

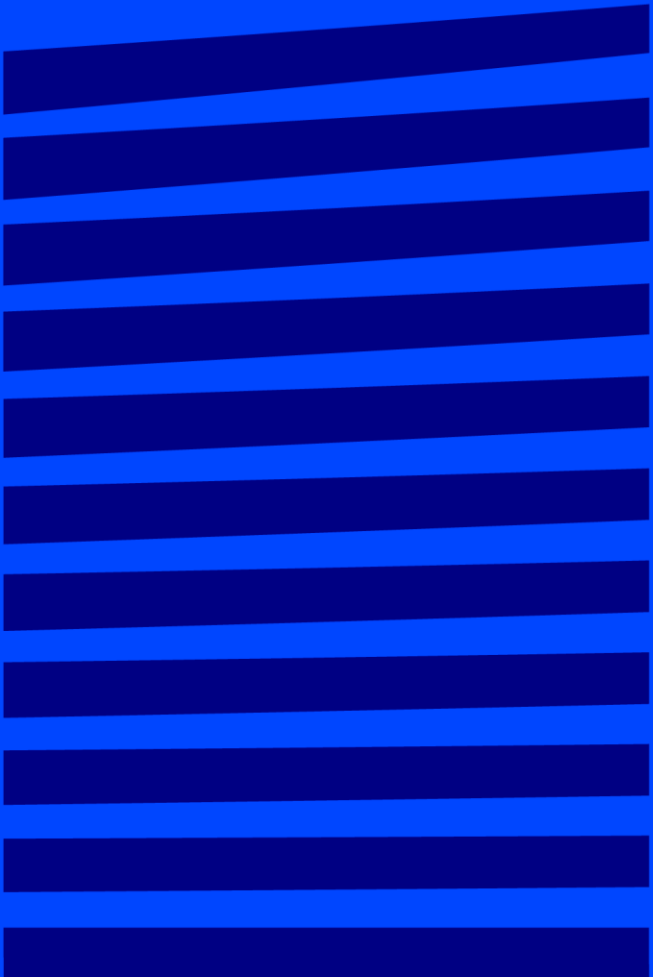


# EUROPE'S CHOICE

## POLITICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2024–2029

**Ursula von der Leyen**

*Candidate for the European Commission President*



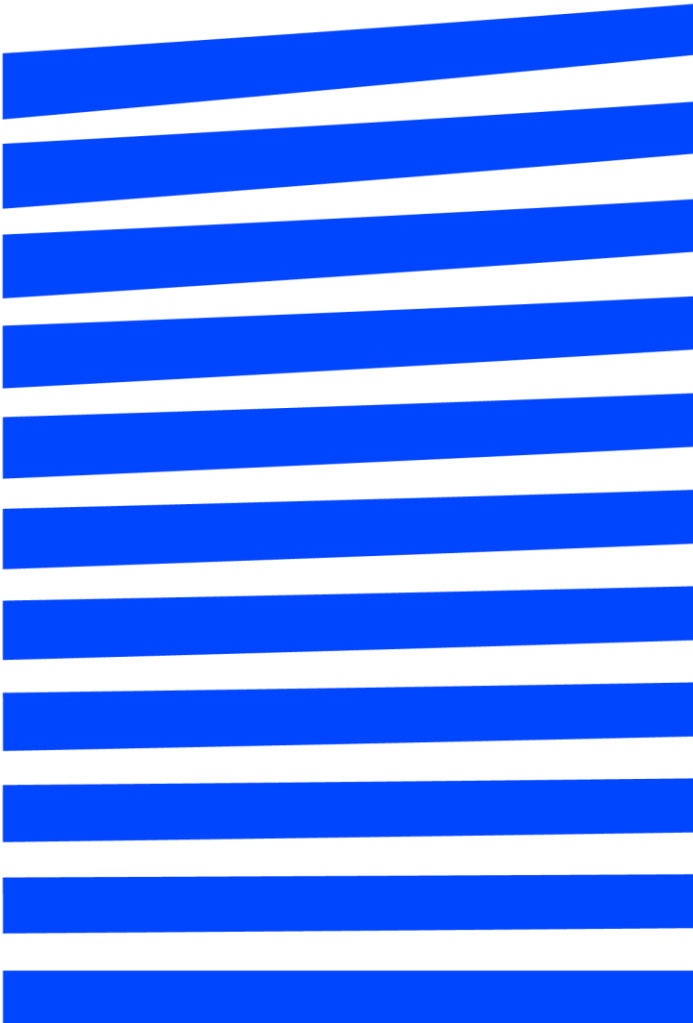


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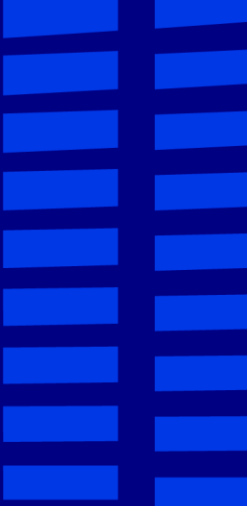
## EUROPE'S CHOICE

Campaigning across Europe ahead of this year's European elections was a reminder of what makes our Union what it is. Almost 500 million people with such disparate cultures, complex histories and differing perspectives all coming together at the same time to articulate their wish for an entire Union of 27 countries. In casting their vote they also help to build a shared European identity – all of this bound together by our rich and varied cultural tapestry. This is Europe's greatest strength. **It makes Europe more than a construct or a project. Europe is our home: unique in design and united in diversity.**

From the record number of first-time voters to those who have voted in every European election, people expressed hopes and aspirations for a healthier and more prosperous future. But they also pointed to the fact that we are in an era of anxiety and uncertainty. Europeans have real doubts and concerns about the instabilities and insecurities we face – from the cost of living, housing and doing business to the way issues such as migration are handled. From our security at home to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. They also worry that Europe is often not fast enough; that it can be either too distant or too burdensome.

All of these expectations and concerns are real, legitimate and must be responded to. For that reason, **I believe it is essential that the democratic centre in Europe holds.** But if that centre is to hold it must live up to the scale of the concerns and the challenges that people face in their lives. Failure to do so would fuel resentment and polarisation and leave a fertile ground for those who peddle simplistic solutions but in reality want to destabilise our societies.

This is the backdrop to what is an era of profound change – for our society and our security, our planet and our economy. The speed of change can be destabilising and, for some, can lead to a sense of loss for the world as it used to be and a worry for the world as it will be.



All of this – coupled with the fallout from elections and events in a more contested world – has created a turbulent and potentially seismic period for Europe. The risks are real, the responsibilities serious.

Europe now faces a clear choice.

**A choice** to either face up to the uncertain world around us alone. Or to unite our societies and unite around our values.

**A choice** to be dependent, to let the divisions weaken us. Or to be bold in our ambition and sovereign in our action, working with our partners around the world.

**A choice** to ignore new realities or the speed of change. Or to be clear-eyed about the world and threats around us as they really are.

**A choice** to let the extremists and appeasers prevail. Or to ensure our democratic forces stay strong.

My view is that our era's greatest challenges – from security to climate change to competitiveness - can only be solved through joint action. **Our threats are too great to tackle individually. Our opportunities too big to grasp alone.**

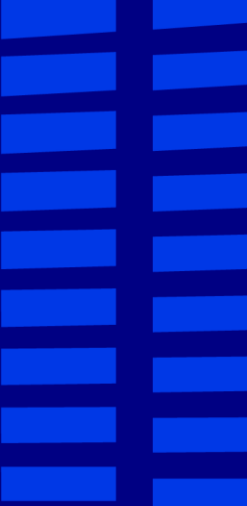
Against this backdrop, I believe Europe must choose its best option: Union.

This is based on a deep conviction that it is only Europe that can live up to our generational challenges in this unstable world – whether supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes, protecting our planet, ensuring social fairness, defending democracy, supporting livelihoods, industries and farmers, or leading on the tech breakthroughs that will shape the world for the rest of this century.

**In the last five years, Europe has shown what it can achieve when it does it together.** When it is fast and uses its size and power – as we did when securing vaccines for every Member State at the same time. When it is bold and ambitious – as we were with on the twin green and digital transitions and our recovery plan, NextGenerationEU. When it is united – as we have been in support of Ukraine, freedom and democracy at the darkest and most difficult of times.

It is time for Europe to step up collectively once again.

This is a shared responsibility for all European voters, but also for all those flying the European flag, from Kyiv to Chisinau, Tbilisi and across the Western Balkans – as well as those calling for a European future in the streets of towns and cities across our Union and continent. We must prepare for that future – by supporting all candidates in their merits-based journey to our Union, and by preparing our Union for the future with essential reforms.



The Union that we choose cannot be boiled down to a binary question of more or less Europe. For these times, **we need a Union that is faster and simpler, more focused and more united, more supportive of people and companies.** We need a Union that acts where it has added value and where we all mobilise together with a clear goal and a collective mission – EU institutions, national and regional governments, private sector, social partners, citizens and civil society.

We have achieved a lot together in the last five years, from the European Green Deal to NextGenerationEU, the Pact on Migration and Asylum and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. **We must and will stay the course on all of our goals, including those set out in the European Green Deal.**

Our focus must now be on implementing what we have agreed, working closely with all stakeholders and focusing on our big challenges. This is why I want to define a set of focused and collective objectives for 2030 and beyond, with clear targets and outcomes in these priority areas.

Defence and security. Sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. Democracy and social fairness. Leading in the world and delivering in Europe.

**The Political Guidelines are our plan for European strength and unity.** The priorities set out here draw on my consultations and on the common ideas discussed with the democratic forces in the European Parliament, and also on the European Council's Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029. They are not an exhaustive work programme but aim to steer our common work.

The next five years will define Europe's place in the world for the next five decades. It will decide whether we shape our own future or let it be shaped by events or by others.

In a world of adversity and uncertainty, I believe Europe must choose to stick together and dare to think and act big. To live up to the legacy of our past, to deliver for the present, and to prepare a stronger Union for the future.

This is the driving force behind these guidelines and all that I want to work on with the European Parliament and the Member States in the next five years.

## A new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness

Europe has always been a continent of industry, enterprise and innovation – reinventing itself through industrial and tech revolutions, global competition and changing societies.

This strength is in large part down to our unique social market economy, which gives Europe many advantages over competitors.

But there are still too many structural brakes on our competitiveness. Our companies operate in a turbulent world, with more unfair competition, higher energy prices, skills and labour shortages and difficulties in accessing the capital they need.

We have seen first-hand the dangers of dependencies or fraying supply chains – from medical products in the pandemic to Putin's energy blackmail or China's monopoly on raw materials essential for batteries or chips.

The world is in a race that will dictate who will be the first to climate neutrality and first to develop the technologies that will shape the global economy for decades to come.

Europe cannot afford to fall behind and lose its competitive edge in this race, nor can it leave any strategic vulnerabilities exposed.

We have a lot to build on – from the massive investment in clean and digital tech in NextGenerationEU to the approach on sovereignty agreed on by Leaders in Versailles.

We have a lot of assets that give us a competitive edge, from world-class researchers and universities, to thriving small businesses and a stable environment based on the rule of law and a level playing field.

But given the scale of the challenges and opportunities, we now need to go much faster

and further to ensure competitiveness, prosperity and fairness. I will also draw on the upcoming report by Mario Draghi on competitiveness for this work.

### *We need a new European Prosperity Plan to:*

- *Make business easier and deepen our Single Market;*
- *Build a Clean Industrial Deal to decarbonise and bring down energy prices;*
- *Put research and innovation at the heart of our economy;*
- *Boost productivity with digital tech diffusion;*
- *Invest massively in our sustainable competitiveness;*
- *Tackle the skills and labour gap.*

### **Making business easier**

Europe's Single Market is key to our competitiveness. It allows goods, services, money and people to move freely, opening up markets and making life easier for people, companies and investors.

But it could do so much more. We need a **new momentum to complete the Single Market** in sectors like services, energy, defence, finance, electronic communications and digital. This will allow our companies – especially our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – to scale up and make the most of the market.



I believe we need **a new approach to competition policy**, better geared to our common goals and more supportive of companies scaling up in global markets - while always ensuring a level playing field. This should be reflected in the way we assess mergers so that innovation and resilience are fully taken into account.

We will ensure competition policy keeps pace with evolving global markets and prevents market concentration from raising prices or lowering the quality of goods or services for consumers.

The 24 million European SMEs create quality jobs anchored in local communities. But they, along with larger companies, still face too many complexities.

**We need to make business easier and faster in Europe.**

I will make speed, coherence and simplification key political priorities in everything we do.

Each Commissioner will be tasked with focusing on reducing administrative burdens and simplifying implementation: less red tape and reporting, more trust, better enforcement, faster permitting.

They will hold regular **dialogues on implementation** with stakeholders to discuss how best to align implementation with realities on the ground.

They will work with a Vice-President for Implementation, Simplification and Interinstitutional Relations to **stress-test the entire EU acquis**.

On this basis, we will make proposals to **simplify, consolidate and codify legislation** to eliminate any overlaps and contradictions while maintaining high standards.

We will also address the patchwork of national regulations that makes doing business in different EU countries more complicated. We will make it easier for

innovators to succeed by reducing the costs of failure.

To support this, I will propose a new EU-wide legal status to **help innovative companies grow**. This will take the form of a so-called 28<sup>th</sup> regime to allow companies to benefit from a simpler, harmonised set of rules in certain areas.

We also need to better support firms whose size and financing capacity cannot be compared to large corporations. They are often the target of killer acquisitions from foreign companies seeking to eliminate them as a possible source of future competition.

We will introduce a **new category of small midcaps** and assess where existing regulation applying to large companies is too burdensome, disproportionate or a hindrance to their competitive development.

Future legislation must also be simplified and designed with small businesses in mind and in a spirit of subsidiarity. This will notably be done through a **new SME and competitiveness check** to help avoid unnecessary administrative burdens, maintaining high standards.

But better lawmaking has to be a joint task – with all institutions involved and all of the legislative process covered – from proposal to amendments to adoption.

In this spirit I will propose to renew **Interinstitutional agreement on simplification and better law making** so that each institution assesses the impact and cost of its amendments in the same way.

To ensure that we collectively follow up on **enforcement and implementation**, I will also ask each Commissioner to prepare an annual progress report for their respective European Parliament Committee and Council formation.

## A Clean Industrial Deal

We have made historic progress in setting out our climate ambitions and have shown that we can successfully reduce our emissions while growing our economy.

We must and will stay the course on the goals set out in the European Green Deal.

The climate crisis is accelerating at pace. And there is an equally urgent need to decarbonise and industrialise our economy at the same time.

We must focus on **implementing the existing legal framework for 2030** – in the simplest, fairest and most cost-efficient way.

**We need a new Clean Industrial Deal** for competitive industries and quality jobs in the first 100 days of the mandate.

Our full focus will be on **supporting and creating the right conditions for companies** to reach our common goals. This means simplifying, investing and ensuring access to cheap, sustainable and secure energy supplies and raw materials.

This will prepare the way towards the 90% emission-reduction **target for 2040** which we will propose to enshrine in our **European Climate Law**. At every step, we will work in partnership with industry, social partners and all stakeholders.

We will put forward an **Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act** to support industries and companies through the transition.

This will channel investment in infrastructure and industry, in particular for energy intensive sectors. It will support European lead markets for the development, production and diffusion in industry of clean tech. It will also help to speed up related planning, tendering and permitting processes.

**We must bring down energy bills for companies and households.**

Thanks to European measures, renewables have reached a record high, accounting for 50% of EU electricity power generation over the last year. Dependence on Russian fossil gas has been substantially reduced and energy savings have brought down overall consumption.

However, we still face many challenges. Our energy market must work better to bring prices down and ensure consumers benefit from the lower production costs of clean energy.

We will continue to bring down energy prices by moving further away from fossil fuels, reinforcing joint procurement for fuels, and developing the governance needed for a true **Energy Union**.

We will scale-up and prioritise investment in clean energy infrastructure and technologies.

This will include renewables and low-carbon technologies, grid infrastructure, storage capacity and transport infrastructure for captured CO<sub>2</sub>. We will also invest in energy-efficiency measures, the digitalisation of our energy system and the deployment of a hydrogen network.

Beyond this, we must use the power and size of our market to secure supplies. This is why I will propose to activate and extend our **aggregate demand mechanism** to go beyond gas and include hydrogen and critical raw materials.

We will work on new **Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships** to help secure supply of raw materials, clean energy and clean tech from across the world.

By leading by example at home, **I want Europe to remain a leader in international climate negotiations**, building on recent EU initiatives on global issues such as methane, carbon pricing and global targets for renewables and energy efficiency.

We will set out our **global climate and energy vision** ahead of COP30 in Brazil in



2025. We will also step up our **green diplomacy** and engage more with non-EU countries on external aspects of our policies.

To achieve our climate objectives, we also need to make it easier for people to shift to more sustainable options. This is notably the case with mobility. Cross-border train travel is still too difficult for many citizens. People should be able to use open booking systems to purchase trans-European journeys with several providers, without losing their right to reimbursement or compensatory travel.

To this end we will propose a **Single Digital Booking and Ticketing Regulation**, to ensure that Europeans can buy one single ticket on one single platform and get passengers' rights for their whole trip.

Reaching climate neutrality by 2050 will require a wide range of innovative technologies, in areas from mobility to energy. For instance, the 2035 climate neutrality target for cars creates predictability for investors and manufacturers. Getting there will require a technology-neutral approach, in which e-fuels have a role to play through a targeted amendment of the regulation as part of the foreseen review.

## A more circular and resilient economy

Working to decarbonise our economy will be part of our continued shift to a more sustainable pattern of production and consumption, retaining the value of resources in our economy for longer.

This will be the purpose of a new **Circular Economy Act**, helping to create market demand for secondary materials and a single market for waste, notably in relation to critical raw materials.

We will put forward a new **chemicals industry package**, aiming to simplify REACH and provide clarity on “forever chemicals”, or PFAS.

We must make our economy more resilient and less dependent.

This is notably important in the **health and pharmaceutical** sector. The EU has been confronted with severe shortages of medical devices and medicines, with antibiotics, insulin, painkillers and other products becoming particularly difficult to obtain.

To remedy this, we will propose a **Critical Medicines Act** to reduce dependencies relating to critical medicines and ingredients, particularly for products where there are only a few supplying manufacturers or countries.

This will be part of our work to complete the **European Health Union** with diversified supply chains, access to the most advanced treatments, more resilient health systems and strategic inventories of key medicines. We must continue our work on anti-microbial resistance.

We will also step up our work on **preventive health**, in particular for mental health, including at work, and cardiovascular diseases, as well as on treatments for degenerative illnesses and research on autism. This will build on the successful model of the Beating Cancer Plan.

We must also do more to protect the security of our health systems, which are increasingly the target of cyber and ransomware attacks. To improve threat detection, preparedness and crisis response, I will propose a **European action plan on the cybersecurity of hospitals and healthcare providers** in the first 100 days of the mandate.

## Boosting productivity with digital tech diffusion

Europe's competitiveness is hamstrung by its lower productivity compared to its direct global competitors. Central to this is the insufficient diffusion of digital technologies, impacting our ability to use tech to develop new services and business models.

We will start by focusing on the implementation and enforcement of the digital laws adopted during the last mandate. Tech giants must assume responsibility for their enormous systemic power in our society and economy. We have begun the active enforcement of the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act. We will **ramp up and intensify our enforcement** in the coming mandate.

We will support this by tackling challenges with **e-commerce platforms** to ensure consumers and businesses benefit from a level playing field based on effective customs, tax and safety controls and sustainability standards.

Reaching our digital targets and building a true digital single market would be a gamechanger for our productivity and competitiveness.

We will step up our investment in the next wave of frontier technologies, in particular supercomputing, semiconductors, the Internet of Things, genomics, quantum computing, space tech and beyond.

Through our **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, Europe is already leading the way on making AI safer and more trustworthy, and on tackling the risks stemming from its misuse.

We must now focus our efforts on becoming a global leader in AI innovation.

In the first 100 days, we will ensure access to new, tailored supercomputing capacity for AI start-ups and industry through an **AI Factories initiative**.

We will also develop with Member States, industry and civil society an **Apply AI Strategy** to boost new industrial uses of AI and to improve the delivery of a variety of public services, such as healthcare.

In this spirit, I will propose to set up a **European AI Research Council** where we can pool all of our resources, similar to the approach taken with CERN.

To support the development of AI and other frontier technologies, **Europe needs to exploit the untapped potential of data**.

Access to data is not only a major driver for competitiveness, accounting for almost 4% of EU GDP, but also essential for productivity and societal innovations, from personalised medicine to energy savings.

However, too many companies in Europe struggle to get access to the data they need – while large foreign tech companies use European data to fuel their business.

While ensuring high standards of data protection, we will support companies by improving open access to data, notably to support SMEs to fulfil reporting obligations.

Europe needs a data revolution.

This is why we will put forward a **European Data Union Strategy**. This will draw on existing data rules to ensure a simplified, clear and coherent legal framework for businesses and administrations to share data seamlessly and at scale, while respecting high privacy and security standards.

## Putting research and innovation at the heart of our economy

Europe's competitiveness – and its position in the race to a clean and digital economy – will depend on starting a new age of invention and ingenuity. This requires putting research and innovation, science and technology, at the centre of our economy.

We will **increase our research spending** to focus more on strategic priorities, on groundbreaking fundamental research and disruptive innovation, and on scientific excellence.

To do this, we will expand the European Research Council and the European Innovation Council.

Europe must also be at the cutting edge between emerging science, tech and industry, the nexus that will make this tech revolution faster and more transformative.

I want Europe to make the most of the biotech revolution. Biotechnologies, supported by AI and digital tools, can help modernise entire parts of our economy, from farming and forestry, to energy and health.

In order to make it easier to bring biotech from the laboratory to factory and then onto the market we will propose a new **European Biotech Act** in 2025.

This will be part of a broader **Strategy for European Life Sciences** to look at how we can support our green and digital transitions and develop high-value technologies.

To lead on innovation, we need to create the conditions for researchers to thrive. This means providing the infrastructure and innovative laboratories they need to test and develop ideas through **new public-private partnerships**, such as joint undertakings.

It also means attracting new talents and retaining the best and brightest minds here in Europe. To do this, I want to strengthen the collaboration between research departments, higher education and business – notably by strengthening our **University Alliances**.

## Turbo charging investment

**This will be an investment Commission.**

We must unlock the financing needed for the green, digital and social transition. We will maximise public investment and leverage and de-risk private capital – working closely with the **European Investment Bank**.

This investment cannot be financed through the public purse alone. Completing the Capital Markets Union could attract an extra EUR 470 billion of investment per year.

We need to be more ambitious in tackling the lack of private capital and our still too shallow markets.

Innovative European companies and start-ups should not be forced to look at the United States, Asia or other markets to finance their expansion. They should be able find what they need to grow here in Europe too.

This is why we will put forward **risk-absorbing measures** to make it easier for commercial banks, investors and venture capital to finance fast-growing companies.

To unlock capital and ensure a level playing field, we will review our regulatory framework to address barriers that restrict the amount of European capital available to finance innovation.

We will tackle the fragmentation of our financial markets which sees EUR 300 billion of European families' savings transferred to foreign markets every year.

To do this, we will develop the proposal in the Enrico Letta report and propose a **European Savings and Investments Union**, including banking and capital markets. This will help leverage the enormous wealth of private savings in Europe to invest in innovation and the clean and digital transitions.

Beyond private savings in Europe, our current financial instruments in the capital market are important to attract savings from around the world as the EU name is a very safe asset with attractive yields.

**We must also make better use of public procurement** – which accounts for 14% of EU GDP.

A 1% efficiency gain in public procurement could save EUR 20 billion a year. And it is one of the main levers available to develop innovative goods and services and create lead markets in clean and strategic technologies.

I will propose a **revision of the Public Procurement Directive**. This will enable preference to be given to European products in public procurement for certain strategic

sectors. It will help ensure EU added value for our citizens, along with security of supply for vital technologies, products and services. It will also modernise and simplify our public procurement rules, in particular with EU start-ups and innovators in mind.

When it comes to public financing and investment, the first priority will be ensuring the use of the resources available via NextGenerationEU and the current budget

Looking ahead, the Clean Industrial Deal must enable us to invest more together in clean and strategic technologies and in energy intensive industries. The future of the clean and cutting-edge tech industry must be made in Europe.

**This is why I will put forward a new European Competitiveness Fund** as part of our proposal for a new and reinforced budget in the next multiannual financial framework.

This investment capacity will invest in strategic technologies – from AI to space, clean tech to biotech - to ensure that we develop strategic technologies and manufacture them here in Europe. And it will ensure that we use the power of our budget to leverage and de-risk private investment in our common goals.

The European Competitiveness Fund will support **Important Projects of Common Interest** (IPCEIs) so that Europe can use its collective strength to invest together in ambitious common projects – as has already been done on a smaller scale with batteries, hydrogen and microelectronics.

I will **make IPCEIs simpler and faster** to get financed and off the ground. The first new set of common projects will be proposed in early 2025.

## Tackling the skills and labour gaps

Europe needs a radical step change in ambition and action – for all skill levels and

for all types of training and education. This is as important for people’s careers and prospects as it is for our competitiveness.

To do so, we will establish a **Union of Skills** – focusing on investment, adult and lifelong learning, skill retention and the recognition of different types of training to enable people to work across our Union.

Central to this will be **embedding lifelong learning into education and careers** and supporting the training and the career prospects of teachers.

We will focus on improving basic skills and propose a **STEM Education Strategic Plan**. This will aim to address the worrying decline in performance and the lack of qualified teachers in areas linked to science, technology, engineering and maths. It should also bring more girls and women into STEM education and careers.

It is also important to give vocational education and training (VET) the prominence it deserves. It prepares people for work and gives them the skills that companies are looking for. This is why I will propose a **European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training**, notably to boost the number of people with a secondary VET degree.

In a fast-moving economy we need to be more responsive to the needs of our companies. We will **boost and refocus skills funding** in the EU budget to ensure it is better linked to labour markets and more focused on sectors crucial for the twin transitions.

We need to make sure that we benefit from all high-quality skills irrespective of where and how they were acquired. This is why we will continue to work towards a European Degree and will put forward a **Skills Portability Initiative** to ensure a skill acquired in one country is recognised in another.

## A new era for European Defence and Security

*‘World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.’*

The first line of the Schuman Declaration encapsulates the story of Europe. It speaks to our past – riven by war, division and some of the worst conflicts the world has ever seen.

Peace in Europe has never been a given but any illusions were shattered by Putin’s war of aggression in Ukraine.

The sickening and remorseless attacks on children’s hospitals, energy infrastructure and other civilian targets show the lengths that Putin’s Russia will go to.

Ukraine is fighting for Europe’s freedom, democracy and values. Our collective resolve must be as strong as the challenge is great.

**The best investment in European security is investing in the security of Ukraine.** Europe’s financial, political and military support must be sustained for as long as it takes.

We will use all the instruments at our disposal, including through the European Peace Facility, working on everything from immediate needs to future **reconstruction** efforts through the Ukraine Facility.

If the last few years have been a sharp reminder about how fragile peace is, they have also been a wake up call for Europe to give itself the means to defend and protect itself and to deter potential adversaries. This is all the more acute as we look towards a more fractured and uncertain world in which Europe can take nothing for granted.

We will look at all of our policies through a security lens. We will plan for scenarios that we hope will never come to pass, but we cannot take the risk of being underprepared or over reliant.

### Bringing the European Defence Union to life

The last several years have exposed the chronic under investment and a lack of efficient spending in our military capabilities.

To put this into perspective, combined EU spending on defence from 2019 to 2021 increased by 20%. In that time, Russia’s defence spending increased by almost 300% and China’s by almost 600%. At the same time, our spending is too disjointed, disparate and not European enough. We must change this.

Our work in the next five years will be focused on building a true **European Defence Union**.

Member States will always retain responsibility for their own troops, from doctrine to deployment, but there is a lot Europe can do to support and coordinate efforts to strengthen the defence industrial base, innovation and the Single Market.

To help coordinate this work at the European level, I will appoint a **Commissioner for Defence**, who will work closely with the next High Representative /Vice-President in accordance with the Treaty.

To frame the new approach and to identify our investment needs we will jointly present a **White Paper on the Future of European Defence** in the first 100 days of the mandate.

Central to this work will be strengthening the EU-NATO partnership. We will continue to extend our cooperation with NATO to cover all threats, including new dangers linked to cyber, hybrid or space, and to strengthen our transatlantic partnership.

In an era of rearmament, the first priority is to significantly increase investment.

While there has been progress, defence budgets are still predominantly spent on a national basis. A fraction of equipment spending in Europe is devoted to EU joint procurement. And the vast majority of defence acquisitions by Member States are still made from outside Europe.

**We need to spend more, spend better, spend together.**

The first task is the urgent need to rebuild, replenish and transform national armed forces – as defined by Member States.

We will **build up the European Defence Fund**, investing in high-end defence capabilities in critical areas such as naval, ground, air combat, space-based early warning and cyber.

The second task is to invest more in our defence industry. We will **reinforce the European Defence Industry Programme** to incentivise common procurement to address the EU's most critical capability gaps.

We will create a true **Single Market for Defence** products and services, enhancing production capacity and fostering joint procurement.

The third task is to pool our resources and counter our common threats through flagship **European Defence Union projects**. These should focus on our biggest common and cross-border threats.

Working with Member States and in close coordination with NATO, we will propose a number of Defence Projects of Common

European Interest starting with a **European Air Shield** and **cyber defence**.

We will ensure that these major projects are open to all and we will use all of the tools at our disposal – both regulatory and financial – to ensure they are designed, built and deployed on European soil as quickly as possible.

We need to match our ambitions with investment.

This starts with incentivising private defence investment. I will work with the European Investment Bank so it can help finance and **de-risk common defence projects** and defence innovation.

This requires European investment in the next multiannual financial framework. But we will also make proposals for urgent defence investment needs.

## A Preparedness Union

Beyond building up our capabilities, Europe also needs **new ambition on crisis and security preparedness**.

We will work on a **Preparedness Union Strategy**, inspired by the report on EU civil and military preparedness to be presented by former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö later this year.

As part of this, we will focus on further **strengthening our cyber defence capabilities**, coordinating national cyber efforts and securing our critical infrastructures – notably by developing a trusted European cyber-defence industry.

Europe also needs a common approach to preventing and preparing other new threats, in particular those linked to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) security.

Building on the work of the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, we will present a new strategy to

support **medical countermeasures against public health threats**, such as those linked to CBRN security, including joint procurement and stockpiling.

We must also work on **integrated deterrence**. With this in mind, we will strengthen our **strategic approach to sanctions** to ensure that we can react flexibly to new threats. This will look at how our sanctions framework against cyberattacks can be expanded and how a new sanctions regime against hybrid attacks on the EU and its Member States could work.

## A safer and more secure Europe

The most basic of rights is the right to feel safe – wherever we are and whatever time of day it is. But organised crime in Europe is on the rise. This damages lives, businesses, and entire economies, while lining the pockets of criminals and gangs.

**There can be no hiding place for organised crime in Europe – either offline or online.**

I will propose a **new European Internal Security Strategy**. This will help ensure that security is integrated in EU legislation and policies by-design.

We need to provide law enforcement with adequate and up-to-date tools for lawful access to digital information, while safeguarding fundamental rights.

Most criminal groups are active in more than three EU countries, navigating constantly between the physical and digital worlds. We will focus on dismantling high-risk criminal networks and their ringleaders, including by revising the current rules on organised crime.

I will propose to **make Europol a truly operational police agency** and more than double its staff over time. This should come with a strengthened oversight and mandate. We must bolster its capacity to support national law enforcement agencies.

We must also ensure these criminals are brought to justice. Strengthening the **European Arrest Warrant** will allow judicial authorities the opportunity to work more closely to help make this happen.

We must also reflect on areas in which the **European Public Prosecutors' Office** will need more powers to look at cross-border serious crime, in particular corruption that impacts Union funds and cannot be handled alone by Member States.

This tougher approach on crime will be particularly important when it comes to the rise of drug trafficking in Europe, which remains a source of personal tragedy and of funding for other criminal activities.

We will put forward a new **European action plan against drug trafficking**, working with partners to close routes and business models. This will support a wider **EU Port Strategy** focusing on security, competitiveness and economic independence, and building on the work of the European Ports Alliance.

The recent spike in terrorist attacks is also a reminder that the threat of organised networks – or the lone wolves they inspire – has not gone away.

It is time for a **new Counter-Terrorism Agenda** to address new and emerging threats, such as the online dimension or the evolving global security landscape, and to take a stronger approach to terrorist financing and anti-radicalisation.

Finally, our united approach to security should be centred around a new **European Critical Communication System** to be used by public authorities in charge of security and safety. This will be part of our work to improve daily operational cooperation in the fight against terrorism and crime and in saving lives in emergency situations.

## Stronger common borders

Europe's coastlines and common borders help millions of people every day with business, work, studies and tourism. We need to make our borders more secure and more fluid. People want to feel safe without waiting too long.

We will make the EU the most advanced travel destination in the world, with a **fully functional European digital border management**.

However, we also need to make our borders more secure to prevent irregular border crossings and to protect the EU against the rise of hybrid and other security threats.

In recent years, Europe has been called on to respond to pressures at its borders, from Lampedusa to Poland's border with Belarus, from the borders of the Baltic states and Finland to the Canary Islands, Cyprus and beyond.

On every occasion we have been able to respond, and on every occasion we have strengthened our borders. But we need a stronger and more agile approach.

We will work on the basis of **an integrated border management approach**. We will strengthen Frontex, notably to equip it with state-of-the-art technology for surveillance and situational awareness, along with its own equipment and personnel to ensure it can protect our borders in all circumstances with strong governance and the full respect of fundamental rights.

To make this happen, I will propose to **triple the number of European Border and Coast Guards** to 30 000.

We will show no tolerance for those who threaten the security of our borders and our citizens with hybrid attacks. Hostile actors who push people across the EU's external borders for political purposes should be

recognised as a threat to our security and should be sanctioned.

We will also do more to work with non-EU countries on border security, notably by developing an **EU Visa Policy Strategy** to better secure borders and manage migration.

Finally, it is of paramount importance for border security to ensure **a complete and fully functioning Schengen area** of free movement. This will enable us to remove the remaining internal border controls.

Bulgaria and Romania have demonstrated their capacity in relation to border management and returns. They are ready and should benefit fully from the Schengen area.

## Standing fair and firm on migration

Migration is a European challenge that must be met with a European solution. This is why it was so important that we deliver on the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**.

The Pact will help us to protect people, to secure our borders, to ensure fair and efficient procedures and to manage migration in an orderly way with solidarity at its heart.

Our joint focus will be on **implementing all parts of the Pact**, and we will step up support for Member States to ensure they have the expertise, operational and financial capacity they need to turn legal commitments into practice, including through investment in our next long-term budget.

The implementation of the Pact is a dynamic, not a one-off, process. We need a **European Migration and Asylum Strategy** to frame our forward-looking vision and adapt to future challenges.

We will put forward a **new common approach on returns**, with a new legislative framework to speed up and simplify the process, ensure that returns take place in a



dignified manner, digitalise case management and ensure that return decisions are mutually recognised across Europe.

We will continue developing **strategic relations on migration and security** with non-EU countries, especially countries of origin and transit.

As part of a **new Pact for the Mediterranean**, we will develop our existing strategic partnerships and work towards new ones with clear responsibilities and deliverables. We will work in areas of shared interest, from investment in education, infrastructure, and the wider economy to talent partnerships and legal pathways. We will step up our work on returns, preventing illegal migration and fighting human smuggling. I will ensure increased transparency towards the European Parliament on such agreements.

We will also further reflect on new ways to counter irregular migration, while respecting international law and ensuring sustainable and fair solutions for the migrants themselves.

Europe has always fulfilled its international obligations in the past – and it always will. **We will always respect human rights** and will ensure that those who have a right to stay can do so, and can receive essential support to integrate into communities.

One life lost in the Mediterranean is one life too many. We need stronger coordination of rescue operations, including with neighbouring third countries, and increased surveillance capabilities for Frontex.

We will never accept that smugglers and human traffickers are the ones who decide who comes to Europe and under what circumstances. There will be **no impunity for smugglers and people traffickers**.

We will break their business model by working with international partners in the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling and taking firm action against Europe's shadow economy.

We will act to ensure that migrants are not exploited in our labour market and have good working conditions. We will disrupt and prosecute the perpetrators, using a 'follow the money' approach to tackle illegal profits, including through enhanced cooperation on asset confiscation. We will **strengthen the capacity of Europol** in this area.

This fair and firm approach to managing migration will enable us to open up **legal pathways**.

We will support Member States and companies with **legal migration based on the skills needs of our economies and our regions**. We will help match the skills of third country nationals with labour market gaps in Europe and we will make it easier to attract the right talent with harmonised rules on the recognition of qualifications.



## Supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model

Europe has a unique quality of life, which serves both as a competitive advantage for our economy and as an essential pillar of our society ensuring that no one is left behind.

However, the crises of recent years have had a direct impact on the quality of life of many Europeans, from the cost of living, housing and energy, to the fairness of incomes and to divisions and inequalities in our society.

As our societies and economies continue to change – and as the speed of that change accelerates – we must focus our efforts on sustaining and improving our unique quality of life. We must reunite our society and ensure that it works for all, with equal opportunities and quality jobs.

**This is our European way of life.** And we must always promote it.

### Social fairness in the modern economy

Europe's way of life depends on the protections and opportunities of our social model and our social market economy.

This is why it is so important for the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights to become a reality across our Union, respecting each country's social model.

We need new impetus in areas where more progress is needed and we will frame this work in a new **Action Plan on the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**.

It will include initiatives looking at how digitalisation is impacting the world of work, from AI management, to telework and the impact of an “always on” culture on people's mental health. New forms of work should not

lead to fewer rights, and I will propose to introduce a right to disconnect.

People and their jobs must always remain at the heart of our social market economy even as our industries and economies change shape. We need to ensure a **just transition for all**.

This is why I will put forward a **Quality Jobs Roadmap**, developed together with the social partners. It will support fair wages, good working conditions, training and fair job transitions for workers and self-employed people, notably by increasing collective bargaining coverage.

And we will **significantly increase our funding for a just transition across the next long-term budget**.

This will be part of a renewed commitment to strengthening European social dialogue in a time of economic and social change. Together with European trade unions and employers, we will deliver a new **Pact for European Social Dialogue** in early 2025.

This will be part of our work to help people to get access to the essential protections and services they need, along with addressing the root causes of poverty through a **first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**.

As part of this we will strengthen the Child Guarantee to prevent and fight social exclusion through education, healthcare and other essential public services.

**We urgently need to address the housing crisis facing millions of families and young people.**

The percentage of household income spent on housing has risen dramatically. Rents and house prices are soaring. There is also significant and growing investment gap in social and affordable housing.

To support Member States in addressing these issues, I will appoint a Commissioner whose responsibilities will include housing, and I will put forward a first-ever **European Affordable Housing Plan**.

This will address structural drivers, develop a strategy for housing construction, offer technical assistance to cities and Member States and focus on investment.

We will work with the European Investment Bank on a **pan-European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing** to attract more private and public investment.

As an immediate first step, we will propose to inject liquidity into the market by allowing Member States to double the planned cohesion policy investments in affordable housing.

We will also revise our State aid rules to enable housing support measures, especially for affordable energy-efficient and social housing.

Central to this will be a swift and effective roll-out of the **Social Climate Fund**, which will notably help with renovations and access to affordable and energy-efficient housing.

Four years ago, I launched the **New European Bauhaus**, bringing sustainability together with inclusion and affordability, creativity with innovation. And we will now enlarge this community.

We must also address the other inequalities that test the cohesion of our societies. We will **tackle the root causes of demographic change** and adapt to new realities. In the coming years, Europe will be confronted with various challenges, from pensions to

public services, from labour shortages to fiscal sustainability and disparities between generations and regions.

We will look at increasing participation in the labour market, especially by women and young people, reducing regional disparities so people can stay in their home regions, and supporting young parents for a healthy work life balance.

**Regions will remain at the centre of our work.**

We need a **strengthened cohesion and growth policy** with regions at the centre. It must be designed in partnership with national, regional and local authorities. We will address regional and social disparities and ensure all citizens have an effective **right to stay** in the place they call home.

As part of this, we will need to mobilise reforms and investments to help build what a community needs to thrive: public services and private activities, education and skills, transport and digital connectivity.

And we will take into account the **specific economic and social challenges facing islands**, such as housing, transport, water and waste management. We will also continue to address challenges facing outermost regions.

**Reuniting our societies, supporting our young people**

One of the takeaways from the last European elections was an unease in society, causing divisions in our communities and enabling extremists to play on people's fears.

We will work on safeguarding the rights of persons belonging to minorities in Europe.

We must also ensure that decisions taken today do not harm to future generations and that there is increased solidarity and engagement between people of different ages. To lead this work, I will appoint a



Commissioner whose responsibilities will include ensuring **intergenerational fairness**.

**We must reunite our society** through education, supporting young people and building on the things that we have in common as Europeans.

We will **strengthen Erasmus+** - including for vocational training - so that more people can benefit. This is key for people to develop skills and create shared experiences and a better understanding of each other.

This will be part of a wider commitment to giving young people greater freedom and responsibility within our societies and democracies.

The new College will lead the way.

I will ask all Commissioners to organise their first annual **Youth Policy Dialogues within the first 100 days** of the mandate. These dialogues will be repeated annually.

I want to make sure that young people can use their voice – their own voice – to help shape our future.

This is why I will set up a **President's Youth Advisory Board** with young people from all Member States to advise me on issues that matter to their peers in their community and to act as sounding board for ideas developed by the Commission.

I believe one of our greatest challenges in this decade is **protecting the mental health of our children and young people** – especially online.

The early and teenage years are critical for brain and personality development – and are also times of vulnerability to harms from social media and excessive screen time. We must have an open and evidence-based debate on this issue. This is why we will launch an **EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media on well-being**.

We will tackle unethical techniques used by online platforms by taking action on the **addictive design of online services**, such as infinite scroll, default auto play or constant push. We will also firmly combat the growing trend of abusive behaviour online with an **action plan against cyberbullying**.

Finally, we will focus on the things that make up our European way of life: our culture and history. I want to make it easier for people – especially younger generations – to benefit from our rich and diverse **cultural heritage**.

## A Union of equality

Five years ago, we set about building a Union of equality. I am proud of the historic progress. However, for too many people, equality is not yet a reality. We must continue to do more for everyone to live, thrive and lead, regardless of who they are.

This is why I will task a **Commissioner for Equality** with proposing an updated strategy on LGBTIQ equality and developing a new anti-racism strategy for post-2025.

We will continue to **strengthen our daily work to strive for gender equality**. This is an area where we have made historic progress, from women on boards to pay transparency. But we are also seeing deeply worrying trends – from the scourge of femicide and violence against women to obstacles preventing women from progressing in their careers or their education.

To strengthen our commitment, we will propose a **new Gender Equality Strategy for post-2025**. It will set out our plan to strengthen women's rights across the board, from the fight against gender-based violence to empowering women in politics and the labour market, across the EU, as well as across the EU institutions.

Finally, I support the idea of a **Roadmap for Women's Rights** which we will present on the next International Women's Day.

## Sustaining our quality of life: food security, water and nature

Europe's quality of life depends on having a secure and affordable supply of quality local food. **Farming is a core part of our European way of life - and it must always stay that way.**

It is thanks to Europe's 9 million farms – and the wider agri-food sector - that Europe has the healthiest and highest-quality food in the world. This is a strategic asset and means Europe is vital for global food security.

Our farmers and rural areas are increasingly under pressure - from the impact of climate change to unfair global competition, higher energy prices, a lack of younger farmers and difficulties in accessing capital. At the same time, they are making huge efforts to contribute to the green transition, for instance through nature-based solutions.

I want to continue engaging with farmers, policy makers, civil society, stakeholders and citizens so we can build a competitive and resilient agriculture and food system.

This is why I convened a Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture which will shortly present its report. Building on these recommendations, I will present a **Vision for Agriculture and Food** in the first 100 days looking at how to ensure the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of our farming sector within the boundaries of our planet.

In this regard, it is **vital that farmers have a fair and sufficient income**. They should not be forced to systematically sell their products below production costs.

I will always defend an EU income policy for Europe's farmers, and **will** ensure that the EU budget and our **common agricultural policy** is targeted, and finds the right balance between incentives, investments and regulation.

We must enable farmers to work their land without excessive bureaucracy, support family farms, and **reward farmers working with nature**, preserving our biodiversity and natural ecosystems and helping to decarbonise our economy on the way to net-zero by 2050.

We will **support the competitiveness of our entire food value chain** through investment and innovation on farms, but also in cooperatives, in our agri-food businesses and in the many SMEs in the sector.

As farmers are often the most vulnerable part of this chain, we have to correct existing imbalances, strengthen farmers' position and further protect them against unfair trading practices.

Together, we will show that Europe will protect its own **food sovereignty** and those who provide for us all.

This must also apply to our fishermen and women. They ensure that fisheries remain the lifeblood of our coastal communities and economies. They provide a healthy supply of food to local, national and international markets.

I will **appoint a Fisheries and Oceans Commissioner** tasked with ensuring the sector remains sustainable, competitive and resilient and with upholding a level playing field for the European fisheries chain.

A **European Oceans Pact** will focus on boosting the blue economy and ensuring the good governance and sustainability of our oceans in all of their dimensions.

We must also continue the **protection of our natural world**. Our forests and woodlands, our wetlands and our grasslands are not only our home and landscapes of the lives of



Europeans, but are also essential to regulating our climate and ensuring food and water security.

We will focus on incentives and on equitable and efficient implementation, notably to ensure we reach our international biodiversity commitments, such as those taken in the **Kunming Montreal Agreement**.

### **Climate adaptation, preparedness and solidarity**

One of the greatest risks to our security is the impact of climate change. Extreme weather continues to ravage ever greater areas of Europe through floods, fires and droughts, throughout the year and across our Union.

Thanks to our Union Civil Protection Mechanism, personnel, planes and helicopters from across Europe help to put out forest fires and deal with the devastating impact of floods, storms or droughts.

This is Europe at its practical best. But we know that will need more of it, more often, as the planet heats up and as the damage to life, land and property becomes more frequent, more intense and more devastating.

**We need better resources and more access to more European assets.** We need a whole of society approach and to use all of the tools required, including military ones.

I believe we need to work towards a **European Civil Defence Mechanism**, looking at all facets of crisis and disaster management, along community resilience building. This will also build on President Niinistö's report.

As Europe's climate warms faster than the global average, we must step up work **on climate resilience and preparedness**.

We will map the risks and preparedness needs for infrastructure, energy, water, food

and land in cities and rural areas, as well as the need for data and early warning systems.

This will be part of a **European Climate Adaptation Plan**, to support Member States notably on preparedness and planning and ensure regular science-based risk assessments.

This must go hand in hand with **strengthening Europe's water security**. Water is an indispensable resource for the security of our food, energy and economy but is increasingly under stress from climate change and increasing demands.

We need a new **European Water Resilience Strategy** to ensure sources are properly managed, scarcity is addressed, and that we enhance the competitive innovative edge of our water industry and take a circular economy approach. As part of this, we will lead efforts to help mitigate and prevent acute water stress across the world.

# Protecting our democracy, upholding our values

Europe's future in a fractured world will depend on having a strong democracy and on defending the values that give us the freedoms and rights that we cherish.

## Protecting our democracy

**Our democratic systems and institutions are under attack.** We have seen a rise in the number of threats from internal and foreign actors – whether hostile governments or non-state actors. The methods used are now harder to track, more damaging and easier to deploy with digital tools and social media.

This reflects a deep change in the information space, shifting from editorial media sources to user-generated content mediated by platforms and pushed by algorithms. This enables new freedoms but also lowers the cost of manipulating information and makes it easier for Russia and others to step up information warfare.

**We need to do more to protect our democracy.**

This is why I will propose a new **European Democracy Shield**. As part of this, we will work to counter foreign information manipulation and interference online, building on the examples of Viginum in France or the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency.

The aim is to increase situational awareness, by detecting, analysing and proactively countering disinformation and information manipulation.

We will focus on **societal resilience and preparedness**, through increased digital and media literacy and boosting prevention through pre-bunking. We will create a

**European network of fact-checkers** and make it available in all languages.

We will also continue to **step up digital enforcement** to ensure that manipulated or misleading information is detected, flagged and, where appropriate, removed in line with the Digital Services Act.

Finally, we will also **address the ever-more realistic deepfakes** that have impacted elections across Europe. We will ensure that transparency requirements in the AI Act are implemented and that we strengthen our approach to AI-produced content.

In protecting our democracy, we will always respect our enduring commitment to **preserving and promoting free speech**.

## Strengthening the rule of law

Europe's democracy and economy relies on the rule of law. It makes our society work and ensures that rights are defended, corruption is punished, and contracts are enforced.

The rule of law does not have an end point. Challenges exist right across Europe, at different scales and with different issues.

We have done a lot in the last five years. We are now better equipped than ever to tackle rule of law issues in an objective way - and in the same way - in every Member State. But we have also seen worrying trends emerge.

**Strengthening the rule of law will be our daily work and duty.**

We will continue to improve our monitoring and reporting, and to strengthen checks and balances, notably by tracking the implementation of recommendations.



The **Rule of Law Report** has shown how dialogue can help make progress. We now need to consolidate the report and ensure it looks at all issues across Europe.

We will add a Single Market dimension to the report to address rule of law issues affecting companies, especially SMEs, operating across borders. We will also include other accession countries in the Rule of Law Report as and when they are ready.

**We will invest in upholding the rule of law.** I will propose that EU funding also be dedicated to national measures, for example on fighting corruption, and to protecting the EU financial interests.

**Respect for the rule of law is a must for EU funds.**

To ensure this, we will build a closer link between the recommendations in the Rule of Law Report and financial support. And we will ensure that the future long-term budget has strong safeguards on the rule of law – including the **general regime of conditionality**, applying to all EU funds.

We will also learn from NextGenerationEU, which has shown how the budget can be linked to reforms that strengthen the rule of law.

Enforcement through infringements and the reinforced application of the **Article 7 mechanism** must continue to be used effectively, including in a future enlarged Union.

One of the central tenets of the rule of law, and of democracy more broadly, is **media freedom**.

In a world of ever-faster media, and ever more disinformation, we must do everything

we can to support a free media across our Union.

We will implement the European Media Freedom Act and **increase our support for and protection of independent media and journalists**, clamping down on acts of pressure and unethical behaviour.

## **Putting citizens at the heart of our democracy**

The Conference on the Future of Europe – and the success of the European Citizens' Panels – have been big steps towards a more deliberative democracy and engaging people beyond elections or politics.

We now need to **embed citizens' participation across the EU**.

Every year, we will choose policy areas and proposals where recommendations from a **European Citizens' Panel** would have the greatest value. We will follow up on their recommendations, such as those from the 2024 panel on **tackling hatred in society**.

In the same spirit, we will also **step up our engagement with civil society** organisations that have expertise and an important role to play in defending specific societal issues and upholding human rights.

**We must ensure civil society is better protected in its work.**

We will also work with local councillors on citizen engagement to get a better understanding of how Europe impacts everyday life. Together with the **Committee of the Regions**, we are already working with a network of more than 3,000 local councillors and we should strengthen this network over the next five years.



## A global Europe: Leveraging our power and partnerships

In a world as dangerous as it has been for generations, Europe needs to be more assertive in pursuing its strategic interests.

Russia's war of aggression – driven by Putin's imperial desire to destroy Ukraine and its European future – is part of a wider, systematic attack on Europe, our values and on the rules-based international order.

**Ukraine is fighting for our freedom every day – and we must work for its freedom too.**

This will continue to be our foremost priority domestically as well as internationally, rallying partners to support with short term needs and long-term reconstruction efforts.

We cannot see this war on European soil in isolation. This is a moment of fracture for the world. The last years were a statement of intent from a new league of authoritarians – from Iran to North Korea to Russia and beyond – who work to sow division and create an alternative international order based on redrawn maps, imperial ideas and spheres of influence

The war in Gaza and the destabilisation of the Middle East as a whole is leading to bloodshed and instability across the region. Coups and conflicts are escalating across the world.

**We have entered an age of geostrategic rivalries.**

The more aggressive posture and unfair economic competition from China, its “no-limits” friendship with Russia - and the dynamics of its relationship with Europe – reflect a shift from cooperation to competition. We are seeing a weaponisation of all types of policies, from energy to migration and the climate. As a result, our

rules-based international order is fraying, and our global institutions have become less effective.

This new reality will endure whatever the outcome of elections across the world in the coming months. Our **new foreign and security policy** must be designed with this unfiltered reality in mind.

This starts with working like-minded partners and friends within the G7 and beyond. In this spirit, we will work to **strengthen relations with the United Kingdom** on issues of shared interest, such as energy, security, resilience and people-to-people contacts.

I will work closely with the High Representative/Vice-President to ensure a coordinated approach to our external action.

### Enlargement as a geopolitical imperative

The celebrations marking 20 years since the largest ever wave of enlargement allowed us to reflect on the success it has proved to be for those countries and the Union as a whole.

History is calling once again, and Europe has a clear choice to make for its future.

I believe it is a moral, political and geostrategic imperative to further complete our Union - in line with the promise we gave in our Treaties.

In a world of major powers, a larger and stronger Union gives us greater geopolitical weight and influence on the global stage. It helps reduce our dependencies, enhances our resilience and strengthens our competitiveness. It makes us more secure and it can help anchor democracy, stability and the rule of law across Europe.



But this will not be an easy journey.

**Accession to the EU will always be a merit-based process** – and each candidate will be assessed on its own progress towards meeting all criteria.

We will step up support to prepare candidate countries, notably using the investment and reforms in the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and the Ukraine Facility. This will help integrate them into parts of the EU *acquis* and the Single Market and will get them used to the approach of EU funds.

The rule of law and fundamental values will continue to be the cornerstones of the EU's enlargement policy, and they will be the foundations of our reformed and enlarged Union in the future.

I will appoint a dedicated Commissioner for Enlargement to steer this work.

Many doubted the EU's ability to integrate a large number of Member States in 2004 – all with different strengths, economic structures and population sizes. But the EU rose to the challenge, by preparing internally and by integrating early.

Europe will rise to this challenge once again.

## **A more strategic approach to our neighbourhood**

This more focused approach to enlargement should also come with a more focused approach to our wider neighbourhood, especially the Mediterranean.

I will appoint a **Commissioner for the Mediterranean** to focus on investment and partnerships, economic stability, job creation, energy, security, migration and other areas of mutual interests, respecting our values and principles. They will work closely with the High Representative/Vice-President.

The **new Pact for the Mediterranean** will reshape this essential relationship and

provide a clear political signal of partnership in a more contested and unstable world.

Beyond this, **Europe must also play an active role in the Middle East** – in the interests of all parties and for the stability of the region.

We must continue to take part in all diplomatic efforts to ensure a **just and comprehensive resolution to the ongoing conflict in Gaza**.

We must do all we can to stop the tragic loss of life. This means working for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, and a significant and sustained increase in the flow of humanitarian assistance to Gaza.

We need an enduring ceasefire and to look further ahead. On the basis of agreed reforms, we will work on a multi-year support package for an effective Palestinian Authority and to help pave the way for a two-state solution. The two-state solution is the best way to ensure security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

This will be part of a wider **comprehensive EU-Middle East Strategy** with a view to 'the day after' the war in Gaza. This strategy should focus on promoting the two-state solution and strengthening partnerships with key regional stakeholders.

## **A new economic foreign policy**

In today's world geopolitics and geoeconomics go together. Europe's foreign and economic policy must do the same.

Europe's trading power and economic openness is essential to our prosperity – opening up new markets for our companies, offering a wider selection of sustainable goods to consumers, and providing new investment in our industries.

This is acutely important in a world shaped by the fight for a technological edge, by the

weaponisation of economic dependencies and by an increasingly thin line between economy and security. We must be clear-eyed about these risks.

**We need a new economic foreign policy for today's realities.**

The three central planks of this will be economic security, trade, and investment in partnerships.

Firstly, the Commission will prioritise advancing Europe's **economic security and economic statecraft**.

This means boosting our competitiveness at home and investing in research capacity for strategic and dual-use technologies that are essential for our economy and security.

At the same time, we must be **more assertive in protecting our economy** from key technology leakage and security concerns. This issue is particularly acute when dealing with those who are also strategic competitors and systemic rivals.

This will be based on a clear-eyed risk assessment and our principle of **'de-risking not decoupling'**.

We will complete the review of the foreign direct investment screening framework, build a genuine coordinated approach to export controls, and address risks from outbound investments. We will develop economic security standards for key supply chains with our G7 and other like-minded partners.

**The second pillar of our economic foreign policy is trade.**

We will continue to deepen our free and fair trade links with growth centres and partners around the world, ensuring reciprocity and a level playing field.

In order to ensure access to what we need to build diversified and resilient supply chains,

we will also develop a new range of Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships and deepen our relationships on **critical minerals and raw materials**.

To support this, we must sustain and improve rules-based trade, including through a **reformed and strengthened World Trade Organization**.

At the same time, we will be more ambitious in enforcing our trade agreements and will use all of our **trade defence instruments** where and when needed.

The third strand of our economic foreign policy is partnerships and investing together in our interests and our partners through Global Gateway, our initiative to invest in infrastructure projects worldwide.

**We will take Global Gateway to the next level** by proposing an integrated offer to our partners – with infrastructure investment, trade, macro-economic support part of the package.

We will do this in a Team Europe approach mobilising Member States, public development banks and development finance institutions, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, export credit agencies, and the private sector.

This is how we want to **create long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships** – by investing in a common future and committing for the long term.

This also means working on areas of mutual interest with the countries and economies of the Indo-Pacific, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Indo-Pacific has become a decisive region for the world's future. Building on our existing strategy, we will deepen our engagement with our partners in the region. We will propose a new **Strategic EU-India**





**Agenda** and strengthen our cooperation with ASEAN.

Similarly, we will work with Japan, Korea, New Zealand and Australia with whom we face common challenges in cyber, space and in the secure supply of critical minerals and technologies. This includes our collective efforts to deploy the full range of our combined statecraft to deter China from unilaterally changing the status quo by military means, particularly over Taiwan.

We need **new impetus in our mutual partnership with Africa** ahead of the next EU-African Union Summit in 2025. Through Global Gateway, we will drive investments in transport corridors, ports, renewable energy generation, green hydrogen production and raw material value chains.

We will work together to mutually address Africa's concerns, from the reform of international institutions to the impact of climate change, demography and migration on our continents.

We will deepen the cooperation between the EU and **Latin America and the Caribbean** through Global Gateway investment and cooperation on our shared interests, from security to energy.

## **Reshaping multilateralism for today's world**

Europe will always defend the international rules-based order, in which laws and norms are stronger than might and conflict. This is the foundation of our Union and it will be the foundation of our future.

However, we must also recognise the legitimate concerns of partners around the world who believe the current system was neither designed by them nor works for them.

I would like **Europe to play a leading role in reforming the international system.**

This will start with the upcoming **UN Summit for the Future** to work towards a more equitable representation for all regions and tackle questions linked to development and debt.

We should seize this opportunity to make our international system fit for today's world – in particular on digital questions where strong safeguards and a new form of governance are needed.

We also need to listen and respond better to the concerns of our partners impacted by European legislation, in particular those linked to the European Green Deal.

We need a more systematic approach to assessing the impact of our laws on non-EU countries, and we need to provide more targeted support to help them adjust to and benefit from those laws.

# Delivering together and preparing our Union for the future

In the last five years, Europe has set course on an ambitious programme of modernisation. We must now focus on implementation, investment and reform to prepare our future. This cuts across all of the priorities set out in these Guidelines and will require a team effort by all institutions and Member States.

## A new budget fit for our ambitions

The European budget improves the quality of life and the livelihoods of citizens, farmers, researchers, businesses and regions across Europe and beyond.

In recent years, the budget has again shown how important it is – from the pandemic response to dealing with the energy crisis and supporting Ukraine.

We agreed on the SURE programme to help save some 40 million jobs throughout our Union, on NextGenerationEU to invest in our future economy and on REPowerEU to help bring energy prices down and boost our supplies after Putin's blackmail.

And when we needed essential funding for urgent priorities, we agreed on the first ever mid-term revision of our budget.

All of this shows that a lot can be done with the European budget to deliver where it matters the most. We must now make sure that we use this financial capacity in the best way possible in the next years.

But we have also learnt a lot from this experience – notably the need for **simplicity and flexibility, speed and strategic focus** in our spending.

Our spending at European level in the current budget period measures up favourably against our competitors – even without

accounting for national spending. However, our spending is spread over too many overlapping programmes – many of which fund the same things but with different requirements and difficulties to combine funding effectively. We need to better focus our EU spending on our shared priorities.

## We need a new approach for a modern and reinforced EU budget.

With this in mind, I will propose a new long-term budget in 2025 which will be:

**more focused** to align with our priorities and objectives, and targeted to where EU action is most needed in a flexible way. I want a policy-based budget, not a programme-based budget.

**simpler** in the way it works – with fewer programmes and a plan for each country linking key reforms with investment, and focusing on our joint priorities, including promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion.

**more impactful**, notably with a European Competitiveness Fund and better use of our budget to leverage further national, private and institutional financing.

## Respect of the rule of law is – and will be – a must for EU funds.

We will also need to **revamp our external action financing**, to make it more impactful and targeted for our partners and more aligned with our strategic interests.

This ambition requires **strengthened and modernised revenues for the EU budget**. New own resources will be needed to ensure sufficient and sustainable financing for our common priorities.



## An ambitious reform agenda for Europe

While reforms were necessary before, with enlargement they become indispensable.

I believe we need an **ambitious reform agenda** to ensure the proper functioning of a larger Union, to ensure we are equipped to tackle our geopolitical challenges and to improve democratic legitimacy, notably through citizens' participation. This includes continuing to follow up on the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

**I believe we need Treaty change** where it can improve our Union.

We must also use enlargement as a catalyst for progress in terms of our capacity to act, our policies and our spending programmes.

Both the EU and future Member States should be ready at the time of accession. We should work on both in parallel. The EU must widen as it deepens.

In the first 100 days, we will present our **pre-enlargement policy reviews** focusing on individual sectors such as the rule of law, the Single Market, food security, defence and security, climate and energy and migration, as well as social, economic and territorial convergence more broadly.

We will put forward proposals to **enhance Europe's capacity to act**, looking at new formats and decision-making processes, including for a larger Union.

In doing so, we will focus on what can already be done now and those areas where a broad consensus is emerging.

## Delivering together with the European Parliament

In 2019, I made it a priority to strengthen the partnership between the European Commission and the European Parliament.

I pledged to give the Parliament a stronger role in initiating and shaping legislation. We made good on that commitment by responding to Parliament's Article 225 resolutions with legislative proposals in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles.

I continue to support this right of initiative.

We will **strengthen our cooperation on Article 225** by asking Commissioners to take part in structured dialogues with Parliamentary committees on these resolutions.

At the same time, there are many areas where we can improve the way our institutions work together.

This is why I want to work with the European Parliament to swiftly **revise our Framework Agreement**. This will help strengthen our joint political responsibility, strengthen our dialogue, increase the flow of information and ensure greater transparency.

Many of the crises we have faced during the last mandate required exceptional responses, notably through the use of Article 122 TFEU.

I have heard the Parliament's views on this subject and will ensure that this tool is used only in exceptional circumstances. When it is used, I will ensure that **the Commission will fully justify the use of Article 122** to the Parliament.

Finally, I want to **strengthen our dialogue** and ensure that Commissioners will be more present in their respective committees.

The College will be available to respond to any demands from the European Parliament to debate in plenary in the most appropriate format.

[REDACTED]

