EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2021) 2393 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 17 November 2021

TEXTE EN

<u>MINUTES</u>

of the 2393rd meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 13 October 2021

(morning)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Single sitting</u>: Wednesday 13 October 2021 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.12 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

<u>Present</u>:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	Items 1 to 9
Ms GABRIEL	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	Items 1 to 8 (in part), and 9 to 11
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	

Absent:

Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President
Mr GENTILONI	Member
Ms VĂLEAN	Member

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

Ms VEGNERE	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Items 1 to 11.1
Ms NIKOLAY	Chef de cabinet to Ms JOUROVÁ	Items 1 to 11.1
Ms SPANOU	Chef de cabinet to Mr SCHINAS	Items 1 to 11.1
Mr BUTI	Chef de cabinet to Mr GENTILONI	Items 1 to 11.1
Ms PERIGNON	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr REYNDERS	Items 1 to 11.1
Mr GOETZ	Chef de cabinet to Ms VĂLEAN	Items 1 to 11.1
Mr RIBOKAS	A member of Mr SINKEVIČIUS's staff	Items 1 to 11.1

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	Items 1 to 11.1
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms RISO	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 11
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 1 to 11.1
Mr VANDENBERGHE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8 and 9
Mr HAUGAARD	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 9

Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 1 to 11
Ms SCHULTZ	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 1 to 11.1
Ms DEWANDRE	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT's Office	Item 10
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	Items 1 to 11.1
Ms BUKA	Secretariat-General	Items 1 to 11.1

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

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2021) 2393/FINAL; SEC(2021) 2393/FINAL)

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings. It also took note of the addition of items 11.2 and 11.3, which were discussed in restricted session.

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET
(RCC(2021) 2393)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 11 October 2021.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2386TH, 2387TH, 2388TH, 2389TH, 2390TH, 2391ST AND 2392ND MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION (14 AND 20 JULY, 8, 14, 22 AND 29 SEPTEMBER AND 5 OCTOBER 2021)
(PV(2021) 2386; PV(2021) 2386, 2ND PART; PV(2021) 2387; PV(2021) 2387, 2ND PART; PV(2021) 2388; PV(2021) 2388, 2ND PART; PV(2021) 2389; PV(2021) 2390; PV(2021) 2391)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2386th, 2387th, 2388th, 2389th, 2390th and 2391st meetings and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2392nd meeting for a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2021) 187)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 8 October 2021 (RCC(2021) 187).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

– **General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030 (Decision) – O'SULLIVAN report – 2020/0300 (COD)**

  Line set out in SI(2021) 282/2.

– **Follow-up to the European Supervisory Authorities' failure to submit draft regulatory technical standards under the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation**

  Line set out in SPI(2021) 50.

– **Package of non-papers presenting proposals for a way forward on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland - Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, published in Official Journal C 384I on 12 November 2019**

  Line set out in SI(2021) 287 to /3.

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

– **Commission replies to the legislative resolutions (and list of non-legislative resolutions without formal reply) adopted by Parliament at its September 2021 part session**

  Line set out in SP(2021) 637.

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

  Line set out in SP(2021) 640.

The Commission approved the line set out for the following point, for transmission to the European Economic and Social Committee:

– **Follow-up to opinions of the European Economic and Social Committee – Plenary session of June 2021**

  Line set out in SC(2021) 33/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

– **Guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 (Regulation) – KRASNODĘBSKI report – 2020/0360 (COD)**

  Information set out in SI(2021) 283/2.

– **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters as regards the entry of alerts by Europol (Regulation) – ZARZALEJOS report – 2020/0350 (COD)**

  Information set out in SI(2021) 284.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2021) 42)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2021) 42 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Friday 8 October 2021.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2021) 338 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 8 October 2021.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2021) 339 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 8 October 2021.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2021) 340 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedure between 4 and 8 October 2021 archived in D*e*cide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2021) 341 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 11 and 15 October 2021 and of a finalisation written procedure.

6.5. COMMISSION DECISION GRANTING DELEGATIONS OF POWERS RELATING TO MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TRACEABILITY SYSTEM FOR TOBACCO PRODUCTS AND REPEALING COMMISSION DECISION C(2018) 7301 (C(2021)7388)

The Commission decided to grant delegations of powers to the Director-General of DG Health and Food Safety to adopt, on behalf of the Commission and under its responsibility, certain measures in the context of the traceability system for tobacco products, subject to the conditions laid down in Articles 2 to 4 of the decision, and to repeal decision C(2018) 7301.

The Commission adopted the decision in C(2021) 7388.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2021) 342)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – COMMISSION DECISION ON POST TERM-OF-OFFICE ACTIVITY OF A FORMER MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION
(C(2021) 9018)

The Commission adopted the decision set out in C(2021) 9018.

The Commission decided that the professional activity envisaged by Mr Karmenu VELLA after leaving office as a Member of the Commission was compatible with Article 245(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and with the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, subject to certain specific conditions and obligations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

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 – TACKLING RISING ENERGY PRICES

– A TOOLBOX FOR ACTION AND SUPPORT (COM(2021) 660 TO /3; RCC(2021) 195)

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr TIMMERMANS and Ms SIMSON for their excellent communication that day ahead of the discussion that the EU leaders would have at the next European Council meeting on 21 and 22 October.

The current rise in energy prices was an important and complex issue affecting the EU and the rest of the world. The situation varied greatly from one Member State to another and they were all affected differently, depending on their energy mix. She pointed out that 90% of the gas consumed in the EU was imported.

She was aware of the campaigns orchestrated by certain interest groups to undermine the European Green Deal and denounce the carbon price, whereas everything showed that rising energy prices in Europe were essentially linked to fossil fuels. The purpose of the Green Deal was precisely to reduce the EU’s energy dependency.

Mr TIMMERMANS said that the proposed communication was intended to provide a framework for discussion in the European Council on the current increase in energy prices and it tried to strike a balance between the urgent need for action and the means of action available to the Commission. The Commission was sensitive to the situation of the most deprived sections of society and it intended to propose to the Member States avenues for reflection and measures to mitigate the effects of the energy crisis on them, without however disrupting the renewable energy market.

Higher energy prices were not the result of EU policies, and in particular the European Green Deal; on the contrary, the energy transition was the solution for the future.

Higher energy prices were having a significant impact on the economies and the GDPs of the Member States and their short-term evolution would depend in particular on winter conditions. Price instability was likely to continue, and the

Commission had to strongly encourage the Member States to strengthen their storage capacities.

He also confirmed that decarbonising the economy would contribute to reducing the EU's energy dependence. Irrespective of its purely speculative elements, he considered that the energy transition was the only viable long-term solution to deal with stressed energy market conditions.

Ms SIMSON pointed out that the energy markets had shown the first worrying signs as early as the end of summer 2021. Gas storage levels, which had fallen after a long winter, were even lower compared with their ten-year average. Demand for gas was increasing but supply had not followed suit, with liquefied natural gas normally intended for Europe going to Asia and supplies from Norway, the US and Russia lower than normal. In addition, there were initial indications of a surge in electricity prices in Spain. The Commission had started monitoring these risks in collaboration with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas, ENTSOG.

She said that the situation had deteriorated rapidly in September. Between April and the present time, European suppliers faced wholesale prices that were four times higher for gas and 200% higher for electricity. Retail electricity prices had risen by 9%, with large variations across Member States.

The Member States were looking to the Commission to indicate what could be done, within the European legal framework, to cope with this increase in energy prices. She added that European energy companies wanted the Commission to avoid fragmentation of the single market and that citizens were demanding to be protected. The Commission was therefore proposing a toolbox of measures that the Member States could take in the short and medium term.

High prices were not due to the sustainable energy transition but to the changing fundamentals of the global gas supply, on which the EU remained dependent.

Ms SIMSON said that China was gradually moving away from coal and had become the top LNG importer and that Europe's domestic production was steadily declining, while imports from Russia were not compensating for the shortfall from the other sources of supply. This gas supply deficit was therefore the main cause of the increase in energy prices, and other factors, such as bad weather, the characteristics of national electricity markets and the parallel increase in prices under the ETS, played a secondary role.

Most of the levers that could be mobilised to tackle the current price increase in the short term were in the hands of the national governments. The proposed toolbox clearly showed that action was possible under the EU framework, and it pointed governments to measures that made economic sense and respected European energy and competition law.

Ms SIMSON said that the Commission was advising them to prioritise targeted support to the most vulnerable households, for reasons of fairness, be it through social payments or energy taxation so as not to add to energy poverty. She also suggested measures to support business and protect consumers, mentioning by way of example that prohibiting disconnections and deferring payments of bills had been quite effective during the COVID-19 pandemic.

More generally, she mentioned some structural trends in the energy transition. In future, the EU needed to step up preparation to face price volatility and unexpected developments. For that reason, the Commission recommended actions aimed at: (i) making the electricity market more flexible and secure while maintaining incentives for renewables, (ii) boosting energy efficiency and accelerating deployment of renewables, and (iii) making the gas market more resilient.

She added that, as gas had a role in the energy transition, she would present by the end of the year a comprehensive reform of the gas market in which she would also address issues of security of supply and storage. The benefits and possible drawbacks of a centralised purchase of gas emergency storage would also be examined in this context.

Since some Member States wanted to review the functioning of the electricity market design introduced in 2019, she recalled that this design was based on a methodology whereby all production technologies bid on the market on the basis of their true production costs, and the price cleared at the level of the last power plant needed to cover demand. Now, with the EU's current energy mix, both renewables with low production costs and gas-fired power plants with very high production costs were needed to cover demand.

Ms SIMSON mentioned in more detail the suggestion sometimes made of decoupling electricity plants powered by renewables and gas powered electricity plants in the formation of wholesale prices, which some believed were being kept too high by the latter. She felt that such a decoupling could bring lasting damage to implementation of the European Green Deal, make it more difficult to match supply and demand, force public authorities to cover the costs of the technologies selling at a lower price than their production costs, and reduce incentives for renewables precisely at a time when massive investment was needed in this area.

The current design of the EU electricity market was the best suited to give consumers the benefits of cheap renewables since the single marginal price allowed producers to recover their significant upfront investment costs. That electricity market design could provide affordable, secure and sustainable energy better than any alternative model.

There were lessons to be learnt for the future from the current price increases. ACER, the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators, had been tasked with studying the functioning of the market and should present its findings by April 2022, with the possibility of a preliminary assessment by mid-November 2021.

Forward contracts indicated that prices should decrease and normalise at the beginning of spring, subject to the coming winter, since 40% of heating and 30% of electricity consumption depended on gas during that season. Against that uncertain background, she would remain closely in touch with the sector to monitor and anticipate developments on gas markets over the course of the coming months.

Ms SIMSON concluded with the observation that questioning the European Green Deal would be a bad response to the current price surge. Instead, low-income households should be protected and deployment of renewables sped up. Europe was still too reliant on imported fossil fuel and it needed to accelerate the green deal in order to become more integrated and more resilient. Its strategic autonomy was at stake.

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

- the need to understand the short and longer-term causes of the current crisis, which was linked to a great extent to the volatility of energy prices, and to find appropriate solutions;

- the diversity of the tax systems of the Member States, which needed the tax revenue generated in order to have adjustment capacity;

- the extent of energy poverty in the Union, even though the energy crisis affected all households and businesses in the Union;

- the possibility of mobilising the Climate Solidarity Fund for the most deprived households;

- the necessity, in the interests of the Union's independence, of accelerating the renewable energy strategy, which would entail creating a genuine internal market for renewable energy;

- the all too real impact of the current energy crisis on fertiliser and food prices, hence the need for monitoring tools and the relevance of the strategy to reduce European agriculture's dependence on fertilisers;

- the sharp fall in renewable energy production costs which was of little benefit to households given that energy tariffs were based on the gas price;

- the need to invest in renewable energy and, to that end, the ongoing review of the Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and energy ;
- the need for permanently available energy and therefore interconnections at European level;
- the problems posed by the current interconnection networks, which no longer reflected the development of new renewable energy, while certification procedures for infrastructure projects were too time-consuming;
- the resilience of Member States' gas storage capacity and energy infrastructure which ought to be tested;
- the study carried out by the Commission on potential anticompetitive behaviour by energy suppliers;
- a feeling that the current energy market in the Union had reached its limits, in particular where renewable energy was concerned, and that a more operational and transparent system should be set up, even though no valid alternative had been proposed to date;
- the wish that the Commission remained vigilant and attentive to the fact that certain instruments, such as the Emissions Trading System (ETS), had become genuine financial products, which disrupted the proper functioning of the energy market; in this sense, it would be useful to carefully examine the functioning of that system and its capacity to promote the European energy transition;
- the value of analysing the increase in electricity consumption that would inevitably be caused by the energy transition and decarbonisation of the economy;
- the welcomed reference to the Commission Decision of April 2020 on taxonomy, as nuclear energy would contribute to the Union's energy transition; technical and political discussions on that subject should continue;

- the importance of not underestimating hydrogen;

- the new dependencies which could be expected in the future, for example in the construction of batteries and the import of certain parts for electric vehicles, which justified further reflection on ways of securing certain essential elements of the future European supply chain;

- a reminder that rising energy prices meant lower growth and that European industry was already showing worrying signs;

- if it proved necessary to import more gas from third countries in the short term, the need for a coordinated European approach and the consideration of a joint procurement by Member States;

- the key role played by innovation in the energy field and the work carried out by many start-ups in Europe, with significant results in terms of energy production and storage options;

- the worrying medium-term outlook of a 50% increase in demand for electricity over the next 10 years.

As the discussion drew to a close, Ms SIMSON said that the sharp rise in energy prices in general and electricity prices in particular was a global phenomenon. One-third of household electricity bills consisted of taxes. Lastly, in Member States that had concluded long-term contracts, the impact of the crisis was less marked.

With regard to the ongoing review of the Renewable Energy Directive, the Commission was calling on the Member States to be ambitious and to boost renewables' share of electricity production to 40% after 2030 by providing incentives to encourage investment in the sector. The Commission was continuing to work on solutions that would eventually allow investment in renewable energy without public subsidies.

The PRESIDENT warmly thanked all who had helped to draft the Communication and contributed to that day's discussion.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2021) 660/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments.

9. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – A STRONGER EU ENGAGEMENT FOR A PEACEFUL, SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS ARCTIC (JOIN(2021) 27 TO /4; RCC(2021) 193)

The PRESIDENT invited Mr BORRELL and Mr SINKEVIČIUS to present the Joint Communication, 'A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic'.

Mr BORRELL began by explaining that the situation in the Arctic had changed considerably over the course of recent decades, and in particular since the previous Joint Communication in 2016, which had established an integrated EU Arctic policy. It was therefore time to relaunch an ambitious EU project for this region, with specific actions for the years to come.

He observed that, among the major upheavals that had affected the Arctic, climate change had a major impact on the region's equilibrium. He pointed out that this was not the result of the activities of the few million people in the region, but of the 7.8 billion living to the south of the Arctic Circle.

Mr BORRELL then referred to another key factor which was that in recent years the region had become a centre of increasing geopolitical interest. New powers such as China and Russia were increasingly present there. As a major geopolitical and economic player, the EU should align its Arctic policy with its priorities, including as regards sustainable development. The territory of the eight Arctic states was of course sovereign, however, a number of the challenges with which the Arctic was confronted, particularly those related to climate change, energy and connectivity, could be tackled more effectively through regional or international cooperation.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS stressed that the Communication's aim was to send a strong message confirming the EU's geopolitical power, as it had strategic interests in the European part of the Arctic as well as the broader region. The new proposal built on the priorities set in 2016, which remained valid, while highlighting the fight against climate change in the context of the new European Climate Law, the 'fit for 55' package and COP26.

Climate change was the most significant and imminent threat to the Arctic, an area that was particularly sensitive to global warming. With this Joint Communication, the EU would help it to develop its resilience against the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

In it, the Commission set out measures to (i) contribute to the achievement of the Arctic Council objective of reducing black carbon emissions by 33% compared to 2013 levels by 2025, (ii) push for oil, coal and gas to remain in the ground, including in Arctic regions, building on partial moratoriums on hydrocarbon exploration in the Arctic, (iii) promote sustainable and responsible extraction and processing of raw materials, (iv) counteract major sources of pollution affecting the Arctic regions in the air, on land and at sea and, finally, (v) encourage research and collection of data on all these phenomena.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS expected that the EU's courageous commitments to the phasing out of the use of Arctic hydrocarbons, the sustainable extraction of critical minerals and the more rapid reduction of emissions from shipping would provoke a reaction. However, he considered that the EU had to remain firm and act without delay, because there would not be a better time to reduce the carbon footprint in the Arctic.

The sea ice was the thinnest it had been since 1850, which was very dangerous for the climate.

He concluded by reporting that he would present the Communication to the Arctic Circle Assembly, the largest annual international meeting on the Arctic, to be held on 14 October 2021 in Reykjavik. Mr BORRELL and Mr SINKEVIČIUS would also discuss the Communication during the EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue in Brussels on 10-11 November 2021.

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

– the importance of the EU having a physical as well as a political presence in the region, specifically through the new European Commission office in Greenland, which would act as an important point of liaison with the local population, particularly young people;

– the link between the use of hydrocarbons in the region and global warming, and the benefits of a strategic rapprochement between the EU and Norway in order to find balanced solutions to propose to the Arctic states in this regard;

– the fact that this Communication would have no impact on energy market prices;

– the geopolitical stakes being played out in the Arctic, and Russia's ambition to increase control over energy exploitation and shipping routes in the region;

– the clarity of the EU's geopolitical approach, the aim of which was to cooperate with all Arctic partners and maintain stability in the region, including in the context of the 'Northern Dimension'.

– the importance of connectivity in the region, which could save lives, but also encourage the participation of young people;

– reference to the Arctic dimension of the future Global Gateway Strategy.

The PRESIDENT thanked all the speakers and welcomed the presentation of this Communication oriented towards the future and young people.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Joint Communication in JOIN(2021) 27/4 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and, for information, to the national parliaments.

10. PROPOSAL FOR A DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON A EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH 2022 (COM(2021) 634 TO /3; RCC(2021) 194)

The PRESIDENT invited Ms GABRIEL to present the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council to make 2022 the European Year of Youth.

Ms GABRIEL thanked the PRESIDENT for presenting in her State of the Union address of 16 September 2021 the idea that the EU should dedicate the year 2022 to young people. She noted that all relevant stakeholders had welcomed the idea with enthusiasm.

The proposal for a decision laid down the general framework for the European Year of Youth and did not, therefore, constitute a catalogue of actions to be taken in 2022.

The general framework would include listening to young people to take account of their concerns, involving them more in European society and supporting them to help them develop their talents and thrive, all while making the best possible use of existing EU instruments.

She pointed out that the contribution of all the Members of the Commission, their departments, the Member States and the European Parliament would be essential for the success of the European Year of Youth. She had already had several exchanges on this issue with the European Parliament, which had committed to participating actively in the event.

Ms GABRIEL reported that a budget of EUR 8.5 million had been earmarked under the communication strands of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

She also stressed that actions under the European Year of Youth would benefit young people not only in the EU but also beyond its borders.

In conclusion, Ms GABRIEL noted that the decision proposed that day was to be adopted by the co-legislators before the end of the year.

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

- the support of the College for this particularly timely proposal;
- praise for the initiative as, through the European Year of Youth, young people would be provided with an opportunity to be more involved in the processes shaping the future of Europe, starting with the Conference on the Future of Europe;
- the welcome attention the proposal gave to young people from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds;
- the need for a cross-sectoral approach to promote equality and an inclusive society;
- the benefits to be gained from placing young people at the heart of international partnerships, since young people represented such a large proportion of the population in some regions of the world;

– the need to put more emphasis on the development of remote and rural areas so that less young talent left these areas.

The PRESIDENT closed the discussion, thanking Ms GABRIEL for her excellent work and inviting the Commission to suggest ideas for implementing the European Year of Youth. This was all the more important given that the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had taken a heavy toll on young people, both in the EU and elsewhere in the world.

Following this presentation, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the proposal for a Decision in COM(2021) 634/3 would be formally adopted by the finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at 10.00 on Thursday 14 October 2021 (PE/2021/7543).

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRESIDENT briefed the College on the extraordinary meeting of G20 leaders held on 12 October 2021 on the subject of Afghanistan.

She began by reporting the finding by United Nations agencies and international organisations that one in two Afghans required humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs, whether for food, healthcare, education or housing. Added to this societal crisis was the risk of imminent economic disaster in the country, whose payments system could rapidly collapse. Preventing a complete failure of Afghan public services, and the health system in particular, was a matter of urgency.

She reported that the G20 participants had agreed on the need to combine their efforts to provide support to the Afghan population, over and above immediate emergency relief, and referred to the difficulties of providing direct life-saving assistance to the Afghan people without legitimising the government currently in place.

The PRESIDENT had announced to her G20 partners that the EU would mobilise a total package of around EUR 1 billion for the Afghan population and Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. This would include EUR 300 million to cover immediate needs, with additional 'humanitarian plus' support for other needs, such as vaccination, shelters, protection of civilians and human rights, and to contribute to stability in the country in order to prevent the crisis within Afghanistan having repercussions for its neighbours. The Commission was currently working to make it possible to use funds intended for Afghanistan of at least EUR 250 million for 'humanitarian plus' support to Afghan people in urgent need, notably in the field of health, in strict compliance with programming procedures under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

To ensure that the funding would benefit the local population directly, the EU had opted to channel its assistance to partner organisations on the ground – United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs.

The PRESIDENT reported that Mr BORRELL was currently working on setting up a platform to organise the aid intended for Afghanistan's neighbours for migration management, cooperation on terrorism prevention, and the fight against organised crime and migrant smuggling.

Ms URPILAINEN confirmed that humanitarian assistance alone would not be enough to avert a major socio-economic crisis in Afghanistan, with the onset of winter likely to aggravate the difficulties already being faced by the population. EU development aid to Afghanistan remained frozen, as the Taliban government was not complying with the applicable conditions, starting with respect for human rights. At their informal meeting of 11 October on Afghanistan, the EU foreign affairs and development ministers had endorsed the principle of 'humanitarian plus' support. She welcomed the fact that the EU was setting an example and hoped that its international partners would follow suit. The projects to be funded under 'humanitarian plus' support would be identified very soon.

Ms JOHANSSON said how important it was for the EU to take the lead on the global initiative to support the Afghan population above and beyond humanitarian aid in the strict sense.

She also stressed the threat to regional and global security that the situation in Afghanistan represented. This was why the EU's support to neighbouring countries was particularly expedient, and very much welcomed by the countries concerned.

Mr LENARČIČ welcomed all the efforts being made to support the Afghan people. The need was immense, given the freezing of the assets held by the Afghan State abroad and of international development aid. He drew attention to the technical rules that applied to the various components of the EU's assistance.

The Commission took note of this information.

11.2. FOLLOW-UP TO THE JUDGMENT DELIVERED BY THE POLISH CONSTITUTIONAL COURT ON 7 OCTOBER 2021

This item was discussed in restricted session.

11.3. PROTOCOL ON IRELAND/NORTHERN IRELAND

This item was discussed in restricted session.

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

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The meeting closed at 11.07.