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Nominations to the new Commission

The next President of the European Commission for the period of 2019-2024 will be Ursula von der Leyen, under whom the new Commission is currently being formed.

Von der Leyen was proposed for the position in an unexpected manner. In 2014, proposals were done through the “the Spitzenkandidaten” system; this time, the system was abandoned.¹ The system was established on the basis of Article 17 (7) in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) of the Lisbon Treaty. According to which, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose a candidate for President of the Commission taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations. In other words, the European Council should propose for the post of President of the Commission the candidate (so-called Spitzenkandidat) of the political faction which won the elections to the European Parliament. The aim of the system is to increase the democratic legitimacy of the EU in the spirit of the Lisbon Treaty, thus giving the possibility for Union citizens to influence the Commission's management.

The European political parties presented their candidates for the 2019 election, and until the European Council summit of 20-21 held in June 2019, it was assumed that the Prime Ministers and the heads of Member States would follow this system. However, no qualified majority could be found either for Manfred Weber, Spitzenkandidat of the European People's Party (EPP) who won the EU election in May 2019, or any other nominee of other political groups to become the next President of the Commission.

A week later, the G20 Summit was held in Osaka, where the EU member states agreed not to follow the Spitzenkandidaten system. There was strong pressure from France in particular who did not support Manfred Weber becoming the head of the next Commission due to their doubts about his leadership skills and his strong ties to the European Parliament, in which Weber has built his career. Parallely, the prime ministers of the V4 countries agreed on this in Prague arguing that none of the proposed Spitzenkandidaten understood the Central European region well. The Spitzenkandidaten system was thus abandoned after only the second parliamentary term after the Lisbon Treaty.

At the subsequent extraordinary European Council summit on 30 June - 2 July 2019, leaders of the EU Member States agreed to fill the so-called EU “top jobs”. The major dispute was over the nomination for the President of the Commission, but the leaders finally agreed on the nomination of Ursula von der Leyen, at the time serving as the Federal Minister of Defense (CDU) in the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel.² She then got through the hearing in the European Parliament and despite the departure from the Spitzenkandidat system, the European Parliament approved von der Leyen on 16 July 2019 by an absolute majority of only 9 votes.³

¹ The system has been applied since 2014 when the first EU election under the regime of the Lisbon Treaty were held. The first President of the European Commission appointed via this system, was Luxembourgish Jean-Claude Juncker, a Spitzenkandidat of the European People's Party (EPP).

² When becoming a nominee on the Chief of the EU Commission, she was succeeded in the position by the current leader of the CDU Party Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

While the Member State can choose whom to nominate to the Commission, it is up to the president of the Commission to decide on the internal organization of the body. Thus, the Member States have gradually over the summer, and after consultations with von der Leyen to a various extent³, nominated their candidates for individual Commissioners.

In most EU countries, the selection process is regulated vaguely, and the process of this regulation is left up to each EU country. There are three basic models that can be identified if the process of selection of candidates to the European Commission at the national level. First, the parliament participates in the selection process, notably through the consultation or hearing of candidates for nomination to the European Commission in Parliament (Poland, Austria, Romania). According to the second model, a parliamentary committee dealing with European affairs may require a hearing with a nominee proposed by the national government, or its nomination discussed, but the committee does not make any formal decision on candidate's suitability (Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia). In the other Member States the selection of the nominee for the EU Commissioner is not consulted with the parliament and the choice is the prerogative of the government (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Germany, Portugal, Greece, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden). In the case of France's semi-presidential system and the presidential system of Cyprus, the choice to remit belongs to the President of the country.

In the case of the Czech Republic, the selection process of the Commissioner-designate is governed by Act No. 90/1995 on the Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies. It stipulates in §109 c) that, "*the Government shall submit to the Committee on European Affairs for consideration the personnel nomination for the European Commissioner, ... Personnel nominations to the institutions of the European Union will be discussed in the Chamber of Deputies before the government takes a final decision on them.*". The Committee for European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies (so-called VEZ) then votes on the adoption of a resolution informing the Government of its position, but it is the Czech government who decides on the nomination itself. Although the Government is accountable to the Parliament, the nomination of the Commissioner is not considered to be a fundamental issue to file a motion of no confidence.

In late August, the Czech Republic nominated Věra Jourová (ANO 2011) who currently serves in the Juncker's Commission 2014-2019 as the Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. The credit Jourová achieved in the Juncker's Commission (1), thanks to the recognition of her work in the Consumer agenda (2) has strengthened her chances to become the Vice-President to the upcoming Commission of von der Leyen. (3) She also has received support across domestic political parties, and (4) although her nomination contributes to the gender balance in the College of Commissioners, her nomination was not certain from the beginning. The Czech Republic tried to apply an unusual strategy, instead of sending the name of the nominee to Brussels and subsequently supporting its nominee to receive the desired portfolio, the government intended to get a portfolio first and to nominate a person accordingly.⁴ Such a method is not standard. Nevertheless, the process of choosing a candidate for the EU Commissioner has not been fixed by the EU legislation. The only explicit criterion

³ As von der Leyen indicated she would insist on gender-balanced Commission and as in some states more candidates were being considered.

⁴ The Polish candidate Krzysztof Szczerski withdrew from the nomination when he learned he would receive a "Agriculture" portfolio, particularly strong and important for Poland, and for which he did not feel himself sufficiently qualified.

is laid down in Article 17 TEU para 3 which states that, “*the members of the Commission shall be chosen on the ground of their general competence and European commitment from persons whose independence is beyond doubt.*”. Usually, the Member States send the name of its candidate to Brussels and then lobby for their candidate to receive the desired portfolio by the President of the Commission (in this case by von der Leyen). It follows the logic that the sooner the governments of the Member State send a name to Brussels, the more time they have to negotiate the desired portfolio. In practice, however, this procedure works only partially. In fact, this generation of nominees is influenced by a mixture of factors, from the domestic political situation⁵ and the national nominee selection process, to negotiations of the Member States with the chief of the Commission.⁶

The reasons for the Czech government to try to get a portfolio first and announce a nominee afterwards, are found on several different levels. First, due to a geographically unbalanced distribution of the top EU postilion (so-called top jobs) in favour of the Western and South-West Europe, von der Leyen announced that she would take it into account when allocating portfolios. The Czech government thus bet on this card to seize a ‘hard’, prominent economic portfolio such as the internal market, small and medium enterprises, or international trade, or transport. Second, stalling to nominate Jourová might have been influenced by Jourová herself and the experience she earned in the Juncker’s Commission. Her profile could have had an influence on what portfolio she would receive, in both a negative or positive manner, depending on perspectives and priorities. If Jourová proved herself to be excellent in a portfolio connected with humanistic and ethical issues (e.g. data protection), von der Leyen would take it into consideration; and that might result in a disadvantage for the Czech Republic’s yearning for an economic portfolio of a technical character. On the other hand, if she served a second term in the EU Commission, she would have a good chance to become a **Vice-President of the Commission**. Third, the Czech Republic has recently become interested in **the digital agenda**⁷, where both a Czech preference on portfolios as well as Jourová’s personal profile and enthusiasm would meet if received. The Czech government was aware of this potential and thus communicated a digital portfolio to be one of the most desired.

Another reason for an unusual tactic and for a delay with Jourová’s nomination might lie in internal relationships within the ANO Party itself, in relationships between Jourová, the prime-minister Andrej Babiš, and other persons connected to ANO potentially interested in the nomination. Finally, a delay with Jourová’s nomination might have been caused by the procedure of the nomination itself. First, the Czech government waited to see whether it should propose two names, one male and one female, to meet the von der Leyen’s ambition to have gender-balance College, and second the Government was obliged to wait for the position of the

⁵ For instance, Italy sent the name of its candidate after the August deadline due to delays on creation of the ruling coalition.

⁶ In the context of the rejection of the French nominee for the EU Commissioner Sylvia Goulard, French President Macron stated he had offered von der Leyen three names for potential candidates and also mentioned possible problems Goulard might have in the hearing, however, von der Leyen encouraged Macron to nominate Goulard. Comp. MOMTAZ, Rym. *Macron on Goulard’s rejection: Don’t blame me!*. [11/10/2019] © Politico Europe. Available on: <https://www.politico.eu/article/macron-on-goulards-rejection-dont-blame-me/>.

⁷ The Czech Republic actively incorporated the Digital Agenda among its priorities at national level.

Committee on European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies (VEZ)⁸, which eventually discussed the nomination.⁹

Since the process of defining portfolios, negotiating their assignment, and lobbying is a very lively, diplomatic-political issue, the Czech government has gradually adapted its tactics as well as external communication. In the context of the Member States' political game of influence in the Union, the government's strategy was not illegitimate, but the allocation of a particular portfolio to a particular Member State interested undermines the fundamental principle of the Commission's supranationality and the independence of its members. The Commissioner should not be viewed through the prism of nationality (which would increase the intergovernmental influence on the Commission) but through their personal qualities and role of College of Commissioners as a whole. The reason why the latter perspective shall be preferred is it overcomes the intergovernmental element of the nationality of 27 Commissioners in favour of the transnational nature of the Commission laid down in the Treaties in a normative manner. It may, therefore, be assumed that if the Czech government had not withdrawn from its strategy to receive a portfolio first for itself, von der Leyen would have refused to do so. In the end, the Czech Republic nominated Jourová to the Commission on 26 August 2019, without having been promised a specific portfolio.

Designation of the new EU Commission

On 10 September 2019, von der Leyen introduced the design structure of the body and the distribution of the portfolios to 27 Commissioners.¹⁰

The European Commission for the five-year period 2019-2024 has 27 members, consisting of one President (Ursula von der Leyen), three Executive Vice-Presidents (Frans Timmermans, Margrethe Vestager, Valdis Dombrovskis), five other Vice-Presidents including the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (Josep Borrell), and 18 other Commissioners. Thanks to coordination between von der Leyen and the Member States she delivered a gender-balanced College made up of 13 women and 14 men.

The Vice-Presidents will coordinate the work on the most important cross-cutting issues to meet the policy priorities. The three Executive Vice-Presidents will hold a dual function. Not only will they coordinate a horizontal agenda, to allow for transparency in all the portfolios, i.e. in finance, climate, or digital, but they will also have a specific portfolio and a relevant Directorate-General (DG) at their disposal. The rest of the five Vice-Presidents will only use the capacities of the DGs of other Commissioners. Commissioner-designate Johannes Hahn will be in charge of 'Budget and Administration' and will report directly to the President of the Commission.

In the upcoming EU Commission, there will be 26 thematic and procedural portfolios, which overlap to some extent with the aim to ensure a comprehensive coherence and coordination.

⁸ The planning was influenced by the fact the Czech Parliament had summer recess.

⁹ Noting the nomination represents a consent but not an explicit endorsement. One of the reasons why Jourová did not receive an explicit endorsement may be attributed to the controversies of the Czech Prime Minister Babiš. Not granting an endorsement may be read as an opposition expression on domestic issues.

¹⁰ In comparison to the Junckers' Commission 2019, there is one Commissioner less as the United Kingdom leaving the Union did not nominate its candidate in prospects of Brexit.

Figure 1: Candidates to the European Commission for period 2019-2024¹¹



* The UK has officially confirmed that it will not nominate a candidate
 ** The European People's Party (EPP) membership of Hungarian party Fidesz was suspended on March 2019.

Concerning changes to the Commission structure compared to the Juncker Commission, von der Leyen wants to acquire two new Directorates-General. The (French) Commissioner for Internal Market will work with a new DG for Defense and Space. This new Directorate will cooperate and share resources with the existing DG of GROW. The Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) currently under the Secretariat-General will be earmarked and transformed into a new Directorate-General. This new Directorate will cooperate and share some resources with the DG of REGIO, to serve the (Portuguese) Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms. Von der Leyen also plans to set up a new working group of experts from the Commission bodies and the Directorate-General for Justice (DG JUST) on equality issues, who will operate under the (Maltese) Commissioner on Equality. Several departments will also be reassigned between the various Commission Directorates-General.¹²

The Czech Commissioner-designate Věra Jourová became one of the five Vice-Presidents and received the portfolio *Values and Transparency*. As her thematic agenda is broadly horizontal and cross-cutting does not necessarily need its own clerical-technical apparatus, Jourová will not have her own DG at her disposal. However, she will be able to use the services of the other portfolios of other Commissioners. Allocating such a portfolio to Jourová may be based on her previous work and her personal profile. There is also the view that giving a portfolio dealing with rule of law and democracy to someone from the V4 region will help to make this topic more mainstream in the region without those citizens believing, ‘the EU does not understand

¹¹ Source: Original figure based on a figure provided by the EU Observer: <https://euobserver.com/eu-election/145826>.

¹² Comp. European Commission. European Commission 2019–2024. Allocation of portfolios and supporting services. © European Union, 10 September 2019. Available on: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/allocation-portfolios-supporting-services_en.pdf.

the situation'. Furthermore, giving Jourová a rather humanistic portfolio instead of an economic one might be a preventive step against a potential conflict of interest in the connection of the Czech Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš (ANO), being from the same party as Jourová.¹³

The Values and Transparency Portfolio should horizontally cover the issues regarding the principles of liberal democracy, media freedom and pluralism, rule of law, transparency of EU legislation and the resilience of European states to external threats undermining EU liberal democracies. (This will allow for greater understanding and planning across all the Member States and their respective portfolios). According to von der Leyen, during her five-year mandate, Jourová is supposed to¹⁴:

- Act as the chair of the Commissioners' Group on a New Push for European Democracy and to play an active role in the Conference on the Future of Europe
- Broker discussions between the European Parliament and the Council on improving **the lead candidate system (Spitzenkandidaten System)** and on the issue of **transnational lists**
- Coordinate the work on a **European Democracy Action Plan**
- Coordinate the work on building **the resilience of EU democratic systems**
- Identify risks to **plurality in the media sector** (via the Media Pluralism Monitor), and propose cross-border projects to support independent and diverse journalistic activities
- Bring more **transparency** to the legislative process
- Work on an **independent ethics body common to all EU institutions**
- Work on improving **the European Citizens' Initiative**
- Coordinate the Commission's work on upholding the **rule of law**, working closely with the Commissioner for Justice (under Commissioner-designate Didier Reynders from Belgium)
- Lead the Commission's efforts to ensure **the European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights**
- Monitor the application of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, and report annually
- Coordinate all efforts and initiatives that **promote a European identity**
- Lead the Commission's dialogue with churches and religious associations or communities, as well as with philosophical and non-confessional organizations.

¹³ Despite this fact, Jourová is seen as a Commissioner of a high credit who proved under her previous service in the Juncker's Commission to be independent on domestic influences.

¹⁴ European Commission. *President-elect von der Leyen's Mission Letter to Věra Jourová*. Brussels, 10/09/2019. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-vera-jourova-2019_en.pdf.

Despite some disappointment and mixed feelings about attributing a “soft”, humanistic portfolio to the Czech Commissioner, the Czech government has spoken about the result positively. Jourová herself looks forward to her work and she publicly says she has lots of plans to fulfil the portfolio. With her new agenda, she would like to build on her previous activities. For instance, she would like to devote her time to the question of the relationship between technology developments and digitization and fundamental rights and democracy, where she sees various challenges.

She considers being a Vice President and having horizontal access and access to strategic debates of the Commission more important than having an economic portfolio. Furthermore, she will lead the Commissioners’ Group on a New Push for European Democracy where she will work closely with the other two EU Commission Vice-Presidents, Maroš Šefčovič (Slovakia) responsible for interinstitutional relations, and Dubravka Šuica (Croatia) responsible for the topic Democracy and Demography. Jourová does not feel disadvantaged due to not having her own DG at her disposal and she believes, the internal rules of Commission will set up clear rules on how the Vice-Presidents will be enabled to use the resources of the DGs and coordinate the work across them through a working group.

It is appropriate to note that Jourová’s portfolio, Values and Transparency, has the potential to play a crucial role not only within the Union itself (e.g. through the agenda on rule of law or the EU electoral system) but also in the external dimension (e.g. through the topic on the resilience of democracy).

Hearings in the European Parliament and approval

The first complication occurred before the hearings had even started, when the European Parliament’s Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) rejected two nominees: Rovana Plumb from Romania, and László Trócsányi from Hungary, due to potential conflict of interest and discrepancies in property statements.¹⁵ Plumb and Trócsányi were to come in person to the Parliament for follow-up questions, however, they did not persuade the committee. Although the committee discussed the possibility of changing the portfolios assigned to Trócsányi (Enlargement) and Plumb (Transport), after a second review they were dismissed as the conflict of interest was considered to be irreconcilable.¹⁶

The Parliamentary hearings took place from 30 September to 8 October 2019, closing the regular procedure with the three executive VPs. In these hearings, 23 out of 26 candidates were confirmed by the European Parliament. Along with Plumb and Trócsányi who were rejected before their hearings, the French candidate Sylvia Goulard, who went through the intensive hearing, did not reach a confirmation in the Parliament. Officially, the rejection was on ethical grounds. However, some analysts see the rejection as mistrust of German conservatives by French President Macron, or the European Parliament’s revenge on the European Council who

¹⁵ Plumb was rejected by 10 votes, with six votes in favour and two abstentions, reportedly because of discrepancies between her declaration of assets made at home and in the EU. The difference, according to the Romanian press, is of one million euro. She has reportedly borrowed €800,000 from a physical person to finance her campaign for the European elections. Trócsányi was asked for details on the law firm he founded before becoming Minister of Justice in Viktor Orbán’s government. Comp. GOTEV, Georgi and RIOS, Beatriz. *Romanian, Hungarian Commissioner nominees rejected*. [online]. © Euractiv, 26/09/2019. Available on: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/romanas-commissioner-designate-plumb-sinks-before-the-hearings/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

declined, under the influence of President Macron, to follow the Spitzenkandidat system.¹⁷ France also suspects the result is due to a dispute between the German conservatives in EPP and von der Leyen¹⁸, but some EPP official view these events differently.¹⁹

As a result, these three Member States: Romania, Hungary, and France, must propose new candidates. But it won't be easy. **Romania** is struggling to nominate a new candidate. Von der Leyen has already rejected Romania's second choice, former Interior Minister and current Member of the European Parliament, Dan Nica, who has been investigated for corruption in the past.²⁰ An alternative was the secretary of state of Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gabriela Ciot. However, Bucharest did not include her name in the official proposal sent to Brussels. The situation is complicated as the government is under the threat of a motion of no confidence.²¹ **Hungary** has nominated, as its second candidate, its Ambassador to the EU, a career diplomat Olivér Várhelyi. According to Politico, Várhelyi has worked as a Hungarian civil servant since the mid-1990s but is considered highly loyal to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (Fidesz); as Trócsányi, Várhelyi has no formal party affiliation.²² **France** has not announced its second nominee yet at the time of the editorial deadline.

Regarding the hearing of the Czech Commissioner-designate Jourová, the procedure went smoothly. No controversies were expected by the Brussels media. Paradoxically, doubts and worries that Jourová's hearing will be tough due to problems with the Czech Prime Minister were much stronger in the Czech Republic than in Brussels. During the hearing itself, there were only two questions related to PM Babiš asked by an opposition Czech MEP Jiri Pospisil (TOP 09) and a Slovak MEP Vladimír Bilčík (SPOLU), both from EPP. This might be because (1) the MEPs had only 25 questions maximum on a broad portfolio which contains several fundamental issues on the European Parliament itself, (2) the credit Jourová earned during her first mandate was sufficient proof of independence, (3) the controversies regarding PM Babiš do not have a sufficient formal or informal European element anymore, the alert is not sufficient to be prioritized, and the EU does not currently have tools operational to cover them (as e.g. EPPO is to be operational at the end of 2020 and laws on media ownership and conflict of interests are primarily in hands of the Member States themselves). Jourová was questioned particularly on issues connected to the agenda of rule of law, media freedom, freedom of

¹⁷ Read more at ROBERT, Aline. *Why the European Parliament rejected Sylvie Goulard*. Euractiv, 10.10.2019. Available on: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/why-the-european-parliament-rejected-sylvie-goulard/>.

¹⁸ According to Politico Europe, the leader of the EPP group Manfred Weber (CSU), who himself was supposed to become a head of the European Commission if the Spitzenkandidaten system had been followed, and the social German MEPs were among those who opposed von der Leyen most fiercely during her own confirmation process in July. Comp. HERSZENHORN, David; DE LA BAUME, Maia and MOMTAZ, Rym. *Finger-pointing and charges of betrayal follow Goulard's defeat*. [online]. Politico Europe, 14.10.2019. Available on: <https://www.politico.eu/article/finger-pointing-and-charges-of-betrayal-follow-gouldards-defeat-macron-goulard-von-der-leyen-merkel/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

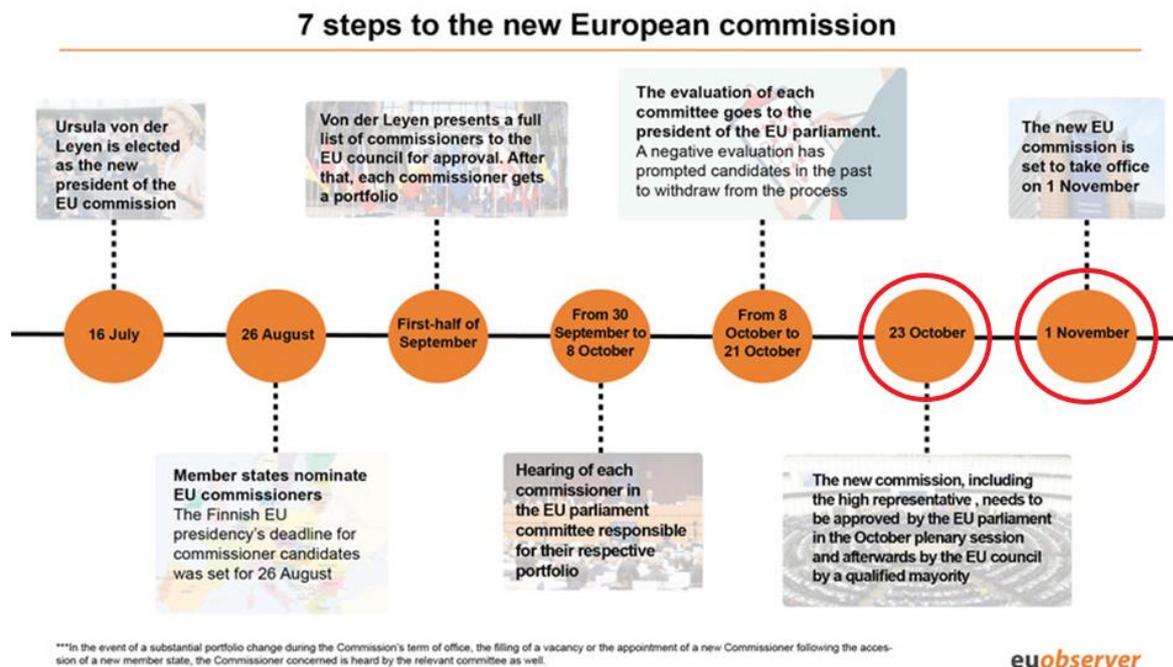
²⁰ The Romanian centre-right opposition opposed him from the beginning, citing the risk of the Nica being rejected in Brussels.

²¹ BARBERA Marcel. *Romanian, Hungarian Commissioner nominees rejected*. [online]. Balkan Insight 09.10.2019. Available on: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/09/romanias-second-european-commission-candidate-rejected/>.

²² BAYER, Lili. *Hungary names EU ambassador as new Commission nominee*. [online]. Politico Europe, 01.10.2019. Available on: <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-names-eu-ambassador-as-new-commission-nominee-oliver-varhelyi-viktor-orban-laszlo-trocsanyi/>.

speech, disinformation campaigns, transparency and fight against corruption. She was approved by the MEPs unanimously.²³

Figure 2: A way to the new European Commission with an initial schedule²⁴



As the three re-nominations has not been resolved yet, the start of the new mandate of the Commission – initially planned on 1 November 2019 - is likely to be delayed. The European Parliament was initially supposed to hold a confirmation vote on a plenary session in Strasbourg on 23 October 2019, but in mid October, it was officially cancelled.²⁵ However, it seems that the deadline will not be met, and the new European Commission will not launch until 1 December.

²³ Comp. European Parliament. *Hearing of Vice President-designate Věra Jourová*. [online]. Press Release, 07.10.2019. Available on: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190926IPR62259/hearing-of-vice-president-designate-vera-jourova>.

²⁴ NICOLÁS, Elena. *The new European Commission: what's next?*. [online]. 02.09.2019, EU Observer. Available on: <https://euobserver.com/institutional/145782>.

²⁵ DPA / Die Welt. *EU-Parlament verschiebt von der Leyens Kommissions-Start*. [online]. 16.10.2019, Available on: https://www.welt.de/newsticker/dpa_nt/infoline_nt/brennpunkte_nt/article201997528/EU-Parlament-verschiebt-von-der-Leyens-Kommissions-Start.html.

Quo Vadis, EU? What to expect from the new Commission

The priorities of the upcoming Commission are outlined in the *Political guidelines*²⁶ which were defined by von der Leyen herself and sanctified by both the European Council (through her nomination) and the European Parliament (through her confirmation).

The new Commission 2019-2024 will focus on six topics:

- (1) A European Green Deal
- (2) An economy that works for people
- (3) A Europe fit for the digital age
- (4) Protecting our European way of life
- (5) A stronger Europe in the world
- (6) A new push for European democracy

The Commission has geopolitical ambitions with robust operational coordination to ensure coherence across the whole internal and external agenda. The Commission will support the EU to be a leader in promoting multilateralism and it will likely connect its ambitions in the green policy with the UN Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Commission also wants to develop a new instrument to deliver on a 'One In, One Out' principle and intends to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens for the EU institutions as well as for the Member States.

Under the **green policy**, the Commission spoke about Europe becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent. Namely, von der Leyen wants EU to be a leader in international negotiations to increase the level of ambition of other major emitters by 2021. She wants the EU Commission to propose (1) European Green Deal in the first 100 days in her office which should include legal commitment on carbon neutrality by 2050, (2) European Climate Pact, (3) a strategy for green financing and a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, including a plan to turn parts of the European Investment Bank into Europe's climate bank, (4) extension of the Emissions Trading System to cover the maritime sector and reduce the free allowances allocated to airlines, to introduce a Carbon Border Tax to avoid carbon leakage. Von der Leyen wants the EU to be a leader also in the circular economy and clean technologies, therefore she plans to introduce a New Circular Economy Action Plan. She also intends to put forward a new industrial strategy with a focus on the Just Transition programme, as well as to bring forward a new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and "Farm to Fork Strategy" on sustainable food.

Under the second priority **human-centered economy**, the Commission is about to focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Von der Leyen also wants to further deepen the Economic and Monetary Union and to complete the Capital Markets Union and the Banking Union. She intends to put forward an action plan to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to propose European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme as well as European Child Guarantee. Von der Leyen wants to ensure full implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive, to bring forward a new European Gender Strategy, and to introduce new anti-discrimination legislation and binding pay-transparency measures. Von der Leyen also want the Commission to focus on domestic violence. Concerning tax policy,

²⁶ European Commission. *A Union that strives for more My agenda for Europe By candidate for President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. POLITICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2019-2024.*

von der Leyen calls for a reform of international corporate tax systems and for solving the digital tax. If there is no global solution found by the end of 2020, the EU should act alone. The College also intends to suggest a common consolidated corporate tax base, or step up the fight against tax fraud.

In the **digital agenda**, the Commission aims to put forward legislation for a coordinated European approach on the human and ethical implications of Artificial Intelligence within the first 100 days in office. Von der Leyen also wants to develop joint standards for our 5G networks and prioritise investments in Artificial Intelligence. The new Commission would like to strive for technological sovereignty and intends to invest in blockchain, high-performance computing, quantum computing, algorithms and tools to allow data sharing and data usage. It also aspires to define standards for new a new generation of technologies that would become the global norm. Von der Leyen also wants to update the Digital Education Action Plan, and fully digitalize the Commission itself.

The priority called '**Protecting our European way of life**' was criticized as supporting populist voices and far-right extremists in Europe and there was pressure to scrap the title altogether. The priority is primarily echoed in the context of migration and internal security. However, when asked to explain what the European way of life needed protection from, von der Leyen responded that the phrase was about respecting individuals and to protect the values defined in Art. 2 TEU (respect for human dignity and human rights, rule of law, freedom, democracy, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality).²⁷ Although Greece's Commissioner-designate Margaritis Schinas, who should be responsible for that portfolio, put in a good performance in his European Parliament hearing, liberal and socialist MEPs called for the title to be scrapped because of its "toxic" far-right connotations.²⁸ Changing the title is to depend on the development of bargaining between the European Parliament and von der Leyen until the final voting which is to be postponed.

Under the target '**A stronger Europe in the world**', von der Leyen intends to strengthen the EU brand of responsible global leadership, support multilateralism and uphold and update the rules-based global order. EU should be a global leader and standard-setter through a strong, open and fair-trade agenda. A special focus should be paid to climate, environmental and labour protection, with a zero-tolerance policy on child labour. Von der Leyen intends to appoint a Chief Trade Enforcement Officer to improve the compliance and enforcement of the EU trade agreements and lead the efforts on updating and reforming the World Trade Organization (WTO). She would like to also have a comprehensive strategy on Africa and open negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Regarding Brexit, she sees the Withdrawal Agreement to be the best and only deal possible for an orderly withdrawal and wants to pave the way for an ambitious and strategic partnership with the United Kingdom. Furthermore, von der Leyen wants to enhance coordination of the EU Member States and to spend 30% more on external-action investment in the next long-term EU budget, increasing the total to €120 billion. The Commission will also focus on the development of the European Defence Union.

²⁷ STEVIS-GRIDNEF, Martina. '*Protecting Our European Way of Life?*' *Outrage Follows New E.U. Role.* [online]. The New York Times, 12.09.2019, Available on: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/world/europe/eu-ursula-von-der-leyen-migration.html>.

²⁸ GOTEV, Georgi. *Schinas puts on good performance but MEPs want 'European Way of Life' title ditched.* [online]. Euractiv, 04.10.2019, Available on: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/schinas-puts-up-good-performance-but-meps-want-european-way-of-life-title-ditched/>.

The sixth priority is dedicated to **democracy within the EU**. First, von der Leyen wants to strengthen the partnership between the European Commission and the European Parliament. Second, she intends to restore and improve the Spitzenkandidaten system, although she herself did not become chief of the College. Additionally, rules for the European elections should be updated. Von der Leyen also supports the right of initiative for the European Parliament, which is currently exclusively in hand of the Commission, and for a move away from unanimity for climate, energy, social and taxation policies, which would be another step towards full co-decision power for the European Parliament. Von der Leyen will support the creation of an independent ethics body common to all EU institutions and bring more transparency into the legislative process. Furthermore, she intends to put forward a European Democracy Action Plan, which should, besides other things, address the threats of external intervention in the European elections or include legislative proposals to ensure greater transparency on paid political advertising and clearer rules on the financing of European political parties. The Commission will aim to introduce the new proposal at the Conference on the Future of Europe, to start in 2020 and run for two years. One of the targets is to encourage participation in the Conference of the EU citizens.



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