



Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel following the meeting of the European Council of 21-22 October 2021

Brussels, 22 October 2021

Good afternoon,

I would like to start with the discussion we had yesterday on the energy prices. The rising energy prices are a real concern for consumers and businesses. We know that this is a global situation, but it bears lessons that we need to implement right here in Europe, too. And that was what the discussion was all about.

First of all, in the short term, we need to support vulnerable consumers and heavily exposed businesses. And Member States are already doing it. Round about 20 Member States have taken measures or they have announced measures. But this is only for the short term. If you look at the mid and long term, we will work on additional steps. To increase resilience and independence, we have agreed to explore how to establish a strategic gas reserve, also to explore the possibilities of a joint procurement. We will intensify our outreach to the different suppliers, also to diversify the supply we do have. And we have to speed up the work on interconnections. In parallel, we will assess the functioning of the gas and electricity market itself and the ETS market. And we will report back on that later this year, at the next possibility where the topic is on the Council's agenda.

And that leads me to the energy mix of the future. It is obvious that we need more renewable and clean energy. If you look at the production price of renewables, it has considerably decreased. For solar energy, it is ten times cheaper today than a decade ago. Wind energy is very volatile, but it is 50% cheaper than it was a decade ago. So that is the way to go. They are carbon-free and they are homegrown, so a lot of independence is in that. Alongside this, we need a stable source, nuclear; and during the transition, of course, natural gas. This is why – as we have already stated as a Commission in April – we will come forward with our taxonomy proposal.

The second topic yesterday evening was, indeed, the rule of law. We had an important discussion, not only on the rule of law but also on the judicial independence. And I welcome that we had that discussion. The rule of law is at the heart of our Union. We all have a stake in this crucial issue, because we know that the rule of law ensures mutual trust, it gives legal certainty throughout the European Union; and it gives equality between Member States and for each and every citizen of the European Union. A fundamental pillar of the rule of law is the judicial independence. This was the core of the Leader's discussion concerning Poland. We have a long road ahead of us. This road is a combination of dialogue, legal response and concrete action to restore the independence of the judiciary. Among other requirements, the European Court of Justice ruled in July that the disciplinary regime for judges had to be overhauled and unlawfully dismissed judges have to be reinstated. We expect Poland to implement this ruling.

Another topic that we have been discussing – and that was today – is the critical situation in Afghanistan. Right now, Afghan people need desperately food, water, shelter and access to healthcare. Every second person in Afghanistan is in need of humanitarian support. And Europe is taking a leadership position here in the global solidarity effort. Last week, I presented an Afghan Support Package worth EUR 1 billion, and it prioritises the humanitarian needs. We need to make sure that displaced Afghans are supported internally or in the neighbouring countries. This is why we are also supporting Afghanistan's neighbourhood under the Support Package we have put forward.

Migration was – as Charles Michel said – a key topic of the discussion today. We are very concerned about the situation at the borders with Belarus. We consider the behaviour of the Belarus government as a hybrid attack. The people used by Lukashenko are victims. We must help them. No one's life should be used for political issues. This is an instrumentalisation of migration – to put political pressure on the European Union. We will keep up the pressure on the Lukashenko regime. We have already proposed targeted measures to reverse visa facilitation for the regime and its proxies. And we are ready to explore options for further sanctions – not only for individuals but also for entities or companies. Second, we agreed that we need concerted action. Belarus, as we are

observing now, is looking at opening new routes. It has offered further visa waivers to additional third countries. We will continue our engagement with these countries to limit this state-sponsored smuggling. We have also discussed the situation in the Mediterranean, and the need to strengthen our cooperation with key third countries.

All of this brings to light, indeed, the need for a coherent and effective common migration and asylum policy. I reiterated my call to Leaders to make progress on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. It is there; it is on the table; it has to be negotiated; it has to be advanced. So there is really an urge to the Leaders to move forward and to negotiate that package.

Thank you.

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