



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2023) 2473 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 6 December 2023

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2473rd meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 15 November 2023

(morning)

PV(2023) 2473 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

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Single sitting: Wednesday 15 November 2023 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.03 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	Items 1 to 7/10
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms IVANOVA	Member	

Absent:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President
Mr REYNDERS	Member
Ms DALLI	Member

Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms SIMSON	Member
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member

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

Ms CONSTANTIN	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms JOUROVÁ	
Mr SCICLUNA	Head of Cabinet to Ms ŠUICA	
Mr BALASSONE	Head of Cabinet to Mr GENTILONI	Item 11.2
Ms TUTS	Head of Cabinet to Mr REYNDERS	
Mr KERR	Member of Ms DALLI's cabinet	
Mr LAHTI	Head of Cabinet to Ms URPILAINEN	
Mr KADARIK	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms SIMSON	
Ms PREISING	Head of Cabinet to Mr SINKEVIČIUS	
Ms DE BASALDÚA	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Ms McGUINNESS	
Ms DENTLER	Deputy Head of Cabinet to Mr HOEKSTRA	

The following also sat in:

Mr STOLTENBERG	Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)	NATO item
Ms RIECKEN-DAERR	Deputy Director of the Private Office	NATO item
Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms SPINANT	Acting Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr MAMER	Head of the Spokesperson's Service and Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr FLOSDORFF	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 1 to 7/10 (in part)

Mr ANDRESEN GUIMARAES	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	NATO item
Ms HILI	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Items 7/10 (in part)
Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
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.

The PRESIDENT opened the meeting by welcoming the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Mr Jens STOLTENBERG. This was the second time Mr STOLTENBERG had spoken at a meeting of this College, which was a sign of the close cooperation established between NATO and the Commission. The PRESIDENT stressed the importance of maintaining these close ties, particularly in view of the ongoing violent conflicts at the EU's borders and beyond.

Mr STOLTENBERG then took the floor, noting that the partnership between NATO and the EU was based on shared values, a joint commitment to tackling common challenges, and the increasingly interconnected European security landscape. He highlighted the growing convergence between NATO and EU members, with Sweden's imminent accession bringing the share of EU citizens now under NATO's wing to 96%.

A discussion followed in which the College raised with Mr STOLTENBERG the key challenges in the field of external relations and the development of EU-NATO cooperation.

Following the discussion, Mr STOLTENBERG thanked the PRESIDENT and the whole College for the invitation to contribute to its deliberations on major international policy issues and welcomed the unprecedented cooperation between the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

The PRESIDENT wound up by thanking Mr STOLTENBERG and the Commissioners for the discussion, which illustrated the convergence of views and complementarity of EU and NATO action.

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1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2023) 2473/FINAL; SEC(2023) 2473/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) 2473)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Tuesday 14 November 2023.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2023) 2469; PV(2023) 2469, 2ND PART; PV(2023) 2470; PV(2023) 2471)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2469th, 2470th and 2471st meetings of 11, 17 and 24 October 2023, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2472nd meeting of 8 November 2023 for a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2023) 180)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (IRG) held by videoconference on Friday 10 November 2023 (RCC(2023) 180).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **European Union geographical indications for wine, spirit drinks and agricultural products, and quality schemes for agricultural products,**

amendment of Regulations (EU) N° 1308/2013, (EU) 2017/1001 and (EU) 2019/787 and repeal of Regulation (EU) N° 1151/2012 (Regulation) – DE CASTRO report – 2022/0089 (COD)

Line set out in SI(2023) 429.

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

Line set out in SI(2023) 430.

- **Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) N° 6/2002 on Community designs, and repeal of Commission Regulation (EC) N° 2246/2002 (Regulation) – LEBRETON report – 2022/0391 (COD) / Legal protection of designs (Directive – recast) – LEBRETON report – 2022/0392 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 431.

- **Establishment of a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amendment of Regulations (EU) 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020 (Regulation) – BEER report – 2023/0079 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 432.

- **Data collection and sharing relating to short-term accommodation rental services and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 (Regulation) – VAN SPARRENTAK report – 2022/0358 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 433.

- **Implementation of the Single European Sky (Regulation – recast) – MARINESCU report – 2013/0186 (COD) / Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 as regards the capacity of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency to act as Performance Review Body of the Single European**

Sky (Regulation) – LIBERADZKI report – 2020/0264 (COD)

Line set out in SI(2023) 434.

- **Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, amendment of Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 and Regulation (EU) N° 913/2010, and repeal of Regulation (EU) N° 1315/2013 (Regulation) – THALER & RIQUET report – 2021/0420 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 435.

- **Establishment of measures for a high level of public sector interoperability across the Union (Interoperable Europe Act) (Regulation) – IJABS report – 2022/0379 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 436.

- **Combating violence against women and domestic violence (Directive) – FITZGERALD report – 2022/0066 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 437.

- **Amendment of Protocol N° 3 on the Statute of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Regulation) – CICUREL report – 2022/0906 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 438.

- **Shipments of waste and amendment of Regulations (EU) N° 1257/2013 and (EU) 2020/1056 (Regulation) – WEISS report – 2021/0367 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 444.

- **Amendment of Council Directive 98/24/EC and Directive 2004/37/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds and diisocyanates (Directive) – VILLUMSEN report – 2023/0033 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 445.

- **Amendment of Directive 2009/138/EC as regards proportionality, quality of supervision, reporting, long-term guarantee measures, macro-prudential tools, sustainability risks, group and cross-border supervision (Directive) – FERBER report – 2021/0295 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 447.

- **Amendment of Council Regulation (EU) N° 216/2013 on the electronic publication of the Official Journal of the European Union (Council Regulation) – VÁZQUEZ LÁZARA report – 2020/0126 (APP)**

Line set out in SP(2023) 579.

- **EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights – Internal rules**

Line set out in SI(2023) 446.

- **EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement – Position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes (Council Decision) – 2023/0319 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2023) 452.

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 October II 2023 part-session**

Line set out in SP(2023) 591.

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

Line set out in SP(2023) 592/2.

The Commission approved the line proposed for the following point, for transmission to the Committee of the Regions:

- **Follow-up to opinions of the Committee of the Regions – Plenary session of July 2023**

Line set out in SR(2023) 23/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Establishment of a framework of measures for strengthening Europe’s net-zero technology products manufacturing (Net Zero Industry Act) (Regulation) – EHLER report – 2023/0081 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 569/2.

- **Establishment of a Union certification framework for carbon removals (Regulation) – PEREIRA report – 2022/0394 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 571/2.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1242 as regards strengthening the CO₂ emission performance standards for new heavy-duty vehicles and integrating reporting obligations, and repeal of Regulation (EU) 2018/956 (Regulation) – EICKHOUT (ex-JADOT) report – 2023/0042 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 572/2.

- **Sustainable use of plant protection products, and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 (Regulation) – WIENER report – 2022/0196 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 573/2.

- **Packaging and packaging waste, amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and Directive (EU) 2019/904, and repeal of Directive 94/62/EC (Regulation) – RIES report – 2022/0396 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 575.

- **Judicial cooperation:**
 - **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)**
 - **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)**

Compromise text in SP(2023) 576, further to note SI(2023) 287 already approved by the Commission on 11 July 2023.

- **Establishment of measures for a high common level of cybersecurity at the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union (Regulation) – VIRKKUNEN report – 2022/0085 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2023) 577, further to note SI(2023) 300/2 already approved by the Commission on 18 July 2023 by written procedure.

- **Establishment of a catch documentation programme for bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), and repeal of Council Regulation (EU) N° 640/2010**

(Regulation) – MATO report – 2020/0302 (COD)

Compromise text in SP(2023) 578, further to note SI(2023) 306 already approved by the Commission on 18 July 2023 by written procedure.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) N° 2019/1009 as regards the digital labelling of EU fertilising products (Regulation) – GRAPINI report – 2023/0049 (COD)**

Information set out in SI(2023) 439.

- **Association agreement with Andorra and San Marino – Draft protocol on financial services**

Information set out in SI(2023) 443.

- **Resolution of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Digitalisation and Administrative Law – MELCHIOR report – 2021/2161 (INL)**

Information set out in SP(2023) 581.

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

Information set out in SP(2023) 554.

**5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION
(RCC(2023) 38)**

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2023) 38 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 8 November 2023.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. *WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED* (SEC(2023) 361 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 6 and 12 November 2023.

6.2. *EMPOWERMENT* (SEC(2023) 362 ET SEQ)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 6 and 12 November 2023.

6.3. *DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS* (SEC(2023) 363 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 6 and 12 November 2023 archived in Decide.

6.4. *SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES* (SEC(2023) 364 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 13 and 17 November 2023, and of a finalisation written procedure.

7. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON

SKILLS AND TALENT MOBILITY

(COM(2023) 715 AND /2; RCC(2023) 184)

- 8. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ESTABLISHING AN EU TALENT POOL
(COM(2023) 716 AND /2; SWD(2023) 716; SWD(2023) 717 AND /2; SWD(2023) 718 AND /2; SEC(2023) 716; RCC(2023) 184)**
- 9. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS
(C(2023) 7700 AND /2; RCC(2023) 184)**
- 10. PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION – ‘EUROPE ON THE MOVE’ – LEARNING MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE
(COM(2023) 719 AND /2; SWD(2023) 719 AND /2; SWD(2023) 720; RCC(2023) 184)**

The PRESIDENT introduced the skills and talent mobility package, which highlighted the importance of legal migration as a means of filling labour shortages in the European labour market. In the previous year, 3.7 million migrants had arrived legally in the EU, making a firmly positive contribution to the European economy. She pointed out that facilitating legal migration was also an effective way to tackle irregular migration and smuggling networks. She then gave the floor to the Members of the College responsible for the package.

Mr SCHINAS noted that the initiatives presented that day had been mentioned in the PRESIDENT’s 2022 State of the Union address and were closely linked to the Pact on migration and asylum. They were a first attempt to create a framework for organised mobility to the EU, bearing in mind that 75% of EU businesses said they could not find the skilled workers they needed. For example, the Digital Decade policy programme had set the target of 20 million ICT specialists by 2030, whereas the EU currently had only 9 million.

Mr SCHINAS said that the Commission regularly received requests from industry and the Member States calling for the organised mobility of talent and skills. The Commission had already taken many measures on skills management in the labour market, for example the skills and talent package put forward in 2022, the European alliance for apprenticeships, the European universities alliances, micro-credentials, individual learning accounts, or funding for upskilling and reskilling. Today's package was also a timely contribution in the global race for talent and a positive instrument of EU foreign policy. During his recent visits to countries of origin and transit, he had detected a keen interest in legal pathways to the EU that would discourage irregular migration.

He then outlined the main features of the proposed package of measures: (i) the EU talent pool, (ii) recognition of qualifications gained in third countries, and (iii) learning mobility.

He explained that the EU talent pool was a platform for publishing job vacancies that would make it easier to match job seekers from outside the EU with European employers. Once a match had been established, the system would notify the Member State in question and indicate the procedures required for the next steps. The Member States' participation in the scheme was voluntary and the system would make no distinction between skills, although it would prioritise occupations in which there were shortages in the EU.

Mr SCHINAS said that current administrative procedures for the recognition of qualifications gained in third countries often resulted in third-country nationals not always succeeding in applying for jobs in their field of specialisation and instead taking up jobs below their level of qualifications. To address this problem, the Commission was proposing criteria for the comparability of qualifications gained in third countries.

As regards learning mobility, the Commission was drawing inspiration from the Erasmus+ programme to extend mobility opportunities to all learners and ensure

that the experience of international mobility was an integral part of all education and training pathways in the Member States.

Mr SCHINAS ended by saying that the aim of the package being tabled that day was to propose practical, balanced and proportionate solutions in order to meet the needs of the European labour market.

Mr SCHMIT said that labour shortages were currently a major challenge facing all Member States, even those where unemployment remained high, and it was not realistic to rely solely on the EU's internal resources to fill them. Nevertheless, those internal resources should be mobilised as a matter of priority, in particular by integrating more young people, women and people with disabilities into the labour market. The Commission must therefore continue its work with the Member States and social partners on this issue. However, he acknowledged that, even if these resources were mobilised in an optimal way, there would still be a shortage of almost 1 million workers per year on the EU labour market, for demographic reasons, hence the introduction of this package of measures.

There had to be a level playing field in the area of legal migration, and the Commission should coordinate Member States' efforts to ensure that was the case, in cooperation with the EU's partner countries. He explained that Europe's openness to legal migration was focused on specific sectors, according to the needs of the labour market, with the Member States remaining free to expand the list of sectors concerned, in line with their specific needs.

Lastly, he spoke about the recognition of qualifications and the validation of skills gained in third countries. The EU was already working actively with Ukraine on this issue, but a more comprehensive approach was needed, so that it formed part of the broader framework of cooperation between the EU and partner countries. This included the development of apprenticeships and exchanges between educational institutions as well as between public administrations.

Mr SCHMIT noted that the package was being put forward in response to a very strong demand arising from the Tripartite Social Summit in March 2023. He stressed the need for these measures to be implemented effectively, while ensuring that they were aligned with European social values and norms. Third-country nationals could not be treated as second class workers: labour law standards had to be applied uniformly in order to avoid social dumping.

Ms JOHANSSON stressed that the measures proposed that day should help to reduce irregular arrivals to the EU. She said that there were currently around 10 million third-country nationals in the EU labour market. However, the arrival of 1.2 million third-country nationals annually was considered to be insufficient, given that the EU labour force was shrinking due to demographic factors and the simultaneous increase in demand in sectors such as healthcare.

The aim of those measures was to help Member States work more closely together on legal migration, since labour migration fell primarily within the remit of national governments. A platform would be set up for European employers meeting specific criteria, in order to prevent the exploitation of third-country nationals. The platform would also facilitate job-seeking for those nationals and limit the influence of criminal intermediaries in the countries concerned.

Finally, Ms JOHANSSON referred to the EU talent partnerships, indicating that there were already partnerships with five countries: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, India and Bangladesh. The new platform would ensure that people in those countries who were undergoing vocational training benefited from specific identification in the system, which would facilitate their job search within the EU.

Mr BRETON highlighted the challenge of finding qualified staff faced by many European companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, as revealed by the latest Eurobarometer survey. He pointed out that this Commission had been active on this issue throughout its mandate and had clearly prioritised the creation of quality jobs for European citizens. This had resulted in massive investment in skills

development and reskilling opportunities for workers. These efforts had resulted in agreements with social partners on training and reskilling for workers in each of the 14 European industrial ecosystems for the benefit of the single market and citizens.

The Commission Recommendation presented that day on the recognition of qualifications acquired in third countries was based on the success of a similar Recommendation drawn up in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The aim of the Recommendation was therefore to facilitate recruitment for European companies, particularly in regulated professions in sectors such as health and manufacturing. It also aimed to enable third-country nationals to better contribute to the European single market. In this regard, he noted that 40% of third-country nationals were overqualified for the jobs they did, compared with 20% of Europeans.

On this basis, the Recommendation called on Member States to strengthen administrative capacity for the recognition of diplomas, to develop cooperation with third countries, to simplify procedures and to reduce the costs of recognition of qualifications for applicants. All these measures should be implemented on the basis of respect for equal treatment and should not offer undue advantages to third-country nationals compared to EU citizens.

Mr BRETON concluded by confirming that the implementation of this Recommendation and the package of measures of which it was part would benefit the European economy and the single market.

Ms IVANOVA presented the proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning mobility. She explained that this proposal had two main aims: firstly, to enable young people to easily access high-level education and training across the continent in order to learn, study, train and work; and secondly, to make learning abroad accessible to all, regardless of age, level of education or financial situation.

She noted that the Recommendation had been inspired by the Erasmus+ programme and aimed to broaden mobility opportunities by focusing on three key actions. The

aim of the first action was to promote learning mobility by inviting Member States to integrate it into all education and training sectors and programmes.

The second action involved setting more ambitious targets for 2030, in order to strengthen political commitment to educational mobility, including specific targets for higher education graduates and vocational learners. In addition, a new target for supporting people facing economic, social, cultural or geographical barriers was introduced to ensure that at least 20% of people participating in mobility came from these groups.

The third action concerned the promotion of mobility among teachers and apprentices. Given the crucial role played by teachers, their participation in learning mobility schemes would from now on be supported by the Commission. In addition, activities for apprentices, such as job shadowing or professional development courses, would be encouraged as they would address skills gaps and increase the employability of young people.

Once the Recommendation had been adopted by the Council, Member States would have to draw up national action plans to guide the work in the 2025-2030 period. The Commission was ready to support these efforts, namely through instruments such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and the alliance of European universities. Thanks to those efforts, Europe would become a globally attractive place in which to learn, train, study and teach.

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

- the very positive assessment of the proposed package of measures;
- the importance of taking into account less qualified staff in occupations with labour shortages at EU level;

- the advisability for the Commission to propose a Communication on the shortage of drivers in the transport sector next year, and, on this basis, a possible revision of the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications;
- the expected benefits of the EU talent pool on EU competitiveness, it being understood that it would not add to the administrative burden for companies.

Following these presentations, the Commission:

- approved the Communication in COM(2023) 715/2 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(2023) 716/2, for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Data Protection Supervisor and the national parliaments, together with the staff working document, the impact assessment, the summary thereof and the opinion of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board in SWD(2023) 716, SWD(2023) 717/2, SWD(2023) 718/2 and SEC(2023) 716, the contents of which were noted;
- adopted the Commission Recommendation in C(2023) 7700/2 and decided to notify it to the Member States and to publish it, for information, in the Official Journal of the European Union;
- adopted the proposal for a Council Recommendation in COM(2023) 719/2 for transmission to the Council and, for information, to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Data Protection Supervisor and the national parliaments, together with the staff working documents SWD(2023) 719/2 and SWD(2023) 720, the contents of which were noted.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1. RESULTS OF THE BUDGETARY CONCILIATION PROCEDURE OF 10 NOVEMBER CONCERNING THE ANNUAL BUDGET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR 2024

The PRESIDENT congratulated Mr HAHN and his teams for having concluded the negotiations on the 2024 EU budget early, something that had not happened since 2017.

Mr HAHN thanked the Commission departments for their hard work and announced that the European Parliament and the Council had reached an agreement on the budget in the early hours of Saturday, 11 November. It would be deemed to be officially adopted once it had been formally approved by the co-legislators the following week.

He felt that this deal, involving an increase in budget allocations and a reduction in payments while at the same time increasing budgetary margins, was particularly significant in the current geopolitical context. With an overall budget of EUR 189.4 billion for 2024, Mr HAHN drew attention to the importance of allocating the funds judiciously. Despite the planned margin of almost EUR 1.4 billion, he felt that prudent management was essential to cover unforeseen needs throughout the following year.

He highlighted the significant increase in funding requested by the European Parliament for the Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ programmes, as well as the reinforcement of the transport strand of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), which was possible because its energy strand had not been fully used up. He also welcomed the additional EUR 400 million for Heading 6, and in particular the reinforcement of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) as well as the increase in EU

humanitarian aid, all of which were crucial to address the numerous crises affecting the EU and its neighbourhood.

However, the deal was based on the current ceilings of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and was ill-equipped to address the EU's current challenges. Agreement on the MFF revision was therefore urgently needed in order to mobilise resources that were commensurate with needs. To make sure that the annual budget would be aligned with the revised financial framework, the deal provided for a joint declaration by the three institutions stating that a draft amending budget for 2024 would be put forward immediately after the adoption of the revised MFF Regulation.

Mr HAHN ended by thanking the College for its support, in particular in terms of promoting a parliamentary majority in the vote on the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework in December.

The Commission took note of this information.

11.2. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL began by referring to the Middle East crisis, pointing out that the European Council had adopted a declaration on the humanitarian situation in Gaza the day before the Foreign Ministers' Council.

He underlined the crucial importance of immediate humanitarian pauses in hostilities. The opening of the Rafah crossing was positive but insufficient, as many lorries were waiting at the border to enter Gaza. Safe corridors were needed to deliver humanitarian aid to the population and to evacuate injured and sick people as well as foreign nationals. He added that more crossings to Gaza should be opened, and that the Cypriot proposal to open a sea corridor was currently being discussed.

The European Union had firmly condemned the use of hospitals and civilians as human shields by Hamas. It had also asked for civilians to be allowed to

leave the combat zone, and had called on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint in this regard. Mr BORRELL noted in addition the EU's call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages held by Hamas, and for access to them by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The second line of action was to avoid any spill-over and regional escalation of the conflict. In this regard, he said that he was closely monitoring developments, particularly in the West Bank, and that he would be in contact with the relevant regional actors during his forthcoming visit to Israel, Palestine, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan.

Lastly, Mr BORRELL spoke about the need to start working on a longer-term vision for Gaza - the 'day after'. It was essential in this context to maintain the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, partner in the region, and to revive the political process. He ended his comments on the situation in the Middle East by noting that, thirty years after the Oslo Accords, the international community had not succeeded in making the two-state solution a reality.

He then gave an update on the situation in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Dmytro KULEBA, had attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 November by video conference. He had briefed the Ministers on the latest developments on the ground, and referred to Ukraine's priorities and needs in the run-up to another winter.

Mr BORRELL reminded the meeting that support for Ukraine must remain a priority for the EU, and welcomed the fact that the Commission had the previous week recommended opening accession negotiations with Ukraine.

The Council had discussed in more detail European military support and the EU's security commitments. Given this, and following the mission entrusted to him by European leaders in October 2022, he was working on the scope

and contents of the EU's future security commitments. This issue had also been broached the day before with the European Defence Ministers. The priority was to obtain additional military support through the Ukraine Assistance Fund, starting from next year.

Mr BORRELL went on to welcome the progress made on the 12th package of sanctions, with more individuals and entities added to the list of those subject to sanctions, new import and export bans, measures to lower the oil price cap and address the circumvention of sanctions, and a ban on trade in Russian diamonds.

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

- the significant support provided by the European Union and its Member States to Palestine and Palestinian refugees;
- the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, which was rapidly deteriorating, particularly in terms of health;
- the human cost of the current conflict, and the many challenges posed by the lack of a real humanitarian pause to help people there.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT reminded the meeting that the EU was the largest donor of funds to Palestine and to the UN agencies present there. She confirmed the importance of working with all actors in the region on the 'day after' scenario, based on a two-state solution that preserved the right of Palestinians and Israelis to freedom, security and dignity.

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 11.07.