



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2024) 2505 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 28 November 2024

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

**of the 2505th meeting of the Commission
held in Brussels
(Berlaymont)
on Wednesday 30 October 2024
(morning)**

PV(2024) 2505 final

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Single sitting: Wednesday 30 October 2024 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.06 with Ms von der LEYEN, President, in the chair.

The meeting was chaired by Ms VESTAGER from item 10 onwards.

Present:

Ms von der LEYEN	President	Items 1 to 9
Ms VESTAGER	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Executive Vice-President	
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Executive Vice-President	
Mr BORRELL i FONTELLES	High Representative / Vice-President	
Ms JOUROVÁ	Vice-President	
Ms ŠUICA	Vice-President	
Mr HAHN	Member	
Mr SCHMIT	Member	
Mr GENTILONI	Member	
Ms FERREIRA	Member	
Ms KYRIAKIDES	Member	
Mr REYNDERS	Member	
Ms DALLI	Member	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Ms JOHANSSON	Member	
Mr LENARČIČ	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 1 to 9 (in part)
Ms SIMSON	Member	
Ms McGUINNESS	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Ms IVANOVA	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)

Absent:

Mr SCHINAS	Vice-President
Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI	Member
Ms URPILAINEN	Member

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

Ms LLANO-CARDENAL	Acting Deputy Head of Cabinet to Mr SCHINAS
Mr BERUTTI	Member of Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI's cabinet
Mr LAHTI	Head of Cabinet to Ms URPILAINEN

The following also sat in:

Mr SEIBERT	Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 9
Mr ADAM	Deputy Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	Items 1 to 9
Mr LADENBURGER	Deputy Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms ERIKSSON	Deputy Director-General, DG Communication	
Ms PODESTA	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	Items 1 to 8
Mr NIINISTÖ	Special Adviser to the Commission	Item 9
Mr FONTÁN	Head of Cabinet to Mr BORRELL	Items 9 and 10
Ms SEMLALI	Policy Assistant in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Ms VILA NUÑEZ	Head of Unit – HR Correspondent	Item 9
Mr TAQUET-GRAZIANI	Acting Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	
Mr CHARLES	Secretariat-General	Items 1 to 8

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2024) 2505/FINAL; SEC(2024) 2505/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) 2505)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 28 October 2024.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(PV(2024) 2502; PV(2024) 2503)

The Commission approved the minutes of its 2502nd and 2503rd meetings of 2 and 8 October 2024, and decided to hold over approval of the minutes of its 2504th meeting of 22 October 2024 for a later meeting.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2024) 142)

The Commission took note of the outcome of the written exchange of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) for the week from 21 to 25 October 2024 (RCC(2024) 142).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Alleged offer of an illegal secret deal to platforms such as X - Major Interpellation G-001001/2024**

Line set out in SP(2024) 522.

- **2025 general budget – all sections – NEGRESCU & HERBST report – 2024/0176 (BUD)**

Line set out in SPI(2024) 30.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2024) 39)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2024) 39 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 23 October 2024.

6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2024) 256 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 21 and 27 October 2024.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2024) 257 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 21 and 27 October 2024.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS (SEC(2024) 258 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 21 and 27 October 2024 archived in Decide.

6.4. *SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN PROCEDURES*

(SEC(2024) 259 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the significant written procedures for which the time limit expired between 28 October and 8 November 2024.

6.5. *COMMISSION DECISION GRANTING DELEGATIONS OF POWERS TO CORRECT NON-SUBSTANTIVE, EASILY RECOGNISABLE ERRORS IN ACTS ADOPTED BY THE COMMISSION*

(C(2024) 9200)

The Commission decided to grant delegations of powers to all Directors-General and Heads of Service regarding the adoption of corrigenda for non-substantive, easily recognisable errors, be they errors in the original versions or in the translations of acts adopted by the Commission, and subject to the conditions set out in Articles 3 to 6 of that Decision.

The Commission adopted the Decision in C(2024) 9200.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2024) 260)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2024) 64)

7.1. *DG AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14/15*

(PERS(2024) 34 TO /4)

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), (1)(b) and (2) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘Sustainability’ Directorate in DG Agriculture and Rural Development (PERS(2024) 34 and /2).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 20 August and 12 September 2024 (PERS(2024) 34/3 and /4).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants’ qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI, it then decided to appoint Mr Ulferdus Gijsbertus SCHILTHUIS to the post.

This decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

**7.2. DG AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – APPOINTMENT
OF A DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14/15
(PERS(2024) 65 TO /3)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director of the ‘International’ Directorate in DG Agriculture and Rural Development (PERS(2024) 65).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 3 October 2024 (PERS(2024) 65/2 and /3).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants’ qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr WOJCIECHOWSKI, it then decided to appoint Ms Elisabetta SIRACUSA to the post.

This decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

7.3. DG TRANSLATION – AUTHORISATION OF THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14, OF A DIRECTOR POST (PERS(2024) 66)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication, at grade AD14/15, and the external publication, at grade AD14, of the vacancy notice set out in PERS(2024) 66 for the post of Director of the ‘Translation’ Directorate in DG Translation, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.4. EUROSTAT – AUTHORISATION OF THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14, OF A DIRECTOR POST (PERS(2024) 67)

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr GENTILONI, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication, at grade AD14/15, and the external publication, at grade AD14, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2024) 67 for the post of Director of the ‘Sectoral and regional statistics’ Directorate in Eurostat, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), 1(b) and (2) of the Staff Regulations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.5. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE – AUTHORISATION OF THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14, OF A

PRINCIPAL ADVISER POST***(PERS(2024) 68)***

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr REYNDERS, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication, at grade AD14/15, and the external publication, at grade AD14, of the vacancy notice in PERS(2024) 68 for the post of Principal Adviser - Relations with internal and external stakeholders in the Internal Audit Service, in accordance with Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii), Article 29(1)(b) and Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.6. DG COMPETITION – CLOSURE OF A SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER AT GRADE AD14***(PERS(2024) 20)***

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms VESTAGER, the Commission decided to close the selection procedure for the post of Chief Technology Officer in DG Competition without making an appointment.

This decision would take effect immediately.

7.7. DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – TRANSFER OF AN AD15 OFFICIAL UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS

On a proposal from Mr HAHN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr HOEKSTRA, the Commission decided to transfer Mr Eric VON BRESKA, currently Director of the ‘Revenue and Multiannual Financial Framework’ Directorate in DG Budget, to the post of Director of the ‘Investment, Innovative & Sustainable Transport’ Directorate in DG Mobility and Transport.

This decision would take effect on 1 November 2024.

8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – 2024 COMMUNICATION ON EU ENLARGEMENT POLICY

(COM(2024) 690 TO /4; SWD(2024) 690 TO /3 TO SWD(2024) 699 TO /3; RCC(2024) 143)

The PRESIDENT gave a brief overview of the situation in the Western Balkans following her fourth visit to the region the previous week, in the context of the preparation of the Commission's annual enlargement package.

She welcomed the tangible progress made in the countries of the region in recent years and the new methodology adopted by the Commission to assess these steps forward. Thanks to this new methodology, the Commission's assessments better reflected the reality on the ground, thus strengthening the credibility of the enlargement package both with the Member States and with the candidate countries. She highlighted the stimulating effect of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and its related instrument, the Reform and Growth Facility, and the partial opening of the single market for certain sectors of the candidate countries' economies. The PRESIDENT then asked the Members of the Commission responsible for the package to present their main conclusions.

First, Mr BORRELL pointed out that this year's enlargement package was once again set against a complex geopolitical background. Russia's aggression against Ukraine had clearly shown that the EU needed to speed up the enlargement process with countries that shared its values, interests and aspirations. In this respect, enlargement policy was crucial in geostrategic terms, positioning the EU as a pillar of prosperity and stability for its neighbourhood and beyond. In 2024, historic

progress had been made, in particular with the Council's decision to open negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the intergovernmental conferences held to advance the enlargement processes for Ukraine, Moldova, Montenegro and Albania.

Mr BORRELL emphasised, however, that enlargement had to remain a rigorous, merit-based process with the rule of law at its core. It was for this reason that the Commission had followed its methodology strictly and had applied the same standards to all ten candidate countries. In this connection, the pace of reforms in these countries had to be stepped up to take advantage of the new enlargement momentum. This also meant resolving bilateral issues, which should not slow down the candidate countries' progress.

As regards these countries' strategic orientation, their alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remained a key indicator. Some partners had taken this objective very seriously, achieving or maintaining full CFSP alignment, or steadily increasing their alignment rate, while others still had a long way to go. The EU's messaging on the need for progress in this area remained strong and clear.

Mr BORRELL then reviewed the situation in each candidate country, as set out in the ten country reports accompanying the Communication on EU enlargement policy.

As regards Georgia, he noted that the country was experiencing a period of political instability and uncertainty following the parliamentary elections of 26 October 2024, which had been marked by violations identified by international observers during the election campaign and on election day. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had not been in a position to qualify these elections as free and fair, and the irregularities noted had to be clarified as soon as possible and dealt with in a transparent manner. Any future government

would have to make a firm commitment to the EU's fundamental values and principles. At the same time, the EU had to send a clear message to the new government regarding its expectations. Without a significant change in the country's current political direction, in particular by repealing the laws on foreign influence and family values in the context of comprehensive, democratic and sustainable reforms, Georgia would not be able to move to the next stage of negotiations. In this respect, the enlargement package offered a clear pathway for re-establishing dialogue with the EU, provided that Georgia's leaders demonstrated the political will for this.

Mr BORRELL then turned his attention to Ukraine. The opening of accession negotiations and the signature of the EU-Ukraine joint security commitments in June 2024 had sent a strong political message to Russia. EU membership also represented a significant morale boost for Ukraine, acting as the ultimate guarantee that could be offered by the EU to this war-torn country.

He noted that Moldova had also demonstrated remarkable resilience and perseverance to deliver on its reform commitments despite the political context, which was significantly affected by the war in Ukraine and constant hybrid attacks. Although the negotiation process was advancing at an unprecedented speed, it was and would continue to remain merit-based. He pointed out, in particular, that the Moldovan people would elect their president on 3 November 2024 and that the political stakes were high following the constitutional referendum on EU accession.

As regards the Western Balkans, Mr BORRELL considered that the moment had come to firmly anchor the region in the EU. In this context, he welcomed the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and the significant progress made by Montenegro on reforms. As far as North Macedonia was concerned, it was important that the country took a strategic approach and fully implemented the reforms agreed with the EU. With regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina, while it had made progress on adopting EU-related reforms and had achieved full CFSP alignment, this positive momentum had been hampered by the secessionist rhetoric

of Republika Srpska and the slowdown in reforms since the opening of accession negotiations in March 2024. As regards Serbia, progress would depend on rule-of-law reforms, its strategic alignment with EU policies, in particular CFSP, and the normalisation of its relations with Kosovo*. He welcomed the positive developments in Kosovo, while stressing that there was still a long way to go. Specifically concerning the dialogue on the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, he noted the very limited progress made in implementing the landmark agreement concluded in Ohrid in March 2023, which nevertheless remained key for their respective EU paths.

Lastly, with regard to Türkiye, Mr BORRELL emphasised the political desirability for the EU of reaffirming the importance of reforms, in particular on fundamental rights and rule of law. In this connection, Türkiye's democratic standards had deteriorated and its CFSP alignment had gone backwards. It was nevertheless in the EU's strategic interest to keep Türkiye engaged, including in the context of enlargement policy.

In conclusion, Mr BORRELL noted that EU membership was a strategic choice made by partner countries, which had to include fully embracing EU values. Enlargement had to be a political priority for the EU given the current geopolitical context. It had been a top priority for the outgoing Commission and should remain as such for the incoming one.

Mr VÁRHELYI outlined the main developments in the enlargement process since last year, in particular the establishment of the Ukraine facility; the opening of the Intergovernmental Conferences with Ukraine and Moldova, where Member States unanimously agreed the negotiating frameworks; the provisional closure of certain

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244 (1999) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

negotiating chapters with Montenegro; and the opening of the first negotiating cluster with Albania.

Mr VÁRHELYI then noted that this was the last annual exercise under this Commission's enlargement policy and reviewed the work done in this area since the beginning of the mandate. He recalled the difficult political context linked to the enlargement which the Commission had inherited in 2019 and highlighted that, during the present term of office, the number of partner countries involved in enlargement policy had risen from seven to ten and the number of countries actively negotiating EU membership had risen from three to seven.

He stated that, politically and institutionally, enlargement policy had become a strategic issue and a priority of the European Council in recent years. Chief among the factors which had contributed to this positive development was the Commission's new evaluation methodology, which boosted the credibility of the whole process by placing the rule of law firmly at its centre. This had enabled candidate countries to make progress with their preparations and the EU to translate its political will into specific decisions to move forward with enlargement. In this context he referred to the recent decisions of the European Council on the granting of candidate country status to Georgia and the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With regard to relations with Türkiye, he mentioned the joint Communication with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy aimed at reviving cooperation in the areas of politics, economics and trade. In view of the positive signals from Ankara, Mr VÁRHELYI considered it important to implement the specific actions set out in the Communication aimed at restoring the credibility of the relationship with Türkiye.

In terms of economic and social issues, he referred to the concept of 'genuine integration', which consisted of preparing candidate countries to join the European single market and the European social market economy model, and

stressed the importance of economic and social convergence in ensuring successful enlargement. This was why the present Commission had prioritised reform and economic development in the candidate countries throughout its term of office.

By way of example, Mr VÁRHELYI mentioned the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of the Western Balkan countries, which should be between 5% and 8% in the coming years if they were to catch up with the Member States. He was confident that the 2020 Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans and the new 2023 Growth Plan would help them to achieve those objectives. The former aimed to mobilise investment to the tune of EUR 30 billion, 57% of which (EUR 17.2 billion) had already been used, and was supplemented by the growth plan, which had a EUR 6 billion facility for the 2024-2027 period.

In his view, the Commission should focus in this context on the region's competitiveness, particularly in the areas of energy production, the development of trade routes and improvements to the investment climate, the latter being closely linked to the rule of law. The countries of the Western Balkans could, if the agreed reforms were fully implemented, be ready to join the European Union by the end of the Commission's next term of office.

Mr VÁRHELYI concluded by saying that the Commission had set up similar programmes for the other partner countries with, for example, the EUR 50 billion Ukraine Facility and the EUR 1.8 billion Growth Plan for Moldova. This would be a good basis for fostering these countries' economic and social convergence, and if there were positive results in terms of reforms, the enlargement of the EU could become a reality.

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

- recognition of the progress made in enlargement policy in recent years, of the restoration of the credibility of the policy, and of its generally positive development in the candidate countries;

- the opportunity for the next Commission to continue setting up a network of partnerships and projects linking the candidate countries with the EU and the single market;
- despite the decreasing flow of migrants via the Western Balkans, the need to increase the border administration capacity of the countries in the region, notably by means of investment and new agreements on the status of Frontex;
- stepping up the fight against organised crime in the countries of the Western Balkans, which were working closely with Europol and the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT);
- successful cooperation with the countries in the region in the area of justice and efforts to combat money laundering;
- the creation of a security centre in Chisinau, Moldova, enabling the Moldovan security services to work with the Member States and the Commission to improve Moldova's internal security;
- the need to involve social partners and civil society organisations of the EU and the candidate countries in the enlargement process in order to ensure its success and, in this context, the importance of ensuring the continuity of initiatives such as that recently organised by the European Economic and Social Committee;
- the ways in which experts and students from candidate countries could be involved in designing EU policy, with the aim of improving the understanding of European integration in those countries without causing a brain drain;
- balanced messages included in the enlargement package concerning the rule of law in the different candidate countries and the use of the same methodology to that of the annual Rule of Law Report;
- the need to pursue investigations into war crimes and ensure that the countries concerned shared information effectively;

- the opportunity for the Commission to take adequacy decisions concerning the protection of personal data with candidate countries based on existing decisions regarding other third countries;
- the importance of taking public opinion into account in the Member States with regard to enlargement, as reflected by Eurobarometer surveys; of the Commission conducting a rigorous, merit-based assessment of the progress made by the candidate countries; and of effective communication of that progress to European citizens;
- the need to prepare both the EU and the Member States for the accession of new Member States, as had been discussed in the recent Conference on the Future of Europe, and to avoid the possible blocking of decision-making in the EU;
- in this context, the value of clarifying the rules and correctly estimating the budget needed to ensure the proper functioning of an enlarged EU, and of using instruments for technical assistance more strategically for reforms in the candidate countries;
- concerns about the objective of integrating Türkiye into Europe and the geopolitical value for the EU of relaunching the High-Level Economic Dialogue with Türkiye;
- the cooperation between the Commission and the Energy Community aimed at diversifying the energy supply in the candidate countries and making more renewables available;
- the remarkable progress made by Ukraine and Moldova in this area and the political and economic need to support these countries' energy systems in the coming winter by filling some of the gaps caused by Russia's war in Ukraine.

The PRESIDENT acknowledged the work done by the Commission and the Energy Community on safeguarding energy supply for Ukraine and Moldova, stressing that such work contributed directly to saving lives.

She closed the discussion with three general observations on the progress made with enlargement. Firstly, she spoke about the importance for the Commission of actively informing the Member States and European citizens about developments in the candidate countries in recent years. She then pointed out that, in spite of the political uncertainty linked to the Council's decisions, the primary objective of candidate countries was to meet all the EU accession criteria, which would enable the Commission to draw up a corresponding Recommendation for the Council. Finally, she emphasised the need for the EU to provide clear guidance and perspective, in both economic and geopolitical terms, to those countries of the European continent concerned by enlargement over the coming ten to twenty years.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the communication in COM(2024) 690/4 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, together with the staff working documents distributed as SWD(2024) 690/3 to SWD(2024) 699/3, the contents of which were noted.

9. REPORT ON THE EU'S PREPAREDNESS AND CRISIS RESPONSE

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr Sauli Niinistö, former President of the Republic of Finland, for having drawn up the report presented that day to the College. Seven months earlier, she had asked him, as special adviser, to prepare a report, together with Mr BORRELL, assessing the complex challenges facing the EU and its Member States, and to propose recommendations to enhance the EU's civilian and military preparedness. She invited Mr Niinistö to present the main conclusions of his report to the College.

Mr Niinistö explained that this report had sprung from the need to ensure the safety of Europeans by preparing them for all types of risks. He cited examples, such as the effects of climate change, growing geopolitical tensions and the consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine, before sharing the recommendations and key messages of the report.

Mr BORRELL said that this report was part of the task entrusted by the European Council to the Commission and the High Representative to work together to strengthen the Union's ability to respond to civilian and military threats.

The Commission took note of this information.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Mr BORRELL reported on recent developments in the EU's external relations, noting that the global situation remained worrying, with limited opportunity for progress in Ukraine and the Middle East.

As regards the situation in Ukraine, he expressed his concern about the growing involvement of North Korea in the conflict, in particular through the logistical support provided to Russia. The situation in Kharkiv was particularly alarming, because of the significant amount of destruction and high number of casualties. In this context, he stressed the importance of the EU's continued support for Ukraine, and welcomed the fact that it was on track to achieve the target of providing one million rounds of ammunition. He noted, however, that discussions were continuing on the potential use of this military assistance to target military targets on Russian territory, which might be discussed at the next G7 summit. Finally, he deplored the fact that the peace process remained stalled.

Mr BORRELL then turned to the crisis in the Middle East, reporting on the escalation of the conflict and the critical humanitarian situation, particularly in northern Gaza. Prospects for peace were limited in the current context and the high risk of an open conflict between Israel and Iran was raising concerns about stability in the region. He also stressed the seriousness of the situation in Lebanon, which was experiencing bombings, including in the north of the country, and the consequent massive displacement of the civilian population. This situation had had an impact on social cohesion and the religious equilibrium in the country, and was forcing many people to take refuge in Syria, even though that country could not be regarded as safe.

He also mentioned the conflict in Sudan and stressed that it was the deadliest conflict in the world, with tens of thousands of victims and 20 million displaced people.

Lastly, Mr BORRELL spoke of various developments in the field of external relations, such as the increase in migration flows, the increasing influence of the BRICS+ countries, the potential breakthrough in trade negotiations between the EU and Mercosur after more than 35 years, the EU's preparations for the outcome of the US elections, and the improvement of relations between the EU and the United Kingdom.

At Ms VESTAGER's request, Mr DOMBROVSKIS reported on the progress made in the negotiations on a trade agreement with the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). He had had the opportunity to discuss this issue with his Brazilian counterparts on the sidelines of the G20 Trade and Investment Ministers' meeting on 24 October in Brasilia. Recent progress in negotiations could pave the way for a possible conclusion of an agreement by the end of the year.

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

- the importance of concluding the trade agreement with Mercosur, particularly in the current geopolitical context;
- the devastating consequences of Israel's recent decision to ban the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), leading to a de facto suspension of essential humanitarian assistance for those recipients.

Ms JOHANSSON then reported to the College on the recent adoption of the new United Nations Convention Against Cybercrime. She said that the decision to sign the agreement would lie with the new Commission.

The negotiations conducted by the EU, in close cooperation with its Member States, had made it possible to considerably improve the initial terms proposed by Russia and China, in particular by incorporating strong human rights and data privacy safeguards.

Ms JOHANSSON pointed out that the only international legal framework in this area so far had been the Council of Europe's Budapest Convention, which covered only a limited number of countries. The new Convention thus aimed to extend the scope and provide a more comprehensive framework for international cooperation on cybercrime. She added that the States that were parties to the Convention would have the possibility to refuse to cooperate with other countries if they considered that fundamental rights were not protected.

She concluded by stressing that the new Convention Against Cybercrime was a significant step forward in this area, and that the EU would continue to work with its partners to promote it and strengthen digital security globally.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.2. NEW COLLEGE SECURE ROOM

Mr HAHN welcomed the completion of the College's new secure meeting room, stressing that it would play a key role in protecting sensitive information and ensuring the confidentiality of Commission proceedings. He highlighted the innovative features of this room, which combined advanced security measures with state-of-the-art technology.

He took the opportunity to announce the inauguration of the new Piazza area in the Berlaymont, scheduled for 6 November. This multifunctional space would host a permanent exhibition that would give European citizens visiting the building specific insight into the EU's achievements. He added that temporary exhibitions would also be organised, the first of which would be dedicated to the Copernicus satellite system.

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 12.14.