EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2389 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 13 October 2021

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2389th meeting of the Commission

held in Strasbourg

(Louise Weiss building)

on Tuesday 14 September 2021

(afternoon)

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PV(2021) 2389 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Tuesday 14 September 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
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 VĂLEAN	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	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr VANDENBERGHE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8 to 10
Mr WHELAN	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 13
Mr ANDRESEN GUIMARÃES	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 11
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 14
Ms SCHULTZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	
Mr VALERO	Secretariat-General	

Secretary: Ms JUHANSONE, Secretary-General, assisted by Ms COLLOMP, Senior Expert.

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2021) 2389/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2389/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) 2389)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 13 September 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2386TH, 2387TH AND 2388TH MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (14 AND 20 JULY, AND 8 SEPTEMBER 2021)

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2386th, 2387th and 2388th meetings for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2021) 172)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 10 September 2021 (RCC(2021) 172).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

– **Establishment of the Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe (Council Regulation) – CARVALHO report – 2021/0048 (NLE)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 566/2.

– **Objection pursuant to Article 111(3) of Parliament's Rules of Procedure – Commission Delegated Regulation …/... of 26 May 2021 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2019/6 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing the criteria for the designation of antimicrobials to be reserved for the treatment of certain infections in humans – C(2021) 3552 – 2021/2718 (DEA)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 582/2.

– **Oral question O-000044/2021 – Reversing the negative social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Line set out in SP(2021) 586.

– **Oral question O-000057/2021 – United States sanctions and the rule of law**

Line set out in SP(2021) 588/2.

– **Oral question O-000046/2021 – EU transparency in the development, purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines**

Line set out in SP(2021) 589.

– **Oral Question O-000059/2021 – Natural disasters during the summer 2021**

Line set out in SP(2021) 590/2.

– **Resolutions of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – BJÖRK & RIBA I GINER report – 2021/2035 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 587.

The Commission took note of the following points:

– **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA III) (Regulation) – ZOVKO & PICULA report – 2018/0247 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2021) 585, further to note COM(2021) 575, which the Commission had already approved on 10 September 2021.

– **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 as regards official controls on animals and products of animal origin exported from third countries to the Union to ensure compliance with the prohibition of certain uses of antimicrobials (Regulation) – CANFIN report – 2021/0055 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2021) 591, further to note SI(2021) 260, which the Commission had already approved on 8 September 2021.

– **Single Market Enforcement Taskforce (SMET) Report 2020-2021**

Information set out in SI(2021) 261.

The Commission approved the lines set out for the following points, for transmission to Parliament:

– **Commission replies to non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its June I 2021 part-session (Part III)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 570/2.

– **Commission replies to non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its June II 2021 part-session (last part)**

Line set out in SP(2021) 581.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 38)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 38 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held by videoconference on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2021) 300 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 6 and 10 September 2021.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2021) 301 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 6 and 11 September 2021.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2021) 302 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 6 and 10 September 2021 archived in D*e*cide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2021) 303 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 13 and 17 September 2021 and of the finalisation written procedures.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2021) 304)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (PERS(2021) 78)

Mr HAHN presented to the College the administrative and budgetary decisions relating to the setting-up of the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) (see items 8 to 10 of these minutes).

He gave a brief explanation of the decisions. It involved (i) setting up a new Commission department, (ii) approving the internal publication of the vacancy notices for the posts of Head of HERA (at director-general level) and Deputy Head (at director level), (iii) creating four head of unit posts, (iv) transferring on 1 October 2021 to the new entity the activities, posts and resources of the 'Health Emergency Response and Vaccines' unit in DG Health and Food Safety, (v) allocating to HERA 20 full-time equivalents from that DG, 18 of which immediately, (vi) approving the conditions of the operational support to be provided by DG Health and Food Safety to the new entity in terms of administration, IT, human resources, internal control, planning and programming, and budget, and finally (vii) approving the organisation chart of the future European Health

Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, and also the resulting amendment of DG Health and Food Security's organisation chart.

He stated that HERA's staff would eventually consist of around 120 people under normal operating conditions, which would be temporarily boosted by deploying extra staff in the event of an emergency being declared, according to arrangements which he specified.

Furthermore, the Deputy Director-General of DG Health and Food Safety in charge of Directorates B and C, Mr Pierre DELSAUX, would be appointed Acting Head of HERA from 1 October 2021 under Article 27(1) of the Commission's Rules of Procedure. He would perform these duties until the Head of HERA was appointed and took up his/her duties.

7.1. EUROPEAN HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE AUTHORITY (HERA) – ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ARRANGEMENTS
(PERS(2021) 79; PERS(2021) 80; SEC(2021) 326)

7.2. DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY – AMENDMENT OF ORGANISATION CHART
(SEC(2021) 327)

Following this presentation, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, the Commission confirmed that the administrative and budgetary matters in PERS(2021) 79, PERS(2021) 80, SEC(2021) 326 and SEC(2021) 327 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 16 September 2021 (SEC(2021) 328 – PE/2021/6964).

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – INTRODUCING HERA, THE EUROPEAN HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE AUTHORITY, THE NEXT STEP TOWARDS COMPLETING THE EUROPEAN HEALTH UNION
(COM(2021) 576 TO /4; RCC(2021) 176)

9. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL REGULATION ON A FRAMEWORK OF MEASURES FOR ENSURING THE SUPPLY OF CRISIS-RELEVANT MEDICAL COUNTERMEASURES IN THE EVENT OF A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY AT UNION LEVEL
(COM(2021) 577 TO /4; RCC(2021) 176)

10. COMMISSION DECISION ESTABLISHING THE HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE AUTHORITY
(C(2021) 6712 TO /4; RCC(2021) 176)

The PRESIDENT introduced the presentation of a set of acts submitted to the College for approval with a view to creating a new European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), which represented a further step towards completing the European Health Union.

She stressed the importance of this Commission Decision, which would make it possible to anticipate any new health crises and coordinate crisis response. The EU, like the rest of the world, was not sufficiently prepared when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Thus, the aim now was to fill a gap and ensure that the new Authority, which was modelled on its American equivalent, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), could begin work without delay.

Mr SCHINAS said that, just a few months ago, the EU had been criticised for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, but that it now had one of the highest

vaccination rates in the world. He saw this as a major European success story that was worth emphasising and that was due in part to the role of the two existing EU agencies, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA). However, the EU was still lacking a prevention and response tool.

For that reason, the Commission was that day proposing to create HERA, not as an EU agency, but as a Commission service, so that it could begin operating very rapidly.

The Authority's activities would be organised into two areas; first, preparing the EU for any future health emergencies and, second, putting a response strategy in place in the event of a crisis.

Mr SCHINAS welcomed the fact that HERA would have a budget of EUR 6 billion under the current 2022-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and that it was laying the groundwork for capacity that was likely to develop further.

Ms KYRIAKIDES stressed that one year earlier, at the worst point of the pandemic, the PRESIDENT had announced the creation of a European BARDA. That commitment was becoming reality today, at a time when the situation across the EU had improved considerably, thanks to an historic effort by the EU and the Member States to purchase vaccines, administer them thus far to 70% of Europeans, strengthen industrial supply chains and launch EU COVID-19 certificates.

In her view, the most important lesson to be learnt from the current crisis, which was not yet over, was that the EU needed to be better prepared and to anticipate not only future pandemics but also other health threats, such as bioterrorism. The EU needed a structured mechanism for crisis response, and this was the idea behind HERA.

Ms KYRIAKIDES said that HERA would start operating on 16 September as a structure within the Commission and was expected to be fully operational from the beginning of 2022.

She explained that HERA had two roles: health emergency preparedness and response.

During the preparedness phase, HERA would anticipate future threats and direct investment and guide action to be taken to prepare for a health emergency. For example, it would issue alerts as soon as dangerous viruses were detected. It would also promote research and innovation in order to develop safe and affordable vaccines and therapeutics. Furthermore, HERA would ensure that critical manufacturing sites for medical countermeasures were available and stockpiles built up thanks to clearly defined plans for production and deployment.

During the crisis-management phase, HERA would shift into a different operational mode. It would be given powers to make swift decisions and mobilise additional funds, industrial tools and research instruments that would otherwise not be available.

Ms KYRIAKIDES saw HERA as a resource shared between the EU and the Member States owing to the close cooperation between the Commission and the national level. That was why its governance model gave the Member States a voice in the steering process, through the HERA Board during the preparedness phase and through the Crisis Board during the emergency management phase.

HERA would be assisted by a Coordination Committee composed of Members of the Commission in order to ensure a consistent approach internally.

Lastly, she referred to HERA’s budget allocation of EUR 6 billion for the next six years, emphasising that this amount would rise to EUR 30 billion if investments in health security, preparedness and crisis response under other EU programmes were

taken into account, increasing even further if Member State and private-sector investments were included.

By way of conclusion, Ms KYRIAKIDES said that HERA would also reach out to the EU's international partners and would be a central pillar of the European Health Union that was currently being built.

Mr BRETON presented the significant industrial component that would underpin HERA, based on the lessons learnt from the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When faced with a shortage of masks and ventilators in spring 2020, or when required to ramp up industrial production of vaccines in record time, the EU had succeeded in improving the quality, speed and output of Europe's industry and had turned its scientific and technological excellence into industrial leadership. In his view, this success was due not only to the determination of the EU institutions as a whole, but also to the agility and adaptability of European industry.

However, he acknowledged that the crisis had shown the EU that its value chains were much more fragile than it had realised. It was therefore crucial to be better prepared for the future, as further crises were inevitable.

Mr BRETON said that one lesson learnt from the past 18 months was that it was impossible to guarantee public health for European citizens without reducing the EU's dependence on third countries. Another lesson was that the EU needed to engage in more determined talks with industry and have the means to access the information needed to manage supply chains in the event of a crisis. It was therefore necessary for the EU to have robust and flexible industrial production capacity for vaccines, medicines and protective equipment so that it could produce them on a large scale independently if suddenly required to do so in a crisis.

To do so, he felt that it was first necessary to prepare. HERA would therefore map and analyse production capacities, identify bottlenecks and dependencies within

European supply chains and work with industry to address these issues. A Joint Industrial Cooperation Forum would therefore be set up. HERA would also help to bring about new industrial partnerships, including for SMEs. The 'EU FAB' facilities, a network of 'ever warm' production capacities for vaccines and medicines manufacturing, would be mobilised to provide reserve capacities should it be necessary to ramp up production, as well as emergency research and innovation plans in dialogue with Member States. The idea was to equip the EU with a network of increasingly efficient production capacities for vaccines and therapeutics, which could be mobilised where needed.

HERA would be able to request information from manufacturers about their production capacities, the activities implemented on their sites and their supply chains. It could also facilitate the repurposing or expansion of existing production facilities or the creation of new sites, should such measures be needed to overcome a crisis.

Finally, Mr BRETON stressed that the Commission would encourage synergies between HERA and the important project of common European interest (IPCEI) in the area of health, which was currently being implemented by Member States.

Lastly, he welcomed the fact that the proposal put forward that day allowed the Commission to incorporate the industrial dimension into the health emergency preparedness and response plans. With flexible, agile governance, a substantial budget and an industrial partnership, all the ingredients were in place to create a European BARDA.

Ms GABRIEL pointed out that HERA was based on close cooperation with Member States and incorporated research and innovation into its mode of operation, in order to support the development and production of medical technologies. She also welcomed the synergies that would be fostered with the European Research Council and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). In conclusion, she emphasised the need to anticipate health risks, a key aspect which lay at the heart of

HERA's mandate. All of these elements would make the Authority a key partner for the EU, Member States, health professions, researchers, industry and international partners.

A brief discussion ensued, during which it was pointed out that the new Authority, HERA, would perform tasks in areas in which the EU already had some experience – for example the stockpiling of medical equipment – through the missions of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and that it would be necessary to ensure effective coordination between these bodies to avoid duplication of roles.

The PRESIDENT warmly thanked all those who had helped to create the European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority, which she believed would be a great asset in future pandemics or health crises.

Following these presentations, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the Communication, the proposal for a Council Regulation and the Commission Decision, in COM(2021) 576/4, COM(2021) 577/4 and C(2021) 6712/4, respectively, would be formally approved by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 16 September (PE/2021/6899, PE/2021/6898 and PE/2021/6900).

11. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL – EU STRATEGY FOR COOPERATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC
(JOIN(2021) 24 TO /3; RCC(2021) 175)

At the request of the PRESIDENT, Mr BORRELL presented to the College the Joint Communication on the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

This region was strategically important for Europe's prosperity and security, in many respects. It was home to three-fifths of the world's population, produced 60% of global GDP, contributed two-thirds of pre-pandemic global economic

growth and was at the forefront of the digital economy.

Together, the Indo-Pacific and the EU accounted for over 70% of global trade in goods and services, and over 60% of foreign direct investment flows. Trade exchanges between the two regions were thus the highest in the world, reaching EUR 1.5 trillion in 2019.

At the same time, geopolitical competition was intensifying in the Indo-Pacific, creating significant strains on trade and supply chains and worsening the overall regional security landscape. Since these tensions had a direct impact on the EU's interests, it was essential for the EU to reinforce cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners to ensure the stability and prosperity of the region.

In April, the EU's Foreign Ministers had adopted Council conclusions on the EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, inviting the Commission and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy to present proposals on the implementation of the EU Strategy.

The Joint Communication therefore set out concrete actions in seven priority areas for EU action. These areas were: (i) sustainable and inclusive prosperity, (ii) green transition, (iii) ocean governance, (iv) digital governance and partnerships, (v) connectivity, (vi) security and defence, and (vii) human security. The EU's strategy was aimed at further deepening and diversifying trade and investment ties, collaborating to help accelerate the green and digital transitions, and spurring innovation and connectivity.

Mr BORRELL emphasised its main message, which was that the EU intended to deepen its engagement with partners to respond to emerging dynamics that were affecting regional stability and to the consequences of climate change.

If the EU wanted to increase its influence as a geopolitical actor, it also had to be perceived as a political and security actor in the region. The EU would seek to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea

lines of communication, while also supporting Indo-Pacific partners' capacity to ensure maritime security and to tackle cybercrime.

In conclusion, Mr BORRELL pointed out that the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific region was one of cooperation not confrontation, and that its renewed commitment to the region was inclusive of all partners wishing to cooperate with it in areas where partners shared principles, values or mutual interest.

To make the strategy presented that day a reality, he proposed that the Secretariat General of the Commission and the EEAS co-chair a permanent Indo-Pacific Strategy Steering Group for implementing the strategy.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr BORRELL.

Following this presentation, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the Joint Communication in JOIN(2021) 24/3 would be formally approved by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 16 September (PE/2021/6795).

12. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS – BEAUTIFUL, SUSTAINABLE, TOGETHER (COM(2021) 573 TO /3; RCC(2021) 177)

The PRESIDENT introduced the Communication on the New European Bauhaus, an initiative that could profoundly affect the arts, architecture and engineering, incorporating environmental considerations and nature conservation into these areas of activity. She asked the responsible Commissioners to present this initiative, which she had launched a year ago and which had already attracted significant interest, prompting many responses from all over the world.

Ms FERREIRA explained that the New European Bauhaus was the cultural expression of the EU's new growth model, that is the European Green Deal. It was a movement aiming to promote a new lifestyle and to create sustainable and inclusive public spaces and products. The Communication presented that day had been developed by listening to and talking together with civil society and stakeholders over a period of more than six months. It took stock of this first co-creation period and defined the main objectives of the next implementation phase.

Ms FERREIRA explained that the work on the New European Bauhaus would be structured around two main work streams: the first one enhancing the transformation of economic sectors with a direct impact on the quality of daily life, such as construction, fashion and furniture, and the second one creating a way of life in which sustainability was reflected in the design as well as the affordability and inclusiveness of products and services.

The implementation of this concept would be based on two main principles, transdisciplinarity and inclusion. On the one hand, transdisciplinarity consisted in bringing together artists and practitioners from all disciplines, with different experiences and skills. Similarly, within the Commission, it would entail overcoming silos between areas of competence, which is why, rather than proposing a new, autonomous programme, the New European Bauhaus would be integrated into all existing EU policies and programmes. On the other hand, inclusion aimed to focus on designing and creating projects together with stakeholders, namely citizens, academia, researchers, young people and businesses.

Ms FERREIRA reported that the co-creation phase had resulted in more than 1 800 contributions, as well as hundreds of events and conversations regarding the NEB. More than 200 partners had been selected to take part in creating a New European Bauhaus community, which would continue to develop. The New European Bauhaus would therefore need to maintain a flexible structure and remain open to experimentation and tailoring projects to local needs. The Lab, which would

be open to all and allow the movement to keep reinventing itself, would support this effort in particular.

Ms GABRIEL stressed that the Commission alone would not be able to implement this European and global movement, which would require the assistance of businesses, public authorities, artists, educators and researchers. At this stage, its role was to identify and combine relevant EU initiatives to define the first elements of a support framework for the implementation of the New European Bauhaus. In particular, Horizon Europe would be used together with, among others, the European Regional Development Fund, the LIFE programme and the Single Market Programme to ensure a symbiotic implementation of the initiative. More than EUR 85 million would be mobilised in 2021 and 2022 under these programmes. Many other EU programmes would integrate the New European Bauhaus as an element of context or as a priority without a predefined budget.

The aim of the project was to achieve a threefold transformation: one of buildings and public spaces, one of an environment conducive to innovation and one of culture. For the first two, the role of cohesion and research policies would be essential. With regard to the latter, the European Green Deal needed to become an integral part of education and culture uniting people and creating a sense of belonging. Instruments such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps would play an important role. In the same vein, the Communication also suggested that every year, starting in 2022, a New European Bauhaus Festival be organised with a forum, a fair and a ‘fest’.

Finally, regarding the next steps, Ms GABRIEL said that each Member State would be invited to designate a contact point for the New European Bauhaus, in order to create a network across the EU. The Commission would also take stock of the progress of the initiative next year.

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

– the scale and atypical nature of the New European Bauhaus project, which combined aesthetics, inclusion and sustainable development;

– the key elements for the success of the New European Bauhaus and the European Green Deal: diversity, equality, accessibility and participation;

– the need to promote this project by explaining it to citizens in simple terms and avoiding any jargon.

Following this debate, the PRESIDENT congratulated Ms FERREIRA and Ms GABRIEL, as well as all the departments concerned, for having carried out, on the basis of a simple idea and in such a short period of time, a remarkable project of great public interest.

Following these presentations, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the Communication in COM(2021) 573/3 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 13.00 on Wednesday 15 September 2021 (PE/2021/6846).

13. PROPOSAL FOR A DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING THE 2030 POLICY PROGRAMME ‘PATH TO THE DIGITAL DECADE’
(COM(2021) 574 TO /3; SWD(2021) 247 TO /3; RCC(2021) 178)

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Ms VESTAGER presented to the College the proposal for a Decision establishing the policy programme entitled ‘Path to the Digital Decade’. She stressed that the Decision built on the Digital Decade Communication adopted by the Commission in March 2021 and that it was an important step towards shaping Europe’s digital transformation between then and 2030.

In that Communication, the Commission had adapted its pre-existing digital strategy

to the lessons from the pandemic, which had not only accelerated the uptake of digital solutions, but had also further enhanced the need for a more inclusive and human-centric approach. The more economies and societies depended on digital solutions, the more important it was not to leave anyone behind and to avoid any digital divide.

She added that the same Communication of March 2021 had also taken account of the new funding opportunities offered both by the adoption of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework and by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, of which at least 20% had been earmarked for investments in digital. She noted that since then, the Member States and other stakeholders had shown strong support for the Commission's plans, with regard to both the 2030 targets proposed and the need for a strong governance mechanism to make those plans materialise on the ground.

Ms VESTAGER said that the Decision presented that day therefore firmly anchored the targets and the governance framework around them in a legal format and it focused on digital skills, on infrastructures and on the digital transformation of professions and of public administrations. She said that the objectives were perfectly aligned with those of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and that the Commission would also ensure that the implementation of the Decision was carried out in full coherence with existing processes, including the roll-out of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Semester of economic and budgetary policy coordination and the ongoing monitoring activities around the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI).

She pointed out that those targets were not as such legally binding on the Member States as most of them required work and efforts from many parts of society, including the private sector. However, Member States would be legally required to cooperate with one another and with the Commission towards the achievement of the targets.

To ensure this would really be happening, the Decision contained a clear

governance framework founded on a regular process based on reporting, discussion and adaptation. Moreover, to ensure the transparency and visibility of the process, the Commission would provide the co-legislators with an annual 'State of the Digital Decade Report' and the Member States, for their part, would outline their national measures by means of 'Digital Decade strategic roadmaps'. She also said that, through an annual cooperation mechanism involving the Commission and the Member States, corrective action could be taken to get back on track where progress lagged behind expectations.

Ms VESTAGER stressed, finally, that the Decision also set out how multi-country projects would be supported where they were needed to pool public and private resources for large-scale intervention in key areas necessary for the achievement of the digital targets. Those projects would need to have a strong European added value and should be used to address market failures or sub-optimal investment situations, without duplicating or crowding out private financing.

She also mentioned the inter-institutional solemn declaration on digital citizenship, which had also been announced in the Digital Decade Communication and which would be signed during 2021, and indicated that its implementation would be covered by the annual monitoring process provided for in the Decision presented that day.

Ms VESTAGER concluded her presentation by stressing the importance of ensuring that all the investments in Europe's digital capacities had one ultimate objective: to improve the lives of the EU's citizens.

Mr BRETON said that, for his part, he believed in a European Union determined to lead the global race for technological leadership, without which it would remain too exposed to global risks, which was well illustrated by the shortage of semiconductors. He pointed out that in 2021 more than 1.5 billion vehicles had not been produced in the EU because of the shortage of semiconductors, which had had a negative impact on the growth of the European automotive sector as a whole. He

considered that European technological leadership required clear rules of the game, whether for on-line platforms, data, artificial intelligence or foreign subsidies.

In addition to regulation, the EU needed investment and resources to ensure technological sovereignty. Thus, just as the EU had a framework for the coordination of economic and fiscal policies, the European Semester, it should now establish a framework for coordinating digital investment.

Mr BRETON stressed that that was precisely the objective of the legislative proposal on the action plan for the Digital Decade, which was based on three pillars. First, the objectives set by the Commission in March 2021 to achieve the EU's digital ambitions by 2030 had been translated into legislation. That would allow the EU to once again become a global player in the production of microprocessors, to double the number of European 'unicorns' and to ensure that all public services were accessible on-line. Secondly, the new annual cycle of coordination of the Member States' digital policies would make it possible to assess progress and ensure that national efforts were consistent with the common objectives. Thirdly, and finally, a new tool, the European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC), was proposed to support projects involving several Member States by combining national funding, the EU budget and private investment.

Mr BRETON considered that this was a unique opportunity because the European Union had unprecedented funds to start its digital transformation through the Facility for Recovery and Resilience and its Multiannual Financial Framework. He also pointed out that the 18 national plans already approved were well above the 20% threshold for digital, i.e. close to 28%, at EUR 112 billion, and that programmes such as Horizon Europe, the Connecting Europe Facility and InvestEU could also be mobilised.

In conclusion, Mr BRETON said that this policy programme paved the way for the Union and the Member States to progress together and without delay towards a successful Digital Decade.

A brief discussion followed, in the course of which the following points were raised:

– the full support of the College for this proposal, which complemented important ongoing projects such as the European Health Union, the Skills Agenda and the Digital Education Action Plan;

– the advisability of immediately stepping up efforts on cybersecurity, which was a question of sovereignty but also of technological leadership;

– the wish for the objectives set out in the policy programme to be defined in a nuanced manner to take account of the diversity of situations in which the Member States found themselves and so as not to aggravate imbalances between them.

Ms VESTAGER replied to the last point by explaining that the objectives in question would not be calculated on the basis of an average but that they would aim to ensure full connectivity. She added that, according to the planned governance system, the Commission would be able to address recommendations to the Member States that did not meet their objectives, which would eventually be part of the European Semester exercise.

The PRESIDENT thanked Ms VESTAGER and Mr BRETON for their excellent work.

Following these presentations, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the proposal for a Decision in COM(2021) 574/3 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 13.00 on Wednesday 15 September 2021 (PE/2021/6858).

14. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON ENSURING THE PROTECTION, SAFETY AND EMPOWERMENT OF JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA PROFESSIONALS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (C(2021) 6650 AND /2; RCC(2021) 174)

The PRESIDENT opened the discussion on the Commission's proposal for a Recommendation on the safety of journalists, which was aimed at ensuring a properly functioning democracy in the EU, in particular freedom of information and freedom of expression.

Ms JOUROVÁ stressed that a robust media contributed to a strong democracy in the EU. Unfortunately, attacks on journalists, political and economic pressures and abusive prosecutions of journalists had increased in recent years. The Commission's Recommendation was therefore designed above all to promote the security of journalists and respect for the rights not only of journalists, but of all citizens.

As security issues were a prerogative of the Member States, a recommendation was the most appropriate legal form for such an initiative, even though it could not fully guarantee results. Nevertheless, a recommendation provided a framework to encourage Member States to take the necessary measures by placing greater emphasis on the correct application of the law and on the protection of journalists at demonstrations and in the digital environment.

Ms JOUROVÁ pointed out that Member States would indeed need to take additional measures, in particular to deal with cases where working journalists faced political pressures, to ensure an adequate level of economic and social protection for journalists and other media professionals, and to provide them with legal advice and psychological support and training to ensure their safety. The recommendation focused in particular on the safety of women journalists, journalists belonging to minority groups and those reporting on equality.

Ms JOUROVÁ concluded by stating that this Recommendation would be followed at the beginning of next year by a proposal to reduce the number of abusive prosecutions of journalists.

In turn, Mr BRETON reiterated that the Commission had embarked on an ambitious and proactive programme to defend media freedom and pluralism. Last December it had presented for the very first time a comprehensive approach, with action plans

for European democracy and for European media in the Digital Decade. The message of these initiatives was very clear: the media was a public good that needed stability, independence and a safe environment in which to nurture media diversity.

The new Recommendation set out a series of concrete measures that could be implemented at national level to ensure that those who disseminate information received the highest standards of protection, both online and offline.

The Recommendation contained a package of measures with three main objectives. Firstly, to ensure better physical protection of journalists, for example during demonstrations, and to address violence against women journalists, who were targeted more often than their male counterparts, and against journalists from minority groups who were harassed because of their origin. Secondly, to ensure the online safety of journalists, who were increasingly exposed to online threats, hate speech, unlawful surveillance and hacking. The Recommendation therefore highlighted the need to protect journalists' privacy and create collaborative spaces with public authorities, businesses, online platforms and civil society in order to combat online attacks. Thirdly, journalists – especially those working online – needed access to specialist training to improve their digital skills.

Mr BRETON concluded by emphasising the need for an effective monitoring system based on dialogue with Member States and stakeholders. The Commission was currently developing indicators to assess the progress made by Member States in implementing this Recommendation. At the same time, it continued to work on the Media Freedom Act, which would further strengthen EU media legislation.

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

– the support of the College for the Recommendation, and in particular the focus on women journalists, minority journalists and those working on equality issues;

– the need for measures to ensure that the public authorities treated all citizens in an impartial, independent, effective and transparent manner;

– the changing world of media, which no longer provided adequate recompense for the work of journalists and no longer offered them long-term career prospects;

– the need to develop citizens' knowledge and skills in respect of media freedom and pluralism in order to prevent acts of violence against journalists.

The PRESIDENT concluded by congratulating Ms JUROVÁ and Mr BRETON on their excellent initiative and by highlighting the benefits of faster digitalisation, but also the challenges facing the EU, including in the media sector.

Following these presentations, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the Recommendation in C(2021) 6650/2 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 16 September 2021 (PE/2021/6813).

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The meeting closed at 14.38.