommendation to monitor closely the situation regarding non-performing loans held by banks.

Mr GENTILONI returned to the issue of unemployment, explaining that according to the forecasts the overall rate for the EU was likely to be 7% in 2022, as opposed to 6.7% in 2019. Beyond this slight increase, it was the structure of the labour market that posed a problem, since unemployment disproportionately affected women, unskilled workers and young people. The social aspect of the crisis should therefore be the focus of attention in the months to come.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr GENTILONI, who would make the Spring Economic Forecasts public within a few minutes.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL briefed the College on the latest developments in external relations.

First he reported on the most recent meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 May, which had been devoted mainly to the Western Balkans and transatlantic cooperation in the fight against climate change.

He then briefly mentioned the ongoing discussions on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme (JCPoA), the current political deadlock in Lebanon, the preparation of a new set of EU sanctions against the leaders of Belarus, and finally the extremely tense

situation in Israel.

The Commission took note of this information.

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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 10.52.