



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

PV(2026) 2561 final

- English translation of the French version which is authentic -

Brussels, 6 May 2026

TEXTE EN

MINUTES

of the 2561st meeting of the Commission

held in Brussels

(Berlaymont)

on Wednesday 25 March 2026

(morning)

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Single sitting: Wednesday 25 March 2026 (morning)

The sitting opened at 9.04 with Ms VIRKKUNEN in the chair.

Present:

Ms VIRKKUNEN	Executive Vice-President	
Mr SÉJOURNÉ	Executive Vice-President	
Ms KALLAS	High Representative / Vice-President	
Ms MÎNZATU	Executive Vice-President	
Mr FITTO	Executive Vice-President	
Mr DOMBROVSKIS	Member	
Mr VÁRHELYI	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr HOEKSTRA	Member	
Mr KUBILIUS	Member	
Ms KOS	Member	
Mr KADIS	Member	
Ms ALBUQUERQUE	Member	
Ms LAHBIB	Member	
Mr BRUNNER	Member	
Ms ROSWALL	Member	
Mr SERAFIN	Member	
Mr JØRGENSEN	Member	
Ms ZAHARIEVA	Member	
Mr McGRATH	Member	
Mr TZITZIKOSTAS	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr HANSEN	Member	Items 1 to 10 (in part)
Mr MICALLEF	Member	

Absent:

Ms von der LEYEN	President
Ms RIBERA	Member
Mr ŠEFČOVIČ	Member
Ms ŠUICA	Member
Mr SÍKELA	Member

The following also sat in:

Mr DE GREGORIO	Director-General, Legal Service	
Ms SPINANT	Director-General, DG Communication	
Mr ADAM	Deputy Head of Cabinet to the PRESIDENT	
Mr GILL	Deputy Chief Spokesperson of the Commission	
Ms PETKOVA	Director of Coordination and Administration in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	
Mr LUNAU	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Item 9
Mr CALACEAN	Adviser in the PRESIDENT's cabinet	Item 10
Mr CHARLES	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	
Mr TAQUET-GRAZIANI	Head of Unit in the Secretariat-General	

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

1. AGENDAS

(OJ(2026) 2561/FINAL; SEC(2026) 2561/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(2026) 2561)

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet held on Monday 23 March 2026.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Commission held over approval of the minutes of its 2556th, 2557th, 2558th, 2559th and 2560th meetings of 26 February, and 2, 4/6, 10 and 18 March 2026 for a later date.

4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

(RCC(2026) 163)

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) held on Friday 20 March 2026 (RCC(2026) 163).

The Commission approved the lines proposed for the following points:

- **Establishment of the Union Customs Code and the European Union Customs Authority, and repeal of Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 (Regulation) – GOTINK (ex-CLUNE) report – 2023/0156 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2026) 72/2.

- **Acceleration of permit-granting for defence readiness projects (Regulation) – YAR & DAL report – 2025/0172 (COD) / Amendment of Directives 2009/43/EC and 2009/81/EC, as regards the simplification of intra-EU transfers of defence-related products and the simplification of security and defence procurement – TOVERI & HENRIKSSON report – 2025/0177 (COD) / Amendment of Regulations (EC) No 1907/2006, (EC) No 1272/2008, (EU) No 528/2012, (EU) 2019/1021 and (EU) 2021/697 as regards defence readiness and facilitating defence investments and conditions for defence industry – MIKSER & DECARO & SALLA report – 2025/0176 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2026) 73/2.

- **Establishment of an application for the electronic submission of travel data ('EU Digital Travel application') and amendment of Regulations (EU) 2016/399 and (EU) 2018/1726 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and Council Regulation (EC) No 2252/2004, as regards the use of digital travel credentials (Regulation) – LÓPEZ AGUILAR report – 2024/0670 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2026) 75.

- **Establishment of a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union, and repeal of Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and the Council, Council Directive 2001/40/EC and Council Decision 2004/191/EC (Regulation) – AZMANI report – 2025/0059 (COD)**

Line set out in SI(2026) 76/2.

- **Amendment of Regulations (EU) 2024/1689 and (EU) 2018/1139 as regards the simplification of the implementation of harmonised rules on artificial**

intelligence (Digital Omnibus on AI) (Regulation) – KOKALARI & McNAMARA report – 2025/0359 (COD)

Line set out in SP(2026) 105/2.

- **Objection to a delegated act pursuant to Rule 114(3) of the Rules of procedure of the European Parliament – Amendment of Annex III to Directive (EU) 2024/1275 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the Union framework for the national calculation of life-cycle global warming potential – C(2025) 8723**

Line set out in SP(2026) 106.

- **Objection to a delegated act pursuant to Rule 114(3) of the Rules of procedure of the European Parliament – Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2022/869 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the Union list of projects of common interest and projects of mutual interest – C(2025) 8144**

Line set out in SP(2026) 113.

- **Objection to a delegated act pursuant to Rule 114(3) of the Rules of procedure of the European Parliament – Supplementing of Regulation (EU) 2024/3012 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing the certification methodologies for permanent carbon removals activities – 2026/2598 (DEA) – C(2026) 553**

Line set out in SP(2026) 115.

- **Amendment of Regulation (EU) 2026/249 fixing for 2026, 2027 and 2028 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters (Council Regulation) – 2026/0069 (NLE)**

Line set out in SI(2026) 77.

- **Oral question O-000013/2026 – Implementation of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and risks to the security of supply of medicines**

Line set out in SP(2026) 107/2.

- **Resolution of the European Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – Just transition directive in the world of work – Ensuring the creation of jobs and revitalising local economies – TOOM report – 2025/2131 (INL)**

Line set out in SP(2026) 109/2.

The Commission took note of the following points:

- **Adjustment of customs duties on the import of certain goods originating in the United States of America and opening of tariff quotas for imports of certain goods originating in the United States of America (Regulation) – LANGE report – 2025/0261 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2026) 81.

- **Non-application of customs duties on imports of certain goods (Regulation) – LANGE report – 2025/0260 (COD)**

Information set out in SP(2026) 80.

5. COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL ACTION (RCC(2026) 211)

The Commission took note of the operational conclusions in RCC(2026) 211 of the meeting of the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) held on Wednesday 18 March 2026.

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6. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS

6.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED

(SEC(2026) 79 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 16 and 22 March 2026.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT

(SEC(2026) 80 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 16 and 22 March 2026.

6.3. DELEGATION / SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS

(SEC(2026) 81 ET SEQ.)

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation and subdelegation procedures between 16 and 22 March 2026 archived in Decide.

6.4. WRITTEN PROCEDURES SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED

(SEC(2026) 82 AND /2)

The Commission took note of the written procedures specifically identified for which the time limit expired between 23 and 27 March 2026.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

(SEC(2026) 83/2)

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

(PERS(2026) 27/2)

7.1. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR AT GRADE AD14/15

(PERS(2026) 28 AND /2)

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 ‘Careers and Staff Development’ Directorate in DG Human Resources and Security (PERS(2026) 28).

It took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 25 February and 5 March 2026 (PERS(2026) 28/2).

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants’ qualifications for the post. On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, it then decided to appoint Ms Ewelina JELENKOWSKA-LUCA to the post.

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

7.2. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – END OF THE SECONDMENT IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE, UNDER ARTICLES 37 AND 38 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS, AND REINSTATEMENT OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL

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

- to end the secondment in the interest of the service under Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations, of Mr Tuure Taneli LAHTI, an AD14 official, currently seconded following a selection procedure as Director for Global Issues in the European External Action Service (EEAS);

- to reinstate Mr Tuure Taneli LAHTI to the post of Principal Adviser for Sustainable Growth and the European Semester in DG Economic and Financial Affairs.

These decisions would take effect on 1 May 2026.

7.3. DG INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – TRANSFER IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVICE, UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF THE STAFF REGULATIONS, OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Mr DOMBROVSKIS and Mr SÍKELA, the Commission decided to transfer, in the interest of the service, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, Mr Tuure Taneli LAHTI, Principal Adviser for Sustainable Growth and the European Semester, to the post of Director of ‘Sustainable Finance, Investment and Jobs; Economy that works for the People’ Directorate in DG International Partnerships.

This decision would take effect on 1 May 2026.

**7.4. DG DIGITAL SERVICES – AUTHORISATION OF THE INTERNAL AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14/15, AND EXTERNAL PUBLICATION, AT GRADE AD14, OF A DIRECTOR POST
(PERS(2026) 29)**

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms VIRKKUNEN, the Commission decided to authorise the internal and interinstitutional publication (at grade AD14/15) and external publication (at grade AD14) of the vacancy notice in PERS(2026) 29 for the post of Director of the ‘Digital Workplace and Infrastructure’ Directorate at DG Digital Services, 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.

7.5. *DG RESEARCH AND INNOVATION – EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE AGENCY (ERCEA)*

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms ZAHARIEVA, the Commission decided:

- to extend the term of office of Ms Laurence MOREAU as Director of the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA) from 1 June 2026 to 31 May 2030, in accordance with Section 6.3 of the Annex to Commission Decision C(2022) 9328;
- to extend her secondment in the interest of the service, in accordance with Articles 37 and 38 of the Staff Regulations for the same period.

These decisions would take effect on 1 June 2026.

7.6. *DG MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT – EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SINGLE EUROPEAN SKY ATM RESEARCH 3 JOINT UNDERTAKING (SESARJU)*

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

- to propose to the Administrative Board of the Single European Sky ATM Research 3 Joint Undertaking (SESARJU) to extend the term of office of Mr Andreas BOSCHEN as Executive Director, from 1 July 2026 for a duration of three years, in accordance with Article 18(5) of Council Regulation (EU) 2021/2085;
- to ask Mr TZITZIKOSTAS to communicate this decision to the

Administrative Board of SESARJU.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.7. DG MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS – EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THREE DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF THE EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY (FRONTEX)

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

- to propose to the Management Board of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) to extend the terms of office of Ms Aija KALNAJA, Mr Lars GERDES and Mr Uku SÄREKANNO as Deputy Executive Directors; these decisions would take effect on 16 November 2026, 1 February 2027 and 16 January 2027, respectively, for a period of five years, in accordance with Article 107(7) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896;
- to ask Mr BRUNNER to communicate this decision to the Management Board of FRONTEX.

Unless otherwise indicated, these decisions would take effect immediately.

7.8. SERVICE FOR FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENTS – DEPUTISING FOR THE DIRECTOR

On a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, and after consulting Ms KALLAS, the Commission decided, in accordance with Article 52(1)(a) of Commission Decision (EU) 2024/3080 establishing the Rules of Procedure of the Commission, that Ms Marika LAUTSO-MOUSNIER, Head of the Unit ‘Regulatory Foreign Policy Instruments and Coordination’, would perform the duties of Director of the

Service for Foreign Policy Instruments when the jobholder was unable to fulfil their duties or when the post was vacant.

This decision would take effect on 1 April 2026.

7.9. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL ADVISERS
(PERS(2026) 30)

The Commission noted the procedure followed, set out in point 9 of PERS(2026) 27/2, and, on a proposal from Mr SERAFIN, in agreement with the PRESIDENT, decided:

- to adopt the list of Special Advisers to the Commission;
- to ask the Director-General of DG Budget to immediately inform the Budgetary Authority of its intention to conclude these special adviser contracts, in accordance with the procedure set out in Article 123(2) of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants;
- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement this decision by signing the contracts on behalf of the authority empowered to conclude contracts of employment. The paid special adviser contracts would be concluded only following a favourable opinion on the notification to the Budgetary Authority. For the institutional special advisers and the medical service special advisers who already had a special adviser contract up to 31 March 2026, the contracts would take effect retroactively, starting from 1 April 2026.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

7.10. DG HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY – APPROVAL OF THE CONDITIONS FOR THE EXCHANGE OF STAFF MEMBERS

***BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND NATO
(SEC(2026) 97)***

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

- to approve the conditions for the exchange of staff members between the European Commission and the NATO International Secretariat (IS) as set out in SEC(2026) 97;
- to authorise the Director-General of DG Human Resources and Security to implement these exchanges of staff members, in accordance with the general conditions.

These decisions would take effect immediately.

***7.11. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – EUROPEAN COMMISSION DECISION
ON POST TERM-OF-OFFICE ACTIVITY OF A FORMER MEMBER OF
THE COMMISSION
C(2026)9010***

The Commission decided that the professional activity envisaged by Ms Jutta URPIAINEN after leaving office as a Member of the Commission was compatible with Article 245(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and with the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, subject to certain conditions and obligations.

The Commission adopted the Decision in C(2026) 9010.

***7.12. SECRETARIAT-GENERAL – 2025 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
CORPORATE MANAGEMENT BOARD
(SEC(2026) 96)***

The Commission took note of the 2025 Annual Report of the Corporate Management Board in SEC(2026) 96.

**8. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON INTEGRATED WILDFIRE RISK MANAGEMENT
(COM(2026) 330 AND /2; RCC(2026) 20)**

Ms VIRKKUNEN introduced the Communication on integrated wildfire risk management, explaining that wildfires were becoming more frequent across Europe and were starting to occur earlier each year. The Communication covered all phases of wildfire management, from prevention, preparedness and response to restoration. She welcomed the fact that the Communication explicitly recognised the importance of data and digital tools in managing risks, as well as the essential role of farmers, foresters and firefighters. Lastly, she stated that the aim of the Communication was to help the Member States address the problem of wildfires and that the Commission would present a proposal for a Council Recommendation before the summer.

Ms MÎNZATU focused on the human factor linked to prevention and preparedness. First, she noted that human activity was responsible for 96% of wildfires, hence the importance of raising awareness and educating everyone living in the EU, particularly young people, about wildfire risks. With that in mind, she indicated that the strategy being presented highlighted the importance of communication, including combating disinformation, particularly in the tourism sector and in dialogue with third countries.

Second, she highlighted the crucial role of first responders during wildfires, whether they were professional firefighters or volunteers. She stressed the importance of supporting them and reducing the health risks they faced, linked to their exposure to

hazardous conditions and toxic substances. In that connection, the Commission was calling on the Member States to collect data on firefighting personnel in different regions so as to assess potential shortages and needs, working conditions and available training opportunities, and evaluate whether equipment and health protection measures were appropriate. In addition, the Commission was encouraging volunteering and offered exchange opportunities for staff and volunteers in the field of preparedness, including under the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps.

Ms LAHBIB stressed that the Communication was timely, as the wildfire season would soon begin, and its adoption coincided with the first anniversary of the EU Preparedness Strategy. The Communication picked up on the existing measures in this area and strengthened synergies between the various parties involved to address wildfire risks, as fires were becoming ever-more frequent and destructive. She highlighted the joined-up approach to wildfire risk management recommended in the Communication, covering all management phases, i.e. prevention, preparedness, response and restoration.

Regarding the preparation phase, she drew attention to two fundamental aspects. On the one hand, it was important to continue developing IT tools such as the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) to collect data, in order to improve early-warning and fire-monitoring capabilities and allow evidence-based decision-making. On the other hand, the whole population, in rural and urban areas, needed to be prepared, not only to keep everyone safe, but also to encourage them to actively take part in resilience-building and risk-awareness efforts.

As regards the response to forest fires, the measures set out in the Communication included exchanges and training for experts, bolstering aerial firefighting capabilities and establishing a European firefighting hub in Cyprus to serve as a regional centre for training, drills and seasonal preparedness. Ms LAHBIB also stressed the importance of the EU's international engagement as a means of supporting firefighting resilience in third countries in a spirit of solidarity, and also

to learn from their experience. Lastly, she highlighted the cross-cutting nature of wildfire risk management. This required better coordination and cooperation at all levels, in particular through exchanges of experts and best practices, and also by providing transparency on the funds available to deal with wildfires.

Ms ROSWALL pointed out that, while climate change increased the risk of wildfires, human behaviour was the main trigger, hence the importance of prevention. In that connection, healthy ecosystems and active forest management were essential tools to strengthen the EU's resilience. Forest rangers and people living in rural communities were key partners in this regard, and they should be given support to ensure available resources were used efficiently.

She stressed that there was no one-size-fits-all solution and that wildfire risks were managed at local level, as they were a Member State responsibility. The Commission's role was to support national and local authorities through knowledge and data sharing. That same day, the Commission had also issued guidance on adapting Natura 2000 sites to climate change. This guidance gave advice on how to use natural environments as fire breaks. On the question of restoring natural areas after a fire, Ms ROSWALL highlighted the need for more investment in land and forest management to prevent future risks and make nature more resilient.

She concluded her presentation by stressing that the Communication had been prepared in close cooperation with national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders, and that this was the model to be followed in the future for wildfire risk management.

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

- full support for the Communication, and the importance of presenting it before the wildfire season began in order to improve public preparedness for these disasters, which threatened not only people's lives, but also the EU's food security and rural livelihoods;

- the key contribution of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to active investment in land and forest management, in particular by reducing flammable biomass, using natural environments as firebreaks, and improving maintenance of forest roads to ensure that firefighters could access the affected areas;
- the ongoing work on a livestock strategy and the importance of coordinating the different solutions proposed to prepare for climate change and ensure wildfire preparedness.

Following the presentations, the Commission approved the Communication in COM(2026) 330/2 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.

**9. PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL ON ESTABLISHING THE PROGRAMME FOR AGILE AND RAPID DEFENCE INNOVATION (AGILE)
(COM(2026) 135 TO /3; RCC(2026) 21)**

Ms VIRKKUNEN introduced the proposal for a Regulation establishing the Programme for Agile and Rapid Defence Innovation (AGILE) by stressing that it represented a major step towards creating a stronger and more robust defence ecosystem. She noted that many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups failed or were acquired by other companies before entering the European market, which had a significant impact on the EU's competitiveness. She considered that the proposed programme complemented existing tools, and not least the European Defence Fund, and that it would enable the EU to achieve readiness sooner by speeding up development and experimentation with innovation in a sector that was key to its future.

Mr KUBILIUS noted that the current conflicts, and particularly those in Ukraine and

the Middle East, called for a new EU approach to the development of defence capabilities. He reminded the College that the roadmap for transforming the European defence industry adopted by the Commission in October 2025 had paved the way for the creation of this new financing tool. Experience had shown that the EU and its defence sector needed products that were cheaper, more innovative and available more quickly. In this context, it was crucial for SMEs in the sector to have access to finance at a time when defence innovation cycles were getting shorter and the deadlines and complexity of the existing programmes were having a detrimental effect on these companies. By way of example, he pointed out that 70 to 80% of defence contracts in the EU were primarily awarded to the 10 largest companies in the sector, whereas in the United States this figure was less than 40%.

He therefore believed that innovative and more effective financing instruments were needed to support defence production. While the European Defence Fund was useful for costly long-term projects, it was equally important to have instruments that were better suited to more short-term projects such as low-cost industrial production or the development of innovative ideas emanating from startups. He stressed that projects needed to become viable opportunities and that, to this end, innovative SMEs and startups in the sector that provided industrial and technological solutions to armed forces in the EU should be supported.

Mr KUBILIUS said that the AGILE programme would act as an amplifier for startups and scaleups by making it possible to grant financial support within four months and ensure that technologies reached the armed forces after one to three years, thanks to simple, quick and flexible procedures. The programme, for which EUR 115 million had been earmarked in 2027, would fund between 20 and 30 projects to the tune of EUR 1 to 5 millions per project. The beneficiaries of this funding, which might cover up to 100% of eligible costs, would be new defence players from the Member States, European Economic Area (EEA) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, and Ukraine. Mr KUBILIUS added that the Commission would have to agree to take more risks when carrying out

evaluations, which would be based in particular on self-declarations concerning the control and ownership of the companies concerned.

He concluded his presentation by expressing the hope that the AGILE programme would enjoy the success it deserved, despite the limited financial resources available in 2027. In any event, he felt that 2027 would be an opportunity to test the new approach and hoped that additional funding could be provided under the next Multiannual Financial Framework. He also pointed out that Member States could adopt similar programmes, especially as they had far greater funding capacities than the EU.

During the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- the opportunity, thanks to the AGILE programme, to see how innovation in the defence sector could be speeded up by helping the industry prepare better for the challenges it was facing;
- the importance of SMEs in the sector being provided with a bridge between innovation and battlefield experience, and of European defence benefiting from the ensuing innovation by rapidly deploying critical products meeting the needs of the Member States' armed forces;
- the advantage of a programme that was open to Ukraine, whose example served as an inspiration, particularly in terms of speed of innovation, responsiveness and cost-effective production.

Following the presentations, the Commission adopted the proposal for a Regulation in COM(2026) 135/3 for transmission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the national parliaments and, for information, to the Committee of the Regions.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION ON THE REQUEST FOR REGISTRATION, PURSUANT TO REGULATION (EU) 2019/788 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ENTITLED 'FAST, CONVENIENT, AFFORDABLE, AND ABOVE ALL CLIMATE-FRIENDLY TRANSPORTATION FOR ALL EUROPEANS' (C(2026) 2014)

In the absence of Mr ŠEFČOVIČ, Mr TZITZIKOSTAS presented to the College the request for registration of the European citizens' initiative submitted to the Commission on 5 February 2026 and entitled, in the authentic language (English), 'Fast, convenient, affordable, and above all climate-friendly transportation for all Europeans'.

The aim of the initiative, as expressed by the organisers, was to ask the Commission to make rail travel a viable alternative to air travel by strengthening the rail network across the continent, improving its governance and correcting market imbalances. In practical terms, the organisers proposed an EU tax on aviation fuels (kerosene excise duty), the abolition of value added tax (VAT) exemptions, fairer pricing and the earmarking of revenues for a strengthened European rail organisation with expanded competences.

Mr TZITZIKOSTAS noted that no part of this citizens' initiative manifestly exceeded the scope of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties. Consequently, this initiative could be considered admissible, and he therefore proposed to register it. He concluded the presentation by pointing out that the organisers would now have to start collecting the required number of signatures, i.e. at least one million signatures in seven Member States. It was

only after the signatures had been collected that the Commission would give its opinion on the substance of the initiative.

Following this presentation, the Commission confirmed that the citizens' initiative entitled 'Fast, convenient, affordable, and above all climate-friendly transportation for all Europeans' met the conditions for registration. In accordance with C(2026) 2014, it therefore decided to inform the organisers and authorised Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to sign the reply on behalf of the College, to send it to the organisers, and to publish it, for information, in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

**10.2. COMMISSION REPLY TO A RESOLUTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT UNDER ARTICLE 225 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (TFEU) – JUST TRANSITION DIRECTIVE IN THE WORLD OF WORK
(SP(2026) 109 AND /2)**

Ms MÎNZATU presented to the College the draft reply to a legislative initiative resolution, under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, adopted by the European Parliament at its January 2026 plenary meeting.

She explained that this resolution called on the Commission to propose a Directive on a just transition in the world of work, in order to support job creation and help revitalise local economies, particularly in the regions most affected by the green and digital transitions. The aim would be to establish a European framework of policy measures to ensure a fair, inclusive and socially sustainable transition while promoting the creation and protection of quality jobs. The resolution mentioned measures relating to working conditions, to the inclusion of people who are distant from the labour market, to information and consultation of workers, as well as to the improvements to the working environment aimed at protecting their health and safety.

Ms MÎNZATU stated that the Commission welcomed the resolution and reiterated its commitment to a just transition. She stressed that many of the recommendations made were already being implemented through existing European instruments. In addition, the ongoing consultation of the social partners on the European Quality Jobs Act also covered, in a cross-cutting manner, the challenges linked to a just transition. She concluded her presentation by mentioning certain limitations linked to the legal basis, in particular regarding the introduction of a general right to training.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the line proposed in SP(2026) 109/2, including the letter to be sent by Mr ŠEFČOVIČ to the European Parliament.

10.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Ms KALLAS reported on the latest developments in external relations. She began by referring to the Middle East and the EU's efforts to try and help de-escalate the situation together with various partners, such as Pakistan and Egypt. However, the 15-point ceasefire plan proposed by the United States had been rejected by the Iranian authorities. She stressed the importance of coordinating messages, including with G7 partners, and pushing for an end to the war.

She noted the serious difficulties caused by the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, especially in transporting oil and fertilisers, and the dramatic impact on the cost of living in several regions of the world. She referred to the devastating consequences of the conflict in Lebanon, particularly the massive displacement of civilians, and pointed to the EU's support for the disarmament of Hezbollah by the Lebanese armed forces.

As regards the West Bank and Gaza Strip, she noted that Hamas was resurgent in Gaza and that, despite the partial reopening of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, crossings were still infrequent. She also

pointed out that settler violence against Palestinians continued in the West Bank. She underlined the need to press ahead with a view to making progress on the second phase of the peace plan.

On Ukraine, Ms KALLAS noted that the peace negotiations had stalled and were now increasingly linked to the situation in the Middle East. She said that Russia was stepping up its air attacks, especially on energy facilities and other critical infrastructure, and condemned the ballistic missile attacks on civilians. Air strikes in Ukraine had also led to Moldova being disconnected from the European electricity grid. Russia had begun a more active offensive phase on the front line. Ms KALLAS felt that all these factors proved that Russia was not interested in negotiating peace and highlighted the need to provide Ukraine with the air defence capabilities required to counter ballistic missiles.

She stressed that these needs, coupled with demand from the Middle East, meant that production by Europe's defence industry had to be ramped up rapidly. She also noted that it was crucial to repair Ukraine's energy infrastructure before the next winter. Additionally, she mentioned the problem of African soldiers being recruited by the Russian army, and the continued need to deal with the Russian shadow fleet. An informal meeting of foreign ministers would be held the following week in Kyiv at the commemoration of the Bucha massacre.

Lastly, Ms KALLAS reported on her visit to Nigeria and Ghana on 23 and 24 March. She referred to the significant progress made in concluding a readmission agreement with Nigeria to facilitate the return of Nigerian nationals staying illegally in the EU. On 24 March she had also signed the EU's first security and defence partnership with an African country (Ghana), which would make it possible to deepen cooperation in the fight against terrorism and cybercrime.

She concluded by referring to a meeting of G7 foreign ministers in Yvelines

on 26 and 27 March, which would focus on the situation in the Middle East.

During the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- the seriousness of the energy crisis, likely to become one of the worst ever faced, and the several years it would take to restore the pre-war situation in the Middle East, in view of the damage to infrastructure in producer countries;
- the impact of high energy costs on businesses and consumers, and the need for EU measures in the short and medium term;
- the security-of-supply difficulties already felt in Asia, which contributed to pushing up prices globally;
- in that regard, the appropriateness of the measures the EU took in 2022 to diversify energy supplies;
- the humanitarian and civil protection consequences of the war in the Middle East, especially the large-scale displacement of people in Iran and the region, and the heavy civilian toll in terms of casualties and destruction;
- the repatriation efforts still ongoing thanks to the EU's civil protection mechanism;
- the attacks on civilian infrastructure in Lebanon as well, especially on medical facilities, the scale of population displacement and the importance of the air bridge organised with Beirut for supplying medical equipment;
- the complete blockade of Gaza despite the partial reopening of the Rafah crossing, the continued Israeli air attacks and the extremely worrying situation in the West Bank;

- questions about the content of discussions between the United States and Iran, particularly on the Iranian nuclear issue, and the long-term impact of the war on the radicalisation of the Iranian regime;
- the deadlocked peace negotiations on Ukraine and some questioning about the way forward;
- on transport, the reports of many European vessels being stranded in the Strait of Hormuz and the risks for their crews; the commercial impact of this situation and the effects on insurance;
- on aviation in particular, the loss of air links in the region due to the total or partial closure of most routes, the increase in kerosene prices and the supply problems to be expected if the conflict continued;
- the damage also caused to transport infrastructure in Ukraine by Russian air strikes, and the need to explore ways of assisting the country in this area too;
- the impact of the war in the Middle East on fertiliser prices and supply, and a reminder that the initial proposal for the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) included a fertiliser component;
- in the current turbulent international context, Europe's role as a safe haven for investment given its stability and quality of life;
- the further efforts needed to increase European competitiveness in energy prices and remedy fragmentation of the single market to provide investors with a highly competitive environment;
- the importance of looking across all policy areas at what could be done to further increase the attractiveness of the EU and of clearly communicating the EU's competitive advantages.

In response to the various comments, Ms KALLAS highlighted the efforts being made in the Gulf to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict, if possible by taking advantage of the five-day suspension of strikes ordered by the US President. She noted that Iranian institutions continued to function and that, as regards nuclear power, Iran had already made a number of commitments not to further develop its nuclear weapons programme. She concluded by stressing the importance of sending a strong signal about the need to end the conflict.

The Commission took note of this information.

10.4. MID-TERM REVIEW OF COHESION POLICY

Mr FITTO briefed the College on the results of the mid-term review of the modernised cohesion policy. He began by pointing out that the programmes had originally been designed in a very different political context. Since then, the world had changed considerably, and the EU was facing new geopolitical, economic and social challenges. The Commission therefore considered it necessary to assess whether existing programmes were still aligned with EU priorities, and to allow Member States and regions to redirect resources accordingly. Mr FITTO stressed that the results of this exercise were significant. A total of 186 programmes had been amended for the current programming period, and EUR 34.6 billion had been reallocated to other priorities across the EU.

These resources had been redirected towards five key priorities. First, EUR 15.2 billion had been allocated to competitiveness, with investments in areas such as 6G technologies and biotechnology. Second, EUR 11.9 billion had been dedicated to defence and dual use investments, including drones, space assets and military mobility. This was a particularly important political signal, as these reallocations were made at the request of the Member States and regions themselves, rather than being imposed by the Commission. Third,

EUR 3.3 billion had been reallocated to affordable housing, including the acquisition and renovation of the existing housing stock. Fourth, EUR 3.1 billion had been allocated to water management projects, including infrastructure to improve drinking water supply and water systems in general. Finally, EUR 1.1 billion had been allocated to energy infrastructure, including interconnectors and industrial decarbonisation. Mr FITTO made particular mention of the speed with which the exercise had been carried out, as these reallocations corresponded to concrete investments that Member States and regions could already implement.

With regard to the method used, he explained that the process had been based on in-depth dialogue with national, regional and local authorities, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. He highlighted three key elements that had made the exercise possible: (i) its voluntary nature, which meant that the Member States and regions saw this process as an opportunity rather than a loss of resources, (ii) flexibility, with pre-financing options, higher co-financing rates and longer eligibility periods, and (iii) simplification, including easier rules for investments in large companies in more regions. This approach reflected a real modernisation of cohesion policy and demonstrated that it could be adapted to new priorities.

Ms MÎNZATU added that the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which was part of cohesion policy, had also been included in the mid-term review exercise. Member States had shown a clear commitment to reallocating part of the ESF+ resources to new priorities, including in support of developing skills related to competitiveness, defence and civil preparedness. Around EUR 3.3 billion had been reallocated to skills-related investments, while around EUR 1 billion had been allocated to social inclusion measures, including actions to tackle child poverty.

She stressed that these results demonstrated that cohesion policy remained fully relevant and capable of responding to new priorities while pursuing its

fundamental objective of reducing regional disparities. She also stressed that cohesion policy should not be perceived as being in competition with competitiveness or defence policies. On the contrary, the reallocation of almost EUR 12 billion to defence-related investments sent a strong signal that cohesion policy could help strengthen Europe's resilience while continuing to support regional development.

Ms MÎNZATU concluded by noting that this exercise showed how different policy objectives could dovetail in a coherent manner, even in a difficult and fluctuating geopolitical context.

During the discussion that followed, the Commission raised the following main points:

- broad support for the results of the mid-term review and the observation that the exercise demonstrated how the cohesion policy could be adapted to meet changing priorities;
- recognition of the fact that redirecting part of cohesion resources towards priorities such as energy, housing and defence clearly met the expectations of Member States and citizens;
- the important political signal, in the current geopolitical context, of allocating almost EUR 12 billion to defence and dual-use investments;
- how this exercise responded to the implementation challenges affecting certain programmes by redirecting resources that might otherwise have been difficult to allocate;
- the need to explore the possibilities of mobilising other EU financing instruments in response to the ongoing energy crisis;
- whether the question of further reallocations could be considered in the future.

In response to certain points raised during the discussion, Mr FITTO pointed out that the method used had been key to the success of the exercise. The Commission had not imposed solutions on the Member States but rather worked closely with national and regional authorities to identify appropriate investment priorities. Around 10% of the overall budget allocation for cohesion policy had been redirected in this process. While further adaptations might be considered, in particular to address the energy crisis, any such measures should continue to be based on dialogue and consultation with the Member States.

Ms MÎNZATU added that the mid-term review had encouraged Member States to reflect on the relevance of their investment priorities and how resources could best respond to emerging challenges. She stressed the strong political commitment that had characterised this process, including direct discussions with governments and regional authorities. She felt that this exercise had strengthened the importance of cohesion policy and had demonstrated its ability to support both territorial development and the EU's broader strategic priorities.

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 10.48.