EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2022) 2439 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Strasbourg, 14 February 2023

TEXTE EN

<u>MINUTES</u>

of the 2439th meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 30 November 2022

(morning)

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Single sitting: Wednesday 30 November 2022 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.08 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	Items 1 to 15.2
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	Items 8/10 (in part) to 15
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	Items 1 to 13/14 (in part)
Ms FERREIRA	Member	Items 1 to 11/12
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	Items 11/12 to 15
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 sat in to represent an absent Member of the Commission:

Ms OJALA	Deputy Chef de cabinet to Ms KYRIAKIDES	Items 1 to 8/10

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 RISO	Deputy Chef de cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's office	
Mr FLOSDORFF	Executive Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8/10 and 11/12
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office	Items 8/10
Ms HOPMEIER	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Items 11/12
Mr VAN KEMSEKE	A member of the PRESIDENT's staff	Items 8/10
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) 2439/FINAL; SEC(2022) 2439/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) 2439)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Friday 25 and Tuesday 29 November 2022.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES
(PV(2022) 2435; PV(2022) 2435, 2ND PART)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2435th meeting of 22/26 October 2022 and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2436th, 2437th and 2438th meetings of 9, 16 and 22 November 2022 until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS
(RCC(2022) 216)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Thursday 24 November 2022 (RCC(2022) 216).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

– **'Fit for 55' – Establishment of a Social Climate Fund (Regulation) – CASA & DE LANGE report – 2021/0206 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 438/2.

– **'Fit for 55' – Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/631 as regards strengthening the CO_2 emission performance standards for new passenger cars and new light commercial vehicles in line with the Union's increased climate ambition (Regulation) – HUITEMA report – 2021/0197 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 439.

– **'Fit for 55' – Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/842 on binding annual greenhouse gas emission reductions by Member States from 2021 to 2030 contributing to climate action to meet commitments under the Paris Agreement (Regulation) – POLFJÄRD report – 2021/0200 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 440.

– **'Fit for 55' – Amendment of Regulations (EU) 2018/841 as regards the scope, simplifying the compliance rules, setting out the targets of the Member States for 2030 and committing to the collective achievement of climate neutrality by 2035 in the land use, forestry and agriculture sector, and (EU) 2018/1999 as regards improvement in monitoring, reporting, tracking of progress and review (Regulation) – NIINISTÖ report – 2021/0201 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 441.

– **General product safety – Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repeal of Council Directive 87/357/EEC and Directive 2001/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (Regulation) – CHARANZOVÁ report – 2021/0170 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 442/2.

– **Consumer credits (Directive) – KONEČNÁ report – 2021/0171 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 452/2.

– **Strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms (Directive) – RAFAELA & PETER-HANSEN report – 2021/0050 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 457.

– **Laying-down of a framework to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy (Council Regulation) – 2022/0367 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 455.

– **Enhancing solidarity through better coordination of gas purchases, exchanges of gas across borders and reliable price benchmarks (Council Regulation) – 2022/0339 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 456.

– **Amendment of Recommendation (EU) 2022/107 on a coordinated approach to facilitate safe free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Council Recommendation) – 2022/0334 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 459.

– **Commission statement on the Ukraine package**

- **Amendment of Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027 (Council Regulation) – 2022/0369 (APP)**

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 as regards the establishment of a diversified funding strategy as a general borrowing**

method (Regulation) – 2022/0370 (COD)

- **Establishment of an instrument for providing support to Ukraine for 2023 (macro-financial assistance +) (Regulation) – 2022/0371 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 449.

– **State of play of the Medical Devices Regulations – Commission orientations on the way forward – (Regulation (EU) 2017/745 on medical devices and Regulation (EU) 2017/746 on *in vitro* diagnostic medical devices)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 461.

– **Distribution of mackerel total allowable catch (TAC) in Northern North Sea waters (4a) and Norwegian waters of Norwegian Sea (2a)**

Line set out in SI(2022) 462.

– **Resolution of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Responsible private funding of litigation – VOSS report – 2020/2130 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2022) 685.

– **European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade – COM(2022) 28 final**

Line set out in SI(2022) 450/2.

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point, for transmission to the European Parliament:

– **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its part-session of September 2022**

Line set out in SP(2022) 681.

The Commission took note of the following points:

– **Non-recognition of Russian travel documents issued in occupied foreign regions (Decision) – LÓPEZ AGUILAR report – 2022/0274 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2022) 686, further to note SI(2022) 397, which the Commission had already approved on 16 November 2022.

– **European Year of Skills 2023 (Decision) – FOURLAS report – 2022/0326 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2022) 445.

– **Protection of the environment through criminal law and replacement of Directive 2008/99/EC (Directive) – MANDERS report – 2021/0422 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2022) 446.

– **Amendment of Council Directive 2003/8/EC, Council Framework Decisions 2002/465/JHA, 2002/584/JHA, 2003/577/JHA, 2005/214/JHA, 2006/783/JHA, 2008/909/JHA, 2008/947/JHA, 2009/829/JHA and 2009/948/JHA, and Directive 2014/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, as regards digitalisation of judicial cooperation (Directive) – RADEV & KALJURAND report – 2021/0395 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2022) 420.

– **Digitalisation of judicial cooperation and access to justice in cross-border civil, commercial and criminal matters, and amendment of certain acts in the field of judicial cooperation (Regulation) – RADEV & KALJURAND report – 2021/0394 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2022) 447.

– **Transparency and targeting of political advertising (Regulation) – GOZI report – 2021/0381 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2022) 448.

– **Results of the European Parliament's November II 2022 part-session**

Information set out in SP(2022) 664.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2022) 43)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2022) 43 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 23 November 2022.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2022) 402 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 21 and 27 November 2022.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2022) 403 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 21 and 27 November 2022.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2022) 404 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 21 and 27 November 2022 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2022) 405 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 28 November and 2 December 2022.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2022) 406)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2022) 85)

DG CLIMATE ACTION – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR-GENERAL AT GRADE AD15/16
(PERS(2022) 60 TO /4)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director-General of DG Climate Action (PERS(2022) 60 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 8 and 24 November 2022 (PERS(2022) 60/3 and /4).

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

This decision would take effect on 16 January 2023.

8. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING A UNION CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORK FOR CARBON REMOVALS
(COM(2022) 672 TO /3; SWD(2022) 377; SWD(2022) 378; SEC(2022) 423; RCC(2022) 222)

9. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR BIO-BASED, BIODEGRADABLE AND COMPOSTABLE PLASTICS
(COM(2022) 682 AND /2; RCC(2022) 224)

10. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON PACKAGING AND PACKAGING WASTE, AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2019/1020 AND DIRECTIVE (EU) 2019/904, AND REPEALING DIRECTIVE 94/62/EC
(COM(2022) 677 TO /4; SWD(2022) 384; SWD(2022) 385; SEC(2022) 425; RCC(2022) 224)

Mr TIMMERMANS started by saying that the proposal on packaging lay at the heart of the European Green Deal and the EU growth strategy. It was important for the EU economy to grow and remain competitive without being dependent on fossil fuels and their by-products, thanks to the development of circular economy models.

That day’s proposals rounded out the measures adopted by the Commission on 30 March 2022, which aimed to make sustainable goods the norm, promote circular business models and boost Europe’s resource independence. The impact assessment of the package presented that day showed that the proposal on packaging would also have positive effects on climate, the environment, the economy and employment, in particular for small and medium-sized undertakings. New technologies would make it possible to address the challenges of this vital change and industry needed predictability.

Admittedly, for certain sectors and industries, reorientation and adaptation would prove more difficult, but this was a necessary development, sought by European citizens.

The European Parliament and the Council had asked the Commission to make progress on this issue and certain Member States had begun to implement their own policies on packaging in the meantime, which was why it was now necessary to shift from a Directive to a Regulation in order to harmonise the EU internal market more effectively.

Mr TIMMERMANS then presented the proposal on an EU certification framework for carbon removals. He explained that the proposal would boost innovative carbon removal technologies and sustainable carbon farming solutions, and thus contribute to the EU's climate and environmental goals. Beyond the obvious advantages for the climate of carbon removal, the Commission would give priority to carbon removal activities that had a positive impact in terms of biodiversity.

He stressed that the proposal would considerably boost the ability of the EU to quantify, oversee and verify carbon removals. Greater transparency would increase the trust of stakeholders, while reducing the risk of greenwashing.

Mr TIMMERMANS said that the proposal was aimed at establishing a sound certification scheme and a new business model, in particular for farmers that wished to take part in the process. He stressed that, in this context, investors would not be prepared to invest in carbon removals unless there was an operational certification scheme.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS, for his part, referred to the demand from society – citizens and industrialists alike – for EU initiatives on the circular economy and argued that this set of proposals provided new momentum, on the basis of clear and fair rules for all.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS also focused on the new opportunities that the green and digital transition would provide for EU innovators and entrepreneurs. The initiatives presented that day would help the EU economy to use resources in a more intelligent way, create new jobs and decrease its dependency on the outside world.

He turned first to the proposal on packaging, noting that the EU had promised, in the European Green Deal and the circular economy action plan, to ensure that all packaging on the EU market was reusable or recyclable in an economically viable manner by 2030.

He was happy to note a constant increase in packaging recycling over the previous 10 years, thanks *inter alia* to EU funds contributing to the necessary investment. However, waste generated was growing faster than recycling, or even EU GDP and population growth, with a rise of 20% over the previous 10 years. Without change, this would mean that the volume of plastic waste in the EU would increase by 46% by 2030.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS argued that businesses that profit from such unsustainable trends had to change their offer, which would also provide innovative, competitive businesses with the opportunity to deliver goods with less wasteful packaging, by investing in reverse logistics and re-use technologies and infrastructure. The positive impact of this development would come in the creation of local jobs for both highly skilled and lower skilled workers, and for EU citizens, who should be able to save some EUR 100 per year once the rules had come into force.

The proposals aimed at less waste, more value in the packaging sector and in the economy as a whole, with all the sectors of the circular economy benefiting from the rules proposed, be it re-use, recycling or innovation in solutions without packaging. Far from being competitors, the re-use and recycling sectors complemented each other and would help the EU to attain its objectives in this area.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS noted that, in 2020, 65% of packaging waste was recycled, which meant that 35% was incinerated, sent to a landfill or ended up as litter, amounting to some 30 million tonnes of materials lost, and this was the part of packaging waste that that day's proposals were targeting.

The overall target for waste prevention was to reduce packaging waste by 15% per inhabitant in all Member States by 2040, compared to 2018. This would lead to an overall waste reduction in the EU of some 37% compared to a scenario without changing the legislation. It could be achieved through both re-use and recycling.

The EU had a duty and not just a commitment to prevent the excessive production of waste, including through re-use.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS said that there would be mandatory targets for undertakings and sectors where there was potential for re-use that would not be reached without common rules at EU level. Member States were taking action in many of these areas and there was, therefore, a clear need for harmonisation, while establishing exemptions for microenterprises.

The proposal was to reduce packaging to the minimum and to ban packaging that was clearly unnecessary, since what consumers needed were the goods, not the waste.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS took the view that, for real change, sustainable packaging had to be made the norm. The proposal was therefore to set criteria for the design of truly reusable packaging and establish a verification system that could ensure that packaging was designed to be fully recyclable.

It was also necessary to help consumers to understand which packaging item should go into which recycling bin. To that end, every piece of packaging would carry a label making it clear in which waste stream it should go and waste collection containers would carry the same labels. The same symbols would be used everywhere in the EU.

Mandatory deposit return systems were to be put into place for plastic bottles and aluminium cans, with an opt-out possibility, but strictly under the condition that 90% of these types of packaging could be collected by other means.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS then turned to the Communication on an EU policy framework for bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics. In his view, such plastics were more and more common and often presented as viable alternatives to conventional plastics, but clarity was required as to their real added value. The products labelled as ‘bioplastics’, ‘bio-based’, ‘biodegradable’ and ‘compostable’ were all different and they all presented different challenges and offered different opportunities.

He stressed that, if a product was said to be ‘biodegradable’, the way and circumstances in which it biodegraded, as well as where, would need to be spelt out, and its biodegradability should in no way be a licence to litter. Similarly, with ‘compostable’ plastics, there was an important difference between materials that could be composted at home and those that required industrial facilities, and that had to be clear for consumers. Lastly, for ‘bio-based’ plastics, it was important for EU consumers to know the extent to which such products contributed towards a sustainable substitution of fossil resources and did not harm the environment.

Finally, the package presented took account of the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises. There were numerous provisions that did not specifically exclude small and medium-sized enterprises, but had been developed taking into account their specific needs, for example by giving them sufficient time to adapt or allowing targeted exemptions. Furthermore, the Commission had to provide guidance to facilitate economic operators’ compliance with the proposed rules, and in doing so would focus on small and medium-sized enterprises.

However, these proposals could be very beneficial for innovative small and medium-sized enterprises that were able to adapt, as they could offer opportunities estimated at around EUR 10 billion in the field of re-use alone.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS concluded his presentation by stressing that the two proposals offered a sustainable pathway for the green and digital transition of the packaging sector and related sectors, in particular with regard to waste management. They would make it possible to conserve resources and would benefit the environment and European citizens. The proposals would also pave the way for innovation, circular economy models and new business opportunities.

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

With regard to the proposal on packaging and packaging waste

– the importance of limiting the constant increase in packaging in the EU, given its substantial negative impact on the environment, in particular when it came to plastics;

– the appropriateness of a proposal for a Regulation which would provide businesses with the required legal certainty and consumers with clarity in product labelling, including in e-commerce, which generated high levels of over-packaging;

– the need to eliminate distortions of the internal market by adopting harmonised rules for all Member States;

– concerns about the impact of the new re-use and recycling rules on small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly micro-enterprises, at a time when European industry had been hit hard by numerous successive crises;

– the importance of not choosing re-use at the expense of recycling, a sector in which many companies had invested in recent years; in this respect, the need to develop current technologies in order better to link recycling with the development of re-use;

- questions as to the indirect effects on households, which might no longer use municipal collection and sorting systems owing to increased waste-collection costs;

- the hope that the Commission would work swiftly on a general support plan for small and medium-sized enterprises, and that it would systematically take account of their constraints in drawing up future initiatives, including through the implementation of an impact assessment ('SME test');

- the importance of properly assessing the cumulative effect on businesses and households, the economy and jobs, of any new proposal linked to the European Green Deal's growth strategy, and of developing a common narrative for all these proposals;

- a reminder of concerns about food waste;

With regard to the proposal on carbon removal certification

- the general satisfaction with the voluntary certification scheme;

- the need to involve the agricultural sector in reducing carbon emissions, giving farmers the opportunity to obtain additional income;

- the importance of communicating in a balanced way on the question of storing carbon in agricultural land and of meeting farmers' high expectations;

- the distinction between carbon capture and storage on the one hand, and reduction on the other;

- in this context, questions as to the environmental safety of carbon capture and storage in the short term, in view of certain reservations about the effectiveness of the industrial technologies used.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS stressed that recycling and re-use were not mutually exclusive, and that it was a matter of combining the various existing techniques to reduce packaging waste. The landfill system was the cheapest but also the most polluting method; he called for the phasing out of existing landfills.

He confirmed that for small and medium-sized enterprises the objective was to enable a realistic adjustment by 2030. Current packaging costs were a burden on them, and the implementation of the proposed provisions would provide an opportunity for optimisation and better collaboration between businesses.

The development of deposit return systems would help to reduce packaging waste. Changes to be made in waste management would also require significant efforts by the relevant stakeholders.

Mr TIMMERMANS noted that the Commission's proposal on plastic bags, adopted during the previous term of office, had proved to be a great success despite initial criticisms, as had that relating to single-use plastics. The proposal on packaging had incorporated many concerns; this would be highlighted in the communication that would follow its adoption.

Moreover, the proposal did not favour re-use to the detriment of recycling; on the contrary, recycling would be an integral part of future solutions to combat waste proliferation. The EU's cultural diversity ought to be taken into account, and everyone would have the necessary time to adapt to the new rules.

The industrial technologies used for carbon capture and storage were increasingly proving their worth, and were necessary to achieve the EU's climate, environmental and zero-pollution objectives. In addition, technologies now existed to convert CO_2 into solid matter, thereby avoiding future release of the captured CO_2.

In conclusion, Mr TIMMERMANS noted that society was undergoing a fundamental transition and, referring to the date on which the proposal would come into effect, said that he was aware of the fears of professionals and the general public regarding the costs of this necessary transition.

The PRESIDENT stressed that the European Green Deal had largely proved its worth in terms of the EU's growth strategy, despite the complexity of the current economic circumstances.

It was essential to analyse carefully the impact of the Commission's proposals on the day-to-day business of small and medium-sized enterprises. Communication on the package of measures proposed that day would have to highlight that the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises had been a core concern throughout its preparation.

The PRESIDENT concluded by recalling the importance of the EU's international competitiveness, on which the Commission would be actively working in the coming months, particularly with the Swedish Presidency of the EU, for which this would be a priority issue.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

– adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2022) 672/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments, together with the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2022) 377, SWD(2022) 378 and SEC(2022) 423, the contents of which were noted;

– approved the Communication in COM(2022) 682/2 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;

– adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2022) 677/4 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments, together with the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the

Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2022) 384, SWD(2022) 385 and SEC(2022) 425, the contents of which were noted.

11. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL ON THE REMEDIAL MEASURES NOTIFIED BY HUNGARY UNDER REGULATION (EU, EURATOM) 2020/2092 FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE UNION BUDGET
(COM(2022) 687 AND /2; RCC(2022) 225)

12. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE APPROVAL OF THE ASSESSMENT OF THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN FOR HUNGARY
(COM(2022) 686 AND /2; SWD(2022) 686; RCC(2022) 225)

The PRESIDENT introduced the two initiatives related to Hungary with reference to the general context of the debate on the rule of law. She reminded the College that, at its meeting of 18 September 2022, it had decided (i) to forward to the Council, under the conditionality mechanism, the remedial measures deemed necessary by the Commission to protect the Union budget, and (ii) to include the milestones on judicial independence in Hungary in the country's recovery and resilience plan. The Commission now had to take stock of these decisions and propose the next steps.

She emphasised that the Conditionality Regulation set very tight deadlines that had to be strictly observed. On 18 September, the Commission had proposed budgetary protection measures under the Conditionality Regulation; Hungary had to implement the remedial measures by 19 November and the Council had to rule on the matter by 19 December.

She pointed out that, following its assessment, the Commission considered that, in spite of the measures taken by Hungary, there was a still a risk to the EU budget, given that the remedial measures that still had to be implemented were of a structural and cross-cutting nature.

With regard to Hungary's recovery and resilience plan, the PRESIDENT explained that the key elements concerning judicial independence and the protection of the EU budget had been included in the plan as 'super milestones', the implementation of which was imperative. This meant that no payment under the Recovery and Resilience Facility would be possible until Hungary had fully and properly implemented these 'super milestones'.

Lastly, she added that, although there were different procedural steps to follow for these two tools (the conditionality mechanism and the recovery and resilience plan), they addressed the same problems. It was therefore important to look at them together in order to take the necessary decisions.

The PRESIDENT then invited the members of the College concerned to present the two proposals in more detail.

As regards the conditionality mechanism, Mr HAHN pointed out that the procedure was being used for the first time, which meant that the institutions had to take particular care. The Commission assessment presented that day followed intensive and continuous dialogue with the Hungarian authorities over the course of the year and was the result of close coordination between the departments concerned. The approach taken by the Commission was to address the risk to the EU budget in close cooperation with the Hungarian authorities on the basis of facts and figures.

According to the Commission's proposal of 18 September 2022, the 17 remedial measures put forward by Hungary had, in principle, been capable of addressing the risks to the EU budget if implemented effectively and correctly. The broad risk areas identified were public procurement, conflicts of interest and transparency, as well as the prosecution service.

Mr HAHN noted that the budgetary protection measures proposed by the Commission to the Council had to be adopted by qualified majority voting (QMV) and related to: (i) the suspension of 65% of the commitments for three operational programmes under cohesion policy, amounting to around EUR 7.5 billion, and (ii) a ban on entering into legal commitments with any public interest trust unless it was completely clear that the trust applied EU financial rules and solid conflict of interest provisions.

He stressed that Hungary had undertaken to implement a clearly defined set of measures before the deadline of 19 November, which was the subject of the Commission's assessment that day. As in the past rounds of this exercise, the Commission had received last-minute additional commitments that would have to be assessed fully on the basis of the legal acts actually adopted by Hungary and their official translations.

Having thus set the context, he then turned to the crux of the matter. The aim was to assess whether Hungary had satisfactorily implemented the 17 remedial measures agreed under the conditionality mechanism by 19 November, so that the Commission could adapt or even retract its proposal for budgetary protection measures made to the Council on 18 September. The overall conclusion of the assessment was that, given the current state of play regarding Hungary's implementation of the remedial measures, the Commission could not state that the identified risks no longer existed. The Commission therefore had to maintain its proposal on the budgetary protection measures.

Mr HAHN nevertheless recognised that Hungary had embarked upon a considerable number of reforms in a short space of time and that the numerical majority of the 17 remedial measures had been addressed. Significant risks remained, however, concerning some of the most central and cross-cutting measures: (i) the newly established integrity authority, (ii) the possibility of reviewing cases dropped by a prosecutor, and (iii) the rules on asset declarations and conflicts of interest.

With regard to the next steps, Mr HAHN explained that, if the Council adopted the budgetary protection measures, the Commission would monitor the situation with a view to lifting these measures once the problems had been resolved. He made clear that, regardless of the Council vote, Hungary’s commitments to the remedial measures were public and stood alone. All the remedial measures, including those already implemented, were listed in Hungary’s recovery and resilience plan and would be monitored there.

He emphasised that, should the Council decide to suspend funds, this would not result in the loss of any funds, given the time limits provided for under cohesion policy rules. Article 7(3) of the Conditionality Regulation expressly laid down that suspended funds could be kept for two years.

In conclusion, Mr HAHN stated that the Commission intended to continue its dialogue with Hungary and make every effort to resolve these issues as soon as possible. The Commission’s assessment made clear that all of these issues could be resolved within a reasonable time frame, which was in the interests of everyone, especially Hungarian citizens.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS focused on Hungary’s recovery and resilience plan. He welcomed the fact that, after 18 months of intense contacts and work, Hungary’s recovery and resilience plan now met all the criteria of the Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF Regulation). In his view, it was a comprehensive and robust package in itself and in comparison with the plans of other Member States. He then explained the main aspects that made Hungary’s plan so robust.

First, he stressed that the plan addressed a key sub-set of country-specific recommendations (CSR) addressed to Hungary, including those from 2022. The plan had dealt with almost all of these recommendations subparts (34 of the 38), placing Hungary’s plan among the top five national plans with the broadest coverage. It included comprehensive measures in the fields of energy, transport, education and healthcare. As regards energy, in accordance with RePowerEU, Hungary's approach set out key reforms, for example on onshore wind, grid connection and renewable energy sources. The plan also included a wide range of measures to strengthen judicial independence by limiting undue influence and arbitrary decisions in the administration of the courts. Hungary had undertaken to strengthen the role and powers of its National Judicial Council and the independence of its Supreme Court.

Second, Mr DOMBROVSKIS underlined that Hungary's green and digital spending targets exceeded European targets, reaching respectively 48% and 30% of the overall envelope. As required by the RRF Regulation, the plan included measures that contributed to all six policy areas of European relevance ('the six pillars'), with a particular focus on the green transition, digital transformation and strengthening economic, social and institutional resilience, as well as on policies for the next generation. The plan also included measures to support smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as social and territorial cohesion.

Third, he highlighted the 27 essential milestones, which the Commission called 'super milestones', covering: (i) all 17 initial remedial measures under the conditionality mechanism, (ii) all the judicial independence milestones, and (iii) all the audit and control measures, such as the establishment of a functioning IT repository to collect data. No funds under the plan would be paid until Hungary had implemented these 'super milestones' satisfactorily.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS compared the situation to that of Poland, whose national plan had also been approved, as it met the requirements of the RRF Regulation. He made it clear that Poland had yet to implement its commitments and consequently the funds under the plan had not yet been disbursed.

The Commission was taking the same approach with Hungary, while ensuring full consistency with the conditionality procedure. Hungary's plan thus covered not only all initial remedial measures as 'super milestones', but also almost 40 regular milestones and targets to monitor actual implementation on the ground until mid-2026.

Lastly, Mr DOMBROVSKIS stressed that the EU needed to take a decision on Hungary’s recovery and resilience plan given the strict deadline for committing funds laid down in the RRF Regulation.

Mr GENTILONI confirmed the quality of Hungary’s plan which had been the result of lengthy discussions. The key milestones, known as ‘super milestones’, were linked not only to remedial measures on the rule of law, but also to stricter audit and control requirements, which was one of the issues of great interest to the European Parliament.

He then referred to the plan’s focus on investment in energy, transport, education, including mechanisms designed to gradually increase teachers’ salaries, as well as healthcare. The social and equality aspects had also been strengthened through measures targeting vulnerable groups, especially the Roma population. Lastly, some of the measures aimed to improve the quality of public finances, in particular to ensure a sustainable pension system.

Mr GENTILONI stressed the importance of the timetable, since the RRF Regulation provided that 70% of the grants allocated to Member States had to be committed before 31 December 2022. An extraordinary meeting of finance ministers (Economic and Financial Affairs Council) would probably be convened in mid-December to take the related decisions.

Mr GENTILONI concluded by highlighting that the package was very balanced and ensured consistency between the conditionality procedure and the Hungarian recovery and resilience plan. Continuous monitoring would be required to assess the actual implementation of Hungary’s commitments.

Mr REYNDERS noted that Hungary’s recovery and resilience plan addressed an additional topic not covered by the conditionality mechanism: judicial independence. For the first time, Hungary had committed to strengthening judicial independence, with four strong and ambitious milestones. This was further proof that the budgetary approach to the rule of law worked and delivered impressive results with sustained effort.

Mr REYNDERS pointed out that Hungary's structural problems with judicial independence had been highlighted in three editions of the Rule of Law Report. In the context of the European Semester, the Council had twice recommended that Hungary strengthen judicial independence. The European Parliament had also focused on the issue in its Article 7 procedure against Hungary.

He then explained the first milestone on judicial independence, which concerned the National Judicial Council, composed of judges elected by their peers. This was a vital part of judicial checks and balances in Hungary. This important milestone required Hungary to implement legislation strengthening the role and powers of the National Judicial Council. For example, this Council would have the power to issue binding opinions on key decisions by the President of the National Office for the Judiciary. Hungary also needed to ensure that this Council was adequately resourced and staffed.

The second milestone presented by Mr REYNDERS concerned the independence of the *Kuria*, Hungary's Supreme Court, which had to be guaranteed through precise and concrete measures. In that respect, among other measures, Hungarian law had to ensure that the President of the Court had a single term of office, that candidates were experienced and that their skills were assessed by the National Judicial Council according to criteria of impartiality, probity and integrity. This was supplemented by enhanced consultation powers for *Kuria* judges, especially in the appointment of key positions within this Supreme Court.

The third milestone concerned the strengthening of the preliminary ruling mechanism. In that context, Mr REYNDERS explained that a national judge hearing a case had to be free to decide whether to refer a question of EU law to the Court of

Justice of the EU. Through the preliminary ruling procedure, the Court of Justice guaranteed that EU law was correctly interpreted and applied by national courts. Although it was a cornerstone of the EU judicial order, a decision by a Hungarian judge to refer a case to the Court of Justice of the EU could currently be reviewed by the *Kuria*. That was not compatible with the EU legal system. Hungary would therefore have to scrap this possibility of the *Kuria* reviewing a referral to the Court of Justice of the EU, leaving it to the judge hearing a case to freely decide on such a referral.

Lastly, the fourth milestone mentioned by Mr REYNDERS concerned the limitation of the constitutional complaint procedure. In that context, Hungary needed to strengthen the power and independence of ordinary courts by ensuring that their decisions were truly final. Since 2019 Hungarian public authorities had been allowed to challenge the final decisions of ordinary courts before the Constitutional Court, which undermined the principle of legal certainty. The milestone would therefore prevent public authorities from using the procedure to challenge final decisions by independent courts.

In conclusion, Mr REYNDERS stressed that that day's package was an important step towards strengthening judicial independence in Hungary. Hungary would have to implement its commitments fully and rigorously, and the Commission would ensure it did so, as with all Member States. In future, it would no longer be a question of the Commission negotiating, but of assessing the proper implementation of the commitments, which would determine payments from the EU budget.

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

- full support for the proposed measures, which showed that both instruments could be used effectively and in synergy with other EU policy tools to strengthen the rule of law in a Member State;

- the need to see the new judicial instruments and institutions in Hungary work in practice to make sure that the objectives of the reforms had actually been achieved and that the EU budget had been protected;

- the economic difficulties of the Member States bordering Ukraine as a result of Russia's war of aggression and thus the need to find a political solution so as not to cut off the flow of EU funds to those Member States;

- the constructive negotiations with Hungary on cohesion policy funding and the possibility of adopting cohesion programmes even if EU funds were suspended, so that the Member State could continue to support beneficiaries;

- the good news about the positive rule-of-law developments in Hungary, after years of discussions, and the importance of the Commission's public communication on the proposed package reflecting that progress;

- the need to acknowledge, in the context of the conditionality mechanism, the significant efforts made by Hungary since September, which was the subject of major political debate in the country;

- a reminder of the need for equal treatment of all Member States in terms of compliance with the rule of law and institutional obligations.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT highlighted that the recovery and resilience plans were made publicly available to promote transparency in monitoring implementation. Once a national plan was approved, negotiations between the EU and the Member State were concluded and commitments of a contractual nature had to be implemented to provide all stakeholders with certainty.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2022) 687/2 for transmission to the Council and, for information, to the European Parliament and the national parliaments;

– adopted the proposal for a Council Implementing Decision in COM(2022) 686/2 for transmission to the Council and, for information, to the European Parliament and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document distributed as SWD(2022) 686, the contents of which were noted.

13. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: EU GLOBAL HEALTH STRATEGY – BETTER HEALTH FOR ALL IN A CHANGING WORLD
(COM(2022) 675 TO /3; RCC(2022) 223)

14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: STATE OF HEALTH PREPAREDNESS REPORT
(COM(2022) 669 TO /3; RCC(2022) 223)

By way of introduction, Mr SCHINAS pointed out that the current period marked a transition between the crisis management phase during the COVID-19 pandemic and the longer-term structural work that now needed to be undertaken. He highlighted the EU’s successes in managing the pandemic and stressed the importance of accompanying these efforts with better communication. He then referred to the two strands of the package proposed that day, namely the EU Global Health Strategy on the one hand, and the annual report on the state of the EU’s health preparedness on the other.

The previous proposal on global health had been developed in 2010 in a very different context from that of today. Mr SCHINAS felt that the strategy presented that day had a clear focus on the EU’s international health ambitions, in particular the call for the EU to match its engagement in the World Health Organization

(WHO) with its financial contribution. He also noted the importance of strengthening the link between the political objectives and priorities, and European funding.

With regard to the report on the EU's state of preparedness, Mr SCHINAS welcomed the progress made by new actors such as the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). In particular, he highlighted the establishment of the HERA INVEST financing mechanism to mobilise private investment for the development of a wide range of medical countermeasures.

Mr BORRELL then took the floor to stress the timeliness of the Communication on a new EU strategy on global health. The COVID-19 pandemic had brought unprecedented challenges but also important changes to the way the EU approached health. Beyond the scientific and medical field, health had become a key area of international cooperation in the context of foreign and security policy and trade policy.

He stressed that, thanks to its contribution to the global COVID-19 vaccination campaign, the EU had the credentials to help shape the new global health order. With this in mind, he went through some of the priorities included in the strategy, such as strengthening multilateralism, fostering safe international mobility, improving surveillance, prevention and detection abroad – including of biological threats – and tackling attempts to weaponise health and spread disinformation.

He was committed to supporting this programme in political dialogues with the EU's partners, in order to promote international cooperation and partnerships and to make the united voice of Team Europe heard around the world, in cooperation with like-minded partners.

Mr BORRELL reminded the College of the essential role played by the EU delegations in gathering health intelligence across the globe and raising awareness of European positions. Lastly, he noted that, in agreement with the future Swedish Presidency of the Council, conclusions on global health would be prepared for the Foreign Affairs Council in May 2023, so as to convey a strong European message to the annual meeting of the World Health Assembly.

Ms URPILAINEN explained that the new Global Health Strategy aimed to put the health-related Sustainable Development Goals back on track and to tackle health inequalities. Global health was a key pillar of the EU's external policy and a geopolitically critical sector central to European strategic autonomy. She wanted to promote sustainable partnerships of equals by building on the Global Gateway strategy, of which the Global Health Strategy was a key part.

She stressed the importance of increasing the health resilience and strategic autonomy of the EU and its partners, in particular by working on manufacturing health products in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. She highlighted production of COVID-19 vaccines in Rwanda and expressed hope that other countries would follow the same path.

The strategy was also linked to other initiatives, for example on digitalisation of health systems, education and skills development. She mentioned the example of vaccine exports and donations, which had not been sufficient to allow successful immunisation of the population in some countries because of logistical failures and a lack of skilled labour. The Global Health Strategy also proposed to strengthen primary health care systems, which were still too fragile in many partner countries.

These efforts would have to be supported by predictable and sustainable financing. The strategy would thus mobilise all existing European instruments, including at least EUR 4.4 billion under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), and promote innovative forms of financing, such as debt swaps or loan buybacks, to increase the fiscal space needed for health system reforms. In this connection, she stressed that a part of the strategy was dedicated to private sector investment, within the framework of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

Ms URPILAINEN pointed out that the European Union and its Member States were among the world's largest funders of global health. During the pandemic and in the face of the emergency, the EU, its Member States and its financial institutions had pooled their resources to respond to the health and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. 'Team Europe' had been born and EUR 53.7 billion had been committed, of which EUR 47.7 billion had already been spent.

Ms URPILAINEN felt that this had made it possible to position the EU as a global health champion, and proposed to make better use of this 'Team Europe' approach by ensuring closer coordination with the Member States and aligning policy action and financial resources with the EU's new health priorities.

She concluded by stressing that this would also ensure that the EU's priorities were voiced more audibly at multilateral level, so that the EU was recognised as a player and not just a payer.

Ms KYRIAKIDES highlighted the excellent cooperation in drafting the health package, which was based on values, principles and action. She explained that it was a long-term strategy for the next 10 years and noted the importance of learning from the global lack of preparation for the COVID-19 pandemic, despite clear warning signs.

She highlighted the increase in the number and frequency of health crises in the last 30 years, pointing out that, before the recent emergence of COVID-19 and mpox, the world had faced crises such as HIV/AIDS, avian flu and Ebola, and that the silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance could be next. She stressed the connections between humans, animals and the environment highlighted by the emergence of zoonotic diseases, as well as the global interconnectedness of health: what happened in other parts of the world had a direct impact on the EU, and this was what the Global Health Strategy was about.

Noting the importance of strengthening European health systems and reinforcing prevention, preparedness and response, Ms KYRIAKIDES referred to the gradual introduction of the European Health Union from 2020 and the creation of HERA, which had already amply demonstrated its added value. In this context, the report proposed that day set out the actions to be taken to enhance the EU's health preparedness.

Going beyond pandemics, it was necessary to tackle the root causes of ill health, be they economic, social or environmental, adopting a 'health in all policies' approach to prevent diseases before they became health threats.

Ms KYRIAKIDES explained that this called for all healthcare services in all parts of the world to be improved, especially for women and girls. She also stressed the role of factors such as digitalisation, global research and resilient manufacturing and supply chains in an effective global health policy.

With this in mind, better multilateral governance was crucial, together with a more effective and accountable WHO, which was sustainably financed and where the EU had a seat at the table, starting with formal observer status and aiming towards full membership. She also stressed the importance of better coordination with the EU's partners, especially the G7, to make a real difference to the lives of people on the ground.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT emphasised the importance of better communication on the EU's efforts and achievements in the field of health, both within the Union and at a global level.

Following these presentations, the Commission approved the Communications in COM(2022) 675/3 and COM(2022) 669/3, 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.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

15.1. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 225 TFEU – RESPONSIBLE PRIVATE FUNDING OF LITIGATION (SP(2022) 685)

Ms JOUROVÁ presented the European Parliament’s legislative resolution, based on Article 225 TFEU, which asked the Commission to closely monitor and analyse the development of third-party litigation funding.

The European Parliament also called on the Commission to submit a proposal for a Directive to establish common minimum standards at Union level on commercial third-party litigation funding, but only after the entry into force of the Collective Redress Directive (Directive (EU) 2020/1828) and taking into account its effects.

The matter covered by Parliament with this resolution was an important one and the Commission had already reflected on it when proposing and negotiating the Collective Redress Directive.

Ms JOUROVÁ also pointed out that private investors had been funding litigation in the EU for a number of years, but that the Commission did not currently have enough information on the activities of these new actors. They were nonetheless key players, insofar as they could support litigation cases brought by consumer organisations which did not usually have the necessary financial means.

It was also important to have transparency with regard to their activities and the source of their funds. The Collective Redress Directive included general safeguards in this regard, but only applied to some targeted consumer legislation, while the European Parliament had asked the Commission to look into the activity of these investors across the board.

As a follow-up, the Commission would inform Parliament of the launch of a mapping exercise to collect information on relevant regulations and practices in the Member States as regards third-party litigation funding. In this context, the Commission would also collect information from the experience of implementing the Collective Redress Directive, which would start to apply from June next year.

In conclusion, Ms JOUROVÁ explained that, based on the information collected in these exercises, the Commission would be able to take a more detailed position in relation to the solutions proposed in the European Parliament's resolution.

The Commission took note of this information.

15.2. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL reported to the College on the progress achieved during the first six months of implementation of the EU Action Plan on the geopolitical impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the preparations for the next step.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine had impacted every region of the world in different ways, affecting food and energy prices and exacerbating budgetary fragilities in many countries. From the outset, Russia had actively pushed false narratives and disinformation about the consequences of the war, blaming them on the impact of sanctions in a narrative depicting Russia as a victim of Western aggression.

In response to this propaganda, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission had drawn up an action plan identifying a series of priority countries and measures in each region, to be implemented jointly with the Member States, the aim being to mitigate the effects of the war and demonstrate that the EU was, more than ever, a reliable partner.

This document had been presented to the Foreign Affairs Ministers in June. In addition to reinforcing EU diplomatic outreach to the Global South, the first steps in implementing the plan concerned in particular the development of a common EU approach to food security and the creation of a toolbox to combat information manipulation and foreign interference.

The EU’s coordinated efforts had already produced conclusive results during the UN General Assembly High-Level Week. Mr BORRELL reminded the meeting of the more recent adoption of the EU-sponsored UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian annexation of four Ukrainian provinces: 143 States had voted in favour, a higher number than those who had condemned the initial invasion in March. More specifically, a number of southern countries had changed their position during the negotiations and supported the resolution, for instance Brazil, Morocco and Gabon. The language of the declaration of the last G20 summit also reflected the growing isolation of Russia’s position with respect to the international community.

Mr BORRELL concluded by pointing out that support for the EU’s position remained fragile and that every vote required an enormous effort by EU and Member State diplomats. He underlined the importance of continuing to implement the action plan, in particular to take account of the emergence of a ‘Global South’, comprising many countries in the southern hemisphere, which was now enjoying increased momentum and was equipped with a trade strategy based on its own interests. These developments constituted an important change in circumstances, forcing the EU to engage proactively with its partners.

The Commission took note of this information.

15.3. FOLLOW-UP TO THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Ms ŠUICA informed the Members of the College that a follow-up event would be held on Friday 2 December during which the EU institutions would report to the European citizens on how they were pursuing the proposals by the Conference on the Future of Europe, each within their own sphere of competence and in accordance with the Treaties.

The 800 citizens randomly selected to take part in the European citizens' panels had been invited to the follow-up event, and the institutions had collectively committed to addressing the 49 major proposals resulting from the Conference's deliberations.

Ms ŠUICA was pleased to announce that, thanks to the collective effort made by the EU institutions, significant progress had already been achieved on over one third of the 171 action points identified for the Commission six months after the end of the conference; this had been done by covering them in ongoing work or including them in the 2023 work programme.

As soon as it had ended, the Conference on the Future of Europe had been the subject of regular follow-up, the first stage of which had been the publication in June of a Commission Communication containing an assessment and a roadmap setting out the next steps in the follow-up to the Conference.

In September, the PRESIDENT had announced the first new initiatives arising from the conference, while in October the Commission had presented the first work programme addressing the citizens' proposals, in which 35 out of the 43 new initiatives announced for next year derived directly or indirectly from the Conference's proposals, a rate of over 80%.

The dialogue established with citizens in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe had induced the Commission to adapt its working methods: it would thus launch its first citizens' panels in December to discuss food waste, learning mobility and virtual worlds.

In conclusion, Ms ŠUICA said that the follow-up event had brought the Conference on the Future of Europe to an end, but that the historic process that it had initiated would continue to bear fruit as citizens had now been placed at the very heart of European policy-making.

The Commission took note of this information.

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

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The meeting closed at 11.35.