



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2023) 2451 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 17 May 2023

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2451st meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 22 March 2023

(morning)

PV(2023) 2451 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	4-5
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2023) 2451/FINAL; SEC(2023) 2451/FINAL)	6
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF HEADS OF CABINET (RCC(2023) 2451).....	6
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES (PV(2023) 2444; PV(2023) 2445; PV(2023) 2446; PV(2023) 2446, 2 ND PART; PV(2023) 2447)	6
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2023) 79)	6
5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2023) 15).....	9
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	9
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2023) 121 ET SEQ.).....	9
6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2023) 122 ET SEQ.)	9
6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2023) 123 ET SEQ.)	9
6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2023) 124 AND /2)	9
7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2023) 125).....	10
7.1. DG BUDGET – TRANSFER OF AN AD15 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS.....	10
7.2. DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – PROPOSAL FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR AND OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF THE TRANSPORT COMMUNITY.....	10
7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL ADVISERS (PERS(2023) 30).....	11
7.4. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART, JOINT INTERNAL PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR TWO	

<i>DIRECTOR POSTS AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTENSION OF THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE TASK FORCE (SG.RECOVER) (SEC(2023) 127; PERS(2023) 31).....</i>	<i>12</i>
8. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON SUBSTANTIATION AND COMMUNICATION OF EXPLICIT ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS (GREEN CLAIMS DIRECTIVE) (COM(2023) 166 TO /3; RCC(2023) 88).....	13
9. PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON COMMON RULES PROMOTING THE REPAIR OF GOODS AND AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2017/2394, DIRECTIVES (EU) 2019/771 AND (EU) 2020/1828 (COM(2023) 155 AND /2; SWD(2023) 59; SWD(2023) 60; SEC(2023) 137; RCC(2023) 88).....	13
10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.....	20
10.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION, PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'END THE HORSE SLAUGHTER AGE' (C(2023) 1839)	20
10.2. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS	21
10.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE FINANCIAL MARKETS	23
10.4. PREPARATION OF THE 2024 DRAFT BUDGET	24

Single sitting: Wednesday 22 March 2023 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.11 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr TIMMERMANS	Executive Vice-President	
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Vice-President	Items 8 to 10
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	Items 1 to 10.3 (in part)
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 10.2 to 10.4
Ms URPILAINEN	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	

Absent:

Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President
Ms GABRIEL	Member
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member
Mr BRETON	Member

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

Ms SRŠEN	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms ŠUICA	
Ms KOLEVA	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms GABRIEL	
Mr GOLUBIEWSKI	Head of Cabinet to Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	
Ms CAUDET	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Mr BRETON	
Ms SIMKIĆ	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Mr LENARČIČ	Items 10.3 (in part) and 10.4
Mr KRISTÓFFY	Head of Cabinet to Mr VÁRHELYI	Items 1 to 10.1

The following also sat in:

Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service
Ms AHRENKILDE HANSEN	Director-General, DG Communication
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission
Mr FLOSDORFF	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet
Mr VAN KEMSEKE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet
Ms SPINANT	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission
Mr MUELLER	Adviser in the Spokesperson's Service
Ms ALLOUIS-LE LOSTEC	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General
Ms BUKA	Secretariat-General

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2023) 2451/FINAL; SEC(2023) 2451/FINAL)

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings.

2. WEEKLY MEETING OF HEADS OF CABINET

(RCC(2023) 2451)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 20 March 2023.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2023) 2444; PV(2023) 2445; PV(2023) 2446; PV(2023) 2446, 2ND PART; PV(2023) 2447)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2444th, 2445th, 2446th and 2447th meetings of 1, 8, 14 and 22 February 2023, and held over approval of the minutes of its 2448th, 2449th and 2450th meetings of 1, 8 and 14/16 March 2023.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2023) 79)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 17 March 2023 (RCC(2023) 79).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **‘Fit for 55’ – Energy Efficiency (Directive – recast) – FUGLSANG report – 2021/0203 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 62.

- **‘Fit for 55’ – Use of renewable and low-carbon fuels in maritime transport and amendment of Directive 2009/16/EC (Regulation) – WARBORN report – 2021/0210 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 68.

- **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)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 64.

- **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)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 65.

- **Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 requesting the Commission to submit a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of plant protection products and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and to propose follow-up actions, if appropriate in view of the outcomes of the study**

Line set out in SI(2023) 58/2.

- **Committee of inquiry of the French Senate on the shortage of medicines and the choices of the French pharmaceutical industry – Visit of a delegation of the committee of inquiry (23 March 2023)**

Line set out in SNP(2023) 5.

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points, for transmission to the European Parliament:

- **Commission replies to the legislative resolutions (and list of non-legislative resolutions without formal reply) adopted by the European Parliament at its part-session of February II 2023**

Line set out in SP(2023) 154/3.

- **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its December 2022 and January 2023 part-sessions**

Line set out in SP(2023) 153/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **‘Fit for 55’ – Hydrogen and Gas Decarbonisation Package:**
 - **Common rules for the internal markets in renewable and natural gases and in hydrogen (Directive) – GEIER report – 2021/0425 (COD)**
 - **Internal markets for renewable and natural gases and for hydrogen (Regulation – recast) – BUZEK report – 2021/0424 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 63/2.

- **Results of the European Parliament’s March I 2023 part-session**

Information set out in SP(2023) 129.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION

(RCC(2023) 15)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2023) 15 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 15 March 2023.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2023) 121 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 12 and 19 March 2023.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2023) 122 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 12 and 19 March 2023.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2023) 123 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 12 and 19 March 2023 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES

(SEC(2023) 124 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 20 and 24 March 2023.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2023) 125)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2023) 29)

7.1. DG BUDGET – TRANSFER OF AN AD15 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to transfer in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Eric VON BRESKA – currently Director of the ‘Recovery and Resilience I’ Directorate in the Recovery and Resilience Task Force (SG.RECOVER) in the Secretariat-General – to the post of Director of the ‘Revenue and Multiannual Financial Framework’ Directorate in DG Budget.

This decision would take effect on 1 April 2023.

7.2. DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – PROPOSAL FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR AND OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF THE TRANSPORT COMMUNITY

The Commission took note of the information set out in point 2 of PERS(2023) 29 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms VĂLEAN, decided:

- to propose to the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community to extend the term of office of Mr Matej ZAKONJŠEK as Director of the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community for a period of three years starting from 1 August 2023;
- to propose to the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community to extend the term of office of Ms Ljuba SILJANOSKA as Deputy Director of the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community for a period of three years starting from 1 September 2023;
- to ask Ms VÁLEAN, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate these decisions to the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.3. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL ADVISERS
(PERS(2023) 30)

The Commission took note of the information in point 3 of PERS(2023) 29 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to adopt the list of special advisers to the Members of the Commission valid, unless otherwise stated, from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, as set out in PERS(2023) 30;
- by way of derogation from the provisions under point 6, second paragraph, of Commission Decision C(2007) 6655 of 19 December 2007 on the rules on special advisers to the Commission, to authorise Mr HAHN, the Member of the Commission responsible for the Budget and Administration, to conclude addenda to the existing contracts in the

event of duly justified and urgent needs, subject to the availability of sufficient budgetary appropriations;

- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement this decision by signing contracts of employment on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.4. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – AMENDMENT OF THE ORGANISATION CHART, JOINT INTERNAL PUBLICATION OF THE VACANCY NOTICE FOR TWO DIRECTOR POSTS AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTENSION OF THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE TASK FORCE (SG.RECOVER)

(SEC(2023) 127; PERS(2023) 31)

The Commission took note of the information in point 4 of PERS(2023) 29 and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to extend the mandate of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force (SG RECOVER) until 31 December 2026;
- to create a ‘Recovery and Resilience III’ Directorate (SG.RECOVER.C), reporting directly to the Head of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force, and consisting of two units;
- to authorise the joint internal publication, with immediate effect, under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2023) 31 for the posts of Director of the ‘Recovery and Resilience I’ Directorate (SG.RECOVER.A) and Director of the ‘Recovery and Resilience III’ Directorate (SG.RECOVER.C);
- to approve the new organisation chart set out in SEC(2023) 127.

Unless indicated otherwise, these decisions would take effect on 1 April 2023.

8. **PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON SUBSTANTIATION AND COMMUNICATION OF EXPLICIT ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS (GREEN CLAIMS DIRECTIVE) (COM(2023) 166 TO /3; RCC(2023) 88)**
9. **PROPOSAL FOR A DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON COMMON RULES PROMOTING THE REPAIR OF GOODS AND AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2017/2394, DIRECTIVES (EU) 2019/771 AND (EU) 2020/1828 (COM(2023) 155 AND /2; SWD(2023) 59; SWD(2023) 60; SEC(2023) 137; RCC(2023) 88)**

The PRESIDENT invited Mr TIMMERMANS, Ms JOUROVÁ, Mr SINKEVIČIUS and Mr REYNDERS to outline the proposed package of consumer protection measures, which was based on two main strands, first, a proposal for a Directive on Green Claims and, second, a proposal for a Directive promoting the repair of goods.

Mr TIMMERMANS began by saying that both proposals came under the scope of the European Green Deal and its Circular Economy Action Plan.

The Green Claims proposal would make it easier for consumers to choose greener products and services and would reassure them that when a product was sold as green, it actually was green. Consumers increasingly wished to contribute to a greener and more circular economy by using their buying power to good effect.

However, at the same time there had been a rise in ‘greenwashing’, that is the practice of describing products as more eco-friendly than they really were. A study carried out in 2020 by the Commission showed that over half of environmental claims proved to be vague, misleading or unfounded, and almost half of labels had weak verification or none at all.

Greenwashing was an obstacle to the green transition in so far as it lowered consumer trust and undermined the efforts of businesses that provided genuinely greener options, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Furthermore, action taken individually by Member States to address this practice risked generating unnecessarily high compliance costs for all businesses.

The proposal thus aimed to address the issue at EU level, providing common rules and a level playing field, and complementing the review of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive proposed by the Commission the previous year.

Mr TIMMERMANS lastly endorsed the proposal on the right to repair, saying that making sure that products on the EU market could actually be repaired was one of the key priorities of the Green Deal and the new Circular Economy Action Plan. The Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation proposed the previous year targeted the supply side but it was equally important to stimulate demand so that consumers would choose to repair products instead of replacing them.

Ms JOUROVÁ explained that the proposal for an Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation was designed to raise the quality, endurance and repairability of a group of key consumer goods, while the purpose of the proposed Right to Repair Directive was to make the repair of goods a more attractive option for consumers.

Broken items were often discarded prematurely rather than repaired or re-used, primarily as a result of a lack of accurate and comparable information about the costs and means of repair. For around half of surveyed consumers this was an important factor in their repair choices.

To address this issue, an optional information form would be proposed to repairers as a model to make it easier for consumers to compare repair costs and services. Member States would be required to publish information about the form and the repair services on an online platform, which would increase the visibility of repair services without imposing a reporting obligation on repairers.

Ms JOUROVÁ closed by stressing the importance of good communication on this subject, supported by precise data. For instance, the impact assessment done during the preparation of the Directive showed that the proposed measures would increase the rate of repair beyond the legal guarantee period by 13.4%. The proposal would help to bring savings on time and costs for consumers, without overly increasing the burden on economic actors.

On the Green Claims proposal, Mr SINKEVIČIUS said that companies routinely used environmental claims to market their goods, and it was difficult or impossible for consumers to separate what was accurate from what was unfounded and misleading. There were currently some 230 ecolabels on the EU market, based on different methodologies and subject to different levels of verification and transparency. The proliferation of such labels led to confusion and mistrust on the part of consumers and generated additional costs for businesses operating in the single market.

Against this background, the proposal established minimum requirements with respect to substantiating, communicating and verifying environmental claims, and measures to curb the proliferation of environmental labels.

Businesses would need to be able to prove their green claims, demonstrating that they were based on scientific data and a reliable methodology. As part of the scientific analysis, companies would need to identify the environmental impacts that were actually relevant to their product, as well as any trade-offs, to give a full and accurate picture. The claims would then have to be submitted for checks by accredited verifiers, to ensure that they complied with the new Directive, but there was no requirement to use a specific methodology.

Green claims would have to be communicated to consumers in a manner that was clear and transparent. Micro-enterprises (such as small family farms selling directly to consumers) would be exempted from the provisions on substantiation and

communication, but could opt in to verification of claims by requesting a certificate of conformity if they so wished.

Under the new rules, the creation of new public labels would not be permitted except at EU level. Any new private schemes would need to demonstrate greater environmental ambition than the schemes already in place and would be subject to prior approval. Lastly, the proposal required Member States to set rules on dissuasive penalties, to improve compliance.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS expressed the view that the proposal would empower consumers who wanted to choose products based on their environmental impact. He thanked all the colleagues involved in preparing the two proposals, stressing that the proposal on the right to repair was an important part of the EU's action on sustainable products.

Mr REYNDERS explained that the proposed Right to Repair Directive was one of a number of highly anticipated initiatives announced in the State of the Union address given by the PRESIDENT the previous year. The proposal served as the final stage in a process that had been instigated by several other proposals made by the Commission with a view to achieving sustainable consumption throughout a product's life cycle.

On the supply side, the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation promoted the repairability of products during the production phase, whilst on the demand side, the proposal for a Directive on empowering consumers for the green transition meant that consumers could make informed purchasing decisions at the point of sale. He stressed that the proposal being presented that day strengthened demand aspects in particular by establishing a framework for the genuine right to repair throughout the EU during the after-sales phase. Two-thirds of consumers preferred to replace products during the legal guarantee period rather than having them repaired and the intention behind the proposed Directive was to reprioritise repairs, unless this was not technically possible or the costs of doing so were too high.

Mr REYNDERS pointed out that, in addition to providing consumers with the right to repair, the proposal imposed an obligation upon manufacturers and their subcontractors to carry out repairs wherever possible, even if goods had originated from non-EU countries. However, that obligation could be outsourced, which would allow a growing number of small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-enterprises to specialise in repair activities. He also stressed that manufacturers would be required to ensure the production of spare parts five to ten years after the last unit of a given item had been produced. They would also be required to provide the necessary documentation to repairers.

He also mentioned the establishment of an online ‘matchmaking’ repair platform in each Member State to put consumers in touch with local repairers and sellers of renovated goods. Those platforms would make it possible to perform searches based on location and quality standards, as well as the price and duration of repair, to increase the visibility of repairers and help consumers find attractive offers.

Mr REYNDERS concluded by adding that the proposal did not create any new reporting obligations for companies, as it only proposed an optional form to facilitate the comparison of offers. In his view, the intense competition between small companies in the sector could be expected to lead to affordable repair prices without the need for external price caps. He also noted that collective redress could be brought by consumers. Lastly, he stressed the welcome emergence of an active second-hand market, thanks to operators specialised in refurbishment.

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

- the contribution of the package to consumer protection and the objectives of the European Green Deal, in particular through the fight against greenwashing and waste reduction;
- the observation by some that many products were now designed to be quickly replaced rather than repaired, and the concern that the digital components of

many products meant that repairing them was even more difficult;

- the disappearance of a ‘repair culture’ in Europe, and the significant differences between Member States in that regard;
- a reference to widespread local initiatives in some Member States whereby the elderly offered their knowledge and services in order to repair used appliances;
- the need to ensure the repairability of products right from the design stage and a sufficient supply of spare parts;
- the essential role of communication in terms of ensuring the success of the Right to Repair Directive and encouraging consumers to prioritise the repair of goods over their replacement;
- the fact that greenwashing was particularly widespread in the agri-food industry, with products being marketed as being ‘carbon neutral’, claims that were misleading for consumers.

In response to some of the points raised during the discussion, the PRESIDENT noted that, indeed, repairing goods was still often more expensive than replacing them. She referred to a longer-term solution whereby companies could keep possession of their products and lease the use of such products as a service, which would encourage them to organise and encourage repair.

Mr SINKEVIČIUS pointed out that the lifetime of household appliances such as washing machines had shortened considerably in recent years, from 30 years to 10 years on average. The first stage in the Commission’s work in this area had been to ensure the repairability of products and he pointed out that it was useful to know with greater certainty which parts were likely to break down first.

As regards the ‘as-a-service’ leasing of goods, he cited the example of companies in the United States hiring out laptop computers for a limited period of time, which also allowed them to relocate labour through local repair shops, thereby reducing

the proportion of production outsourced to third countries. This also made it possible to develop the second-hand market by selling refurbished products at more affordable prices.

Mr REYNDERS made the point that almost one-third of consumers were already choosing to have products repaired rather than replaced during the legal guarantee period, noting, however, that there were significant differences between Member States. In that context, he stressed the importance of the availability of spare parts in order to achieve the objectives of the proposal, and stressed the current difficulties of complying with that obligation.

For example, storage had to be found for an increasing number of spare parts and manufacturers had to provide information relevant to the repair of goods. He highlighted the usefulness of the proposed ‘matchmaking’ platforms, a point which he illustrated by mentioning a French digital platform which included over 130 000 companies and shared relevant information between consumers and repairers.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- adopted the proposal for a Directive in COM(2023) 166/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments;
- adopted the proposal for a Directive in COM(2023) 155/2 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the national parliaments, and, for information, to the Committee of the Regions, together with the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2023) 59, SWD(2023) 60 and SEC(2023) 137, the contents of which were noted.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION, PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'END THE HORSE SLAUGHTER AGE' (C(2023) 1839)

Ms JOUROVÁ presented the proposal for a Decision submitted to the College for approval on the registration of a European citizens' initiative entitled, in the authentic language (English), 'End the horse slaughter age'.

The objective of the citizens' initiative was to ensure better protection for horses, in particular by prohibiting the slaughter of horses, the long-distance transportation of horses for slaughter and also prohibiting excess work or hard training.

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. Those conditions included 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.

The request made by the promoters of the European citizens' initiative 'End the horse slaughter age' did not fall outside of the Commission's powers to propose legal acts for the purpose of implementing the Treaties under Article 192(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. 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 the European Union from at least seven Member States, the Commission would then analyse the substance of the proposal.

Ms JOUROVÁ added that five of the last seven citizens' initiatives submitted to the Commission had related to the protection of animals. She viewed this as a clear sign from European citizens, also highlighted in the Conference on the Future of Europe. She felt that it would therefore be appropriate for the Commission to address this issue of animal welfare in more detail.

During a brief discussion, the Commission discussed primarily the growing interest in the issue of animal welfare not only in civil society but also in the political arena and within the EU institutions.

Following these exchanges, the Commission confirmed that the initiative 'End the horse slaughter age' met the registration conditions required. It therefore decided, in accordance with C(2023) 1839, to inform the group of organisers 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 this decision, for information, to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national parliaments.

10.2. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL began by presenting to the College the EU Action Plan on the geopolitical consequences of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

On his travels, he had seen how urgent it was to improve the EU's dialogue with its partners, particularly in the Global South, and not only with those who shared the same values. He pointed out that the Russian aggression against Ukraine had revealed how some of those partners did not share the EU's positions on issues such as regulation, deforestation, vaccines or trade agreements.

Mr BORRELL then reported on the latest developments in external relations.

He first referred to the main results of the meeting of the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers that had taken place on 20 March. Following a brief statement by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro KULEBA via video conference, the Council had held an exchange of views on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Mr KULEBA had briefed EU Ministers on the latest developments on the ground and on Ukraine's military priorities, in particular its urgent need for ammunition.

Mr BORRELL explained that, at a joint meeting of the EU's Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers, the Council had approved the three-pronged proposal he had presented with Mr BRETON for urgently supplying Ukraine with artillery ammunition from existing stocks or joint purchases.

First, a new support package of EUR 1 billion would be adopted through the European Peace Facility for the reimbursement of immediate deliveries of ammunition from national stocks or existing orders.

Secondly, an additional EUR 1 billion would be made available to reimburse joint purchases of ammunition from European industry and from Norway as part of a project led by the European Defence Agency. Mr BORRELL added that this project was well on track and that contracts were expected to be concluded with industry by the end of May.

Thirdly, the proposal contained a series of measures to support the European defence industry to enable it to urgently increase its production capacity to meet demand and allow Member States to replenish their stocks. As part of the agreement, Ministers had also agreed to consider a potential top-up of EUR 3.5 billion.

Mr BORRELL added that the Council had taken stock with the Defence Ministers of the good progress made under the EU Strategic Compass a year

on from its adoption. In that context, he had had the pleasure of hosting the first edition of the Schuman Forum the day before, bringing together the Union's closest partners in the field of security and defence. He stressed the success of this meeting, which had involved more than 50 partners from all over the world.

Mr BORRELL concluded his presentation by referring to the outcome of the meeting held on 18 March in Ohrid (North Macedonia) as part of the dialogue between Kosovo¹ and Serbia.

Ms VESTAGER then informed the College of her recent visit to Latin America.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE FINANCIAL MARKETS

The PRESIDENT asked Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Ms McGUINNESS to provide an update on the latest developments regarding the financial markets.

Mr DOMBROVSKIS provided a short summary of developments in the US and Switzerland and of their impact on the EU's financial sector and its economy.

He stressed that direct contagion to the EU banking sector had been limited, and European banks therefore remained robust. It was essential, however, to remain vigilant, because the economy was undergoing a profound shift, especially the rapid rise in interest rates, which would continue to have an impact on the price of financial assets in the month to come.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Ms McGUINNESS emphasised that the EU's banking system was much more resilient, thanks to the reforms carried out after the 2007-2008 global financial crisis. In particular, banks were now better capitalised and more liquid, and the biggest banks were under direct supervision at EU level by the ECB. There were also regular contacts between the European supervisory authorities and third-country authorities for banks also operating outside the EU.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.4. PREPARATION OF THE 2024 DRAFT BUDGET

At the request of the PRESIDENT, Mr HAHN gave an update on issues relating to the preparation of the 2024 draft budget and the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework (MFF).

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 11.00.