EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2022) 2411 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 27 April 2022

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2411th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 16 March 2022

(morning)

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Single sitting: Wednesday 16 March 2022 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.07 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	Items 8 to 10
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	Items 8 to 10
Ms GABRIEL	Member	Items 8 to 10
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	Items 1 to 8
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	Items 1 to 8 (in part)
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VĂLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 1 to 9
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	Items 1 to 8
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	

Absent:

Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President
Mr HAHN	Member
Mr REYNDERS	Member
Ms DALLI	Member

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

Mr SAMSOM	Chef de Cabinet to Mr TIMMERMANS
Mr BRIENS	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr BORRELL
Ms ASTERIADI	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Mr ŠEFČOVIČ
Mr MUELLER	Chef de cabinet to Mr HAHN
Ms TUTS	Chef de cabinet to Mr REYNDERS
Ms GERHARDS	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms DALLI

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 FLOSDORFF	Executive Adviser in the PRESIDENT’s Office	
Ms MICELI	Policy Coordinator in the PRESIDENT’s Office	Item 9
Ms BUKA	Secretariat-General	
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	

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

1. AGENDAS
(OJ(2022) 2411/FINAL; SEC(2022) 2411/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(2022) 2411)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 14 March 2022.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2407th, 2408th, 2409th and 2410th meetings of 15 and 23/24 February and 2 and 8 March 2022 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2022) 86)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 11 March 2022 (RCC(2022) 86).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

– **Serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 1082/2013/EU – TRILLET-LENOIR report – 2020/0322 (COD)**

  Line set out in SI(2022) 65/2.

– **Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amendment of Directive 2000/31/EC (Regulation) – SCHALDEMOSE report – 2020/0361 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 56/2.

– **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)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 73.

– **Access of third-country goods and services to the Union's internal market in public procurement and procedures supporting negotiations on access of Union goods and services to the public procurement markets of third countries (Regulation) – CASPARY report – 2012/0060 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 78.

– **Strasbourg Declaration on the Common Pillar of European Public Administrations – Conference of European ministers responsible for public transformation and the civil service**

Line set out in SI(2022) 77.

– **Resolutions of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Combating Gender-based Violence: Cyberviolence – VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI & SPUREK report – 2020/2035 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2022) 142/2.

The Commission approved the line set out for the following point, for transmission to Parliament:

– **Commission replies to the legislative resolutions (and list of non-legislative resolutions without formal reply) adopted by Parliament at its part-session of February 2022**

  Line set out in SP(2022) 134/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

– **Statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (Regulation – recast) – WIELAND & GOERENS report – 2021/0375 (COD)**

  Information set out in SI(2022) 55/2.

– **Revision of the EU Emissions Trading System – Amendment of Directive 2003/87/EC establishing a system for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Union, Decision (EU) 2015/1814 concerning the establishment and operation of a market stability reserve for the Union greenhouse gas emission trading scheme and Regulation (EU) 2015/757 (Directive) – LIESE report – 2021/0211 (COD)**

  Information set out in SI(2022) 76/2.

– **Results of Parliament's March I 2022 part-session**

  Information set out in SP(2022) 108.

– **Draft text for the future EU-United Kingdom agreement in respect of Gibraltar – Frontier workers' rights and social security coordination**

  Information set out in SI(2022) 84.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2022) 13)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2022) 13 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 9 March 2022.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2022) 125 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General’s memoranda recording decisions adopted between 7 and 13 March 2022.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2022) 126 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General’s memoranda recording decisions adopted between 7 and 13 March 2022.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2022) 127 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General’s memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 7 and 13 March 2022 archived in D*e*cide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2022) 128 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 14 and 18 March 2022.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2022) 129)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2022) 15)

7.1. DG EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO) – AUTHORISATION FOR THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL (AT GRADE AD14/15) AND EXTERNAL (AT GRADE AD14) PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR A DIRECTOR POST (PERS(2022) 16)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr LENARČIČ, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional (at grade AD14/15) and external (at grade AD14) publication of the vacancy notice in PERS(2022) 16 for the post of Director of the ‘Disaster Preparedness and Prevention’ Directorate in DG Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.2. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS REGARDING THE REPRESENTATION OF THE COMMISSION IN THE COMMON SECRETARIAT OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to extend the administrative arrangements regarding the representation of the Commission in the Common Secretariat of the Conference on the Future of Europe until 1 June 2022.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF LISTS OF CANDIDATES FOR POSTS OF HEAD OF EU DELEGATION AND DEPUTY HEAD OF EU DELEGATION AT GRADES AD14-15/AD14 AND AD9-14/AD12 (PERS(2022) 17)

The Commission took note of the information in point 3 of PERS(2022) 15 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided to approve:

- the lists of candidates for the posts of Head of EU Delegation to Australia, China, Japan and South Africa (at grades AD14-15/AD14), Botswana, Djibouti, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Guyana, Haiti, Panama, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and to the Council of Europe (at grades AD9-14/AD12);

- the lists of candidates for the posts of Deputy Head of EU Delegation to Afghanistan (not covered by the rotation exercise), Thailand, Serbia and Morocco (at grades AD9-14/AD12).

The competent authority of the European External Action Service would make the final appointments on the basis of these lists, as set out in PERS(2022) 17.

This decision would take effect immediately.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

SITUATION IN UKRAINE – LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE INFORMAL EUROPEAN COUNCIL (VERSAILLES, 10 AND 11 MARCH 2022)

The PRESIDENT introduced the College's discussion on the situation in Ukraine and presented the conclusions of the informal summit of EU Heads of State or Government held in Versailles on 10 and 11 March. Three main topics had been discussed at the summit in the context of the war in Ukraine, namely strengthening the EU's defence capabilities, reducing its energy dependence and Ukraine's accession to the EU.

On the first topic, strengthening the EU's defence capabilities, she stressed that the current crisis cast new light on these issues. She referred to the announcements certain Member States had made with regard to increasing their defence budgets and ending their derogation arrangements for security and defence policy matters. In her view, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was the most powerful military alliance in the world today, but the European Union also needed to be able to mobilise when required.

She noted the growing number of investments announced by Member States and considered that this made it necessary to clarify the arrangements for a strategic European approach in order to address defence gaps, for example with regard to surface-to-air missiles, secure communications, cyberdefence and space connectivity, and avoid duplication of efforts. The European Council had tasked the Commission, in coordination with the European Defence Agency, with identifying specific needs and gaps with a view to presenting an assessment of investment requirements by mid-May and proposing new initiatives, if required, to strengthen the industrial and technological aspects underpinning European defence.

On the second point, energy, the PRESIDENT welcomed EU leaders' broad support for the recent Commission initiative *REPowerEU*, the main aim of which was to end European dependence on Russian gas and other fossil fuels. The Heads of State or Government had also agreed to diversify supplies, particularly through the use of liquefied natural gas and the development of biogas, continue setting up a European hydrogen market, speed up the development of renewables, finalise the interconnection of European gas and electricity networks, synchronise all the electricity networks in the EU, reinforce contingency planning with regard to supply security, and, lastly, improve energy efficiency and energy-use management in the EU. The PRESIDENT considered these ambitions to be achievable.

With regard to the use of liquefied natural gas, she stressed that it was necessary to avoid a situation whereby multiple purchase agreements were entered into by the Member States, as this would lead to price increases, and felt it was preferable to have a voluntary joint procurement scheme, as had been the case for vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She referred to the EU's strategy vis-à-vis countries that produced liquefied natural gas, such as the United States, Qatar, Egypt and Algeria, and said that the United States was willing to supply the EU, subject to purchase guarantees being in place. She also said that the EU needed to have 90% of its energy stocks available in readiness for the next two winters. The European Council had invited the Commission to present, by the end of March, a plan designed to guarantee security of supply in the EU and affordable energy prices for the coming winter.

With regard to energy price fluctuations, she said that while some Member States had opted for fixed retail prices and others had chosen to tax large companies' windfall profits, the European Council had asked the Commission to present a range of concrete options.

The PRESIDENT announced that, in order to carry out this assessment with a view to the upcoming European Council meeting on 24 and 25 March, the College would hold a policy debate on 21 March on the issue of energy prices, to which she wished to add the issues of food security and the rise in agricultural prices.

Lastly, she came to the third point discussed by EU leaders at their informal summit on 10 and 11 March, namely the question of Ukraine's joining the European Union. The Council had invited the Commission to issue opinions not only on Ukraine's application, but also on applications from Moldova and Georgia, in line with the relevant provisions of the Treaties. She briefed the College on the discussions held on this point at the Versailles summit, highlighting the importance of setting out a way forward for Ukraine and giving it hope with regard to its path to EU accession.

She then invited the Members of the Commission concerned to brief the College on the work ongoing in the areas under their responsibility.

Mr SCHINAS referred to the ongoing cooperation with the Member States to implement the Directive on Temporary Protection and to ensure that the rights granted to Ukrainian refugees were effectively guaranteed throughout the EU. While there were some difficulties, he explained that they were linked to uncertainty as to where the refugees would settle in the EU.

At its next meeting, the College would examine a Communication that was designed to provide guidance for the Member States in the practical implementation of the rights associated with the temporary protection granted to Ukrainian refugees. Of these rights, the Communication would focus on access to healthcare, employment and education.

He noted the scale of the healthcare requirements that needed to be addressed. He referred to purchases of medicines and vaccines, and to transfers of patients within the EU as a result of the significant pressure on hospitals in certain Member States that were taking in Ukrainian refugees. As for access to employment, he explained that it would be necessary to certify the skills and qualifications of Ukrainian refugees and noted the need to establish qualification profiles. With regard to access to education, he proposed establishing a dedicated task force, and referred to the need for textbooks and language support, assistance for teachers and avenues to be explored under twinning arrangements.

To conclude his presentation, Mr SCHINAS said that, as things stood, EUR 400 million had been mobilised to cover the most urgent requirements in the Member States; most of this sum came from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and was funding that had not been used under the previous multiannual financial framework. The Commission would set up a one-stop shop to simplify and speed up procedures to help Member States use this EU funding. Lastly, he said that, for the most part, the refugees were not submitting asylum applications owing to the generous and immediately applicable provisions of the temporary protection status granted to them, meaning that the European asylum system was not overstretched.

Ms JOHANSSON referred to the plight of the millions of people affected by the war in Ukraine; there were seven million internally displaced persons in Ukraine and three million refugees already on EU territory, almost half of whom were children. Most of these refugees had entered Poland, which was doing an excellent job of hosting them, and smaller numbers had entered Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. So far, few refugees had travelled to other Member States.

However, a significant number of refugees had entered Moldova, although many of them had already left the country and moved elsewhere.

She confirmed that 15 000 asylum applications had been registered by the Member States and noted that third-country nationals, some 160 000 individuals, had mostly been repatriated, with help from the Frontex agency when necessary. She welcomed the fact that security checks were being carried out successfully in the Member States, but felt it was regrettable that registration procedures were not more uniform.

She emphasised in particular the situation of orphan Ukrainian children, many of whom had been left to their own after the destruction or evacuation of their care facilities in Ukraine, and the risk that some of them would be targeted by human trafficking and smuggling organisations. She also mentioned the potential trafficking of the children of Ukrainian surrogate mothers and wondered what initiatives could be taken to protect them.

Ms JOHANSSON considered that the needs for the resettling of refugees would become apparent at a later stage. She added that, although funding under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund was limited, other funds were available and it should be possible to use them as rapidly as possible to help Member States to welcome refugees properly. In conclusion, she reported that the new solidarity platform coordinated by the Commission under the system of temporary protection, which allowed Member States to exchange information on their reception capacities, would meet on Wednesday 16 March.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS reported on the measures taken in the field of trade policy. He mentioned in particular the abolition of the most favoured nation treatment granted to Russia in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the suspension of Belarus' accession to the WTO. In practice, the EU could therefore set the customs duties it wished to apply to imports from Russia and Belarus. The EU had also just banned the import of certain categories of goods in the iron and steel sectors from those two countries and would reallocate the quotas intended for them to other exporting countries on a proportional basis. Finally, he said that the export of certain luxury goods to Russia had just been banned.

With regard to the economic impact of EU sanctions in Russia, the rouble had collapsed, the Russian central bank had significantly raised its key interest rate and the Moscow Stock Exchange remained closed. For Russia, the combination of these various factors made servicing its foreign-currency denominated debt increasingly complicated, which could lead it to breach its obligations. He said that all the rating agencies had lowered their Russian debt ratings to just above the default level and that Russia was showing the first signs of difficulties in paying coupons linked to some of its dollar-denominated bonds. He added that many international companies were pulling out of Russia to preserve their reputation.

At the same time, Russia had adopted retaliatory measures in response to EU sanctions by banning the export of technology and goods. Its reprisals also included intellectual property rights, nationalisation of the assets of international businesses leaving Russia and closure of its airspace to flights from EU Member States.

Regarding the impact of these measures on the European economy, in recent days Mr DOMBROVSKIS had noted sharp increases in energy and raw material prices and food security problems that would affect the prices of other goods and services. The EU would face disruptions of supplies from Russia, which would add to the current disruptions in supply chains, although not all Member States would be affected equally.

From a financial point of view, the sovereign bond yields of the Member States in the euro area were not affected by the economic turmoil, unlike those of the non-euro area Member States. He said that the EU would have to take into account the direct budgetary costs incurred in offsetting them. He also said that the impact of sanctions on the European financial sector remained relatively limited.

With regard to the aid granted to Ukraine, Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that the EU had just paid the first tranche of EUR 600 million of macro-financial assistance and that, in accordance with the rules, the Commission would have to wait three months before being able to disburse the second tranche of EUR 600 million. In addition, there was USD 1.4 billion of emergency financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the bilateral aid provided to Ukraine by other third countries. The EU’s financial institutions – the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) – had also approved immediate financial support of EUR 668 million and EUR 2 billion, respectively, to strengthen the country’s resilience.

In conclusion, he reported that, according to preliminary estimates, the damage already suffered by Ukraine as a result of the war amounted to EUR 500 billion and that this amount was constantly increasing, which was why the real needs of the country were not yet known.

Mr GENTILONI remarked that EU sanctions were having a significant impact on the Russian economy.

As for the impact of the war on the EU economy, he used the keyword of the conclusions of the recent meetings of the Eurogroup and the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers, namely uncertainty. That was why they welcomed the Commission's budget guidelines, provided that they preserved the flexibility needed to adapt to changing circumstances.

Mr GENTILONI took stock of the economic difficulties encountered since the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. He said that prices had increased by an average of 10% over three weeks, and by as much as 60% for gas. The market for agricultural raw materials was also affected, with a price increase of 30%, which would have an impact on food chains in the EU and in other countries around the world, for example in Africa. He added that EU exports to Russia had fallen dramatically from EUR 4 billion per week before the war to EUR 868 million currently, while imports from Russia to the EU were significantly lower. This situation would have significant fiscal effects, even if it was still difficult to quantify them. However, the cost of the fiscal measures to tackle rising energy prices was estimated at around 0.4% of GDP for the EU as a whole.

Mr GENTILONI referred to the various measures taken by the Member States to intervene in the energy market; some Member States had granted a rebate on petrol prices while others had reduced the rate of VAT and excise duties. The finance ministers had called on the Commission to ensure a degree of coordination of these measures and its staff were working on it.

As regards possible economic scenarios, he pointed out that the EU had tackled this new crisis when it was in a very favourable situation, with a resumption of growth forecast at 4% for 2022. According to the Commission's baseline scenario, which was very similar to that of the European Central Bank (ECB), this year the current crisis should result in a downward revision of growth by 0.7% and additional inflationary pressure of 1.4%. The worst-case scenarios of both institutions envisaged a downward revision of growth by more than 2% and an increase of more than 3% in inflation.

Mr GENTILONI concluded that the European economy was subject to a manifest risk of stagflation and it was therefore necessary to stress that the EU could limit the effects of the crisis if it acted together and used the tools it already had, such as the temporary State aid scheme.

Comparing the current crisis with that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, he emphasised that in both cases the Member States would suffer asymmetrical consequences, but the macroeconomic situation was different today, as were the decisions taken by the ECB. Although two years ago the EU had reacted to the health crisis by aligning the fiscal policy stances of the Member States with the monetary policy of the European Central Bank, he noted that the ECB was today announcing a reduction of net asset purchases and the possibility of raising its key interest rates. In conclusion, Mr GENTILONI considered the use of additional economic policy instruments inevitable if the crisis continued, without jeopardising NextGenerationEU or the recovery and resilience plans. He was aware of the fact that some were calling for recourse to the significant financial envelope of this instrument to deal with the current crisis. Even if it was possible to show some flexibility in reallocating the resources available to the Member States, in particularly in the energy part of their national recovery and resilience plans, he considered that it would be wrong to imagine that the Commission could use NextGenerationEU to regulate the increase in energy costs.

Mr LENARČIČ reported on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, which was worsening from day to day. It was estimated that one-third of the Ukrainian population could seek refuge in the EU. 13 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance in the country.

He explained that providing this assistance was a real challenge, since safe passages were rare due to violations by Russian forces of humanitarian law and the principle of protection of civilians. This prevented aid from reaching the population groups for which it was intended.

As regards the measures taken by the EU, the total humanitarian aid of EUR 85 million for Ukraine and EUR 5 million for Moldova had been the subject of contracts with the EU's partners for the provision of food, water, medicines, shelter and essential goods on the ground. Among these partners, he mentioned a large number of international organisations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other non-governmental organisations present in Ukraine.

He also announced that the United Nations would shortly be launching a new call for donations for humanitarian aid to Ukraine. As regards the EU budget for humanitarian action, he pointed out that it was not possible to draw on funds from the operational or solidarity reserves, which were exhausted, or from aid programmes for other countries in crisis. This was a point on which he wished to reassure the beneficiaries of these programmes.

In any event, Mr LENARČIČ noted that the assistance granted to Ukraine and Moldova was already the largest operation ever carried out under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, in which all the Member States participated together with Norway and Turkey.

Poland, Romania and Slovakia had asked for assistance through the mechanism and platforms had been set up in those countries, as well as in Moldova, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid. The first and most important of these platforms was in Poland, the second was in Romania and the third was currently being set up in Slovakia. The first transfers of patients had been organised for children, from Poland, where hospitals were overwhelmed, to Italy.

He also referred to the support requested by Latvia and also the Czech Republic, which was requesting temporary shelter capacity. As a general point, he drew attention to the need to give priority to the issue of housing for Ukrainian war refugees.

Mr LENARČIČ also pointed out that Ukraine was beginning to lack fuel. This too would have humanitarian consequences, even though distributions had been organised from two Member States.

Finally, he referred to the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats, which had prompted several measures. These were (i) the launch of emergency procurement procedures for purchasing iodine pills for Ukraine, (ii) a donation from a Member State, (iii) the establishment of EU stockpiles for the medium term, through funding from the EU Civil Protection Mechanism RescEU, and in collaboration with the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), (iv) supplies of iodine pills and other pharmaceutical products to be used in the event of a chemical attack and, finally, (v) the setting up, in collaboration with a Member State, of a private donation platform.

Mr VÁRHELYI explained that the EU had managed to mobilise EUR 500 million to deal with the humanitarian consequences of the war, employing unused funding under the previous financial framework and reprogramming some other funding. Part of this amount had already been made available to Ukraine and the rest would be made available within one or two weeks. Some ongoing programmes were being reallocated, in accordance with the ‘Omnibus’ Decision, which had been adopted a few days ago. This Decision amended several Commission implementing Decisions concerning the financing of bilateral and regional cooperation with Ukraine. The key question was to determine which part of the funding would be redeployed, bearing in mind that the country's reconstruction needs would have to be met after the war.

EU funding for Ukraine had been devolved as far as possible to local authorities, but the aid provided for housing, electricity production and water tanks had already been destroyed by the Russian army. Like Mr LENARČIČ, he in his turn stressed the growing funding needs that would have to be met.

The EU was working on the ground with civil society to organise evacuations of civilians and he hoped that by the end of this week 30 000 people would have been saved. The EU was also supporting Ukrainian journalists and media, with the Polish assistance platform helping to resettle those fleeing the war.

Mr VÁRHELYI then turned to the situation in Moldova, which was also under considerable pressure due to the influx of Ukrainian refugees. He referred to the Commission's efforts to put in place evacuation routes, which were expected to be opened within the next 24 hours. He added that the Commission was organising the delivery of border protection equipment and that a European Union Border Assistance Mission in Moldova (EUBAM) would be deployed immediately.

Finally, with regard to Ukraine's application for accelerated membership of the EU, he called for a factual communication, in the interest of the EU and Ukraine, which would state that the Commission had received this request and that the Council had instructed it to give an opinion.

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

- the College's full support for all the measures taken so far to address the humanitarian emergency caused by the conflict in Ukraine and to make every effort to endeavour to put an end to Russian military aggression against Ukraine;

- the advisability of activating the EU's temporary protection regime, which had made it possible to evacuate refugees relatively smoothly and offer them immediate protection giving them access to a wide range of rights, including the right to education for children and the right to access housing, healthcare and the EU labour market;

- the need for the Commission to guide the Member States in effectively implementing the rights thus granted to Ukrainian refugees, which would be the subject of a Communication presented on 23 March;

- the urgent need to provide refugees with temporary shelters and provide for access to housing in the medium and long term;

- support for Member States in integrating refugee women into the EU labour market and providing children with day-care and educational facilities, including school material and language assistance;

- the need to develop a digital education forum for Ukrainian teachers in order to facilitate access to education for children;

- the urgent need to improve support for unaccompanied minors, vulnerable women and people at risk of marginalisation, who were particularly at risk of trafficking in human beings;

- reference to the partial or total destruction by Russian forces of 106 Ukrainian hospitals, placing besieged populations in need of emergency medical assistance (comprising the injured, the sick and the chronically ill) in a situation of extreme precariousness;

- the need to provide vaccines and medicines, in close cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry, to prevent the emergence of epidemics, prepare Member States' health systems for the influx of refugees, provide appropriate medical assistance and relieve Member States bordering Ukraine before their reception capacity in hospitals was overwhelmed;

- the call to provide for measures to protect the mental health of refugees, especially children, who are often traumatised by war and exile, in particular by giving teachers appropriate training;

- the recommendation to envisage providing appropriate medical treatment in the event of a chemical attack or nuclear accident in Ukraine;

- the reference to the need for logistical support in the towns located in the most westerly regions of Ukraine, which were less affected by the Russian military offensive but which were dealing with the largest influx of refugees; this support could only be provided with the backing of the EU and its partners;

- the importance of organising the arrival of refugees and managing their relocation throughout the Member States, in order to alleviate the pressure on the Member States bordering Ukraine whose reception capacities were now overwhelmed;

- the urgent need to deliver fuel to Ukraine to ensure the movement of refugees and displaced persons;

- the case for the EU to fund the train tickets of Ukrainian refugees currently paid for by private transport companies;

- the suggestion to consider the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia on the global supply of agricultural products and fertilisers, which risked creating a shortage, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, and increasing the price of foodstuffs;

- the call to work immediately with the EU's partners, in particular the EU neighbourhood countries, to prevent a possible food crisis;

- the value of issuing a Communication from the Commission on reviewing supply chains to prevent possible disruption, given the events in Ukraine and a new wave of the COVID-19 epidemic in China, which could interrupt the supply of certain products and raw materials;

- the desirability of the EU issuing a Communication that could ease tensions on the raw materials markets, notably the energy market, and prevent spiralling price increases;

- the importance of making provision for a State aid scheme in the energy sector, to address the impact of the war in Ukraine on certain sectors of the EU economy;

- the recognition of the well-functioning state of the Ukrainian energy network and the support for its growing synchronisation with the EU network, with the aim of ensuring the supply of energy to Ukraine;

- the concern raised by the fact that several Ukrainian nuclear power plants were under the control of the Russian army, which threatened their safety and increased the risk of an accident in the short or medium term;

- the recommendation to protect European airlines from third-country competition, in view of the flight restrictions on EU air carriers in Russia and the airspace ban over part of its territory, which meant longer and therefore more expensive flights;

- the need to consider issuing national transit permits to connect Moldova with its trading partners;

- the invitation to identify existing cybersecurity weak spots and to provide additional guidance both to Member States and to EU institutions in this area;

– the call to anticipate future financing needs to tackle the Ukrainian crisis and allow the EU to continue to provide assistance and, in the longer term, contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction;

– hence the suggestion to use all possible sources of EU financing in a flexible way and to set up a one-stop shop to ensure a link between Member States' spending and the reallocation of unused funds, including between different policies, e.g. the Asylum, Integration and Migration Fund and activities concerning social action, education and health policies;

– the value of adapting the Member States' recovery plans to the most recent needs without undermining the initial NextGenerationEU objectives;

– the call to bring together the measures under the Cohesion's Actions for Refugees in Europe (CARE) whenever possible and to do so in such a way that all Member States could benefit, even those without unallocated funds;

– the Commission's backing for the organisation of an international pledging event to support humanitarian assistance in Ukraine and the country's future reconstruction;

– the importance of encouraging the EU's international partners to increase their production and exports of oil in order to stop the inflationary spiralling of energy prices;

– at diplomatic level, the usefulness of seeking the support of the third countries that abstained in the United Nations General Assembly vote on the resolution condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine;

– the need to give European prospects to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which had recently applied for EU membership;

– the desirability of a representative sample of Ukrainian society taking part in the final stages of the Conference on the Future of Europe;

The PRESIDENT returned to some of the comments made during the presentation and discussion.

First, she pointed out that the Commission's services would conduct joint missions to the Member States receiving large numbers of Ukrainian refugees to assess their exact needs and determine how the Commission could respond to them.

She then informed the College that emergency plans would be deployed in the Member States to deal with possible chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.

With regard to Ukraine's EU membership application, she noted that a procedure had now been launched, since the Council had requested an opinion from the Commission. She pointed out that traditionally the accession process took a number of years, but also that Ukraine was part of the European family.

She also recommended informing the public of the significant economic repercussions that European sanctions were having on the Russian economy in the short term. She stressed that the impact of these sanctions would continue to grow.

The Commission took note of this information.

9. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATION (EU) No 909/2014 AS REGARDS SETTLEMENT DISCIPLINE, CROSS-BORDER PROVISION OF SERVICES, SUPERVISORY COOPERATION, PROVISION OF BANKING-TYPE ANCILLARY SERVICES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR THIRD-COUNTRY CENTRAL SECURITIES DEPOSITORIES
(COM(2022) 120 AND /2; SWD(2022) 75 AND /2; SWD(2022) 76; SEC(2022) 160; RCC(2022) 91)

The PRESIDENT asked Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Ms McGUINNESS to present the proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EU) No 909/2014 as regards central securities depositories, the aim of which was to improve the efficiency of settlement markets in the EU, while safeguarding financial stability.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS said that central securities depositories were a crucial component of financial market infrastructure and played a systemic role, as they enabled transactions in financial markets to be completed by ensuring that buyers actually received the shares they bought and that sellers received payment. The average daily volume of these settlement transactions in the EU was over EUR 2 billion.

He explained that when there was a transaction in a security, the change of ownership did not happen immediately but typically two days after the transaction. In the intervening period credit risks could arise as well as legal, political or even geopolitical risks, as was the case at present.

Certain precautionary measures therefore had to be taken to ensure the smooth functioning of this market infrastructure and of the financial system as a whole. Thus, a regulation on central securities depositories had been adopted in 2014 to reduce these risks and the potential costs that might be incurred.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS stressed that the main aim of the amendment being tabled that day was increase the safety and efficiency of securities transactions and of the financial market infrastructure in the EU.

This review was a legal obligation laid down in the Regulation itself but had also been requested by the European Parliament and was a key feature of the 2020 Capital Markets Union action plan. The initiative formed part of the Commission’s efforts to make the EU’s capital markets more efficient and more integrated, for the benefit of EU businesses and investors, including small and medium-sized enterprises.

Ms McGUINNESS said that the EU sanctions against Russia had highlighted the key role played by central securities depositories. On 25 February 2022, the EU had decided to ban central securities depositories in the EU from holding the accounts of Russian clients. Once the depositories were no longer able to provide their services in relation to Russian securities, trading in these securities stopped, as the transfer of ownership could no longer be guaranteed.

Ms McGUINNESS added that in March 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, turbulence on the financial markets had shown that some of the regulatory constraints on central securities depositories were not proportionate.

With the current proposal, the Commission was therefore seeking to (i) simplify the passport procedure applicable to central securities depositories to make it easier for them to offer their services across national borders, (ii) develop cooperation between supervisory authorities, (iii) improve the conditions under which central securities depositories could access ancillary banking services, (iv) improve settlement discipline, and lastly (v) establish better oversight of third-country central securities depositories.

Finally, Ms McGUINNESS noted that, at its informal meeting on 10 and 11 March, the European Council had reiterated the importance of completing the Capital Market Union. This proposal would help achieve that goal.

The PRESIDENT wound up the discussion by thanking Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Ms McGUINNESS for the quality of the proposal.

Following these presentations, the Commission adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2022) 102/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the national parliaments, together with the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2022) 75/2, SWD(2022) 76 and SEC(2022) 160, the contents of which were noted.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'FUR FREE EUROPE' PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL (C(2022) 1530)

Ms JOUROVÁ presented a proposal for a Decision submitted to the College for approval. It concerned the registration of the European citizens' initiative entitled 'Fur Free Europe', in the authentic language (English).

The initiative essentially called on the Commission to propose legal acts with a view to achieving an EU-wide ban on (i) keeping and killing of animals for the sole or main purpose of fur production, and (ii) placing farmed animal fur, and products containing such fur, on the EU market.

Ms JOUROVÁ reminded the College that its task that day was to decide only on the registration of the initiative and not at this stage to analyse its substance or political expediency.

She explained that the conditions for registering European citizens' initiatives were set out in Article 6(3) of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative, which had repealed and replaced Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 with effect from 1 January 2020. One of those conditions was the requirement that no part of the citizens' initiative should manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for an EU legal act for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

She noted that the request made by the promoters of the European citizens' initiative 'Fur Free Europe' fell within the Commission's powers to propose legal acts for the purpose of implementing the Treaties under Article 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Ms JOUROVÁ underlined that if, within a period of twelve months, the proposal gathered the minimum support required, in other words at least one million signatures from citizens of at least a quarter of the Member States, the Commission would then analyse the substance of the proposal.

In accordance with the new Regulation (EU) 2019/788, proposed initiatives registered now benefited from more user-friendly arrangements for organisers to gather support and easier access for European citizens. The Commission would have a period of six months to submit its reasoned decision whether or not to take any action.

The Commission confirmed that the citizens' initiative 'Fur Free Europe' fulfilled the conditions for registration. It therefore decided, in accordance with C(2022) 1530, to inform the group of organisers of this and authorised Ms JOUROVÁ to sign the reply on behalf of the College, in the authentic language (English), to send it to the group of organisers of the initiative, and to publish it, for information, in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The Commission also agreed to transmit its decision, for information, to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.2. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 225 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (TFEU) – COMBATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: CYBERVIOLENCE (SP(2022) 142 AND /2)

The PRESIDENT asked Ms JOUROVÁ to present the Commission's draft response to a European Parliament resolution pursuant to Article 225 of the

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on combating gender-based violence - cyberviolence.

Ms JOUROVÁ explained that the European Parliament resolution called on the Commission to propose a Directive to establish a common criminal law definition of gender-based cyberviolence, and to harmonise sanctions against offenders. The Directive should also include provisions to promote and support preventive actions by the Member States, as well as measures to protect, support and ensure reparation for victims.

Ms JOUROVÁ stressed that the Commission fully shared the objective to do everything possible to prevent and combat gender-based violence both online and offline. She explained that, in its letter to the European Parliament, the Commission mentioned two of its recent legislative initiatives, and also a set of non-legislative measures, which delivered on the main requests in the resolution.

Firstly, she cited the initiative presented by the Commission in December 2021 inviting the Council to include hate speech and hate crime in the list of serious crimes at the EU level. If this Decision was unanimously adopted by the Member States, the Commission would be able to criminalise hate speech and hate crime on all grounds, including sex and gender, both online and offline. So far, the Council had not concluded its negotiations on this proposal.

Secondly, she cited the proposal for a Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence adopted by the Commission on 8 March 2022.

The PRESIDENT thanked Ms JOUROVÁ and noted the College's approval of the line proposed in SP(2022) 142/2, including the draft letter to be sent to the European Parliament.

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The meeting closed at 12.08.