



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2024) 2486 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 17 April 2024

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2486th meeting of the Commission
held in Strasbourg
(Winston Churchill building)
on Tuesday 12 March 2024
(afternoon)**

PV(2024) 2486 final

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Single sitting: Tuesday 12 March 2024 (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 ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member	
Mr BRETON	Member	Items 1 to 9.3
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Ms VÁLEAN	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Mr SINKEVIČIUS	Member	Item 9 (in part)
Ms IVANOVA	Member	
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	

Absent:

Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President
Mr SCHMIT	Member
Mr GENTILONI	Member
Ms DALLI	Member

Mr LENARČIČ	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member
Ms McGUINNESS	Member

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

Ms DYRSKJØT	Member of Ms VESTAGER's cabinet
Ms LOTSON	Member of Mr BORRELL's cabinet
Mr BRAUN	Head of Cabinet to Ms JOUROVÁ
Ms FABER	Policy coordinator in Mr SCHMIT's cabinet
Mr PIANTINI	Expert in Mr GENTILONI's cabinet
Mr KERR	Member of Ms DALLI's cabinet
Ms PAJNKIHAR	Member of Mr LENARČIČ's cabinet
Mr SAVIGNAT	Member of Ms URPILAINEN's cabinet
Ms O'HEA	Member of Ms McGUINNESS's cabinet

The following also sat in:

Mr CALLEJA CRESPO	Director-General, Legal Service
Ms SPINANT	Director-General, DG Communication
Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet
Mr VAN KEMSEKE	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2024) 2486/FINAL; SEC(2024) 2486/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(2024) 2486)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 11 March 2024.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2024) 2482)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2482nd meeting of 14 February 2024 and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2483rd, 2484th and 2485th meetings of 21 and 27 February and 5 March 2024 until a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2024) 77)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) held on Friday 8 March 2024 (RCC(2024) 77).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Approval and market surveillance of non-road mobile machinery circulating on public roads and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 – VANDENKENDELAERE report – 2023/0090 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 160.

- **Amendment of Directive 2009/16/EC on port State control (Directive) – TAX report – 2023/0165 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 162.

- **Amendment of Directive 2009/21/EC on compliance with flag State requirements (Directive) – TAX report – 2023/0172 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 163.

- **Collection and transfer of advance passenger information (API) for enhancing and facilitating external border controls, amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/817 and Regulation (EU) 2018/1726, and repeal of Council Directive 2004/82/EC (Regulation) / Collection and transfer of advance passenger information for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime, and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/818 (Regulation) – OETJEN & KANKO reports – 2022/0424 (COD) and 2022/0425 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 166.

- **Prohibition of products made with forced labour on the Union market (Regulation) – LEITÃO-MARQUES & RAFAELA report – 2022/0269 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 167/2.

- **Extension of Directive [XXXX] to third country nationals legally residing in a Member State (Directive) – MANDERS & KUHNKE report – 2023/0393 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 168.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards multiannual survey programmes, notifications concerning the presence of regulated non-quarantine pests, temporary derogations from import prohibitions and special import requirements and establishment of procedures for granting them, temporary import requirements for high-risk plants, plant products and other objects, the establishment of procedures for the listing of high-risk plants, the content of phytosanitary certificates, the use of plant passports and as regards certain reporting requirements for demarcated areas and surveys of pests (Regulation) – AGUILERA report – 2023/0378 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 170.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/881 as regards managed security services (Regulation) – CUTAJAR report – 2023/0108 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 175.

- **Amendment of Directives 2009/102/EC and (EU) 2017/1132 as regards further expanding and upgrading the use of digital tools and processes in company law (Directive) – RADEV report – 2023/0089 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 161.

- **Establishment of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans (Regulation) – RESSLER & PICULA report – 2023/0397 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2024) 165.

- **Road transport and aviation:**
 - **Amendment of Regulations (EC) No 80/2009, (EU) No 996/2010 and (EU) No 165/2014 as regards certain reporting requirements in the fields of road transport and aviation – (Regulation) – OETJEN report –**

2023/0361 (COD)

- **Amendment of Directives 2009/12/EC, 2009/33/EC and (EU) 2022/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 96/67/EC as regards certain reporting requirements in the fields of road transport and aviation – (Decision) – OETJEN report – 2023/0362 (COD)**

Line set out in SP(2024) 184.

- **Oral question O-000059/2023 – Promised revision of the EU animal welfare legislation and the animal welfare-related European Citizens' Initiatives**

Line set out in SP(2024) 191.

- **Establishment of the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Joint Committee established by the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community as regards the amendment of the Decision No 1/2023 of the Joint Committee of 24 March 2023 laying down arrangements relating to the Windsor Framework (Council Decision) – COM(2024) 57 final of 30 January 2024**

Line set out in SI(2024) 152.

- **EU position to be taken in the meetings of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF), established under Article 508 of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement**

Line set out in SI(2024) 171.

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 February I 2024 part-session**

Line set out in SP(2024) 196.

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

Line set out in SP(2024) 177/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Consumer redress and dispute resolution:**
 - **Amendment of Directive 2013/11/EU on alternative dispute resolution for consumer disputes, as well as Directives (EU) 2015/2302, (EU) 2019/2161 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Directive) – BALLARÍN CEREZA report – 2023/0376 (COD)**
 - **Repeal of Regulation (EU) No 524/2013 and amendment of Regulations (EU) 2017/2394 and (EU) 2018/1724 with regards to the discontinuation of the European Online Dispute Resolution Platform (Regulation) – BALLARÍN CEREZA report – 2023/0375 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2024) 188.

- **European Maritime Safety Agency and repeal of Regulation (EC) No 1406/2002 (Regulation) – MONTEIRO DE AGUIAR report – 2023/0163 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2024) 185.

- **Use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area, amendment of Directive 2012/34/EU and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 (Regulation) – METZ report – 2023/0271 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2024) 186.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 as regards minimum requirements on minimum breaks and daily and weekly rest periods in the occasional passenger transport sector (Regulation) – VIRKKUNEN report – 2023/0155 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 183, further to note SI(2024) 85, which the Commission had already approved on 14 February 2024.

- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1024/2012 and (EU) 2018/1724 as regards the use of the Internal Market Information System and the Single Digital Gateway for the purposes of certain requirements laid down by Directive (EU) .../... of the European Parliament and of the Council on European cross-border associations (COM(2023) 516) (Regulation) – PELLETIER report – 2023/0314 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2024) 182.

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

Compromise text in SP(2024) 179, further to note SI(2024) 20, which the Commission had already approved on 24 January 2024.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) No 2019/1009 as regards the digital labelling of EU fertilising products (Regulation) – GRAPINI report – 2023/0049 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 180, further to note SI(2024) 68, which the

Commission had already approved on 6 February 2024.

- **Review of the EU design protection legislation:**
 - **Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) No 6/2002 on Community designs and repeal of Commission Regulation (EC) No 2246/2002 (Regulation) – LEBRETON report – 2022/0391 (COD)**
 - **Legal protection of designs (recast – Directive) – LEBRETON report – 2022/0392 (COD)**

Compromise texts in SP(2024) 181, further to note SI(2023) 572 already approved by the Commission on 19 December 2023 by written procedure.

- **Energy performance of buildings (recast – Directive) – CUFFE report – 2021/0426 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 175, further to note SI(2023) 563 already approved by the Commission on 19 December 2023 by written procedure.

- **Horizontal cybersecurity requirements for products with digital elements and amendment of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 (Regulation) – DANTI report – 2022/0272 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 173, further to note SI(2023) 550, which the Commission had already approved on 12 December 2023.

- **Harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) and amendment of certain Union legislative acts (Regulation) – BENIFEI & TUDORACHE report – 2021/0106 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 174, further to note SI(2023) 568, which the Commission had already approved on 19 December 2023 by written procedure, and to note SI(2024) 78, which the Commission had already approved on 6 February 2024.

- **Establishment of a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State, and establishment of a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State (recast – Directive) – MORENO SÁNCHEZ report – 2022/0131 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 176, further to note SI(2024) 11, which the Commission had already approved on 16 January 2024.

- **Asset recovery and confiscation (Directive) – VINCZE report – 2022/0167 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 178, further to note SI(2024) 1, which the Commission had already approved on 10 January 2024.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics (Regulation) – VAN OVERTVELDT report – 2023/0237 (COD)**

Compromise text in SP(2024) 187, further to note SI(2024) 93/2, which the Commission had already approved on 14 February 2024.

- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) No 1092/2010, (EU) No 1093/2010, (EU) No 1094/2010, (EU) No 1095/2010 and (EU) 2021/523 as regards certain reporting requirements in the fields of financial services and investment support (Regulation) – KARAS report – 2023/0363 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2024) 202.

- **Question Time (Commission) – Preparedness of EU governments to combat foreign interference, including from Russia**

Information set out in SP(2024) 190.

- **Draft texts for the negotiation between the Union and Switzerland on a broad package for the consolidation and further development of EU-Switzerland relations**

Information set out in SI(2024) 164.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2024) 12)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2024) 12 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2024) 80 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 10 March 2024.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2024) 81 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 4 and 10 March 2024.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2024) 82 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 4 and 10 March 2024 archived in Decide.

6.4. *SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES*

(SEC(2024) 83 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 11 and 15 March 2024, and of the finalisation written procedure.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2024) 84)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2024) 26)

7.1. *DG FINANCIAL STABILITY, FINANCIAL SERVICES AND CAPITAL MARKETS UNION – PROPOSAL FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A MEMBER OF THE BOARD / DIRECTOR OF RESOLUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION AT THE SINGLE RESOLUTION BOARD (SRB)*

(PERS(2024) 18 TO /3)

The Commission took note of the procedure followed, as set out in point 1 of PERS(2024) 26, and, on a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Ms McGUINNESS, decided:

- to propose the appointment of Ms Karen BRAUN-MUNZIGER to the post of Member of the Board / Director of Resolution Policy Development and Coordination at the Single Resolution Board;

- to ask Ms McGUINNESS, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to the European Parliament and to inform the Council.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.2. DG COMMUNICATION NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY – EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR CYBERSECURITY (ENISA)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr BRETON, the Commission decided:

- to propose to the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity to extend the term of office of Mr Juhan LEPASSAAR as Executive Director for five years with effect from 16 October 2024, in accordance with Article 36(7) of Regulation (EU) 2019/881;
- to ask Mr BRETON, the Member of the Commission responsible, to communicate this decision to the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.3. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – EXTERNAL PUBLICATION OF A VACANCY NOTICE FOR THE POST OF DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT FUND (PERS(2024) 27)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and after consulting Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Mr GENTILONI, the Commission decided to authorise the external publication of the vacancy notice for the post

of Deputy Executive Director of the European Investment Fund (EIF) set out in PERS(2024) 27.

This decision would take effect immediately.

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: MANAGING CLIMATE RISKS – PROTECTING PEOPLE AND PROSPERITY

(COM(2024) 91 TO /3; RCC(2024) 80)

The PRESIDENT asked Mr ŠEFČOVIČ and Mr HOEKSTRA to present to the College the measures proposed to manage climate risks with a view to protecting the populations and the prosperity of the European Union.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ began by highlighting the considerable efforts made by the EU and its Member States to fight climate change, in particular by reducing CO₂ emissions and greening industry. Nevertheless, it was necessary to prepare for the inevitable impacts of climate change, even if the ambitious climate change mitigation targets were to be met.

This was the first time that the Commission had addressed climate change adaptation in such a comprehensive manner, heeding the calls of the European Parliament and of the Council to enhance the resilience of the EU. The increased frequency and greater intensity of natural disasters in Europe underlined the need for a strong response. A total of EUR 8.6 billion from the European Union Solidarity Fund had been provided to 24 Member States and 4 candidate countries in response to 110 natural disasters.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ raised a major concern regarding the rate of warming in Europe, which was twice as high as the global average. The Communication showed how

various economic sectors were exposed to climate-related risks and the measures which the EU and its Member States must take to mitigate them.

It also addressed the concept of risk ownership, calling for the respective responsibilities of the Union and the Member States to be clearly defined and for greater involvement of local authorities. In this context, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ mentioned the efforts made by the Commission to help the Member States implement their national energy and climate plans, in particular by facilitating the exchange of best practice in managing climate risks.

The proposed initiative took the form of a Communication, as the aim was not to legislate, but to set out a roadmap for the rest of the current Commission's term of office by identifying already available tools and processes, such as satellite cartography, that could be used for climate adaptation purposes.

The Communication also stressed the need to finance climate resilience initiatives via a combination of public and private investments, and the significant cost of inaction, which was likely to be in the thousands of billions of euros. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ explained that proactive investments in reducing vulnerabilities would ultimately serve to save lives and preserve financial resources that would otherwise be needed to fund reconstruction after natural disasters.

He concluded by pointing out that investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, such as buildings and transport and energy networks, could also create business opportunities and skilled jobs and thereby contribute positively to the European economy as a whole.

Mr HOEKSTRA noted that the emphasis was often on mitigation strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but that this Communication stressed the vital role of adaptation in order to cope with the now inevitable impacts of climate change. He predicted that there would be a significantly greater focus on this issue in the coming years.

The aims of the Communication were twofold: (i) to continuously monitor and collect data in order to assess the progress made and adapt to changing circumstances, and (ii) to strengthen the adaptation efforts already underway. He highlighted the urgent need to adapt society to climate change, noting that, unlike mitigation, which often dealt with abstract future scenarios, adaptation concerned real and current threats faced by citizens such as drought, floods and other climate crises.

He also stressed the importance of the financial costs of inaction, which he illustrated with the example of Slovenia where, in 2023, drought-related financial losses accounted for a significant share of gross domestic product (GDP), even surpassing the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. The Communication gave a clear picture of the increased costs associated with climate change in the absence of action.

There were nevertheless substantial opportunities to be proactive. The Communication thus identified four key pillars to strengthen the EU's resilience, namely: (i) establish clear and coordinated responsibilities between different levels of government, (ii) use data and predictive models to anticipate disasters, (iii) integrate adaptation considerations into existing policies, such as cohesion policy, and (iv) finance climate change adaptation through a combination of public and private investments.

In conclusion, Mr HOEKSTRA stressed that the Communication was only a starting point, providing guidance to Member States and paving the way for future legislative proposals to strengthen the EU's climate resilience in the coming years.

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

- the College's support for the Communication and the recognition of the essential role of prevention, as a complement to mitigation measures, in effectively tackling the impact of climate change;

- the importance in this regard of financing projects focusing on water management, the restoration of natural resources and the improvement of infrastructure resilience, including through cohesion policy;
- the need for EU-funded infrastructure to be built taking into account climate risks, and the suggestion to include these risks in the legislation governing infrastructure development;
- the variations in the degree of vulnerability between the different regions of the EU, a fact highlighted in particular in the 9th Cohesion Report which is due to be adopted shortly;
- the essential role of the Solidarity Fund in supporting reconstruction after natural disasters and the need to increase the Fund's budget to cope with the increase in the frequency of such disasters;
- the effect of human actions on increasing the risk of natural disasters, such as the granting of building permits in areas prone to flooding or unsustainable irrigation practices;
- the need, therefore, for a more stringent regulatory framework and enforcement by public authorities, and the urgent need to address existing vulnerabilities due to human practices.

Following the discussion, the PRESIDENT highlighted the need for adaptation to recurrent disasters such as floods and forest fires and acknowledged the difficulty of changing established practices. In this context, she stressed the crucial role of the Solidarity Fund in ensuring a rapid and effective European response to disasters. Even moderate financial assistance from the Fund could have a significant positive impact on the populations affected.

In reply to a question from the PRESIDENT on the more pronounced rise in temperatures in Europe, Mr HOEKSTRA emphasised the role played by the

geographical location of the continent in the increase in temperature, estimated at 3 degrees Celsius. He added that, even within the European Union, this increase would not be evenly distributed. Southern European countries, regions bordering water sources such as rivers and seas, and regions close to the Arctic were expected to be particularly affected, while Central Europe may experience less extreme changes.

Mr HOEKSTRA concluded that these differences once again highlighted the need for a targeted approach to climate change adaptation, with tailored strategies to address the specific vulnerabilities of the different regions of Europe.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2024) 91/3 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.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

9.1. PROGRESS OF UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TOWARDS EU ACCESSION

At the invitation of the PRESIDENT, Mr VÁRHELYI presented the state of play regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the reforms required with a view to the opening of EU accession negotiations, and regarding Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in implementing the recommendations contained in the Commission's Report on the enlargement process of 8 November 2023. He would present this state of play at the General Affairs Council of 19 March, which was responsible for preparing the discussions between Heads of State and Government at the European Council on 21 and 22 March.

Mr VÁRHELYI pointed out that the Commission's Report on the enlargement process, adopted last November, had highlighted the substantial progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the reforms required to launch the accession negotiations. The Report had also identified the measures still needed to achieve a sufficient degree of compliance with EU legislation, which was the prerequisite for the formal opening of negotiations. In December 2023, the European Council had concluded that the accession negotiations could start once this condition had been met and had tasked the Commission with reporting on the progress made since November 2023 in implementing the ongoing reforms.

The aim of the Report to be adopted that day by written procedure was not to provide a full assessment of the country's progress, as the November 2023 report had done, but rather to provide a factual update on the progress made since that time.

Mr VÁRHELYI noted that since the European Council had granted Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status in December 2022, major reforms had been carried out thanks to the public commitment of political leaders to the strategic objective of European integration. Moreover, the prospect of opening accession negotiations had impacted positively on the governance of a country with complex institutional structures, making it possible to mobilise the country's various ethnic communities around the common objective of EU accession. In particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina now had a federal government, a budget, and parliaments at regional and federal level playing their full part in adopting reforms prior to the opening of accession negotiations. Equally, popular support for EU accession was at an all-time high of 75%.

With more specific regard to the Report's contents, Mr VÁRHELYI noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina had demonstrated its commitment to forge ahead with the ongoing reforms, such as the adoption of the law on the prevention of

conflicts of interest and the law on combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The country had also taken important steps to fight corruption and organised crime and to strengthen its judicial system. As regards migration management, the approval of a mandate for negotiations with the Bosnian government on Frontex's operational activities within its territory marked a significant step forward. Lastly, he emphasised that Bosnia and Herzegovina above all had aligned itself with the EU's common foreign and security policy, which he regarded as crucial in the current geopolitical turmoil.

In the light of the results achieved since 2022, the Commission considered that Bosnia and Herzegovina had now reached the necessary level of compliance with the accession criteria and it was therefore recommending that the Council open accession negotiations with the country.

With regard to Ukraine and Moldova, Mr VÁRHELYI noted that the Commission on the same day would present to the Council draft negotiating frameworks with these two countries, following the decision taken by the European Council in December 2023 to open negotiations. He would also present an oral report to the Council on the progress made in their respective reform programmes, in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the Commission's latest Report on the enlargement process.

These draft negotiating frameworks set out the guidelines and principles to steer the accession negotiations with each candidate country. The draft frameworks developed by the European Commission were divided into three parts, namely: i) the principles governing the accession negotiations; ii) the content of the negotiations; and iii) the negotiation procedure.

Mr VÁRHELYI specified that the draft negotiating frameworks were founded on the experiences of past enlargements and on the ongoing accession negotiations. They therefore incorporated the revised enlargement

methodology and took into account the evolution of the EU *acquis*. He pointed out that the purpose of these negotiations was to guarantee that Ukraine and Moldova incorporated the entire EU *acquis* and ensured its full implementation.

With regard to Ukraine, progress was still needed in terms of the fight against corruption, the regulation of interest representation and the protection of minorities. Moldova would need to continue its reforms in the area of justice and the fight against corruption and the excessive influence of oligarchs in the country's economy.

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

- the College's full and unequivocal support for the opening of accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, taking into account the progress made in implementing the reform agenda set out in the enlargement process and the country's momentum in its quest to become a member of the EU;
- the positive impact of the prospect of EU accession on the stability of the country and on the governance of its institutional system;
- the importance of pursuing an approach that was merit-based and founded on credible and impartial assessments of the degree of compliance of candidate countries' legislation with EU legislation;
- the positive signal sent to the people of these three nations, and the favourable impact of enlargement on the stability of the EU.

The Commission took note of this information.

9.2. COMMUNICATION ON THE PACT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

The PRESIDENT began by recalling the significant progress made by the Commission on migration since the start of its term of office, referring in particular to the Pact on Migration and Asylum and the recent partnership agreement concluded with Tunisia. She reported that she would be visiting Egypt very shortly, accompanied by the Belgian, Italian and Greek Prime Ministers, to finalise a similar agreement with that country.

She welcomed the practice adopted by the Commission whereby it kept the European Council informed by means of letters of the progress made on these matters between its meetings.

Mr SCHINAS also underlined how useful these letters were, saying that they had created opportunities for dialogue and political decision-making within the Council. This Communication, which would be adopted that day by written procedure, took a slightly different tone as it was aimed at a wider audience and was intended to summarise all that this Commission had achieved so far in this respect. The Communication also reflected the Commission's determination to implement the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and to introduce other specific measures in future.

In relation to migration, this Commission had already addressed many challenges, with proposals that were now enshrined in European Union law and European funding designed to underpin action at different levels, wherever needed.

Ms JOHANSSON in turn underlined the importance of acknowledging what the Commission had accomplished with the Pact on Migration and Asylum, highlighting not only the measures adopted but also the trust that had been restored between the various stakeholders, and the return to a normalised, pacified, fact-based framework for discussion. New decisions would have to be taken during the Commission's next term of office, hence the need to

maintain this mutual trust when it came to drawing up and nurturing future compromises.

The common arrangements established by the Pact would benefit all the parties concerned, promoting efficient migration management. This approach was based on agreements with countries of origin and transit covering efforts to combat migrant smugglers and criminal networks, speed up return procedures and develop a legal migration policy for the EU.

Ms JOHANSSON felt that this had given the European Union a stronger position in the international arena, that the EU was a source of inspiration for many countries and that it was supported by the United Nations. Moreover, the EU was now better prepared to deal with future challenges, in particular the arrival of irregular migrants, their potential instrumentalisation by third countries and the abuse of asylum rights, in a seriously deteriorating geopolitical situation.

Of the eleven pieces of legislation making up the Pact, an important one was the protection of the EU's external borders through more efficient screening of migrants at borders and reinforced asylum and return procedures. In addition, the number of returns was higher when decisions were taken rapidly; the tools available to Member States and at European level to do this had been fine-tuned, and the legal loopholes giving rise to abuses had been closed. At the same time, protection for asylum seekers had been strengthened, in particular for children and minors.

Ms JOHANSSON ended by referring to the solidarity mechanism for Member States designed to provide support to those countries facing temporary difficulties. She pointed out that the Communication was not simply a stocktaking exercise: it also pinpointed possibilities and priorities to be tackled in the near future.

During the brief discussion which followed, the Commission raised the

following points:

- a reminder of the need for the EU to guarantee the protection of its external borders;
- the importance for the EU of signing partnership agreements with neighbouring countries in order to deal with migration in a way that would benefit all the parties concerned;
- the need for the EU to tackle the underlying causes of migration and the security challenges it could pose;
- the satisfaction expressed with the EU's training and equipment for third countries of transit which had increased the interception of irregular migrants by reinforcing police cooperation, combating smugglers, protecting borders and developing return policies.

The PRESIDENT ended the discussion by emphasising the fact that the Commission had managed to put an end to fragmented migration policies by integrating the various aspects into a global framework, including the instrumentalisation of migrants by third countries. She considered that the balance struck was based not only on material and financial investments in partner third countries and the fight against smugglers, but also on the opening of legal migration channels.

The Commission took note of this information.

9.3. EU RELATIONS WITH SWITZERLAND

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ briefed the College on an important stage in the EU's relations with Switzerland – the Council's adoption that day of a negotiating mandate authorising the Commission to conduct negotiations with Switzerland on behalf of the EU. Switzerland had adopted its own negotiating mandate the previous week, opening the path for the start of official talks. A

meeting between the PRESIDENT and the Swiss President, Ms Viola Amherd was scheduled for Monday 18 March to mark this step forward.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ stressed the considerable collective efforts made by all parties to reach this stage and the EU's strong desire to secure a successful agreement. He underlined the need for continued close cooperation between Commission departments throughout the negotiation process.

After 18 months of intense exploratory discussions, a joint understanding had been reached, reflected in the mandate of the Recommendation presented by the Commission on 20 December 2023, defining the guidelines for the negotiations to come. These negotiations would concentrate on individual sectoral agreements, reflecting Switzerland's preference to move away from a horizontal approach.

It was therefore planned to negotiate ten different agreements covering a large range of areas: air, rail and road transport, free movement of people, mutual recognition of qualifications, trade and agricultural products, health, and a fair financial contribution from Switzerland to the EU's programmes. The talks would also cover crucial issues, such as the dynamic application of EU law, the implementation of a dispute settlement mechanism and a guarantee of consistency between the agreements concluded.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ emphasised the EU's commitment to reaching a balanced agreement and avoiding any solution unilaterally favouring one side over the other. He concluded with reference to the EU's ambitious target of finalising the negotiations within a year.

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

- the College’s recognition of this significant step forward in relations between the EU and Switzerland;
- requests for clarification concerning the EU’s negotiating strategy, with questions regarding the need to conclude ten sectoral agreements at the same time and the likely solutions for dealing with the issue of transporting goods across the Alps;
- questions on the timetable for Switzerland’s financial contribution to the EU’s programmes and on its participation in the single market.

In response to some of the issues raised, the PRESIDENT stressed that the sectoral agreements would not be finalised until all the agreements had been concluded and the financial commitments respected.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ pointed out that Switzerland will have to contribute to the cohesion funds on a regular and agreed basis and will also have to comply with the EU’s State aid rules, the aim being to include such provisions in both the existing and the future agreements on the internal market.

The Commission took note of this information.

9.4. MARITIME CORRIDOR TO SEND HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA

The PRESIDENT briefed the College on the recent launch of a maritime corridor to make it easier to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, underlining that it was the result of several months of cooperation with Cyprus, in close coordination with the United Arab Emirates, the US and the UK. This maritime corridor would play a key role in complementing the road and air routes that already existed for delivering vital supplies to Gaza. Israeli inspections of humanitarian shipments would be carried out in Cypriot ports before the vessels departed. This approach was intended to ensure the safe and secure transport of aid while minimising delivery delays.

She emphasised that the absence of a functional port in Gaza remained a major obstacle. To address this shortage of critical infrastructure, the US was in the process of developing temporary floating port facilities, which would make access easier for larger vessels delivering aid directly to Gaza. In this respect, a ship had recently been authorised to deliver essential supplies directly to Gaza for the first time since 2005.

In conclusion, the PRESIDENT noted that, despite the dramatic situation facing the people of Gaza, the implementation of this maritime corridor was a sign of hope that living conditions in the region would improve.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 14.40.