

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Marta KOS****Enlargement****1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? How will you contribute to implementing the political guidelines of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? How will you implement youth mainstreaming?

What guarantees of independence are you able to give Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?

My work and personal life experience, my intrinsic motivation and my deeply felt European commitment underpin my qualification as the future Commissioner on Enlargement.

I have a proven record of 35 years of successful leadership experience in various political, civil society and private sector engagements. I have received numerous awards and honors for my work as an ambassador (Ambassador of the Year 2016 in Germany and Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), for successful leadership trainings and communication.

My professional engagement has always been closely related to European values, freedom and democracy, justice, inclusiveness and gender equality. My personal commitment is rooted in the values I was fortunate to receive during my childhood. Mutual respect and consideration, commitment to others and personal responsibility were at the heart of our family values and of our engagement in our local community.

During my mandate as Director of the Government Communications Office and Government Spokesperson we launched a broad-based campaign in support of Slovenia's integration into the EU "Home in Europe". With this slogan, we expressed that we had always felt as Europeans, and that with formal accession to the EU, Europe would become what we longed for: our European home.

My strong interest and commitment to European integration continued when I was Vice - President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, supporting the country's accession by helping companies to prepare for the EU internal market.

I have also proven my skills in successfully promoting European values and ideas during my seven-year tenure as ambassador in Germany and Switzerland. During my years in Berlin, I was deeply involved in the Berlin Process, as a platform to increase cooperation between the Western Balkans Six.

Because I have personally experienced the benefits of becoming a European citizen, I understand well the aspiration of the citizens from countries with an EU perspective to join the European family as well as the complex internal processes countries must undergo to transform and adopt to become a full member of the EU.

For me, the values and objectives of the EU, as set out in the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, are fundamental. In accordance with the EU's objectives, I will always work for the well-being of citizens, I will fight against social exclusion and discrimination, I will work for sustainable development that never forgets the people and I will respect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity, in which I am very proud that Slovene is one of the 24 official languages of the EU!

My personal and professional record demonstrates my independence and honesty, and loyalty to our values. I have built my entire career - from independent journalism in the national and international mainstream media to diplomacy and the private sector - on my own integrity, loyalty and independence. I will remain true to this commitment if granted the opportunity for taking over the responsibility as Commissioner and will put my competences and commitment at the service of the European Union and all its citizens.

If confirmed, as Commissioner for Enlargement I would see it as my personal responsibility to seize the renewed momentum around enlargement, as evidenced in President-elect von der Leyen's political guidelines and in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 agreed by the European Council on 27 June. I fully adhere to the principle that enlargement is a merit-based process, determined by the speed of progress achieved by each country, starting with reforms in the fundamentals. There are no shortcuts to membership, and I will seek to ensure that each candidate country and potential candidate is treated fairly and assessed according to the same criteria, with progress determined by the individual merits of each. This means I will consider with equal care all enlargement countries that share an EU perspective.

I will lead continued and sustainable support to Ukraine together with the High Representative/Vice President. I will use all potentials of the Instrument for pre-accession assistance, the Ukraine Facility and Growth Plan for the Western Balkans in strategic way. I will engage in regional integration, good neighborly relations, reconciliation as well as on facilitating resolution of bilateral disputes.

In accordance with my Mission letter I will lead the preparation of a communication strategy that should address citizens and stakeholders in candidate countries and in the EU itself, focusing on providing clear information about the aims and objectives of enlargement policy and the accession process.

I am ready to work hand-in-hand with my peers in the College in preparing the pre-enlargement policy reviews and the Multiannual Financial Framework, to contribute to the broader, ambitious reform agenda so that the EU is prepared for enlargement.

Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine constitutes an unprovoked, unjustified, and illegal attack against a sovereign nation and its territorial integrity and right to self-determination. Ukraine is fighting for our freedom every day and I commit to work for its freedom too, including by engaging in its accession to the EU. My mission letter calls on me to lead the Commission's continued and sustained support of Ukraine – something that I am strongly committed to do, building on the unprecedented levels of support provided to Ukraine to date. This will require that we continue tying financial support for the recovery with reforms necessary to both lift the economy of Ukraine and help it on its path towards accession.

We will continue supporting Ukraine through the implementation of the Ukraine Facility and reforms linked with the Ukraine Plan, as well as work on the reconstruction of Ukraine in cooperation with our partners and through the Ukraine Donor Platform.

Given the scale and scope of support, in a context of significant uncertainty, I will insist on maintaining the very high levels of scrutiny, accountability and transparency over the use of EU funds as well as effective communication with citizens both in the EU and in Ukraine about the mutual benefits that this support delivers.

Collaborating tightly with the other members of the College, I will start considering options for continued support to Ukraine in the post-2027 period, as part of overall reflections on the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

In the East, the main priority should be to firmly anchor Ukraine and Moldova in the EU membership process and try and ensure Georgia can remain on an EU path.

If confirmed, as a Commissioner for Enlargement I will, together with the High Representative/Vice president develop and coordinate an approach to supporting all the countries of the Southern Caucasus and work towards a new overall strategic framework for the Black Sea.

I will rely on my long-lasting experience in the movement "She Knows" in promoting gender equality in ensuring efficient implementation of EU policies in countries with the EU membership perspective. I am dedicated to empowering women in political life and encourage all those that are already in executive political positions, e.g. by leveraging informal networks throughout the EU enlargement countries.

I am strongly committed to promoting gender equality in all dimensions of my work in line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the Gender Action Plan III. I will ensure that gender equality and inclusivity is mainstreamed in the execution of the financial assistance within my remit, and that the gender equality perspective continues to guide our interventions, from the initial identification of actions through to their implementation.

I will support the youth in every possible way, because I strongly believe, that young generation is not only our future, it is our present! The EU must win the hearts and minds of young generations in neighboring countries as it did with us, before we joined in 2004. They also have a right to see their future and perspectives with hope and confidence. Investing in youth will therefore be a priority during my mandate, in line also with the 2022 Youth Action Plan.

To address challenges such as youth brain drain, initiatives like the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, the Ukraine Facility and the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova Facility already focus on reskilling and upskilling young people. In addition, I will continue supporting the deployment of the Youth Guarantee.

If granted the opportunity, I will continue working with the Young European Ambassadors network established in the Eastern Neighborhood and Western Balkans to raise awareness about the EU and its benefits. As outlined in my mission letter, I will also swiftly start organising a first edition of the annual Youth Policy Dialogues, that should take place within the 100 days of my mandate.

2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament

Can you commit to duly informing Parliament about your actions and those of your departments? In what respect do you consider yourself accountable to Parliament?

What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of your engagement with and presence in Parliament, both in committee and in plenary, transparency, cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with timely information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

If confirmed, as Commissioner for Enlargement I will keep close and regular dialogue with the European Parliament on all issues falling within my remit. This is especially important during this period of renewed momentum around enlargement and in the broader geopolitical context marked by considerable instability and uncertainty. This is a shared endeavor that demands close cooperation among all institutions and actors to ensure our success.

I am committed to maintaining a strong, transparent, and constructive relationship with the European Parliament, fully recognising that I am accountable to its elected members, who represent the voices of 450 million EU citizens. Effective cooperation with the Parliament and its members is fundamental to enabling me to play my role as Commissioner for Enlargement. This is because I see the European Parliament as the voice of public opinion across the Union, and I will listen to your voice and consider it in my work. This requires open dialogue and close collaboration with the Parliament as we advance the EU's enlargement agenda.

I acknowledge the European Parliament's critical importance within the EU's institutional framework and am committed to fully engaging with its members at all stages of the policy-making process. Institutional balance is essential; accountability to Parliament is not merely a procedural requirement but a key pillar of democratic legitimacy and transparency.

The recent establishment of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, the Ukraine Facility and the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova exemplifies the Parliament's dedication to delivering results during urgent times. I am committed to maintaining this collaborative approach, fully recognising the time-sensitive nature of our shared responsibilities, and committing to act with transparency, trust, and a sense of common purpose.

I am committed to regularly inform the European Parliament on the state of affairs regarding accession process and to engage in an open exchange of views. I will strive to include the views of the European Parliament when addressing important political issues as I firmly believe this is the only way to prepare candidate countries to accession.

I am committed to appearing before plenary sessions and relevant committee meetings to provide timely updates on key initiatives under my responsibility, and ensuring the Parliament is briefed before major decisions or negotiations. This will be done in accordance with our legal framework while upholding the principle of institutional balance. I am also committed to fully respect the specific roles assigned to the Parliament and the Council, including as co-legislators, especially as we prepare for upcoming legislative procedures and financing instruments.

I will ensure my presence in parliamentary committees, such as the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), and during plenary discussions related to my portfolio. My engagement will extend to trilogues and key negotiations, maintaining direct contact with Parliament members to foster ongoing dialogue.

Transparency will guide my actions as Commissioner. The Parliament will receive information on par with the Council wherever provided for by the legislation, including concerning the Ukraine, Western Balkans and Moldova Facilities. Additionally, I am prepared to report to the Parliament and provide information on the implementation of these instruments in the context of the regular dialogues foreseen in the respective Regulations, as well as in the the high-level geopolitical dialogue with the EP on IPA III.

I am also committed to responding swiftly and comprehensively to parliamentary resolutions and questions. Supporting the European Parliament's role in initiating and shaping legislation, as regularly affirmed by President-elect von der Leyen, I will provide formal responses to resolutions within the stipulated three-month period. I will work closely with relevant parliamentary committees at every stage of the process, particularly on resolutions under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, ensuring comprehensive and timely follow-up.

Finally, I acknowledge the essential role Parliament plays in supporting democracy globally, particularly in our enlargement and neighborhood regions. I am committed to collaborating closely with Parliament on democracy support, particularly in following up on Electoral Observation Missions' recommendations, which are crucial for promoting democratic standards and ensuring political stability in partner countries. I will work to maximise the EU's impact by ensuring a coordinated and coherent follow-up to these mission recommendations.

If granted the opportunity to be the Commissioner for Enlargement I will work closely with the European Parliament on sharing the European values to the neighboring countries, emphasising the importance of democracy, human rights, inclusiveness and equality. The empowerment of woman and young people in social and political life shall be our collective effort. I would also like to rely on the expertise of the Members of the European Parliament as regards regional integration, neighborly relations and especially on reconciliation.

I would like to include Members of the European Parliament actively in the communication campaign that will ensure that the benefits of enlargement are clearly communicated to EU citizens and stakeholders and to the citizens of enlargement partners; also, by jointly participating at public events and campaigns in this regard.

Questions from the Committee on Foreign Affairs

3. The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029 describe enlargement as “a moral, political and geostrategic imperative to further complete our Union”. Without prejudice to the Commission’s decision-making processes, what would be your concrete priorities and objectives/goals for the enlargement portfolio in the short, medium and long term (for the duration of your mandate), and how do you envisage the division of tasks and complementarity of roles with the Vice-President/High Representative regarding enlargement policy and the Eastern neighbourhood? What are the main challenges (international, regional, bilateral, institutional, etc) that you see on the way of pursuing those priorities and objectives, how do you intend to overcome them and sufficiently enhance the EU’s communication strategy in order to counterbalance false narratives and disinformation, notably about the EU?

The current geopolitical context has moved enlargement to the forefront of the political priorities of the EU and confirmed enlargement policy as a key driver for peace, freedom and prosperity on our continent. If confirmed as Commissioner, my primary objective will be to work intensively with enlargement partners to help them advance on their respective EU paths in line with their own aspirations and political commitment. In doing so, I will make use of all the tools at my disposal and, as enlargement is a whole-of-the-Commission exercise, I will work closely with my peers in the College and in particular with the High Representative/Vice President to take forward this

work. I am also eager to support the process of ensuring that the EU is ready to welcome new members, notably the pre-enlargement policy reviews.

In the next five years, if confirmed as Commissioner for Enlargement, I am fully committed to bring as many enlargement countries as possible to a point when they are fully prepared to take on the obligations of EU membership and have concluded the accession negotiations. This would send a strong signal of our commitment to enlargement and reassure partners that the Union stands by its promises. At the same time, the merit-based approach must remain the guiding principle. This is essential for a credible and sustainable enlargement process. In the short term, I will focus on moving all candidates forward on their accession path. Concretely, this would include for example closing chapters with Montenegro, opening remaining clusters with Albania, and opening the fundamentals cluster with North Macedonia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

Given the central role of the fundamentals in determining the pace of progress in the negotiations, I intend to pay close attention to progress in this area. I will support enlargement partners in ensuring that necessary reforms undertaken in this area reflect a sustained and irreversible commitment to democratic governance and the rule of law, including the fight against corruption and organised crime and the respect of human rights.

Ensuring continued support for Ukraine on its journey toward EU membership will be another key priority of my mandate. Despite Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine has shown remarkable progress in reforming its institutions and regulatory framework. I will make full use of the Ukraine Facility to support Ukraine's economic recovery, public and private investments, and political alignment with the EU, with a major part of the funding tied to progress in key reforms that are also crucial for growing the economy and helping with recovery and reconstruction. I will work closely with Ukraine to help keeping these reforms on track, while paying close attention to ensuring that the financial interests of the EU are protected.

I will also drive forward the gradual integration of enlargement partners into key sectors of the EU economy. I will make full use of new tools including the Ukraine Facility, the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, the Türkiye Investment Platform and, once adopted by the co-legislators, the future Facility for Moldova. It will also be crucial to maximise opportunities under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. This will enable the enlargement partners to reap tangible benefits of EU membership in certain sectors where regulatory approximation is sufficiently advanced already before accession and facilitate the integration process.

Resolving blockages in the enlargement process is a central task of my mandate. Bilateral issues, whether between candidate countries themselves or with EU Member States, have caused significant delays in the past. Without denying the legitimacy of concerns underpinning these disputes, they must be addressed swiftly to avoid hindering the progress of enlargement partners and undermining the credibility of the process. I will explore possible avenues to that end and work with the High Representative/Vice President on finding solutions. In the Western Balkans, regional cooperation is an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements and is also at the heart of the Growth Plan. I believe that a renewed focus on their EU perspective, gradual integration with the EU through the Growth Plan, and regional initiatives such as the Common Regional Market, can act as incentives to bringing the region together and contribute to reconciliation and overcoming legacy issues.

Considering recent developments and the complex dynamics in our Eastern neighbourhood, it is crucial that our partnership with the region is fit for purpose. This will require a differentiated approach reflecting evolving realities. Accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova must progress. In Moldova, the successful roll out of the Growth Plan – should the co-legislators adopt the related Facility – is of paramount importance to support the country, including its European accession agenda. The future of EU-Georgia relations will depend on the course of action of the Georgian authorities. I stand ready to engage if and when the Georgian authorities decide to return firmly to the EU path I also remain ready to support a political transition in Belarus when the conditions allow. At the same time, I will continue encouraging and supporting those who aspire to a free and democratic future for their countries.

When it comes to the South Caucasus, I will continue rolling out the Resilience and Growth Plan for Armenia to support the new partnership established with Yerevan, in the form of grant assistance and investments leverage. I will work closely with Member States and the future Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration on the visa liberalisation dialogue with Armenia. With Azerbaijan, I propose to focus on energy security, connectivity, and

economic development, while continuing efforts to advance the agenda on human rights and the rule of law, together with the High Representative/Vice President. I will work with both Armenia and Azerbaijan to support the peace process, to promote stability and peace across the wider neighbourhood and to unlock closer cooperation on regional connectivity. I will also work closely with the High Representative/Vice President to develop a coherent Black Sea strategy under which I will take forward the implementation of key infrastructure projects to enhance the region's energy security and digital connectivity. Security challenges in the region, exacerbated by Russian military activities, must also be addressed. In all countries of the region, I will invest in civil society and I will also continue our support to Russian civil society, human rights defenders and independent media.

Together with the High Representative/Vice-President, I will also continue the re-engagement with Türkiye, which is a candidate country and a partner of the EU. Although accession negotiations are at standstill since 2018, it is of mutual interest to improve cooperation on political, economic and trade matters. This cooperation must be accompanied by constructive efforts on the part of Türkiye to address concerns related to the rule of law and fundamental rights, and to work towards reaching a settlement of the Cyprus problem, within the UN framework, in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded and its *acquis*.

Effective communication about both the benefits and challenges of enlargement is essential to sustain public support. As a former journalist, I believe strongly in the power of communication as a tool for positive change. I will spend the first weeks of my mandate taking stock of concerns about enlargement, which will in turn feed into the detailed communication strategy that I will develop, focusing on both our enlargement partners and EU Member States. I will engage closely with Member States to understand their citizens' specific concerns regarding enlargement, and I hope to count on the support of the European Parliament in bringing the voices of EU citizens into this debate.

At the same time, I am well aware of the ways communication is misused by those who wish to undermine the EU and what it stands for, and how enlargement policy is targeted in this context. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has also exposed the serious threats to our security and democracy. If confirmed, I will step up efforts linked to the Democracy Shield announced by President von der Leyen, supporting our partners in building resilience against disinformation and upholding democratic processes. This includes institutional cooperation, as well as supporting civil society, protecting journalists, and defending human rights.

4. Following the general guidance by the Commission President for strengthening the Commission's relationship with the European Parliament, could you please provide details on how you intend to:

- *proactively and effectively involve Parliament (as an integral player of "Team Europe") from the earliest stages in the processes of elaborating and developing your priorities and objectives;*
- *maintain regular exchanges of views in Plenary and with the Committee on Foreign Affairs; ensure 'structured dialogue' and your ad-hoc presence in the Committee at short notice in case of significant events or major developments; ensure your attendance at Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on CFSP/CSDP when relevant;*
- *ensure that the positions of Parliament are duly taken into account in proposals for legal acts and new or updated EU communications and strategies, and ensure that Parliament and notably its Committee on Foreign Affairs is in a systematic and timely manner informed of and consulted on such proposals and documents (including the enlargement package) and better synchronisation of Commission and Parliament's activities (for example through the systematic advance sharing of planned timelines for the release of official strategic documents, ministerial meetings and summits, proposals to open or close chapters in accession negotiations, proposals to open negotiations on international agreements, human rights dialogues, etc.);*
- *ensure that Parliament receives relevant information and documents on enlargement policy, including those shared with the Council, and that the Committee on Foreign Affairs is immediately and fully informed, in writing and orally, at all stages of accession negotiations and of negotiations of international agreements, and that Parliament's views are duly taken into consideration before negotiations start and throughout the process;*
- *ensure that pertinent and relevant non-public information is provided to Parliament during in-camera meetings;*
- *maintain and ensure further cooperation, coordination and efficiency of democracy support activities between the Commission and Parliament?*

In line with the guidance from the Commission President for strengthening the Commission's relationship with the European Parliament, if confirmed, I intend to proactively and effectively involve Parliament from the earliest

stages of elaborating and developing my priorities and objectives. I look forward to exchanging views regularly with the European Parliament on matters of my portfolio and will duly take them into consideration. I will also ensure timely information, and exchange with the Committee on Foreign Affairs and other relevant committees on strategies, annual reports, and other planned or ongoing initiatives during my mandate, with due consideration for the required level of confidentiality.

More specifically when it comes to enlargement, I will participate in the structured dialogues with the AFET Committee and any exchange of views on the Enlargement Package with the Committee directly after its adoption by the College., I will inform the European Parliament about my visits to the countries falling under my competence and will engage and share information with the AFET Committee and other relevant committees. Regular and transparent dialogue with the European Parliament is key for the public support to enlargement within the EU.

I will ensure that as part of the regular dialogues with the Parliament on the financing means under my responsibility, Parliament receives sufficiently detailed information on how funds are used. I will value your views on how instruments could be better implemented. I will also keep MEPs duly informed of all types of partnership arrangements with countries falling under my responsibility, in accordance with the principle of good and fair interinstitutional cooperation and existing rules, to ensure the respect of the Parliament's budgetary oversight capacity.

I will participate in the European Parliament's plenary debates, as well as in committees' meetings and in interinstitutional (trilogue) negotiations. I am also committed to working closely with the European Parliament and responding appropriately and in a timely manner to issues raised in its resolutions, taking into account the views expressed in the frameworks of our bilateral or multilateral relations with partners.

I will ensure that the Parliament is immediately and fully informed on the enlargement process and negotiations of international agreements. This would require that the necessary arrangements are made to ensure confidential treatment where necessary.

I stand ready to participate in relevant activities led by the Parliament, as appropriate. I am also keen to explore how we could reinforce synergies when it comes to our respective capacity-building activities such as the EP-organised Jean Monnet Dialogues, study visits, fellowships or parliamentary conferences and seminars with a view to exchanging parliamentary best practices, mediating and promoting dialogue in difficult situations. In addition, I am ready to explore how the interparliamentary delegations between the EP and partners, in particular enlargement countries, could help maintain momentum and focus on the necessary reforms.

5. The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029 underline that “accession to the EU will always be a merit-based process - and each candidate will be assessed on its own progress towards meeting the criteria”. How will you ensure robust and enhanced monitoring of the enlargement process based on reporting and assessment of the reforms and progress made by the candidate countries in all the negotiating chapters with a strategically applied targeted conditionality based on clear progress benchmarks, sanctioning regression on fundamental principles and values or persistent stagnation in reforms and rewarding reforms and fulfilment of benchmarks through clear negotiation timelines? As your mission letter states that you will work on the gradual integration of candidate countries, what concrete policy areas do you identify to be suitable for this purpose and what are in your view the main inter-institutional and policy-related reforms, which are necessary to make the accession of the enlargement countries a success? How do you plan to restore credibility of the EU enlargement process, particularly in the Western Balkans, and what specific measures will you take to ensure faster progress on long-awaited key reforms in this region?

My approach to enlargement will be guided by a clear vision: enlargement must both strengthen the Union and its future members. This means that future members must be well prepared and fully committed to their EU path, upholding the integrity of our values and the credibility of our processes. If confirmed, I am committed to working tirelessly with our enlargement partners, EU Member States, the European Parliament, and all stakeholders to make this vision a reality. I will firmly uphold the merit-based approach, ensuring that enlargement remains robust, credible, and grounded in clear progress. Each enlargement partner will continue to be assessed individually, based on its achievements in meeting EU criteria. This will be ensured through applying the comprehensive framework

in place, which includes transparent reporting, strategic conditionality, and clear progress benchmarks, as per the revised enlargement methodology.

The annual Enlargement Package will remain the primary tool for evaluating reforms across the fundamentals (including the rule of law) and all negotiating chapters and for making recommendations against which further progress is measured. The reports are essential for providing detailed, transparent insights into the progress each enlargement country is making.

To guarantee that reforms adopted by the enlargement countries are fully implemented, I will maximise the use of the rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at our disposal. These mechanisms include regular assessments of each candidate's alignment with the EU *acquis* and detailed reports on their performance in key areas. The critical focus will not just be on the adoption of laws, but on the demonstrated results of these reforms. We have all the tools prior to accession to ensure a proper track record on the rule of law, including the fight against corruption and serious and organised crime, as well as the respect of fundamental rights in practice not just law, and I will continue the work with my colleagues in the College and with the Council and the European Parliament to put safeguards in place so that progress is not reversed after accession. Any future Accession Treaty must be drafted with this objective in mind.

Furthermore, I want to ensure that the reforms undertaken by enlargement countries are sustained and irreversible. Building on lessons learnt from the previous enlargements, I stand ready to redouble efforts to support our enlargement partners to progress as fast as possible – and as fast as they wish to advance – on their respective EU paths. This means implementing the ‘more for more’ principle, whereby those who undertake the necessary reforms stand to reap the benefits of their efforts. The Growth Plan for the Western Balkans is a prime example of how we can help make this happen. Its accompanying Reform and Growth Facility will enable our partners to receive additional financial support conditional to the implementation of key reforms in the fundamental and socio-economic sectors. In parallel countries are reaping some of the benefits of integration into the EU’s Single Market prior to full accession to the EU through the roll out of the other parts of the Growth Plan. I will work to implement the first pillar of the Growth Plan, building on the substantial work already achieved and adding new areas in which the partners could have access to our internal market. Similar opportunities already exist in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. I intend to make full use of the potential of all existing instruments and prioritise those areas of gradual integration that bring tangible benefits to citizens and businesses within the EU as well as in enlargement countries. Immediate priority areas are reducing costs for roaming and payments and facilitating the trade of goods. Over the course of my mandate, if confirmed as Commissioner, I will explore further opportunities of gradual integration for our enlargement partners.

The need to ensure the sustainability and irreversibility of reforms is especially critical in the areas of justice, particularly as regards judicial independence and anti-corruption, where reforms must be consolidated and internalised to ensure a lasting impact. I am fully committed to keeping the fundamentals at the core of this. A key goal of EU enlargement is to firmly anchor the rule of law in our continent. The inclusion of the most advanced enlargement countries in the Commission’s Rule of Law Report aims at putting them on equal footing with Member States early on. It will support these countries’ reform efforts to achieve irreversible progress on democracy and the rule of law ahead of accession, and to guarantee lasting high standards after accession. This approach enables an extension to other enlargement countries in the future, as foreseen in the President’s political guidelines. This will also further feed into the accession process, including the enlargement reports and funding instruments. If confirmed, I will not hesitate to propose to Member States decisive and proportionate corrective measures for the enlargement countries in cases of any serious or prolonged stagnation or backsliding in reform implementation and meeting the requirements of the accession process.

A free and pluralistic media environment, as well as a vibrant and enabled civil society are essential for the rule of law. Civil society and independent media also play a critical role in monitoring the progress in the implementation of reforms, as well as the state of democracy, rule of law and human rights, holding governments to account when they fail to uphold EU values. If confirmed, I will ensure that capacity-building support continues to foster an enabling environment and supports these actors in playing their democratic role, and I will be firm in ensuring zero-tolerance to all forms of violence, intimidation or harassment of individuals, groups, civil society organisations, human rights defenders or journalists.

Regarding the main inter-institutional and policy related reforms, please be referred to the answers to question Nr. 9.

6. The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029 underline that “the rule of law and fundamental values will continue to be the cornerstones of the EU’s enlargement policy”. Considering that accession processes can take place in a reversible manner, and that the merit-based approach can also lead to the freezing of the accession negotiations, which concrete steps would you take in the event of backsliding on fundamental values and principles of the EU, notably as regards democracy, human rights, the rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary, pluralism of the media, and the fight against corruption?

The rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights values are the cornerstones of our enlargement policy. I am committed to upholding these values and, if confirmed as Commissioner, I will work closely with the European Parliament and the Council to ensure that they remain deeply ingrained in our approach. The fundamentals - including the rule of law, a well-functioning and independent judiciary, functioning of democratic institutions, fundamental rights, anti-corruption and human rights - are the backbone of the accession process. The so-called fundamentals cluster includes chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights and chapter 24 on justice, freedom, and security, which are the first to be opened during negotiations and the last to be closed. Progress in these areas determines the overall pace of negotiations, as per the 2020 revised enlargement methodology.

The accession process today is more rigorous and comprehensive than ever before. The successful anchoring of the rule of law and democratic values in the political and institutional setting, as well as the broader societal culture, requires wide-ranging institutional reforms but ultimately hinges on the political will and the ability to overcome institutional resistance to such reforms in our enlargement partners. To this end, I will prioritise a rigorous monitoring of compliance with the rule of law and democratic standards.

In this context, the annual Enlargement Package serves as the vital tool in assessing each candidate's progress in areas such as judicial independence, media pluralism, respect for human rights, the fight against corruption and serious and organised crime and gender equality. It allows us to address any signs of regression early and address them promptly. In identifying and addressing breaches of core values, the Enlargement Package provides a factual and fair assessment of progress - or lack thereof - and offers concrete recommendations to remedy shortcomings.

Additionally, in the event that a candidate country shows backsliding on fundamental values, the Negotiating Frameworks provide mechanisms for decisive and proportionate corrective measures. I will not hesitate to activate or recommend these measures if necessary and to discuss them with you. This could include freezing negotiations on specific chapters, delaying the opening of new chapters, or, in severe cases, suspending the entire negotiation process. Maintaining the integrity of the enlargement process is crucial, ensuring that countries cannot simply sign laws on paper while undermining democratic principles in practice. Concrete steps to that effect have been taken in the past, for instance in the context of the accession negotiations with Türkiye, where accession negotiations are at a standstill since 2018, or with Georgia where [the European Council of June 2024 stated that] the current course of action jeopardises Georgia’s EU path, de facto leading to a halt of the accession process. These mechanisms safeguard the integrity of the accession process. This does however not preclude that EU values and principles be further pursued with the candidate country through other avenues in the broader context of EU relations as outlined in the respective European Council Conclusions. This is how I intend to work.

At the same time, we need to reward progress to maintain the momentum of reform. Enlargement partners that achieve tangible milestones in meeting their benchmarks should advance in negotiations and I will support this approach. Financial and technical assistance will also be provided to further support their efforts. This performance-based approach enables candidate countries to benefit from increased EU support and more opportunities for gradual integration as they align with EU standards.

I will leverage these financial incentives to reinforce compliance with the rule of law. Already today, payments from performance-based instruments such as the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, the Ukraine Facility, and the proposed Growth Facility for Moldova are contingent on the successful implementation of agreed-upon reforms that are critical to strengthening democratic governance and the rule of law, and include the principle of non-reversibility of the reforms. By linking financial support to tangible progress, we can encourage enlargement partners to remain committed to these essential reforms.

7. With regard to the external financing instruments, how will you improve the consistency, efficiency and transparency of pre-accession assistance to the candidate and potential candidate countries, applying strict conditionality in the implementation of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, the Ukraine Facility and other similar instruments, and ensuring a genuine role of the European Parliament in the strategic

steering of the external financing instruments, including through the timely provision of written information on their implementation? Regarding the Commission proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, what is your position on the need to keep a dedicated instrument for pre-accession? How will you ensure that these investments positively strengthen the presence and image of the EU in the beneficiary countries, and what specific strategies will you implement to enhance the EU's visibility and impact through pre-accession assistance?

Enlargement has been identified as a priority of the coming mandate.

I believe that the link between financing and reforms by our partners as in the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, the proposed Moldova Facility, and the Ukraine Facility, should be considered for future financing for pre-accession and Eastern neighbourhood together with other financing modalities. Support must be scalable and sufficiently flexible to cater for unforeseen developments, including the possibility to withhold or reorient funds in case of backsliding, or increase funding levels for those that undertake more, or particularly difficult reforms. For Ukraine, given the ongoing uncertainty around the duration and intensity of the war, this must include delivering stable, predictable, and flexible assistance in a sustainable manner, and factoring in needs linked to recovery and reconstruction.

Under the current Multiannual Financial Framework, the EU budget will continue to play a key role in this process, and we will maximise the impact of our support to enlargement partners through the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, the Growth Plan for Moldova, the Türkiye Investment Platform and the Ukraine Facility to accelerate the partners' economic convergence with the EU and its Single Market, while developing the right standards and processes required to absorb EU funds and put the EU *acquis* in practice. I am committed to further strengthening these ties, including stepping up capacity building for the national administrations to manage effectively and efficiently EU funds.

Looking ahead to the next Multiannual Financial Framework, I will prioritise close collaboration with the Commissioner for Budget and the High Representative/Vice-President to comprehensively revamp our external action financing, making it more impactful, targeted, and aligned with EU strategic interests. Concretely, I will work with our partners to prepare them for accession, incentivising and supporting the structural reforms needed. If confirmed, I will make sure that the specific priorities and features of pre-accession funding are duly considered.

The impact of enlargement on the EU budget is another crucial aspect to consider. It will be covered in the upcoming pre-enlargement policy reviews, as well as in the course of the accession negotiations. The widening of our Union will amplify the need for a modernised, simpler, and more flexible EU budget, capable of adapting to the diverse needs of its current and new members. Enlargement is thus an additional reason – though not the trigger – to review thoroughly our EU budget, to ensure it will support our current and future policy objectives.

The European Parliament already plays a crucial role in the strategic oversight of our external financing instruments, including through dedicated dialogues on the instrument for pre-accession (IPA III), the Western Balkans Reform and Growth Facility and the Ukraine Facility.

Visibility is key to maximizing the impact of the EU's pre-accession assistance and to strengthening the EU image in the beneficiary countries. Activities and investments deployed through the EU's financing instruments must be properly labelled and duly communicated as such to the citizens and stakeholders, both through the authorities of the beneficiary countries and the EU in order to reach broader audience in enlargement countries. This will become an integral part of the communication strategy as stated in my Mission letter. In addition, it is important to maintain a regular dialogue with representatives of civil society, notably through their consultation on decision making processes as happened in the preparation of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine Facility and Growth Plan for Moldova.

Question from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

8. Your mission statement foresees that a special emphasis will be put on rule of law and fundamental values in your action and that you will contribute to the annual Rule of Law report for accession countries. How do you plan to ensure that the accession countries follow up on the issues identified in the annual Rule of law report? Do you envisage including specific benchmarks in the relevant negotiation chapters? How do you plan to engage with the Parliament in this process and how you will cooperate with the other Commissioners with competences in this area?

I strongly believe that strengthening the rule of law and protecting fundamental values are at the heart of the accession process. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will use all available instruments to make sure this guiding principle is respected. This includes making full use of the conditionalities and incentives under the accession negotiations, the financing instruments such as the Facilities for Ukraine, the Western Balkans and, provided the co-legislators support the adoption of the proposed Facility, for Moldova.

The inclusion of Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia in the 2024 Rule of Law reports aims to increase involvement of candidate countries in existing EU processes, putting them on equal footing with Member States early on. The country chapters provide a comprehensive overview of each country's progress and challenges, in the same way as for EU Member States.

Including candidate countries in the Commission's rule of law report further supports their respective reform efforts to meet recommendations set in the Enlargement Package and help them achieve sustainable and irreversible progress on democracy and the rule of law ahead of accession, and to guarantee that lasting high standards can be maintained also after accession. In line with the President's political guidelines, I will work with the Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Justice to include other enlargement partners in the Rule of Law Report as and when they are ready.

The annual Enlargement Package remains the main Commission instrument for assessing the state of play and progress of reforms in the fundamentals of the enlargement process, including the rule of law and fundamental rights. This is also where the Commission's recommendations are set out for all areas. The enlargement process needs to be guided by a single, consistent set of recommendations. For this reason, the Rule of Law report does not contain recommendations for enlargement countries.

I intend to prioritise progress in upholding the rule of law in my engagement with candidate and potential candidate countries. In line with the accession methodology, Negotiating Frameworks provide that negotiations on the fundamentals' cluster are opened first and closed last, with specific opening and interim benchmarks for the rule of law chapters. I will work to ensure robust and fair benchmarks are set in the process, to support the negotiating countries in addressing these benchmarks and to ensure the Commission provides prompt assessments once the necessary progress has been achieved. I will only recommend moving forward in the negotiations with each country based on tangible and continuous progress on the rule of law.

I will closely collaborate with the other Commissioners with competences in this area, in particular the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and Rule of Law, to ensure that the EU's enlargement policy is consistent and effective in promoting the rule of law and fundamental values. As previously stated, I will engage closely with the European Parliament on the annual Enlargement Package and I stand ready to exchange with MEPs.

Question from the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

9. Building on European Parliament resolution of 29 February 2024 on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement, do you concur that significant inter-institutional reform of the EU is needed in light of this challenge? Which concrete measures do you intend to propose in order to undertake the institutional reforms necessary to ensure that an enlarged Union is able to function efficiently and has the adequate capacity to absorb new members and to promote their successful integration? How would you coordinate with the rest of Commissioners and Commission President to ensure that the revision and amendment of the Treaties ensure a smooth enlargement process?

Which reforms in your opinion can be pursued without Treaty change in the next five years?

Do you agree to move away from unanimity in order to have more effective decision-making procedures, and that qualified majority voting should be implemented in areas such as the intermediate steps in the enlargement process, the protection of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the MFF, sanctions and other relevant foreign policy decisions?

Would you support a stronger and more effective decision-making of the EU's enlargement policy, including oversight by the EP, in order to increase democratic legitimacy and accountability?

Successive enlargements have strengthened the EU and brought significant benefits to both old and new Member States. I will ensure that only candidates that are truly ready and unconditionally committed to respecting the values on which the EU is built will accede.

We also need an ambitious internal reform agenda to ensure the proper functioning of a larger Union. Both the EU and future Member States should be ready at the time of accession of new members. The EU must deepen while it widens. We should work on both tracks in parallel. Questions around the EU's capacity to act exist already in a Union of 27 Member States and are not only related to future enlargements.

Enlargement should in fact be considered as a catalyst for progress in terms of our capacity to act, our policies and our spending programs. The question of which reforms are needed, and at what point in time, will have to be considered taking into account this broader context, beyond the scope of the Enlargement portfolio alone.

The pre-enlargement policy reviews that the Commission will carry out will help to identify gaps and needs, ie where changes are needed, to ensure our policies can continue delivering effectively in a larger Union.

As stated in the Political guidelines, we need a Treaty change where it can improve our Union. But we should also focus on what can already be done now and those areas where a broad consensus is emerging. For instance, the Treaties already foresee 'passerelle clauses' allowing for a shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting within the Council in key policy areas. The Commission continues to be a strong advocate for the activation of these clauses.

As regards the enlargement process itself, the need for unanimity for admitting a new Member State is well understood and fully justified. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the requirement of unanimity for every step in the process can slow things down if even just one Member State objects. I am ready to contribute to the reflection on how procedures and processes could possibly be adjusted and sped up for some of the intermediate steps in the enlargement process, while respecting the prerogatives of the Member States.

I will collaborate closely with the President and my fellow Commissioners to ensure that the institutional reforms necessary for enlargement align with the broader priorities of the EU. Strengthening inter-institutional cooperation—especially between the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council—will be essential, and I am committed to advancing these efforts.

Finally, as already outlined above, I see an important role for the public and for civil society in ensuring that the Union is prepared for enlargement. Here I intend to put a strong focus on communicating clearly and transparently about developments related to enlargement and listening to the voices of people across the EU and in the enlargement partners themselves.

Question from the Subcommittee on Human Rights

10. Do you intend to step up the support of the European Union to the actors of civil society and democratic forces which promote human rights, rule of law and fundamental values in the enlargement countries and other countries falling under your portfolio? Which concrete measures do you propose to put in place in this respect?

As demonstrated through my personal history, which includes civic activism, this issue is especially close to my heart. Civil society is at the core of every healthy democracy, and I am personally dedicated to doing what I can, if confirmed as Commissioner, to empower these essential actors at every level. Already today, the Commission actively facilitates capacity-building initiatives and provides financial support to civil society organisations, enhancing their ability to advocate for legal reforms, engage in policymaking, and hold authorities accountable. For example, I would highlight Pillar III of the Ukraine Facility, through which the Commission will ensure continuous support for human rights defenders, anti-corruption fighters and other bottom-up initiatives from the country's vibrant and active civil society, now also with an added focus on the EU accession process of Ukraine.

If confirmed, I intend to step up this engagement with civil society to ensure a safe and enabling environment where these organisations can operate without undue restrictions. Where they cannot, the EU still needs to find ways of supporting them that will not endanger their lives or livelihoods. We owe it to those who bravely uphold the EU flag, even at great personal risk. As such, continuous engagement with civil society, independent media, and human rights defenders will be my focus to ensure that their voices are heard, and their concerns are addressed. Technical and capacity-building support under our financing instruments must also benefit civil society in all enlargement and Eastern neighbourhood countries.

Freedom of expression and media freedom are part of the essential foundations of a democratic society and as such, one of the EU's fundamental values. They are therefore a crucial element of the EU accession process and an important interim benchmark to be fulfilled under the rule of law chapters of the accession negotiations. During my visits to the enlargement and Eastern Partnership countries, I am committed to meet with representatives of civil society and non-governmental organisations in various fields, including organisations covering women's rights, and those representing marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, minorities and LGBTIQ persons.

I will also continue to engage with partner governments through political dialogue, including on human rights, even in difficult political environments. In countries where the space for civil society is shrinking, EU Delegations on the ground continue to monitor the situation and can distinguish between independent and state-captured civil society and media organisations. I will also draw on work done by reputable organisations and partners such as the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in promoting civic activism and democratic engagement in complex environments.

I will make sure that our financial assistance complies with EU values, including the promotion of human rights, democracy, rule of law and fundamental. Consultation of concerned stakeholder and application of the 'do no harm' principle will continue to guide our interventions. This allows the Commission to build EU interventions in line with fundamental values, and to address potential violations of human rights.