



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# On which departments of the new European Commission will the future of the EU depend most?



In 2019, the former president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, appealed to the member states not to rush into replacing the commission members who have become deputies in the European Parliament, as there is not enough work for 28 commissioners anyway.

The European Commission is not a typical government, and its departments are not comparable to national governments in Europe or elsewhere. But the former EU chief executive from Luxembourg was right when he said that there was not enough work for all 28 members of the European Commission at the time.

After the elections for the European Parliament in June, now, six months later, the new European Commission in the second term of Ursula von der Leyen has been **confirmed**. As before, each EU member state has one seat in the executive body of the EU, which is one of the important legacies of the Union but also a handicap for its effectiveness.

Will all 26 **commissioners**, plus the president of the commission, have enough work in the next five years?

Considering the work priorities outlined by the Commission's President, Ursula von der Leyen, and the unique circumstances of the new Commission's mandate, it is evident that certain portfolios will be significantly busier than others.

Moreover, whether the EU remains important or a secondary global factor by the time its cycle ends in 2029 will directly depend on the effectiveness of some of them.

The following departments, along with their new commissioners, will primarily shape the EU during this period:

## Competition policy

As the top priority of her new mandate as the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen **emphasised** the need to increase

the competitiveness of the EU in relation to the US and China, with the aim of narrowing the existing gap and enhancing European economic independence.

Mario Draghi, the former head of the European Central Bank, laid out this "to be or not to be" objective in his September **report**. His main warning was that the EU has been losing its breath in the race with its principal global competitors—the US and China—and that it is facing low growth that threatens the prosperity and well-being of its citizens and economy.

The directives in Draghi's report will undoubtedly guide the new EU Commission, not merely as an economic strategy to boost growth, innovation, and subsequently competitiveness.

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This is also the basis for the EU's geopolitical positioning in the whirlpool of intensified competition, where the parameters related to the green transition and supply chain security will directly influence the overall strength of the bloc.

The competition portfolio will be in the hands of Spain's Teresa Ribera Rodríguez, the new Vice President of the Commission and former Minister for Ecological Transition in Pedro Sanchez's socialist government.

Based on Jean-Claude Juncker's criteria, but not only them, she will face significant challenges over the next five years. Her leadership role will be an expanding one, as all key members of the bloc have accepted the direction that the EU must regain its global competitiveness through a combination of economic and political measures.

## Climate action and green transition

The most attractive European export commodity and one of the EU's most important geopolitical advantages will remain a key priority for the new European Commission. Many departments, from agriculture, trade, budget, energy, and industry to foreign affairs, will be involved in the tasks related to the green transition and achieving the climate targets by 2030 and 2050.

Ursula von der Leyen highlighted the decarbonisation and competitiveness plan as the second pillar that will guide the work of her commission over the next five years.

### **In the first 100 days of its term, the Commission will launch the Clean Industrial Deal**

In the first 100 days of its term, the Commission will launch the Clean Industrial Deal—a strategy that focuses on decarbonisation, reducing energy costs, investing in energy-intensive sectors, and simplifying regulations.

The EU's green policy holds significant importance for the new Commission, primarily due to its role in promoting increased competitiveness, as detailed in Draghi's report. Simultaneously, and in reaction to the resolute dedication of Europeans to this cause, elections frequently result in either victory or defeat.

This cross-sectoral task will fall primarily to Wopke Hoekstra, the new Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero, and Clean Growth, otherwise a former Dutch Foreign Minister and the EU's main representative at the recently concluded UN Climate Change Conference COP 29 in Azerbaijan.

## **Foreign and security affairs**

With the election of former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas as vice president of the commission and high representative for

foreign affairs and security policy, the EU is sending a strong signal of its determination to support Ukraine in its defence against Russian aggression.

Mrs Kallas will be one of the busiest European Commissioners, given the "storm" of complex foreign policy events in which the EU has to find its place and assert itself as an unavoidable factor.

One of the most significant events in the resolution of last year's crises was the signing of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah on the day of the Commission's election in the European Parliament and a few days before she took office.



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Moreover, EU diplomacy will have to immediately adapt to the Ukraine crisis in view of the arrival of the new US presidential administration and its expected initiatives to end the conflict.

Foreign policy, and in particular involvement in peace management in crisis areas, will determine the EU's overall position among the global players—the US, Middle Eastern countries, China, and Russia.

Recent years have clearly shown that crises such as Ukraine or the Middle East have a much greater impact on the state of the EU

than many of its internal processes. Therefore, the foreign affairs and security department will play a crucial role in shaping not only the EU's external position but also its internal relations.

## EU Enlargement

Enlargement may become one of the most important aspects of EU policy over the next five years, despite its prolonged absence from the EU executive's top priorities.

The capacity for enlargement has long been one of the strongest proofs of the vitality of the project of a united Europe and its internal strength. However, the UK's withdrawal led to its cessation more than a decade ago and its near complete extinction.

However, the changed geopolitical circumstances and, in particular, the Russian aggression against Ukraine have reactivated the enthusiasm of Europeans to extend their alliance primarily to those European states directly threatened by aggressive Russian influence.

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The next five years of the new European Commission, which will begin on Monday, could be characterised by a new wave of enlargement. If it takes place, it will be of long-term, strategic importance for the future of the EU, especially if it succeeds in "sucking in" some of the states on its eastern borders, such as Moldova or some of the Balkan states.

In this respect, Ukraine's accession to the EU is a decisive step, as it offers guarantees, in addition to the endeavours to become a member of NATO, that will deter Moscow from a possible new aggressive approach towards Ukraine.

The new Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos from Slovenia, will not have too much influence in this respect, as enlargement policy is the direct responsibility of the EU member states.

But precisely for this reason, the Commission may be under pressure from national governments, especially the most influential ones, to speed up procedures for the admission of new members. In most European capitals, the prevailing view is that the fastest possible accession to the EU is the best way to protect against the spill over of Russian aggression to the continent.