



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2023) 2470 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 15 November 2023

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2470th meeting of the Commission

held in Strasbourg

(Winston Churchill building)

on Tuesday 17 October 2023

(afternoon)

PV(2023) 2470 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

EN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attendance list	4-6
1. AGENDAS (OJ(2023) 2470/FINAL; SEC(2023) 2470/FINAL)	7
2. WEEKLY MEETING OF HEADS OF CABINET (RCC(2023) 2470).....	7
3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES (PV(2023) 2465).....	7
4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (RCC(2023) 169)	7
5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2023) 35).....	11
6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS.....	11
6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2023) 331 ET SEQ.).....	11
6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2023) 332 ET SEQ.)	12
6.3. DELEGATION/SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2023) 333 ET SEQ.)	12
6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2023) 334 AND /2)	12
7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2023) 335)	12
<i>DG AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – TRANSFER OF AN OFFICIAL AT GRADE AD14 FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION</i>	12
8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL ON THE EU ROADMAP TO FIGHT DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ORGANISED CRIME (COM(2023) 641 TO / 3; RCC(2023) 171).....	13
9. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN	

PV(2023) 2470 final

PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2018/1806 AS REGARDS THE REVISION OF THE SUSPENSION MECHANISM (COM(2023) 642 AND / 2; RCC(2023) 171)	13
10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2024 – DELIVERING TODAY AND PREPARING FOR TOMORROW (COM(2023) 638 TO / 3; RCC(2023) 172)	16
11. OTHER BUSINESS.....	18
<i>LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS</i>	<i>18</i>

Single sitting: Tuesday 17 October 2023 (afternoon)

The sitting opened at 13.09 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Executive Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Mr HAHN	Member	Item 11 (in part)
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	Items 8/9 (in part) to 11 (in part)
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	Items 1 to 11 (in part)
Ms IVANOVA	Member	

Absent:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Mr GENTILONI	Member
Ms FERREIRA	Member
Ms JOHANSSON	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member

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

Ms LOTSON LÓPEZ	Policy coordinator in Mr BORRELL's cabinet
Mr NOACK	Member of Mr HAHN's cabinet
Mr PIANTINI	Expert in Mr GENTILONI's cabinet
Ms WEBBER	Head of Cabinet to Ms JOHANSSON
Mr SAVIGNAT	Member of Ms URPILAINEN's cabinet
Mr KADARICK	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms SIMSON
Ms O'HEA	Member of Ms McGUINNESS's cabinet
Mr MES	Member of Mr HOEKSTRA's cabinet

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service
Ms SPINANT	Acting Director-General, DG Communication
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet

Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission
Ms ASTERIADI	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Mr ŠEFČOVIČ
Ms BUKA	Secretariat-General

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2023) 2470/FINAL; SEC(2023) 2470/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) 2470)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 16 October 2023.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2023) 2465)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2465th meeting of 6 September 2023 and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2466th, 2467th, 2468th and 2469th meetings of 12 and 27 September, and 3 and 11 October 2023 until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2023) 169)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held on Friday 13 October 2023 (RCC(2023) 169).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Fluorinated greenhouse gases: amendment of Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and repeal of Regulation (EU) N° 517/2014 (Regulation) – EICKHOUT report –**

2022/0099 (COD)

Line set out in SI(2023) 388.

- **Substances that deplete the ozone layer and repeal of Regulation (EC) N° 1005/2009 – POLFJÄRD report – 2022/0100 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 382.

- **Common framework for media services in the internal market (European Media Freedom Act) and amendment of Directive 2010/13/EU (Regulation) – VERHEYEN report – 2022/0277 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 384.

- **Liability for defective products (Directive) – BOTOŞ & ARIMONT report – 2022/0302 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 373/2.

- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) N° 260/2012 and 2021/1230 as regards instant credit transfers in euro (Regulation) – HOOGEVEEN report – 2022/0341 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 386.

- **Objection pursuant to Rule 111(3) of Parliament’s Rules of Procedure – Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) .../... amending Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2139 establishing additional technical screening criteria for determining the conditions under which certain economic activities qualify as contributing substantially to climate change mitigation or climate change adaptation and for determining whether those activities cause no significant harm to any of the other environmental objectives**

Line set out in SP(2023) 534.

- **Objection pursuant to Rule 111(3) of Parliament’s Rules of Procedure – Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) /... supplementing Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards sustainability reporting standards**

Line set out in SP(2023) 535/2.

- **Fixing the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Baltic Sea for 2024 and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/194 as regards certain fishing opportunities in other waters (Council Regulation) – 2023/0301 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 383.

- **EU Action Plan for the Mediterranean routes**

Line set out in SI(2023) 390.

- **Oral question O-000038/2023 – New European innovation agenda**

Line set out in SP(2023) 532.

- **Oral question O-000041/2023 – Mental health at work**

Line set out in SP(2023) 533.

- **Preparation of a meeting between the Director-General for Competition, Mr Olivier Guersent, and the Committee of inquiry set up by the French Parliament on the French rail freight sector, including the Commission’s formal investigation on the financing of Fret SNCF, on 24 October 2023**

Line set out in SNP(2023) 15/2.

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

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

Line set out in SP(2023) 525.

- **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its part-session of July 2023**

Line set out in SP(2023) 526/2.

- **Commission replies to the non-legislative resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its part-session of July 2023**

Line set out in SP(2023) 504/4.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Establishment of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform ('STEP') and amendment of Directive 2003/87/EC and of Regulations (EU) 2021/1058, (EU) 2021/1056, (EU) 2021/1057, (EU) N° 1303/2013, (EU) N° 223/2014, (EU) 2021/1060, (EU) 2021/523, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697 and (EU) 2021/241 (Regulation) – FERNANDES & EHLER report – 2023/0199 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 519/2.

- **Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) N° 1224/2009, and amendment of Council Regulations (EC) N° 768/2005, (EC) N° 1967/2006, (EC) N° 1005/2008, and Regulation (EU) N° 2016/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control (Regulation) – AGUILERA report – 2018/0193 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2023) 514/2, further to note SPI(2023) 35, which the Commission had already approved on 18 July 2023 by written procedure, and to

note SI(2023) 228, which the Commission had already approved on 20 June 2023.

- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) 2019/943 and (EU) 2019/942 as well as Directives (EU) 2018/2001 and (EU) 2019/944 to improve the Union’s electricity market design (Regulation) – GONZÁLEZ CASARES report – 2023/0077 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 387.

- **Question Time (Commission) – European measures to prevent and to fight the rise of organised crime**

Information set out in SP(2023) 531.

- **Joint common principles for enhanced consumer protection during the winter of 2023-2024**

Information set out in SPI(2023) 44.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2023) 35)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2023) 35 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 11 October 2023.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2023) 331 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 9 and 15 October 2023.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT
(SEC(2023) 332 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 9 and 15 October 2023.

6.3. DELEGATION/SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS
(SEC(2023) 333 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 9 and 15 October 2023 archived in Decide.

6.4. SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES
(SEC(2023) 334 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 16 and 20 October 2023 and of the finalisation written procedures.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS
(SEC(2023) 335)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
(PERS(2023) 96)

**DG AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – TRANSFER OF AN
OFFICIAL AT GRADE AD14 FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF
THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION**

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI, the Commission decided to transfer Ms Catherine GESLAIN-LANEELLE in the interest of the service, under Article 8 of the Staff Regulations, from the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union to the European Commission, and to assign her to the post of Director of the 'Strategy and Policy Analysis' Directorate in DG Agriculture and Rural Development.

This decision would take effect on 1st November 2023.

**8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL ON THE EU ROADMAP TO FIGHT DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ORGANISED CRIME
(COM(2023) 641 TO / 3; RCC(2023) 171)**

**9. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL AMENDING REGULATION (EU) 2018/1806 AS REGARDS THE REVISION OF THE SUSPENSION MECHANISM
(COM(2023) 642 AND / 2; RCC(2023) 171)**

Mr SCHINAS presented to the College the package of measures proposed to strengthen security within the Union. He began by highlighting the efforts made since the beginning of this Commission's term of office to bring together in a coherent package all the measures taken in the field of security, so as to enable the implementation of a genuine Security Union.

He pointed out that, when preparing his confirmation hearing before the European Parliament at the beginning of the Commission's term of office, he had had to cover as many as 55 separate clusters relating to different aspects of security. These different clusters had all been integrated into the holistic approach to the EU's security policy that the Commission had developed.

Mr SCHINAS then presented the different elements of the package. He explained, first, that the report on the Security Union, which would be approved in parallel by written procedure, provided an overview of the state of play of the measures and programmes implemented in this area. He pointed out that the co-legislators had already adopted more than half of the 36 legislative initiatives proposed by the Commission during this term of office, in particular to respond to new needs arising from the rapid evolution of digital technologies. However, the report highlighted the difficulty of ensuring complete security in a radically changing environment where new threats were emerging all the time. Mr SCHINAS also noted the multiple forms which these threats took, depending on the context in which they arose, ranging from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to the development of digital technologies or the instrumentalisation of migrants.

In view of the need for swift action, he stressed the importance of concentrating efforts on the implementation of existing legislation and its uniform application by the Member States and on the conclusion of ongoing legislative procedures. A letter to this effect had been sent to the 27 Member States in connection with the approval of the report.

Mr SCHINAS then presented the EU Roadmap to step up the fight against drug trafficking and criminal networks, building on the legislative and operational initiatives put forward so far. The drugs trade was one of the most significant security threats facing the EU today.

This was why the Roadmap set out 17 targeted practical measures to address emerging gaps, in four priority areas: (i) dismantling high-risk criminal networks, (ii) strengthening cooperation between the EU and its international partners, in particular in Latin America, to close the main supply routes, (iii) establishing a new alliance of European ports to increase the resilience of ports to criminal infiltration, and (iv) strengthening prevention in order to stop criminal groups from infiltrating society and the legal economy.

Mr SCHINAS then stressed the urgent need to speed up work on the third element of the package, which would also be approved by written procedure, namely the Communication on combating the threats posed by the illegal and dangerous use of drones intended for civil use. The aim was to ensure the security of the EU's critical infrastructure and prevent an uncontrolled increase in threats in civil space in light of rapid technological developments and the increasing number of drones.

The Communication thus aimed to provide Member States with a toolbox of six measures to support the implementation of an EU policy on drones. These included the creation of a Commission group of counter-drone experts and the establishment of an online platform to share best practices and information in order to streamline existing activities. The Communication also aimed to help Member States choose from a variety of commercial anti-drone technologies available on the market by providing advice and guidance on the technical specifications to be taken into account.

Lastly, Mr SCHINAS presented the proposal for a Regulation revising the current visa suspension mechanism, which directly concerned the external dimension of the EU's migration policy. New tools were now needed and others would have to be adapted to deal with the emerging threats. In particular, the current mechanism did not allow for a response to abuses of the visa exemption in the case of state-sponsored instrumentalisation of migrants, a new hybrid threat facing the Member States.

The proposed revision therefore sought to (i) broaden the grounds for suspending the visa exemption arrangements, (ii) increase the length of the current procedure and introduce a new urgency procedure to allow a swifter response where necessary, and (iii) strengthen the Commission's monitoring obligations in respect of any visa-free countries where problems were identified.

Following this presentation, the Commission, on a proposal from the PRESIDENT, confirmed that the Communication and the proposal for a Regulation set out in

COM(2023) 641/3 and COM(2023) 642/2 would be formally adopted by finalisation written procedure, the deadline for which was set at Wednesday 18 October 2023 (PE/2023/7089 and PE/2023/7077).

10. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2024 – DELIVERING TODAY AND PREPARING FOR TOMORROW (COM(2023) 638 TO / 3; RCC(2023) 172)

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ introduced the Commission Work Programme for 2024, which reflected the achievements of the last 4 years, set out the Commission's new proposals for the months ahead and presented important initiatives to cut red tape.

He began by thanking the Commissioners and departments for their cooperation in preparing the last work programme of this Commission, which emphasised the support to be given to the co-legislators in order to reach agreement on the key initiatives proposed by the Commission. He noted that this work programme came in the run-up to the end of the legislature and the 2024 European elections, and against a complex geopolitical background, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the energy crisis and the current crisis in the Middle East.

This year's exercise had been shorter than usual, as the European Parliament had not organised the usual dialogue between the College and the chairs of parliamentary committees. Nonetheless, inter-institutional dialogue had taken place at all levels, including a number of structured discussions between Commissioners and Parliament, with the co-legislators showing a high degree of convergence with the proposals outlined by the PRESIDENT in her latest State of the Union speech and in her political guidelines.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ stressed that one important aspect of the Commission's work programme was full application of the 'one-in, one-out' approach for the third consecutive year. This followed the PRESIDENT's commitment to reduce reporting requirements by 25%, in line with the strategy to boost the EU's long-term competitiveness and relieve the burden on small and medium-sized enterprises.

In this context, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ ended by pointing out that cutting red tape had so far saved businesses around EUR 7.3 billion. Additional savings of more than EUR 3 billion were expected from the proposals on reducing the cost of reporting requirements and from the evaluations and fitness checks proposed in the 2024 work programme.

The PRESIDENT said that identifying reporting requirements for businesses was a difficult but necessary exercise. She asked the Commissioners to support the work of the departments to find ways to cut red tape.

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

- full support for the last work programme of this Commission;
- satisfaction that the co-legislators had adopted a large majority of the initiatives proposed by the Commission;
- the importance of clearly communicating what the Commission had achieved during this mandate and what could still be achieved before the end of the mandate.

On this last point, the PRESIDENT explained that, as the Commission neared the end of its term of office, it was necessary to assess the desirability of adopting major initiatives as well as the prospects for bringing them to a successful conclusion. She also said that care should be taken not to make commitments that would bind the next Commission.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2023) 638/3 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.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The PRESIDENT expressed her deepest condolences to the families of the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Belgium and France. She referred to the tragic resurgence of anti-Semitic terrorism in Europe and Israel, with the massacre of 1 400 people of Jewish faith in one day. Witnessing the troubling scenes during her recent visit to Israel had been a highly emotional experience for her, and she highlighted the deep pain felt by an entire nation created as a refuge for the Jewish people.

She felt that it was important to recognise that Hamas was responsible for the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians, and she reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international humanitarian law. There was no contradiction between expressing unwavering solidarity with Israel and confirming the commitment to meet the humanitarian needs of Palestinians.

She mentioned the substantial increase in the humanitarian aid granted by the Union to Palestine, which had been tripled to EUR 75 million euros, while a humanitarian air bridge had been put in place between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Given the major challenges facing Egypt, which was hosting many refugees, the PRESIDENT also called for increased support for it.

Finally, the PRESIDENT welcomed the fact that several high-level political leaders had decided to see the situation on the ground and to demonstrate their support for Israel. She recommended a constructive dialogue with the Israeli authorities,

emphasising the broader regional and global implications of the crisis. She went on to announce that an extraordinary meeting of the European Council would be held by videoconference later that day, followed by a G7 meeting during the week.

Mr LENARČIČ in turn recognised Israel's right to defend itself, while stressing the importance of doing so in full compliance with international humanitarian law. He described the critical situation in the Gaza Strip and reminded the meeting of the EU's continued commitment to provide aid to the Palestinians. In his talks with Mr Philippe LAZARINI, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), he had had the opportunity to confirm the EU's willingness to provide practical assistance, and to stress the importance of Israel facilitating humanitarian access to Gaza.

With regard to the increase in humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, Mr LENARČIČ insisted on the importance of the rapid allocation of funding, and mentioned the need to draw on the Union's solidarity reserves in order to make the additional funds available. Reinforcing the humanitarian budget would therefore be necessary in order to preserve the EU's capacity to respond to other emergencies in future.

He emphasised, moreover, the crucial importance of establishing a humanitarian air bridge to ensure the delivery of essential supplies despite the challenges posed by the siege of Gaza. There was also an urgent need to open border crossings in order to facilitate the delivery of supplies waiting on the Egyptian side as the absence of such measures risked increasing the number of casualties. Lastly, he referred to the steps taken to repatriate European citizens from Israel and the implementation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism by several Member States for this purpose.

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

- the EU's unconditional support for Israel and its legitimate right to defend itself;

- the need, however, for Israel to respect international humanitarian law and the rule of law;
- the fact that many people with dual European and Israeli nationality were among the victims of the Hamas terrorist attacks;
- the importance of making every effort to secure the release of the hostages held by Hamas, and the efforts made by several Member States to that end;
- the precarious situation of Palestinian civilians, who were also victims of Hamas;
- the geopolitical ramifications of the conflict, in both the EU and the rest of the world;
- the recent terrorist acts in Belgium and France, which had caused considerable fear;
- the clear increase in anti-Semitism and the need to implement strong security measures to ensure the protection of Jewish communities; at the same time, the rise in Islamophobia and the worry experienced by those affected in the EU;
- a reminder of the EU's strategies against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism;
- the likely impact of the Middle East crisis on migration flows in the Eastern Mediterranean;
- the need for clear and coherent communication as the situation developed, in particular because of the influence that social media had on people's perceptions, and the risk of misinformation by Hamas;
- a reminder of the EU's historic duty in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;

- the clear signal sent by the EU with its humanitarian support, illustrated by the tripling of aid to Palestine, and its unwavering solidarity with Israel;
- the need for vigilance to ensure that EU aid would never finance a terrorist group.

In reply to the various points raised during the debate, the PRESIDENT began by referring to the ongoing discussions on the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework. The EU was facing fiscal pressure on many fronts, in particular as regards the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve.

She stressed that both Israelis and Palestinians were victims of Hamas, and it was important to stand firmly with Israel as allies and friends, which would also make it possible to better convey some of the EU's concerns directly to the Israeli authorities. In particular, she pointed out that the water supply had been restored in Gaza thanks to the sustained efforts of Israel's partners. Several parties had a role to play in opening the Rafah border crossing in the south of the Gaza Strip.

It was important to ensure that the EU and its Member States adopted a united front. She pointed out the effectiveness of the EU's common approach to Ukraine, and the perseverance needed to ensure such unity, which had initially been difficult to achieve.

The PRESIDENT concluded by welcoming the significant progress made with the allocation of EUR 75 million in aid to Palestine, an initiative which had inspired other G7 countries.

The Commission took note of this information.

*

* *

The meeting closed at 14.44.