

Confirmation hearings 2024: How will the Commission fulfil the promises of Von der Leyen II?



Introduction: From guidelines to mission letters, the challenge of delivering

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From 5 – 12 November, the European Parliament (EP) will hold confirmation hearings of the 26 Commissioners-designate presented by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for the 2024-2029 mandate. Each of them will face questions by MEPs of one or several EP committees that are relevant to their portfolios. To be confirmed in their position, they will need to obtain a majority of two-thirds of the chair and coordinators of the committee that holds the hearing.

Ahead of the hearings, we analyse the Commissioners' portfolios and the main priorities of the new Commission. We raise the questions that we consider MEPs should ask the Commissioners-designates to clarify their work programme, or address gaps in policies and overlaps between Commissioners, which are revealed by our analysis of their [mission letters](#).

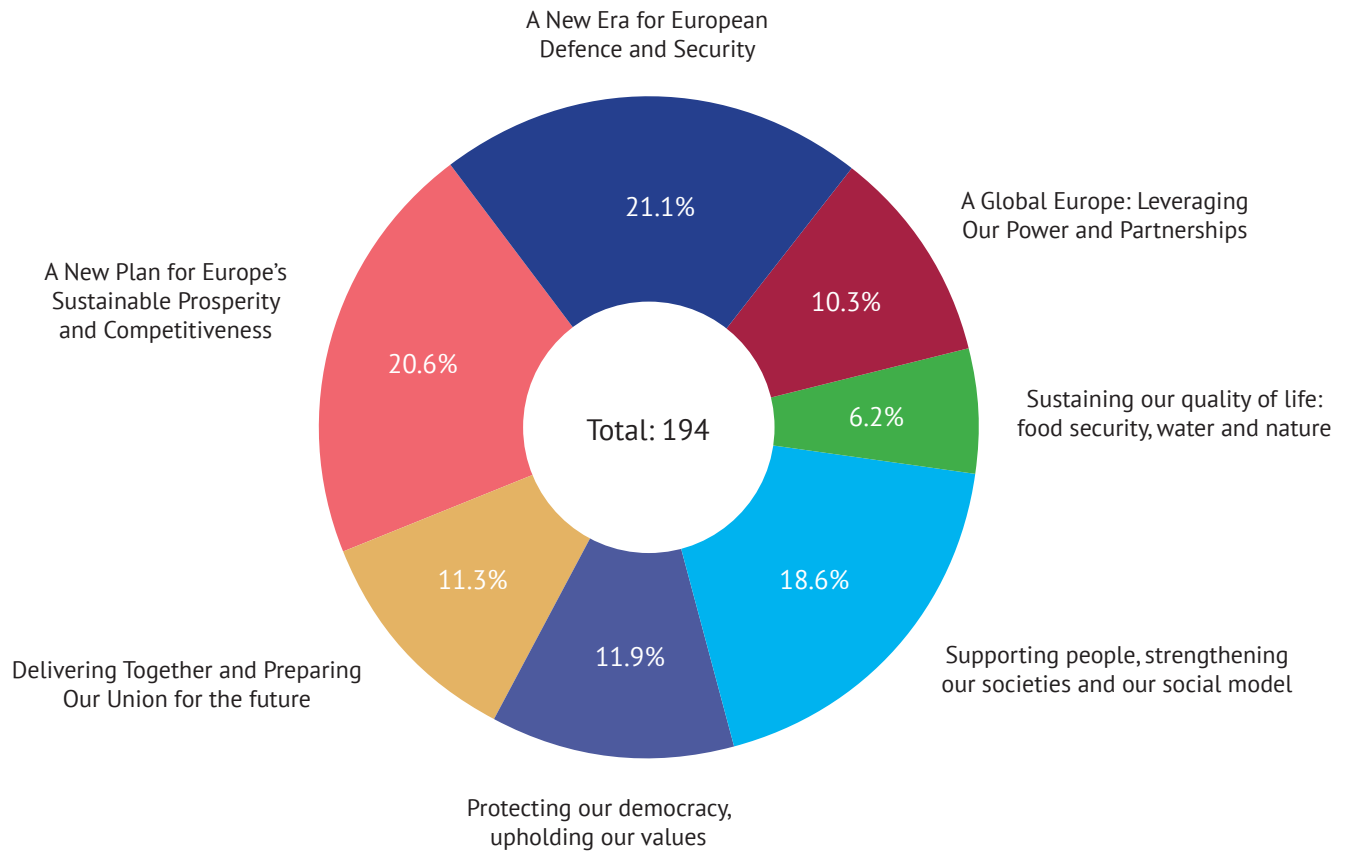
Before delving into the Commissioners-designate's portfolios, we looked at whether Ursula von der Leyen's mission letters addressed to them reflected the priorities and commitments that she outlined in a speech to the EP when she was re-elected Commission President. With Eulytix, a political tech venture with a focus on EU politics and legislation, we subjected to a rigorous quantitative analysis of the Commission's [political guidelines](#) published in July and the Commissioners- mission letters.

At the outset, we extracted Von der Leyen's commitments using natural language processing techniques. The guidelines are divided into seven chapters, in addition to a preamble. As more concrete promises are found in the specific chapters, we restricted our analysis on them. With this procedure we identified 194 specific promises made by the President-elect of the Commission. **Figure 1** presents the distribution of these commitments across the chapters in the guidelines.

The three main chapters of the guidelines in terms of commitments appear to be those linked to defence, competitiveness, the green and digital transitions and social issues. This reflects both the priorities set by EU heads of state and government in the [Strategic Agenda](#) adopted in June 2024, as well as the [priorities of the European political parties](#) that Von der Leyen needed to woo to get elected by the Parliament.

Figure 1

THE DISTRIBUTION OF IDENTIFIED COMMITMENTS ACCROSS CHAPTERS



Source: Eulytix via European Commission's guidelines

The next step was extracting objectives with which Commissioners-designate were tasked with in their [mission letters](#). These letters contain a preamble outlining the general direction of the Commission,¹ and a set of personalised tasks, unique to each candidate. The extraction of candidate specific tasks was performed on the latter section.

Finally, we mapped each commitment to the task, or in some cases multiple tasks fulfilling them. A cutting edge [Large Language Model](#) (LLM) was used for each of these steps. This methodology does not only help us answer the question of to what extent the portfolios deliver on Ursula von der Leyen's promises outlined in her political guidelines, but it also allows us to map commitments to portfolios.

Figure 2

ILLUSTRATION OF THE MAPPING BETWEEN COMMITMENTS FOUND IN POLITICAL GUIDELINE CHAPTERS AND PROPOSED PORTFOLIOS



Source: Eulytix via European Commission

Notes: Only mappings with a contribution greater than 2% are depicted

Figure 2 illustrates our results on so-called Sankey charts. For the sake of clarity, we decided to draw one chart for each chapter of the guidelines. These charts illustrate the distribution of tasks mapped to commitments in a certain chapter across proposed portfolios; unfulfilled commitments are highlighted in red.

The first finding of our analysis is that a very large part of the commitments made by Ursula von der Leyen to MEPs are translated into tasks entrusted to Commissioners-designate. Indeed, we found that more than 95% of the identified commitments are sufficiently covered in the mission letters.

A specific gap stands out within this overall adequacy between the guidelines and the mission letters. Whereas the percentage of unfulfilled commitments remains under 2% for almost all policy issues, the analysis reveals that in the area of democracy and European values, about 10% of the commitments are not adequately covered by any of the portfolios. This includes citizens' participation in EU policymaking, for which the mission assigned to Commissioner-designate Michael McGrath remains quite undefined, as well as EU internal reform, which is not mentioned in any letter. The analysis also shows that some policy areas are

scattered across a plethora of portfolios. This is particularly the case with issues placed under the "new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness" chapter of the guidelines, which will be dealt with by 13 Commissioners, or with issues placed under the "supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model" chapter, which are distributed among 10 Commissioners. This can be explained by the cross-cutting nature of these issues, where economic, industrial, social, financial and environmental dimensions are inter-linked. This also highlights the [choice made by Von der Leyen](#) to dilute her Commissioners' responsibilities and increase her presidential role, with a risk of overlaps, bottlenecks and lack of coherence.

Overall, the language analysis operated by Eulytix shows that Ursula von der Leyen has so far delivered by translating her commitments into items on the lists of tasks entrusted to future Commissioners. However, she has done so in a way that could make it more difficult for them to implement the Commission's guidelines. This is what MEPs will have to clarify during the confirmation hearings. This compendium brought together by EPC analysts will contribute to understanding what is at stake. With each analysis, we suggest a question MEPs should ask to Commissioners-designate.

Industry first: The next Commission's limited nature agenda

Brooke Moore, Policy Analyst, Sustainable Prosperity for Europe Programme



Teresa Ribera Rodríguez,
Executive Vice-President
for Clean, Just and
Competitive Transition



Christophe Hansen,
Commissioner for
Agriculture and Food



Jessika Roswall,
Commissioner for
Environment, Water
Resilience and a
Competitive Circular
Economy



Costas Kadis,
Commissioner for
Fisheries and Oceans



Wopke Hoekstra,
Commissioner for Climate,
Net Zero and Clean Growth

When it comes to the green transition, the commissioners' mission letters reveal a predictable but narrow focus on decarbonisation, with the Clean Industrial Deal (CID) taking centre stage. Decarbonisation is undeniably critical, and the prioritisation of it across the board, is a success in itself. However, framing the CID as a kind of rebranded Green Deal, rather than a more overarching strategy, risks undermining the Green Deal's core objectives. More concerning is how this approach appears to sideline nature-focused policies that don't necessarily align with industry-related priorities. This is evident throughout the mission letters, where nature-related issues are relatively scarce and often lacking depth.

The need to boost incentives and private financing for nature-positive actions is a recurring theme. Notably, one of only two environmental references in the letter to the Executive Vice-President-designate for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, Teresa Ribera, is to measures like these. They also appear in the letter to the Commissioner-designate for Agriculture and Food, Christophe Hansen. While certainly a positive impulse, what appears to be missing is consideration of the unintended costs of the Commission's push to 'cut red tape' — particularly for nature — and whether investments and incentives can truly compensate for weakened regulations. Biodiversity, by contrast, receives some, but significantly less attention. The letter to Commissioner-designate for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, Jessika Roswall, emphasises the importance of nature protection and international biodiversity commitments. However, action items are kept to enforcement, implementation and simplification, the latter of which could compromise these very efforts.

On a more positive note, priorities for the Commissioner-designate for Fisheries and Oceans, Costas Kadis, include increasing biodiversity while ensuring healthy marine and coastal areas. An European Climate Adaptation Plan is also mentioned. While climate adaptation extends beyond environmental policy, it is deeply connected to nature. In the letter to the Commissioner-designate for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, Wopke Hoekstra, who would lead this task, the importance of nature-based solutions within the European Climate Adaptation Plan is specifically mentioned, importantly serving as a clear link between nature and Europe's broader security concerns.

Beyond these points, the focus is overwhelmingly on decarbonisation and supporting industry and SMEs. At its core, a more competitiveness-conscious narrative is not problematic. On the contrary. Embedding Green Deal goals within diverse sectoral dialogues is essential for long-term success. The concern is that this industrial lens risks narrowing the scope of the EU's green transition. It could close in on decarbonisation within the bounds of industrial competitiveness, while overlooking critical areas like nature protection. Importantly, the Draghi report's call for financing is evident throughout the letters, with a clear push to incentivise nature-positive actions and channel investments in that direction. While mobilising finance is crucial, the question is how to ensure that funds flow towards these sectors which are not only deprioritised but also inherently less financially "profitable" or attractive from a competitiveness perspective.

Given the industry-focused nature of the Commission's priorities, how will sufficient attention and resources for other initiatives like nature restoration be guaranteed?

Pact implementation and migration partnerships: A balancing act

Helena Hahn, Policy Analyst, European Migration and Diversity Programme



Magnus Brunner,
Commissioner-designate
for Internal Affairs and
Migration



Dubravka Suica,
Commissioner-designate
for the Mediterranean



Jozef Sikela,
Commissioner-designate
for International
Partnerships

Under the second von der Leyen Commission, migration will remain high on the agenda, notably due to its role in cooperation with partner countries. If the previous Home Affairs Commissioner's main task was to see the negotiations on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum through, Commissioner-designate Magnus Brunner will see its implementation on his agenda. But anyone believing that this phase will be less politicised would be sorely mistaken, as the weeks leading up to the hearings have demonstrated. Not only did some member states show early resistance to implementation, as in the case of [Hungary](#) and Poland, others, such as [Spain](#), France and Germany, have pushed for accelerated progress. Among others, this is to benefit from specific provisions, such as accelerated border procedures and responsibility-sharing, that will apply only as of mid-June 2026.

Despite the European Commission's tight deadline for member states to finalise their National Implementation Plans, which will coincide with the new Commission if the College is approved by 1 December, the emerging patchwork of member state demands and needs does not bode well. What was meant to be a largely administrative exercise could become subject to politicisation. If confirmed, Brunner must put his full weight behind the Pact to keep the process from derailing. In doing so, his skills as a political broker will be tested as he will face the difficulty of negotiating interests not just across party lines, but also within his own political group, the European People's Party (EPP). With [recent endorsement](#) by von der Leyen of actions going beyond, and possibly undermining the reforms, there is an open question of how he will manage his relationship with her and approach non-compliant member states in lieu of sanctioning mechanisms in line with the Commission's role as the guardian of the treaties.

What is more, there is a growing coalition of member states calling for the implementation of various tools for the externalisation of migration management, notably the concept of 'return transit hubs' and extra-

territorial processing of asylum claims. Despite several legal, financial, and practical challenges, migration partnerships and the euphemistically framed 'innovative tools' Italy-Albania will likely dominate much of the agenda in the next years, as reaffirmed in the 17 October [Council conclusions](#).

Amid a strategic-cum-geographic re-orientation in the new Commission, the pursuit of partnerships to better "manage migration" must be seen in a new light. Notably, the new Commission would have at least three Commissioners dealing with migration. Considering her increasingly favourable stance towards member states on migration matters, von der Leyen is likely to play an even bigger role, possibly leading to frictions within the Commission and with member states reluctant to see this trend continuing.

Moreover, with different strategic interests defining the Migration, Mediterranean and International Partnerships portfolios, finding common ground and a coherent approach will be incumbent. This relates to migration partnerships largely aimed at reducing irregular migration, a new strategy for the Middle East, and rejuvenating relations with Africa as part of a development agenda increasingly shaped by Global Gateway. However, the emerging shift from values-based to increasingly Realpolitik-driven external action, promises to make this a no less challenging endeavour compared to the last cycle.

How does the Commission intend to guide the implementation of the reforms and hold member states to account, ensuring a system based on solidarity, fairness, and effectiveness, as well as to ensure coherence between the migration and international partnerships and Mediterranean portfolios?

What does a modernised competition policy mean?

Varg Folkman, Policy Analyst, Europe's Political Economy Programme



Teresa Ribera Rodríguez,
Executive Vice-President
for Clean, Just and
Competitive Transition

Teresa Ribera has big shoes to fill, arriving at DG COMPETITION in the wake of Margrethe Vestager. President Ursula von der Leyen has given her ample room to make her mark, charging her with modernising the union's competition policy in her mission letter, as well as shaping a state aid policy fit for funding a Clean Industrial Deal. No small feat, if Ribera succeeds.

Modernising competition policy means remains an open question. The Commission published in August 2024 a draft of [new antitrust guidelines](#) and only in 2023 published a revision of its [merger regulation](#) to simplify it and cut red tape. Both these have involved significant processes and have faced resistance from lawyers and industry.

A review of merger rules that places emphasis on investment intensity and innovation, among other indicators, would be a complicated and fraught task, with no immediate answer to how legal certainty and the goals of such a revision could be balanced. The same can be said of Von der Leyen's request that Ribera clamp down on killer acquisitions, where large companies buy small, innovative rivals. The [EU Court of Justice ruled in September 2024](#) that the Commission can no longer use special rules that let member states refer these deals to them, as they are usually beneath turnover thresholds for merger review, making the legal path forward an uncertain one.

Ribera is also tasked with creating a new state aid framework to enable funding for a Clean Industrial Deal. So far, new climate-related rules under the General Block Exemptions and the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework, have provided a seemingly endless supply of exemptions to state aid rules for green transition funding. The goal now is to focus aid on more Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI), which are expected to become faster and more agile. At the same time, strict state aid control needs to be maintained and balancing the need for faster approvals with the time-consuming process of state aid review.

Loosened state aid rules favour the largest member states who have the means to fund expensive projects. These also tend to dominate the IPCEI, which are complex projects laying claim to large bureaucratic resources. State aid and IPCEI will be a key part in funding clean tech innovation under the Clean Industrial Deal and Ribera must secure an even playing field across the bloc, reducing fragmentation due to differentiated aid intensities. Lawmakers should push Ribera on the tensions inherent in the need for climate funding and the request for discipline in state aid control, as well as what role capital markets will play.

How will Teresa Ribera make the IPCEI more agile and avoid them causing market fragmentation?

Translating rhetorical commitments into practical actions on enlargement

Berta López Domènech, Policy Analyst, European Politics and Institutions Programme



Marta Kos, Commissioner for Enlargement

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 pushed EU enlargement to the top of the Union's agenda. President Ursula von der Leyen described the expansion of the Union as a "moral, political and geostrategic imperative" in her [2024 – 2029 political guidelines](#). Hence, enlargement was expected to be an important dossier in the new politico-institutional cycle. It sparked some surprise then, that it was not attributed to an Executive Vice-President, as some [initially predicted](#). But the fact that the enlargement and neighbourhood dossiers are now dissociated is good news for the future of the policy. It will allow Commissioner-designate Marta Kos to focus on the countries aspiring to join the EU, while Dubravka Šuica will be dedicated to strengthening partnerships with the countries on the Southern and Eastern flanks of the Mediterranean.

The appointment of a Commissioner from Slovenia, one of the most vocal Member States in favour of enlargement, will be seen positively by EU aspirants. Internally, Kos will be faced with the major challenge of helping the EU27 [reach a consensus on 'how' and 'when' to advance on the dossier](#).

The Commission and European Council have very clearly linked the discourse about EU enlargement to internal reform and stated that both tracks should advance in parallel. Following this logic, the Commission is expected to carry out in-depth pre-enlargement policy reviews in some sectors in the first half of 2025. This will follow up on a [first assessment of the implications of a larger EU in four areas](#) – values, policies, budget and governance – published in March 2024. There are large divergences

of positions between the EU27 when it comes to the specificities of the reforms needed (i.e. the reluctance of some to give up their veto powers). This suggests that member states have found a way to express political support for enlargement while keeping the option of stopping the process by pointing to a lack of progress on internal reform. The absence of any mention of internal reform in Kos', or any other commissioner's, mission letter raises uncertainty about how the EU will deliver, in practice, on both dossiers.

Marta Kos' mission letter stresses that the EU accession process "is and will remain merit-based" and tasks her with supporting (potential) candidates in meeting EU membership criteria. To succeed, the new Commissioner should focus on restoring the credibility of the process and building relationships of mutual trust with the different stakeholders, including civil society. At the same time, the geostrategic dimension of enlargement has become increasingly relevant in the past years. EU enlargement can no longer be thinkable without an inherent security strand. Overcoming the dilemma between the geopolitical imperative and the merit-based logic will be at the core of the EU's strategy to expand.

How are you going to make sure that both EU and candidates deliver on their commitments – the EU institutions and member states forging a consensus on 'how' and 'when' to advance the policy and candidates carrying out the required reforms?

Trading resilience for preparedness, or the lack of strategic foresight

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Hadja Lahbib,
Commissioner for
Preparedness and Crisis
Management; Equality



Roxana Minzatu,
Executive Vice-President
for People, Skills and
Preparedness



Andrius Kubilius,
Commissioner for
Defence and Space

“We will look at all of our policies through a security lens,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament in July when presenting the [Commission’s guidelines for 2024-2029](#). In addition to the creation of a Defence Commissioner and two portfolios that cover security (Henna Virkkunen) and economic security (Maroš Šefčovič), this is demonstrated by the elevation of the concept of ‘preparedness’.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and in anticipation of a potential second Trump administration, preparing the EU for future episodes of the [permacrisis](#) is warranted. Despite this, the structure of the college and the commissioners’ mission letters indicate a lack of clear vision and foresight on what the concept of preparedness entails.

In March 2024, Ursula Von der Leyen [tasked](#) former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö with preparing a report, due later this year, on civilian and defence preparedness. Not much is known yet about what it will include. In her [mission letter](#), Commissioner Lahbib is asked to design and implement an EU Preparedness Union strategy, “following whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches”. This is ill-defined and it raises the question of how the Commission, within its competences, will be able to carry out such a multi-level strategy.

Lahbib will work under the authority of Roxana Minzatu, whose [portfolio](#) mostly includes labour, education and social issues. It would have made more sense to place work on preparedness in the remit of the EVP for tech sovereignty, security and democracy, Henna Virkkunen. All the more so as Defence Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, who reports to her, is also [asked](#) to “enhance Europe’s civilian and military preparedness and readiness”. Responsibility for preparedness is therefore shared between three commissioners as part of two EVP’s domains. This creates a high risk of overlaps and lack of coherence on an issue which is itself not clearly defined.

During the COVID-19 years, a key EU concept was ‘[resilience](#)’ (e.g. the Recovery and Resilience Facility, or the [European Health Union](#) to “reinforce the EU’s resilience for cross-border health threats”). Although it is still widely used by the Commission, it is increasingly linked to or replaced by ‘preparedness’. However, preparedness is usually used in relation to crisis management, as clearly stated in the title of Hadja Lahbib’s portfolio. By the Commission’s [definition](#), resilience is “the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair and democratic manner”. In trading resilience for preparedness, the Commission risks focusing only on potential crises and foregoing anticipating further developments of the [polytransition](#) that the EU is facing.

This can be achieved through the [foresight tool](#), which aims at exploring possible futures. In the previous Commission, foresight was part of Vice-President Šefčovič’s portfolio and four [strategic foresight reports](#) were published between 2020 and 2023. The Commission should keep up the reporting, while making efforts to integrate more foresight into policymaking. Unfortunately, Hadja Lahbib and Roxana Minzatu’s mission letters subordinate foresight to crisis preparedness. This potentially reduces the scope and usefulness of foresight, limiting the Commission’s capacity to prepare for the future.

How will the Commission ensure that its preparedness strategy can be implemented at all levels of authority in the Union, and how will it avoid reducing future-oriented policymaking to crisis management?

No comprehensive and ambitious approach to EU democracy

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Henna Virkkunen,
Executive Vice-President
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Michael McGrath,
Commissioner for
Democracy, Justice,
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Maroš Šefčovič,
Commissioner for
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Transparency



Marta Kos, Commissioner
for Enlargement

Although high-level discourse on democratic values persists, the new Commission [has demoted the priority of democracy](#). Responsibilities connected to democratic values and participation have been reduced to a minor component under the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security, and Democracy, Henna Virkkunen, and merged with the justice portfolio of the new Democracy, Justice, and Rule of Law Commissioner, Michael McGrath. As none of them have worked closely on these topics in the past it is crucial that Members of the European Parliament thoroughly test their expertise and ambitions for driving forward the Commission's democracy agenda.

Even more concerning is the growing trend of securitising democracy, tying it to issues like disinformation, external threats, and electoral manipulation. While the proposed European Democracy Shield is necessary, it is far from sufficient. The Commission's focus on foreign interference overlooks the fact that most disinformation campaigns originate within the EU itself, sometimes even backed by European governments (e.g., Viktor Orbán's in Hungary) or MEPs (e.g., Spain's Alvieste Pérez).

This outward focus distracts the Commission from addressing internal democratic challenges, such as the Spitzenkandidaten principle, or a new electoral law. These went unaddressed during the previous mandate and have been sidelined again. Crucial institutional reforms in the context of the EU's potential enlargement in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe also remain absent. It is crucial that the Commission progresses the discussion on such institutional issues during the next term. Marta Kos, candidate for the Commissioner for Enlargement, will be important on these issues, alongside Virkkunen and McGrath.

While citizen participation has been framed as a horizontal priority for all commissioners, it remains unclear who will oversee its implementation, define the priorities, or monitor compliance. Without clear lines of responsibility and accountability, there is a significant risk that commissioners may neglect this duty. So far, the proposals do not seem to go beyond the already existing European Citizens' Panels (ECPs) and there are no new initiatives at the level of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Part of this mission should be to coordinate citizens' engagement, particularly ECPs across EU institutions. As head of interinstitutional coordination, Maroš Šefčovič will need to drive forward this agenda.

In sum, Von der Leyen's emphasis on the securitisation of democracy risks neglecting the more fundamental structural factors that uphold it, while allowing the new Commission to avoid the necessary reforms to improve the Union's democratic system. Deepening democracy – rather than merely securitising it – is the best way to protect it.

The upcoming hearings offer the European Parliament an opportunity to push the Commission to reintegrate vital internal EU reforms into its agenda and establish clear accountability. The EU should take an offensive stance on championing democracy, not a defensive one. MEPs should seize the opportunity to push for ambitious plans.

Beyond the European Democracy Shield, what internal democratic reforms are being proposed to deepen the EU's democracy?

Boosting competitiveness: Decreasing regulatory burdens and strengthening the Single Market

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Valdis Dombrovskis,
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Implementation and
Simplification



Stéphane Séjourné,
Executive Vice-President
for Prosperity and
Industrial Strategy

Alongside increased focus on security, improving the EU's faltering competitiveness has arguably become the new Commission's top priority. President von der Leyen's political guidelines, and the Letta and Draghi reports have all called for reducing regulatory and administrative burdens and deepening the Single Market as key horizontal vectors for more competitiveness.

All the commissioners' mission letters contain a section calling for the reduction of administrative burdens and simplifying legislation. The Commissioners are tasked with reducing reporting obligations by at least 25%, better stakeholder involvement, stress testing the EU acquis, following the principles of better regulation, subsidiarity and proportionality, as well as a rigorous application of the new competitiveness and SME checks.

In this endeavour, Valdis Dombrovskis, Commissioner-designate for Implementation and Simplification, is given a coordinating role. How will he ensure that this latest effort in reducing the regulatory burden is more effective than the many previous, often futile attempts? Draghi's idea of a six month period at the beginning of each mandate devoted to an 'evaluation bank' systematically stress-testing all existing regulations by sector, would be a good start.

Another question is how to balance more regulatory scrutiny and stakeholder involvement with the need to accelerate the lengthy legislative process in the EU. Possible solutions include expanding the use of digital tools, such as AI, improving coordination, and adopting common standards across EU and national authorities, as recommended in Dombrovskis' mission letter. But how can he align interests in a new interinstitutional agreement on simplification and better law-making, and accelerate the rollout of digital tools?

The Commission has recognised the need for a more proportional regulatory treatment of mid-caps. [These "hidden champions" play an important role for the EU's](#)

[economic transitions](#) and competitiveness, but encounter [disproportionate regulatory burdens](#) and less public support compared to SMEs and large corporations. In July President von der Leyen announced the creation of a new small mid-cap category. But will Stéphane Séjourné, the Executive Vice-President designate for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, include the regulatory benefits and alleviations in this new category needed to unleash the full potential of Europe's hidden champions?

A simplified reporting regime and derogations similar to those of SMEs, a more prominent role in public procurement and targeted support programmes, for example in R&I under the framework of Horizon Europe and scale-up in InvestEU, should be the goal. Moreover, many particularly innovative companies facing disproportionate burdens and not enough support are large mid-caps between 500 and 3,000 employees. The Commission should consider proportionate simplification and support for them, too. Overall, the Commission should move away from a mere focus on "think small" and SMEs towards a growth and scale-up doctrine.

Enhancing the Single Market in key strategic sectors and ensuring consistent enforcement across member states is crucial for boosting competitiveness. After policing of the Single Market [dropped under the last Commission](#), what should Stéphane Sejourne do to reinforce the Single Market Enforcement Task Force (SMET)? Strategies could be to increase staffing and to prioritise enforcement of cases in strategic fields. Another important question is how the Commission can get member states on board for a harmonisation of services markets in the highly politicised fields of energy, defence, connectivity, professions and finance. Closer dialogue with member state governments and parliaments should be one way of escalating the issue nationally.

After so many failed attempts in the past, how can the Single Market be strengthened and regulatory burdens be decreased?

Virkkunen's political baptism as Tech Commissioner: A trial by fire?

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Henna Virkkunen,
Executive Vice-President
for Tech Sovereignty,
Security, and Democracy

A bleak picture and a difficult job await the candidate for the EU's next Tech Commissioner post. Complex digital rules weighing down tech companies, stagnant growth, poor venture funding, and a staggering lack of competitiveness in frontier technologies will not be easy fixes.

Commissioner-designate Henna Virkkunen will have to convince the European Parliament (EP) that she has what it takes to deliver on Europe's digital and economic security transitions. The former Finnish MEP will likely be pressed on three challenges: ambitious enforcement of the new EU legislation, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA); redressing the 2030 Digital Decade Policy Programme (DDPP); and putting Europe back in the race on frontier technologies. However, these three areas must be scrutinised in more detail to assess the candidate's suitability.

With many new digital regulations, Virkkunen must choose which areas and policies to prioritise and outline a clear enforcement vision. On this note, EP committees must inquire about what battles she will decide to take on and whether she will reserve enough attention for the rigorous implementation and enforcement of the DSA. If so, what will her vision be to fix the issue of unruly platforms continuing to spread online disinformation? Would she consider suspending the services of platforms like X in the EU?

Virkkunen will have to convince MEPs that she is aware of and can rectify the DDPP's failures. Therefore, it is imperative that she is asked about her vision for the upcoming strategy review. Will she make the political decision to double down on ongoing efforts? If so, what targets will she prioritise? What does her contingency plan look like, and what appropriate measures will she take to minimise challenges associated with the failure of the DDPP, namely a widening digital divide and skills polarisation?

Lastly, Virkkunen must demonstrate that she knows how to fix Europe's competitiveness problem. To this end, what is her strategy to solve poor performance in the global race for frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and quantum computing? What will she do to close Europe's investment gap? And what are the strategic industries where she thinks we still stand a chance against global competitors and that she will, therefore, prioritise?

Europe is at a crossroads, and Virkkunen's hearing is one of the first test cases for whether von der Leyen's new team has what it takes to face the new world.

What will be your top priorities across the contexts of implementation, the digital transition, and research and development of frontier technologies?

Strengthening Europe's health security

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Olivér Várhelyi,
Commissioner for Health
and Animal Welfare



Hadja Lahbib,
Commissioner for
Preparedness and Crisis
Management; Equality



Stéphane Sejouré,
Executive Vice-President
for Prosperity and
Industrial Strategy



Ekaterina Zaharieva,
Commissioner for
Startups, Research
and Innovation



Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner
for Trade and Economic
Security; Interinstitutional
Relations and Transparency

Ursula von der Leyen's [mission letters](#) to commissioners show more ambition vis-à-vis the biopharmaceutical sector than we have seen in past mandates. The letters propose several initiatives, such as a new EU Biotech Act and Strategy for Life Sciences, a Critical Medicines Act, a new Strategy to support medical countermeasures against public health threats as well as an EU Stockpiling Strategy.

Previous mandates have shown that the EU traditionally struggled [to position the healthcare sector as a strategic sector](#) and address the [nexus between industrial and pharmaceutical policies](#). The ongoing negotiations on the EU's pharmaceutical framework are a case in point. They are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to adapt the current framework to technological developments in areas like new cell and gene therapies and critical technologies such as AI.

Providing the right incentives for innovation to attract investment in the EU, increasing the number of clinical trials in the EU as well as making the sector more sustainable in light of its [carbon footprint](#), should all be high on the Commission agenda as opportunities to again [make the EU a leader in health](#). Instead, the review is only mentioned in the [mission letter to the Commissioner for Health](#) Olivér Várhelyi.

In their hearings, Commissioners will have to respond to the question of whether the proposed policies are sufficient to promote the biopharmaceutical sectors economic base, competitiveness and growth, as the Commission's [Economic Security strategy](#) stipulates.

Considering that a vibrant innovation infrastructure is vital for patient access to medicines and treatments, it defines biotechnology as one out of four sectors deemed critical for the EU - together with AI, semiconductors, and quantum. In addition, [Mario Draghi in his recent report](#) on competitiveness called the pharmaceutical sector a sector of geostrategic importance.

The mission letters heavily focus on preparing the EU for future security risks and reducing unwanted dependencies but less on attracting investment in the biopharmaceutical industry. [A focus on risk should not divert attention away from technological excellence](#) and ensure a [regulatory framework that works for businesses](#), including the biopharmaceutical industry. An international perspective is missing too, with the topic of global health and international collaboration with like-minded countries absent from the letters.

Faced with a [rapidly declining position of the EU](#) in pharma innovation, a demographic transition and a [lack of relevant skills](#), the Commissioners better prepare for a more comprehensive vision and answers to this question.

How does the Commission plan to come up with a joined-up approach to boost the competitiveness of the pharmaceutical sector and ensure health policies are not seen in isolation from the EU's broader political agenda?

Gender equality must not be a secondary priority in the next mandate

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Elizabeth Kuiper, Associate Director and Head of the Social Europe and Well-being Programme



Hadja Lahbib,
Commissioner for
Preparedness and Crisis
Management; Equality

Ursula von der Leyen's challenges in establishing achieving gender parity within the College of Commissioners, whereby she struggled to get member states to nominate female candidates may anticipate obstacles for gender equality in the forthcoming mandate. Despite her professed commitment, the new Commission and its mission letters indicate a concerning lack of prioritisation for gender equality. This is particularly apparent in the absence of a dedicated Commissioner for equality; instead, the responsibility for "equality" has been subsumed within the portfolio of the Commissioner-designate for Preparedness and Crisis Management.

The phrasing in the [mission letter](#) to Commissioner designate Hadja Lahbib's suggests that equality is treated as an afterthought to the core responsibilities of the portfolio. The letter states, "I would like to entrust you with the role of Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management. You will also be Commissioner for Equality," implying that equality is secondary to the primary focus of crisis management. This wording underscores the concern that gender equality will receive less attention during the mandate.

This is even more alarming considering the importance of the initiatives outlined in the letter. The development of a roadmap for women's rights is to set out the key gender equality policy principles for the years ahead. This should help frame the new reiteration of the gender equality strategy which, according to the mission letter will tackle the fight against gender-based violence, political participation, discrimination in health, education, housing and social protection as well as the challenges facing women in the labour market, online violence and work-life balance.

Lahbib will also be tasked with leading efforts to integrate [gender mainstreaming](#) into EU policies, legislation, and funding programmes. However, for gender mainstreaming to be effective, it cannot be confined to a single directorate; it must be a priority across all portfolios.

The equality task force, mentioned in the letter may play a role in facilitating such collaboration but there is little to no mention of gender equality in the other mission letters, even in areas that the gender equality strategy is expected to address, such as economy, health, skills and housing. This raises concerns about the Commission's commitment to prioritising gender equality across its agenda.

The last mandate saw the appointment of a Commissioner responsible for equality and significant strides were made over the course of the five years. Initiatives such as the Work-Life Balance Directive, the European Care Strategy, the adoption of the Women on Boards and Pay Transparency Directives, as well as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the directive on combating violence against women all help to address ongoing inequalities across the EU. While these achievements are commendable, gender equality must remain a priority in the next mandate. The current geopolitical landscape, climate crisis, and shifting demographics carry distinct gendered impacts that must be recognised and integrated into policy responses. Achieving this requires strong political leadership, and questions must be made about how the new Commissioner will prioritise gender equality amidst a wide-ranging portfolio and collaborate with other Commissioners to ensure a cohesive approach to gender equality.

How will the Commission ensure that gender equality remains a top priority across the Commission's agenda?

Blind spots in Europe's policy development for protecting the Rule of Law and its CSOs

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Michael McGrath,
Commissioner for
Democracy, Justice,
and the Rule of Law

There is a strong emphasis on the securitisation of democracy and protection from external threats in the Commission's guidelines and mission letter for Michael McGrath, Commissioner-designate for Democracy, Justice, and the Rule of Law. Proposals for the protection and support of Civil society from authoritarian tendencies within the EU on the other hand, are disappointing. One of McGrath's responsibilities will be to build a new '[Civil Society Platform, to stimulate civil dialogue and strengthen protection of civil society](#)'. How this will be shaped is not specified.

The lack of a more concrete agenda on internal threats could be the result of the growing influence of the far-right in the European institutions. Ursula von der Leyen's on and off alliance with the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR) could also be to blame. Up until recently, the importance of protecting the Rule of Law from internal threats was frequently highlighted in speeches and political narratives. Von der Leyen herself held a [fiery speech](#) on the topic at the Parliament during Viktor Orbán's visit in October 2024. Most of the mainstream European parties' [manifestos for the 2024 EU elections](#) also gave it prominence. However, at less visible moments, this issue is approached with more nuance such as in the Commission's guidelines, particularly when support is needed from the far-right governments and parties in the European Parliament.

Rule of Law—a cornerstone of European democracy—is emphasized intermittently, depending on what suits the European political actors. While in the past, the [interplay between the European Parliament](#) and the Commission has led to improvements such as a strengthened Annual Rule of Law Cycle, complete with actionable recommendations for member states and the Rule of Law Conditionality regulation. The current increase of

influence by the far right could complicate potential new policies and limit the political space for improvement. This politicisation can threaten the safeguarding of the Rule of Law, and particularly improvements in the protection of civil society from internal threats.

We should not be less alert to internal threats to the Rule of Law and Civil Society. Both the [Annual Rule of Law report](#) and the [Civic Space Report](#) show a trend of increasing challenges for Civil Society Organisations (CSO's) and Human Rights defenders in multiple member states. With the far right joining the governments of some member states, it has become even more important to strengthen civil society at the European level. There is a growing need from Europe's CSO's for EU legislation that provides protection from criminalisation of their work by national governments and a supply of systemic and accessible funding filling the gaps left by disappearing national funds.

The Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law will have a central position in the defence of Rule of Law and the protection of civil society from threats and politicisation from within the bloc itself. What is needed, is a Commissioner willing to push for a probing agenda on the situation in the EU while being capable of building alliances in an increasingly unwilling political landscape.

What concrete measures is the Commissioner planning to take to protect Europe's civil society from the increasing pressure from the far-right in member states and within EU institutions, and to strengthen the Rule of Law in the EU, while facing internal opposition?

Boosting social investment for affordable and sustainable housing in Europe

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Dan Jørgensen,
Commissioner for
Energy and Housing

In a historical first the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has appointed a Commissioner for Energy and Housing. In [his mission letter](#), the Danish Commissioner-designate Dan Jørgensen has been tasked with completing a robust Energy Union through the development of an action plan for affordable energy prices. He is also called to address one of Europe's biggest challenges: ensuring affordable and sustainable housing.

In the aftermath of the COVID19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, energy and housing have never been more critical in Europe. These crises have intensified the urgency for sustainable, affordable, and resilient housing and energy systems. The number of households in energy poverty has risen in the last years, with [10.6% of the EU population unable to keep their home adequately warm](#) in 2023, according to Eurostat. This has been further exacerbated by the quality of homes in which many Europeans are forced to live in, often due to financial and social constraints. Low-income families, marginalised individuals, and young adults are the most severely impacted by the energy and the housing crisis.

The development and the implementation of the first-ever European Affordable Housing Plan represents one of the most ambitious goals set by the Commission for this mandate. The main challenge will be to ensure technical assistance and housing support measures for energy efficiency and social housing at member states level, and most importantly establishing the "[pan-European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing](#)" that is mentioned in the mission letter, to attract both public and private investment. However, it is still unclear how member states and local governments should channel these potential funds, and what the proposed revision of state aids rules will entail to achieve the objectives related to energy efficiency and social housing.

When it comes to investment in housing, [government expenditure in the EU ranged between 1.1% and 0.5% of GDP from 1995 to 2022](#), with relevant disparities across regions and cities. Given the increasing number of homeless Europeans and households overburdened by the raising housing costs, it is now time to fill this gap.

Therefore, investment should focus on the renovation of existing dwellings, often in state of decay and in poor energy efficiency. There is a pressing need to address the imbalance between the number of individuals without shelter and the number of properties that are either empty or in a state of disrepair. Considering the contribution of private homes to higher rent, real estate speculation, and gentrification, it is crucial to understand how the Commissioner envisages the role of private investment, as depicted in the proposed investment platform. While private investment is necessary, public authorities must ensure that private sector participation does not come at the expense of inclusivity or exacerbate housing inequality for low- and medium- income families. This can be done by fostering public-private partnership and directing investments towards the development of more social housing structures.

Additionally, it is vital to reinforce social infrastructures to enhance public and private investment in the housing supply, considering the long-term advantages and economic returns of such investment. Ensuring affordable, accessible and energy-efficient housing for all will be the ultimate test of Europe's commitment to social equity and inclusion.

How exactly does the Commission see the role of private investment in affordable and sustainable housing, and what policies and regulations will be put in place to ensure that they contribute to an inclusive and affordable housing market?

Moving through the existential threats to Ukraine's European future together

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Marta Kos, Commissioner for Enlargement



Kaja Kallas, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission



Andrius Kubilius, Commissioner for Defence and Space



Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security; Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency



Christophe Hansen, Commissioner for Agriculture and Food



Maria Luís Albuquerque, Commissioner for Financial Services and the Savings and Investments Union

As Russia's war against Ukraine approaches its third anniversary and Ukraine's EU integration progresses, support for the country will be a significant part of the new Commission's agenda. Russia's war of attrition will continue to be a significant security threat to Europe and a growing burden on Ukraine, entailing multiple policy challenges for the EU.

The complexity of wartime challenges and goals requires strong commitment, political mobilisation, as well as effective, coherent and holistic decision-making processes. With Ukraine included in the dossiers of several Commissioners, cross-cutting engagement by different parts of the Commission is expected. Policy solutions will have to be delivered simultaneously, often in an emergency mode, across different policy areas, including defence and security, enlargement, trade and agriculture, foreign policy, sanctions policy, etc. This in turn will require a high level of coordination within the Commission, and among various internal and external stakeholders in the EU, Ukraine, and other allies.

The new Commission must provide timely, predictable and sustainable military, financial, and humanitarian support to Ukraine for it to withstand Russian aggression. Deepening Ukraine's integration into Europe's security and defence architecture, and developing Ukraine's domestic defence industry will remain priority areas. The Commission must assist Ukraine in seeking justice for the large-scale war crimes carried out by Russia, and support the international community and allies in providing Ukraine with long-term security guarantees.

Simultaneously, the Commission must take steps to progress Ukraine's EU accession and deepen cooperation which will be decisive for Ukraine's further consolidation, morale, and resilience. Ukraine is keen to open multiple [negotiating chapters](#), starting with the fundamentals cluster during Poland's upcoming presidency of the EU Council in 2025. This means further broadening the EU agenda and engagement on Ukraine.

Continued EU support of Ukraine's reconstruction and strengthening of its economic capacity during the war and beyond is crucial. This includes recovering and protecting its critical infrastructure, facilitating business involvement, developing transport corridors, and ensuring further EU-Ukraine trade liberalisation. Furthermore, the Commission's work on improving sanctions' implementation and enforcement to avoid circumvention and further restrict the flow of crucial components for weapons to Russia, will undermine its potential for war and plans to continue the invasion.

All of the above will require a consolidated approach across all policy areas.

How is the new Commission going to address all these challenges and implement consolidated, coherent and streamlined policies related to Ukraine?

Implementation of the Green Deal: Keeping people and businesses on board

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In the new institutional cycle, European Green Deal implementation is expected to be under the spotlight. Questions remain as to how it is to be achieved. The green backlash, strengthened by the populist surge [in the EU elections](#), continues to undermine the legitimacy of the Green Deal. It is paramount to keep people and businesses on board and ensure that the Green Deal is implemented successfully.

Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines and mission letters emphasise the Clean Industrial Deal, a new initiative aiming to empower companies to achieve the Green Deal objectives and improving their competitiveness. Although aforementioned documents recognise the importance of unlocking investment opportunities, they fall short of offering a clear vision of how decarbonisation of the European economy is to be financed. Given that the Green Deal will require [more than EUR 600 million in investments annually until 2030](#) (notwithstanding other investment needs), it is evident that the Multiannual Financial Framework, Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Innovation Fund will not be sufficient. A Savings and Investment Union and public-private investments under InvestEU, mentioned in the mission letters, can help mobilise private financing, but how these instruments and the Clean Industrial Transition link up, lacks clarity. References made to state aid in the mission letters point to another potential source of funding for the Clean Industrial Deal. The question remains as to how the EU will benefit from more state aid without fragmenting the Single Market.

The mission letters recognise the importance of supporting Europeans through the green transition, highlighting the role of the Just Transition Fund, Social Climate Fund and state aid. Experience from the previous Commission mandate shows that communication towards citizens, workers, consumers and farmers should be improved. They should be involved in sustainability-related discussions to strengthen the legitimacy of the Green Deal.

While there appears to be a strong intention to counter climate disinformation and improve communication about the importance of climate action, similar ambition is lacking for other sustainability topics (on nature restoration, pollution). Participatory mechanisms directly related to the Green Deal are subpar. The political guidelines and mission letters make reference to the European Citizens' Panels and Youth Policy Dialogues but no direct link is made between these initiatives and the Green Deal. In the case of agriculture, it is not clear how the dialogue with the farmers will continue beyond the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture. How vulnerable groups such as women, migrants, people with disabilities and lower-income residents will be consulted remains an open question. The linkage between the Skills Union, announced by the Political Guidelines and mission letters, and the green transition is left unclear, despite the importance of ensuring that workers are re-skilled and prepared for the green jobs of the future.

Even though the Commission has not come up with concrete measures to implement the Green Deal, Commissioner-Designates should already have a clear vision of how to address the requests made in the political guidelines and the mission letters. To test this, a starting question, primarily to Executive Vice-President-Designate Theresa Ribera, can be posed as follows:

How will you achieve the implementation of the Green Deal, ensure that the people and businesses stay on board and avoid another green backlash in the future?

Facing up to the trade-offs of the economic security agenda

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Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security; Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency

Picking a seasoned Commission stalwart such as Maroš Šefčovič to head up trade and economic security may prove to be a wise choice by President Ursula von der Leyen. The global community is fragmenting and regrouping in regional blocks, while individual countries seek safe supply of critical goods. The world may not be deglobalising, but we are far from the heady 90s. A safe pair of hands is needed.

In formulating a new Foreign Economic Policy and a new Economic Security Doctrine, as requested by Von der Leyen in her mission letter, Šefčovič will face tough trade-offs.

The trade-off between prosperity and security is a major point of contention in the push for economic security. There are few actions available to the Commission that will make the EU richer and more economically secure. As Šefčovič starts to shape a foreign policy and a doctrine to help protect the EU economy, tough dilemmas will pop up. Should the bloc push back against unfair trade measures even though other countries will retaliate? How long will EU citizens abide by some relative suffering for the long-term goal of becoming more economically secure?

Lawmakers should question Šefčovič during his hearing on the trade-off he will have to make in his new mandate and the effects their constituents will bear.

Šefčovič has also been tasked with continuing the struggle for reform with renewed support of the World Trade Organization and the multilateral system. With the continued lack of support for the WTO from the US, it is unlikely that we will see much change in the organisation's status in the coming mandate. Although the EU has presented a [reform proposal](#) that has much in common with American proposals, the sticking point is the Appellate Body. The institution rules in trade disputes but the US has made it inert by blocking new judges from being approved. EU officials have long sought to get it back up and running.

On a parallel track, Šefčovič will continue the Commission's work to strike free trade agreements with third countries, allowing it to secure critical raw materials. After discussions stalled or fell apart with Mercosur and Australia in the last mandate, expectations are not high. Von der Leyen tasks Šefčovič with concluding deals in Latin America and the Indo-Pacific. A Mercosur deal will be challenging as the EU has not been willing to budge to demands for access to European agricultural markets. However, it may have to fold if it wants Latin-American rare earths.

How will the EU build support for WTO reform and what is Maroš Šefčovič willing to compromise on to strike key free trade agreements?

Defence: On all fronts

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Andrius Kubilius,
Commissioner for Defence
and Space

The [overarching mission](#) of Defence and Space Commissioner-designate Andrius Kubilius is to set a strategic direction for the European Defence Union centred on the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base fit for war. This comes with a challenge since the EU's capabilities and capacities at industrial, financial, societal, and institutional fronts are inadequate. On the technical front, the priority should be to assess short- and long-term needs based on every scenario. On the political front, the priority should be to forge a shared understanding in the EU's institutions about the need to pull the defence agenda in the same direction. Here are three key areas for action.

Military power is *sine qua non* of statehood, with different national interests and cultures. This will make consensus and majority in the EP and Council challenging.

It is crucial to recognise a diversity of strategic cultures in the EU and show readiness to work towards a shared European strategic culture based on empathy, trust and respect.

It adds value if Kubilius shares how he handled a crisis, how he overcame challenges and built bridges to reach a compromise, despite the prevalence of competing interests.

It is important that Kubilius demonstrates understanding of inter-institutional cooperation and pledges active presence and dialogue with the EP and national capitals. It is equally important to have strong support from HR/VP and the President of the Commission.

Second, there is a need to look at the prospects for the European Defence Union and a single market for defence.

European Defence Union is a long-term ambition that can only be realised with gradual convergence of national defence policies. It starts with an understanding of the changed security environment. Russia's war in Ukraine is a watershed moment for Europe, with Beijing and [Pyongyang](#) closely watching the events.

Cooperation on defence is vital for Europe's security, [highly supported](#) by the citizens and critical to EU's

competitiveness and jobs agenda, with [€135 bln turnover in 2022](#). The objective of cooperation is to build EU's defence, technological and industrial base. The EU's internal market for energy and transport has been unfolding through several legislative packages and projects of common interest. Defence can follow a similar logic, but it needs to be backed up by sufficient investment.

Third, European defence is facing a [€500 bln investment gap by 2034](#), with other priorities competing for the same EU budget.

It is important for Kubilius to stay factual and recall that on some fronts Europe was unprepared when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, and again in 2022. Finance is one such front: €1.5 bln for 2025-27 is insufficient to build a strong industrial base and deemed "risky" by the [Court of Auditors](#). The other front is societal: since Europe lacks forces, infrastructure and civil preparedness, how can [Art 5](#) or [Art 42.7](#) be met? A [whole-of-Europe](#) must be prepared. To use the Latin saying, "if you want peace, prepare for war", so more resources are needed.

This is doable. Over the past two years most European countries have increased their defence budgets. Much will also depend on financial creativity and political will in balancing priorities, budget and time. It is useful to point out that there is precedent and refer to joint borrowing. [History](#) witnesses no war without extensive borrowing. The UK paid off its WW1 loan in [2015](#), which speaks for itself. The post-COVID recovery fund is a more recent precedent.

There is no time to waste in the face of Russia's [possible attack](#) on the EU or NATO before 2030. Europe must be prepared on all fronts, because the cost of under-investment and un-preparedness would be higher. It is useful for Kubilius to emphasise that Europe knows that cost, because the EU rose from the ashes of WW2, through the [bloodlands](#) between Berlin and Moscow. Kubilius should point out that he does not say this lightly, as he comes from a country with a painful history in its fight against Russia's aggression.

Considering that Russia's war against Ukraine continues unabated and Moscow [may attack](#) the EU and NATO by 2030, how does Kubilius plan to prepare Europe and its citizens for this threat, to ensure that Europe does not step into the same [bloodlands](#) twice?

The Significance of Health for the EU

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Investments Union

Health is [crucial for citizen well-being and socio-economic stability](#). The upcoming commissioner hearings for the new EU mandate present a critical opportunity to evaluate the European Commission's approach to health in the 2024-2029 mandate. Despite its importance, the [mission letters](#) to the Commissioners reveal a concerning lack of integration of health into broader policy areas. This gap signifies a missed opportunity to adopt a holistic and strategic approach to health, which should be a priority across all sectors.

The mission letters outline several legislative proposals, including the Critical Medicines Act, the European Biotech Act, and the [European Beating Cancer Plan](#). These initiatives aim to fortify the healthcare framework and address pressing health challenges. However, these efforts must be part of a broader strategy that incorporates health considerations into other policy areas. For instance, the letters highlight the need for sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty, reflecting a commendable approach to health and environmental sustainability.

Outlined in the mission letters, is the critical intersection of health and environmental policies. Yet, [Teresa Ribera's letter](#) falls short of addressing antimicrobial resistance (AMR) —a grave threat causing around [35,000 deaths annually in the EU](#). The necessitated planetary health approach to combat the issue is lacking, despite the establishment of a dedicated One Health Directorate in the European Commission. At the 2024 UN General Assembly, a [Political Declaration](#) was adopted with a global commitment to combat AMR, echoing the EU's [Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority](#) (HERA) dedicated efforts to tackle AMR. This Declaration received support from EU countries, including the European Commission. In conclusion,

the Declaration calls for monitoring of national goals, ensuring accountability and progress in combating AMR, reflecting the alignment with the work of HERA.

The mission letters also fall short of comprehensively integrating health into other policy areas. They mention preventive health and tobacco but lack a firm commitment to follow through on existing legislative reviews. The Commission must provide concrete examples of how it plans to tackle issues such as young people's access to tobacco products and ensure follow-through on commitments like the European Beating Cancer Plan. Additionally, the absence of specific strategies for protecting nature and marine ecosystems, critical for mitigating climate change, highlights a significant oversight. Adequate funding for nature-based solutions and AMR initiatives is crucial in light of the health of people and the planet.

The new mandate must ensure that funding levels meet the needs to combat climate and biodiversity crises by 2030. This commitment will be instrumental in achieving the mission letters' decarbonisation and green transition goals, including a 90% emissions reduction target by 2040.

The hearing of Health Commissioner designate Olivér Várhelyi is an opportunity to address these gaps, ensuring that health becomes a strategic priority integrated into every facet of EU policy, fostering a healthier, more resilient future for all EU citizens.

How to ensure that health becomes a strategic priority for the Commission, integrated into every facet of EU policy to foster a healthier, more resilient future for all EU citizens?

COMMISSIONERS-DESIGNATE, AS PRESENTED ON 18 SEPTEMBER



SEPTEMBER 2024



Source: European Commission

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The **European Politics and Institutions** programme covers the EU's institutional architecture, governance and policymaking to ensure that it can move forward and respond to the challenges of the 21st century democratically and effectively. It also monitors and analyses political developments at the EU level and in the member states, discussing the key questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions over the Union's future and how to win their support for European integration. The programme has a special focus on enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, questions of EU institutional reform and illiberal trends in European democracies.

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Co-funded by
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