

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Teresa RIBERA****Executive Vice-President for the Clean, Just and Competitive
Transition****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?

I have been committed to the promotion of the European common good all along my professional career, mostly as a public servant. I am convinced of the importance of aligning economic and environmental policies to provide social benefits, economic prosperity and competitiveness gains and environmental stewardship. Ensuring a sound and effective transformation in the economy requires a broad support from the society based on dialogue and broad consensus.

Indeed, as Spain's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Ecological Transition; as Secretary of State for the Environment; and as Director General of the Spanish Climate Change Office, I have devoted my energy to building bridges between different views and expectations to ensure progress and to move forward. I have dedicated my efforts to dissolving blockages, aligning positions, interweaving multiple variables and seeking solutions conceived from a holistic perspective.

The active involvement in climate negotiations allowed me to learn that complex challenges require a multi-dimensional approach and the integration of different disciplines (energy, climate, environment, industry, finance...). The experience as Director of the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) allowed me to provide intellectual contributions to articulate the well-balanced climate deal the international community achieved in Paris in 2015.

I have come to appreciate the significance of forging and nurturing robust agreements and the importance of acknowledging our interdependencies. Most importantly, I have recognized that the individuals most impacted by policies must invariably be included in the decision-making process. The transition towards a new industrial and economic model requires new approaches and a particular attention to those being affected the most.

The challenges we face today and the one we need to anticipate paving the way for the future cannot be addressed in silos, as all these realities are interconnected. Therefore, I believe that EU commissioners must work as a single team, with a common strategic approach based on balance and consensus.

As a European Commissioner, I will implement the political guidelines 2024-2029 of the President-elect based on the strong conviction that has informed my professional and political career: building bridges and fostering dialogue, is the most appropriate means to achieve the goals we set.

I believe that these skills are especially useful in the current situation where we need to be even more united to address EU's challenges, in a context of great global competition, to find the best ways to improve the

competitiveness of our industry, a well-functioning market and a committed action to provide the right answers to citizens' expectations according to our values.

As the reports from Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi highlighted, in order to be successful in the current global environment, we need a well-functioning single market to boost prosperity, protect the consumers and build an appealing ecosystem for investment, innovation, clean industry and employment to compete globally.

As a European Commissioner, I will also be firm on gender parity policies. I pledge that my teams will respect this principle and that I will work to address inequalities between men and women. I am committed to ensuring with fellow Members of the College that equality mainstreaming is central to our clean, just and competitive transition.

I am committed to working with my fellow Commissioners to ensure that the EU's promise of prosperity is delivered to our younger generations. We owe it to present and future generations to contribute to a healthy planet. We therefore need to further integrate an intergenerational fairness dimension into our policies to leave no one behind, including in areas like skills and housing. I am also committed to ensuring the same standards across the European Union on animal welfare, as well as their consistent implementation while addressing sustainability, ethical, scientific, and economic considerations, and consumer expectations. Internationally, we need to continue to promote high global standards.

There are no conflicts between my personal and professional trajectories and the responsibilities I would assume as European Commissioner. I have no private interests in either the financial or the corporate world. I am fully aware of the responsibility I am taking on, and there is and will be nothing in my path that will divert me from the principle of neutrality. My full commitment would be to the common good of European citizens. If a situation of potential conflict of interests in the performance of my duties as a Commissioner will arise in the future, I will inform President von der Leyen without delay.

I am a disciplined and respectful person, aware and committed to the goals and competences outlined in the EU Treaties. I do and will maintain confidentiality with diligence and independence throughout my career. I would pledge allegiance to the defence and implementation of EU Treaties and act from a position of neutrality and independence from the interest of individual Member States, including the one that has proposed my nomination.

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?

I pledge to keep the European Parliament continuously informed about the areas under my responsibility. If confirmed, I will ensure that this approach is followed consistently across my portfolio, in close cooperation with other Members of the College and the relevant services, in particular with the Commissioners in the 'Clean, just and competitive transition' cluster, to ensure transparency and information flow with the Parliament.

I will take responsibility and be accountable for the decisions made by the Commission as a College. Most importantly, I will do so with respect for the citizens in Europe. I will visit Member States regularly, including areas beyond their capitals.

Together, we need to work faster and further for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. We must strive for a clean, just and competitive transition that benefits all citizens, ensuring that markets work better for European consumers and businesses. This requires using all available instruments in full respect of the EU Treaties in a coherent and coordinated manner.

Competition policy, alongside other relevant EU and national policy tools, will play an important role. By ensuring fair conditions and a level playing field in the Single Market, it contributes to lower prices, faster innovation, and a more resilient economy. This helps to make Europe more competitive in the global economy, in particular in the more innovative sectors and supports the EU in the transition towards climate neutrality. The same is true of the

just transition: relying on competitive markets will help us achieve our goals more quickly, more fairly and more efficiently, leaving no one and no place behind.

I will work closely together with the European Parliament and engage in an open, structured dialogue, based on mutual trust. I will be transparent about the policy rationale, economic background and overall thinking behind our rules and our decisions. In this context, I commit to regularly participating in committee meetings and plenary exchanges on topics within my portfolio, as well as to personally taking part in important trilogue negotiations.

Together with my services, I will be open to participate in informal discussions with Members through Committee Working Groups and Open Coordinators' Meetings, organised by relevant Committees' secretariat as well as have bilateral dialogues with Members of the European Parliament.

I would continue to use all available means to keep stakeholders and the public informed and engaged. Any significant policy proposal will be subject to a public consultation.

I am confident that we will work together in an atmosphere of full mutual trust. You can count on me.

President-elect von der Leyen committed that her Commission will follow-up on Parliamentary resolutions. I fully subscribe to this objective. To this end, I will organise, where relevant, a structured dialogue with you, to discuss how to take forward any Article 225 resolution falling under my remit that your institution may adopt, and will make sure that the Commission responds to such resolutions within 3 months of their adoption.

Questions from the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

State aid

3. You are tasked to develop a new State-aid framework as part of the Clean Industrial deal. How do you intend to find the right balance between supporting industrial policy, maintaining fair competition and a level playing field? Do you recognise risks of fragmentation of the single market emerging from the diverging fiscal space of Member States? What safeguards do you see to prevent market distortions and economies with less fiscal capacities?

In line with the Treaties, State aid should be targeted at market failures and avoid overcompensation, crowding out private financing and other undue competition distortions in the Single Market. As Executive Vice-President, I will enforce these principles, ensuring equal treatment of all Member States. I am fully committed to a level playing field in the European Union, which is a basis for a clean, just and competitive transition. In recent years, State aid policy has enabled the European economy and its businesses to cope with successive crises. It has also evolved considerably to align with the EU's policy objectives, including enabling the green and digital transitions and resilience.

On this basis, in the last mandate, the Commission approved over EUR 450 billion in energy and environmental aid by Member States in addition to around EUR 800 billion in State aid in the context of the energy crisis. Existing State aid rules already provide numerous possibilities to support the greening and decarbonisation of the EU economy widely used by Member States. Now we need to go faster and further in our enforcement to achieve our common goals.

Addressing the decarbonisation challenge requires the EU to act together, leveraging collective resources and European value chains to foster economies of scale for a cost-efficient and innovation-driven and fair transition. I am convinced that the Single Market is Europe's best asset. We cannot afford subsidy races between Member States, with larger and richer Member States undercutting smaller, less wealthy ones. We need to promote sustainable industrial ecosystems for the benefit of the whole EU, and we must continue to foster the economic development of less developed areas in the EU by providing incentives for productive investments promoting European cohesion.

Simplifying and speeding up State aid assessment procedures will also be a priority. We cannot afford to delay public support for the energy transition or measures to decarbonise the European industry and enable its competitiveness. In this spirit, and as part of my mission letter, I will develop a new State aid control framework to enable Member States to provide swift and effective State aid as part of the Clean Industrial Deal. This framework will draw on the experience of the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework and be based on the

following objectives: i) accelerating further the roll-out of renewable energy generation; ii) deploying industrial decarbonisation and energy efficiency, in particular for energy-intensive sectors, and iii) ensuring sufficient manufacturing capacity for clean tech in Europe, especially where there is a risk of such investments being diverted to third countries due to subsidies available there. In doing so, I will ensure that cohesion objectives and the integrity of the Single Market are preserved.

Mergers

4. What changes might the 'new approach to competition policy' involve, and how can it be better aligned with industrial policy? Are you satisfied with the current state of play of the application of the Merger Regulation? Would you be in favour of Commission's possibilities to also look into mergers below the notification threshold? How will you protect our EU innovators from killer acquisitions or acquisitions of EU based undertakings by foreign-based state-owned enterprises supported and subsidised by their governments in ways that the EU single market rules prohibit for EU entities?

In the past mandate, much work has already been done to make sure that all competition instruments (merger, antitrust and State aid control) are geared to protect fair competition and aligned with the objectives of a green, digital, and resilient EU economy. The Commission added new instruments to tackle emerging challenges in the Single Market, in particular digital gatekeepers (the Digital Markets Act) and the distortive effects of foreign subsidies (the Foreign Subsidies Regulation). But the challenges the EU economy is facing call for more action. These new instruments need to be fully implemented. Competition and other policies, like industrial, trade or budgetary policy, have a complementary role in fostering long-term competitiveness and economic growth. As recognised in the Draghi report, there is no competitiveness without effective competition in a market economy. The proper enforcement of competition policy should lead to more innovation and can ensure that the European industrial policy is more efficient and effective by helping to set the right incentives.

If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, in line with the Political Guidelines of President Von der Leyen and my mission letter, I will further modernise competition policy, by focusing on three overall key objectives.

First, I will significantly simplify and speed up processes to be effective in the current dynamic environment. We cannot afford delaying necessary public support for the energy transition leading to lower prices or measures to decarbonise the European industry that enable them to stay globally competitive. Here, we need to further simplify the conditions to approve State aid. Similarly, we cannot afford unduly long antitrust investigations during which companies continue to benefit from their anticompetitive practices. We need to become more effective by assessing what the features should be of a possible update of the procedural rules, based on the ongoing evaluation of the procedural framework for antitrust investigations. This is an exercise the European Parliament should continue to be closely involved in of course. Finally, we need to make sure that we are agile enough to enforce competition policy in the current digital reality. The digital transition is central to reigniting productivity growth in Europe and timely action to maintain open and well-functioning markets is key to both for new digital players and for the diffusion of digital solutions throughout our economy.

Second, I will strengthen and better target competition enforcement. For example, I will make sure that competition rules are vigorously enforced and that our actions are focused on the most distortive aid measures or business practices. Conversely, I will provide upfront guidance and cut red tape for Member States to implement unproblematic public measures and help enable pro-competitive cooperation between businesses. Similarly, I will push for a vigorous enforcement of the DMA, shaping the Commission policy concerning this important new instrument, in order to deliver concrete results for European business and end users.

Third, I will ensure a further effective alignment of competition policy with the EU's priorities. This of course includes contributing to the Clean Industrial Deal for a sustainable and competitive European economy and deepening our Single Market. It also includes promoting investments by working with other Members of the College to align the criteria that enable combining private, EU and national funding in the most efficient manner.

Specifically with regard to merger control, the EU has traditionally taken a favourable view towards market consolidation and the benefits it can provide – with the clear exception of when consolidation significantly impedes effective competition, in particular because it leads to excessive market power, which can harm the whole EU economy, including SMEs and of course consumers. While this basic objective of impeding excessive accumulation of market power must remain in place, EU merger control must continue to evolve to capture contemporary needs and dynamics like globalisation, digitalisation, sustainability, innovation and resilience. Changes in efficient scale for investment-intensive activities, or in the geographic scope of operations of rival

firms, should be taken into account. Regard should be had to the willingness of customers over time to consider novel suppliers which have developed products in other regions, or to attach value to more trusted and reliable local suppliers. Continuous adaptation is necessary for EU merger control enforcement to remain a key facilitator to the competitiveness of EU companies in full respect of the Treaties, including when they operate in global markets or when global players start to penetrate European markets. While such evolutions take place to a significant extent through the decisional practice, it is essential that the underpinning legal framework remains modern and fit for purpose.

I am therefore committed to delivering on the task in my mission letter of modernising competition policy specifically for merger control, by engaging in a review of the Horizontal Merger Guidelines in line with my mission letter. My aim is to ensure that merger control gives the right weight to the EU economy's needs and reflects overall policy objectives and market realities, including possible efficiencies. This would be a review with innovation, investment, and resilience among the core drivers.

In parallel, I am determined to swiftly find the best way to ensure that 'killer acquisitions' of target companies with low or no turnover but with high competitive and innovative potential do not escape scrutiny under EU merger rules, just because they do not meet the turnover-based notification thresholds. This is key to protect innovation and future competitiveness in the EU. To this end, I will look into all options without creating any unnecessary additional administrative burden or legal uncertainty for companies.

Separately, I will rigorously enforce the Foreign Subsidies Regulation to protect the Single Market from distortive subsidies by non-European countries, specifically the part of that legislation that applies to concentrations. In doing so, I will strongly push for a global level playing field for European companies, alongside other Members of the College and Member States responsible for other tools such as foreign direct investment screening and trade defence instruments.

Draghi report

5. Will you take steps to develop a 'New Competition Tool', as proposed in the Draghi report, to address structural competition problems, paying particular attention to sensitive categories of consumers? Which other competition proposals in the Letta and Draghi Reports would you support being implemented? What should be the role of competition policy to address inflationary dynamics?

Both the Letta and Draghi reports emphasise the importance for the EU's competitiveness of deepening the Single Market by fostering competition and maintaining a level playing field. I fully support the pressing goal of deepening the Single Market, including on key strategic sectors, to gain scale. And I very much agree that undermining competition rules also undermines the drivers of growth, investment and European competitiveness. If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will focus on modernising and strengthening competition enforcement, in line with my mission letter and giving careful consideration also to the recommendations of both reports.

The proposal for a 'New Competition Tool' from Professor Draghi's report draws attention to structural problems in certain markets that may give rise to concerns, as regards e.g. tacit collusion, consumer vulnerability or excessive dependencies, without entailing a clear infringement of competition rules. I believe that it merits an in-depth reflection on how a new market study and investigation mechanism could identify such problems in specific areas, and how it could usefully resolve them in a resource-efficient way, in cooperation with relevant market operators and in complement to the existing tools of EU and national competition law, as recently reinforced by the Digital Markets Act and the Foreign Subsidies Regulation. The benchmark for any 'New Competition Tool' should be that it can effectively deliver and neither weakens enforcement against infringements of existing competition rules nor materially weakens predictability for businesses.

Finally, although competition enforcement is not as such an anti-inflation tool, and cannot directly tackle inflation drivers such as scarcity or demand surges, it can ensure that market operators do not take advantage of shock situations to increase prices above competitive levels or to keep prices artificially high when the market circumstances return to normal, and prices should have decreased again. By fostering competitive and contestable markets, EU competition policy can help prevent price increases or facilitate price decreases. This is of relevance in key markets that are threatened by overdependence on one or very few suppliers. If confirmed in my role, I intend to give full attention to such situations.

Questions from the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

6. What concrete steps will you take to ensure the full and timely implementation of the environmental acquis and the Green Deal, in particular in relation to the Fit for 55 legislation? How will you implement this task “in the simplest, fairest way and in dialogue with all stakeholders” as stated in your mission letter, while ensuring competitiveness, also considering the specific situation of SMEs, and ensuring a just transition? Which remaining gaps and which regulatory inconsistencies or overlaps do you still see in the European Green Deal and related policies, and what concrete actions will you take to address these?

During the last mandate, the Commission put forward an unprecedented legal framework to set the EU on the course to climate neutrality by 2050. Adopting such an ambitious framework, in the context of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of war in Ukraine is a testament to the European commitment to becoming the first climate neutral continent. If confirmed, I will work closely with the relevant Members of College to regularly monitor the implementation to ensure we deliver on the set objectives. This will be complemented with implementation dialogues building on good experience so far talking to stakeholders in a value chain approach, including regions and local communities and finance and social partners. Where needed, we can prepare guidance, and enforcement actions where appropriate. I intend to cooperate closely with the Commissioner for Economy, Productivity, Implementation and Simplification, supervising the stress-tests of the EU acquis in the area of my responsibility. In this context, we will be engaging with stakeholders to identify gaps, inconsistencies, and unnecessary regulatory burden.

I will work closely with Member States in the finalisation and implementation of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), which are central to realising the Fit for 55 targets on the ground, pointing at gaps in the implementation of the framework by the Member States.

For environmental policies, I will engage with Member States and other stakeholders to identify the key areas that require structural reforms to remedy persistent non-compliance. I will listen to Member States, regions, citizens and businesses to build trust and ensure that laws produce results for the citizens. I will seek measures to strengthen administrative capacity at all levels – national, regional and local – and support those in charge of implementation to learn from each other’s experiences. Even though prevention is better than cure, working with the relevant Commissioners, we will not hesitate to also use infringement procedures. We will focus on structural and systemic problems of non-compliance where the Commission enforcement action has most added value. In particular, we will make sure that the EU Directives are transposed fully and correctly.

Furthermore, if confirmed I will pay particular attention to upcoming implementing and delegated legislation. Avoiding unnecessary administrative burden, respecting the ‘report once only’ principle and not duplicating reporting requirements will be key points to monitor. Simplification means improving European policies and delivering policy goals in the least burdensome and most cost-effective way possible, which requires mutually supportive and coherent policies. Needless to say, new acts should shine as examples for simple, fast and effective legislation.

To achieve the 2030 climate and environment goals, I will work hand-in-hand with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy and Commissioners working under my guidance to put forward selected new proposals and initiatives, including those related to the Clean Industrial Deal, the Circular Economy Act, the Decarbonisation Accelerator Act, the Chemical Industry package and nature credits to name a few.

7. Which specific actions will you propose to ensure a coherent approach towards a Clean, Just and Competitive transition, and how do you see the links between these three aspects of your portfolio? What specific new actions do you plan to propose as an enabling framework to support the achievement of the climate targets, including as part of the Clean Industrial Deal and covering all sectors of the economy? How do you plan to create a more streamlined and supportive regulatory and investment environment to encourage climate-friendly investment and innovation, and the uptake of clean technologies, ensuring a just transition for all? What kind of measures will you propose to mobilise the necessary investments for this transition, including for SMEs, to support all involved stakeholders, in particular businesses, workers and households? What is your position on the targeted amendment of the regulation setting CO2 emissions performance standards for cars and vans?

The green transition offers significant growth opportunities for the European economy and the EU has shown that GDP can increase while CO2 emissions decrease. However, this transition also presents challenges and uncertainties for many sectors and workers. If confirmed, I will collaborate with Executive Vice-President for People, Skills, and Preparedness to ensure our initiatives are well aligned and that relevant Commission services

work hand-in-hand to make Europe's clean transition successful, leaving no one and no place behind. In line with its legal objectives, the implementation of the Social Climate Fund should support the most vulnerable.

As regards the Clean Industrial Deal to strengthen the EU industry's competitiveness and speed up Europe's decarbonisation, I intend to work with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy. The Clean Industrial Deal needs to be comprehensive and unify EU's tools for prosperity, competitiveness, decarbonisation, and social fairness, building synergies among them. The Clean Industrial Deal will focus on strengthening the business case for decarbonisation and supporting industry in its efforts to innovate and scale up. It will present a set of initiatives aimed, but not only, at simplifying administrative processes to decarbonise industry, establishing a framework to develop lead markets, and mobilising private funding for the transition. Adequately manage the social impact of the decarbonisation with two components: just transition (territorial/regional level) and fair transition (wider distributional issues of climate policy). We will develop an Action Plan on affordable energy prices for companies and households, looking at all components of energy prices (including clean and energy taxation and financial markets for energy commodities), to address one of the EU's key competitive disadvantages, as well as an industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act focusing on energy-intensive industries. This Act will support the development, production and diffusion of European clean tech in industry and will speed up planning, tendering and permitting processes, in particular for the transition of energy-intensive industries. Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships will strengthen our relationships with partner countries for mutual benefit. This will create a framework conducive to making the right investment decisions to achieve the EU's climate targets. In line with my mission letter, and as set out in my reply to question 3, I will also develop a new State aid framework to enable Member States to provide swift and effective State aid, while avoiding overcompensation, crowding out private financing and other undue competition distortions in the Single Market. The Clean Industrial Deal should create the right conditions for (i) turning our decarbonisation strategy into a source of growth and quality jobs, (ii) helping companies to be competitive globally in clean tech sectors and (iii) citizens to benefit from the transition. A European industrial policy requires social dialogue and co-responsibility of businesses.

Member States hold the foundations for a highly competitive EU economy but addressing the decarbonisation challenge requires the EU to act together and not as 27 separate Member States, leveraging collective capacities to achieve economy of scale, innovation and make the transition cost efficient.

As outlined in my reply to question 5, I will also work closely with Member States to ensure they finalise their National Energy and Climate Plans as soon as possible. They will feed into the proposal for a 2040 climate target.

The implementation of the existing legal framework will require a significant contribution from private funds. I will work within the College to develop the most cost-efficient combination of private, national and Union funds for a higher impact to achieve the required decarbonisation. The Commission will also put forward a new European Competitiveness Fund to ensure that we invest in the innovation and technologies that will shape our economy and drive our transitions, including the green transition. In line with the mission letter, this should be linked to and support the Important Projects of Common Interest (IPCEIs).

When it comes to the regulation setting CO₂ emissions performance standards for cars and vans, it is a key part of the EU delivering on its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 and the climate-neutrality objective by 2050. Ambitious policies are required to ensure a swift and sufficient decrease in emissions from all sectors, including transport. In this context, the CO₂ emission performance standards for new cars and vans set clear targets from 2030 onwards, and a 100% reduction target from 2035 onwards. Electrification and clean fuels must be available. As stated in the Political Guidelines: *"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"*. This is also emphasised in the mission letter to the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth.

8. How will you ensure effective coordination with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, as well as the Commissioners working under your guidance, to fulfil the tasks mentioned in your mission letter? Which concrete initiatives will you propose in relation to the 2040 climate target, environment, clean

circular economy, and just transition? How will you ensure coherence between the clean transition and achieving the climate and biodiversity targets on the one hand, and competition policy on the other?

If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will ensure effective coordination with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, as well as the relevant Commissioners, to fulfill the tasks mentioned in my mission letter. To achieve this, I will establish regular meetings with the Commissioners and staff to track progress, align objectives, and foster cooperation, leveraging the expertise of Commission services. I will also hold regular dialogues with stakeholders, from industry to local authorities, and from finance to consumers, to assess progress. I will seek a close and trusted partnership with the European Parliament and its relevant committees and members, as well as with Council and Member States, all of whom need to work together.

Regarding the 2040 climate target, which is addressed in more detail in my reply to question 9, I will rely on the findings of the detailed Impact Assessment accompanying the Communication on the recommended 2040 climate target. This assessment highlights the need for all sectors to contribute to the 2040 climate target in a balanced and cost-efficient way. However, the pace of decarbonisation in each sector depends on the availability of carbon-free solutions

To deliver the pathway to climate neutrality and the Clean Industrial Deal, I – will work with other Members of College to ensure coherence between policies, including clean energy access, funding opportunities, lead market creation, trade policy, competition policy, circular economy policies, as well as climate and taxation policies.

The Circular Economy Act will also be a key component of our efforts to decarbonise the economy and support industrial competitiveness. This act will promote a more sustainable pattern of production by making secondary materials more attractive. Following our success in decoupling economic growth from emissions, we must now decouple it from the use of primary resources. The promotion of circularity will also extend to the development of a regulatory framework to boost a more circular use of carbon, generating carbon removals and reusing carbon in the EU's economy in a sustainable way.

I intend to work with Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy on The Chemicals Industry package to ensure simplification and more speedy procedures

I will also coordinate the work on the Water Resilience Strategy to enhance water resilience across the EU territory and across different economic sectors. A key focus will be on accessibility of clean water for all as part of the just transition agenda, as well as water efficiency and competitiveness of water related industries.

As regards land management, a holistic vision can deliver on climate mitigation as well as on creating a more climate resilient agriculture, improving yield resilience, enhancing biodiversity and boosting soil health. This vision also aims to further integrate the EU bioeconomy into circularity.

As outlined in my reply to question 16, only healthy and resilient forests will be able to produce the biomass needed in a climate-neutral economy, and to deliver at the same time the indispensable ecosystem services, such as carbon removals and biodiversity. Under the Carbon Removal Certification Framework, will work with my colleagues to develop methodologies to recognise sustainable uses of biomass, and to integrate these initiatives into the development of the Bioeconomy Strategy.

Finally, extreme heat, drought, wildfires, and other violent weather events are amplified by climate change and will become more frequent and destructive. Not factoring this into our policy choices will undermine competitiveness and harm social cohesion. This is why I will work with the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth on a new European Climate Adaptation Plan to protect critical transport and supply chain infrastructure, as well as natural capital inputs from climate risks.

A key part of my responsibilities if confirmed as Executive Vice-President will be to combine climate and biodiversity objectives with competitiveness. This requires predictability for doing business in Europe and beyond, a strategic approach, support and market-based incentives, as indicated in my reply to question 7.

As to coherence with competition policy: First of all, let me underline that I am committed, in accordance with the EU Treaties, to an independent and impartial handling of individual competition cases, in full respect of the integrity and confidentiality of the investigations. That said, competition policy is, of course, part of the tools of the European Union. If confirmed in my role, I will make sure that competition policy will contribute, alongside other policy tools, to reach overarching objectives, such as the clean transition, including climate and biodiversity targets. Regulation and competition enforcement must work hand-in-hand and reinforce each other in a coherent

way. For instance, in the past, competition enforcement has triggered and complemented regulatory initiatives in many fields deepening the Single Market, and it is essential that regulatory proposals are informed by sound competition policy. It is for this reason that I see many synergies between the various areas of my portfolio in full respect of the Treaties.

Questions from the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

9. What is your vision for your portfolio over and above your mission letter and what would you like your legacy to be? What legislative proposals and other initiatives will you suggest to the College of Commissioners for adoption in the next five years and in particular in the first 100 days? How will you ensure that these proposals, as well as the implementation of existing legislation, would strengthen European competitiveness? Do you intend to base those legislative proposals on dedicated impact assessments? What other measures will you propose to ensure clean, social, just and competitive transition, notably in the most affected sectors? What are your plans in particular for the Clean Industrial Deal? How do you plan to guide the work on the implementation of the existing legal framework to achieve the 2030 targets and prepare, once the 2040 emission-reduction target has been adopted, a new architecture to reach net-zero by 2050, ensuring stability and predictability for European companies and investors, reduction of energy prices and competitiveness? What enabling measures will you propose to help EU companies achieve the net-zero target? What measures do you envisage to close the annual private and public investment gap of around €800 billion identified in the Draghi report including through the European Competitiveness Fund? How do you intend to strengthen citizen participation in your work?

If confirmed, my mandate will focus on combining competitiveness and decarbonisation to turn the clean transition into a source of growth and prosperity for the EU. The EU must strive for a clean, just and competitive transition that benefits all citizens, ensuring that markets work better for European consumers and businesses as well as the planet. Europe should remain a prime destination for investment opportunities that bring stable, future-proof, quality jobs, with a strong industrial ecosystem. I will coordinate the decarbonisation agenda with the relevant Members of the College and pursue a competition policy that aligns with EU common goals, ensuring a level playing field. At every step, I will work in partnership with industry, social partners, including in regions and local communities, and all stakeholders. I believe decarbonization and competitiveness are inseparable objectives and all must be achieved in a fair manner.

As strongly underlined in the Draghi Report, decarbonisation can be a driver of competitiveness if all policies are well aligned. This means we need to ensure that our policies are designed to leverage synergies and avoid inconsistencies. We must support our industry to decarbonise through innovation, turning the transition into a competitive advantage. We will not secure Europe's long-term competitiveness if we do not shift away from imported fossil fuels towards a clean, competitive, and circular economy. And this should happen urgently. I will ensure that we act on all the principal levers that are at our disposal to drive the clean transition: improving the business environment; mobilising public and private investment; bringing down energy prices. When acting on those levers, I will ensure the principles of proportionality, subsidiarity and Better Regulation are respected, including through wide consultations, impact assessments, and specifically taking into considerations the needs of SMEs and small mid-caps.

To achieve our climate targets, the starting point is the full implementation of the existing legislation to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030. At the same time, we need to provide a longer-term trajectory for the clean transition. In this regard, I will support Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth in preparing a legislative proposal for the 2040 climate target soon in the new mandate. The 2040 target, once agreed, will be the basis for the EU's next Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. In preparing the post-2030 climate framework, I will ensure that particular attention is paid to ensuring cost-efficiency, enhancing the EU's global competitiveness as well as enabling a just transition.

I will work closely with my colleagues on the Clean Industrial Deal to facilitate decarbonization and enhance competitiveness, as outlined in my reply to question 7. When it comes to State aid, I will come forward with proposals to simplify and target competition policy enforcement and ensure alignment with EU priorities, as mentioned in the reply to question 4.

The funding requirements for industrial decarbonisation are considerable but a necessary investment for competitiveness over the long run and also when compared to the costs of non-action. Private financing will and should cover most needs. To achieve this, we must: (i) deepen private capital markets as suggested in both the Letta and the Draghi reports; (ii) scale up sustainable finance, especially transition finance, and (iii) ensure the bankability of decarbonisation investments. Public funds should incentivise private investments to meet the

substantial needs of European industries. Member States have varying fiscal capacities, making State aid control crucial for fair competition and cohesion within the Union while enabling the achievement of public policy objectives.

To turn private financing into actual private investment, stable implementation of our existing policies and legal requirements is crucial. I will look to create opportunities for combining more effectively private funds, national funds and Union funds to achieve the funding scale necessary for the decarbonisation challenge. The EU budget is one of the main catalysts to European competitiveness and I will work with other relevant Members of the College to ensure investment is targeted towards European net zero infrastructure and priorities. The next multiannual financial framework will provide for an opportunity to further support these efforts by strengthening the competitiveness of European industry and ensuring a just transition. As stated in the Political Guidelines for the new College, the Commission 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. In line with the mission letter, this should support the Important Projects of Common Interest (IPCEIs). This Fund will invest in strategic technologies – including clean tech – and decarbonization efforts to ensure that we develop strategic technologies and manufacture them here in Europe. The design of the future European Competitiveness Fund is ahead of us. The reflection needs to start with “what we want to finance” to then see “how” we can best deliver on our objectives in a cost-efficient way and maximise results on the ground. This will allow to make our funding more impactful. We will use the power of our budget to leverage and de-risk private investment in pursuit of our common goals.

As a powerful transversal policy, competition policy should contribute, alongside other relevant policy tools, to reach the overarching objective to become, by 2050, a competitive and resilient carbon neutral economy. For that, we need more competition on all relevant parameters, not less. If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will further modernise competition policy to ensure that it remains a facilitator to the competitiveness of EU companies, while striving to uphold the rule of law and the principle of equal treatment.

10. Do you believe that the current state aid rules sufficiently ensure fair competition across the Union? How do you aim to ensure that the new approach to competition policy and the new State aid framework will promote the roll-out of clean and renewable energy, energy efficiency, industrial investments and sufficient manufacturing capacity of clean tech, while also limiting external dependencies, strengthening EU competitiveness and protecting European industry from external unfair competition in line with WTO and internal market rules? What is your view on the Commission's findings on unfair subsidisation of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) from China and the provisional countervailing duties imposed on imports of those vehicles? What measures will you propose to address the particular challenges faced by European SMEs and small midcaps? What measures will you propose to attract private investments and prevent offshoring of economic and industrial activity?

As indicated in the replies to questions 3 and 4, my objective will be to speed up and target State aid enforcement and further adjust State aid policy to the longer-term objectives to implement the Clean Industrial Deal and contribute to European competitiveness. In this context, as raised by the Draghi report, we should draw on the lessons from the State aid rules put in place to respond to the crises and promoting coordinated aid at EU level to limit the risk of fragmentation of the Single Market.

More broadly, I will modernise and further strengthen competition enforcement, ensuring that it supports European companies to innovate, compete and lead worldwide and contributes to the wider objectives of this Commission.

I believe in multilateralism. A reformed WTO is part of the solution for global prosperity. We should continue to defend the EU's competitiveness and resilience using the full breadth of the Commission toolbox to tackle the challenges of the global economy. For example, I will rigorously enforce the Foreign Subsidies Regulation to protect the Single Market from distortive subsidies by countries outside the Union to ensure a level playing field for all companies operating in the Single Market, while remaining open to trade and investment with third countries. I will make sure that the Foreign Subsidies Regulation is implemented in a coherent way with all other relevant tools in our toolbox to achieve our common objectives. Moreover, we also work to restore a global level playing field through a convergence on competition rules in other fora outside the WTO, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Competition Network.

We need to ensure that the EU remains a place for Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) production and that we preserve the EU's manufacturing capabilities in a sector that is vital to the EU's green transition and our climate objectives. The BEVs anti-subsidy investigation was grounded on solid facts and evidence and was carried out in line with WTO rules. The Commission is working to find a negotiated solution for the BEVs case that is WTO compliant,

effective and enforceable. This case is not a substitute for our automotive industrial strategy. Looking ahead, we need to conduct a broader strategic discussion about the future of the automotive industry in the EU using all the policy tools in our toolbox in a coherent way, with a view to achieving a transition and ensure a green, competitive and well- functioning car industry value chain in Europe.

Regarding SMEs, it is essential to bring them on board to make Europe's clean and digital transition a success. This is why State aid rules provide more flexibility for Member States to support SMEs, for example with risk financing and in general with higher levels of aid. Furthermore, EU merger control protects SMEs by preventing price increases and the loss of quality and innovation. Strong antitrust and cartel enforcement helps protect SMEs from being squeezed out of the market by dominant firms and ensures that they can benefit from fair access to markets, to the benefit of stakeholders and consumers. I will closely work with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy who has been tasked by the Commission President on the SME definition building on the insights of the recent evaluation. An important priority will be to further facilitate SME participation and access to Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs). Furthermore, I will ensure that effective antitrust enforcement goes hand in hand with the vigorous enforcement of the Digital Markets Act, to ensure that European tech start-ups have a real shot at success on these markets.

11. What actions do you envisage to bring down energy prices in the short, medium and long term and rid the EU of its dependency on fossil fuels? What will you do to speed up the phase out of gas imports from Russia? What you consider to be the main drivers behind energy price volatility in the EU and what concrete measures you think should be taken to ensure prices are competitive, market reactive and affordable? How will you ensure that businesses and households benefit from the lower production costs of renewable energy? What role should IPCEIs play with regard to energy production and interconnectivity and how additional funding can be unlocked for their implementation? How do you view the role of technological neutrality in the context of energy supply and energy prices? What is your view on nuclear energy and SMRs?

Higher and volatile energy prices are one of the biggest brakes on our competitiveness and the ability of our industries to grow, as highlighted by the Draghi Report. If confirmed, I will steer the work in the European Commission on affordable energy and ridding ourselves of our dependencies on fossil fuels, starting by phasing out the remaining fossil fuels that the EU imports from Russia. I will work with my fellow Commissioners, especially with the Commissioner for Energy and Housing to boost investment in clean energy infrastructure and address energy poverty across Europe. I believe that our best strategy to deliver affordability of energy is to complete the clean energy transition and build a robust Energy Union as fast as possible. To this end, the Commission will present an Action Plan for Affordable Energy, as part of the Clean Industrial Deal addressing all components of energy prices, including taxation, and financial markets , the development of power purchase agreements and two-way Contracts for difference for energy markets in Europe. We will also come forward with a Roadmap towards ending Russian energy imports. This will also be accompanied by a review of the EU's energy security architecture. Finally, we will concentrate our efforts on implementing the recent reform of the Electricity Market Design, expanding renewables in the energy system and delivering energy efficiency improvements.

Millions of people are already reaping the benefits of cheap renewables as self-consumers or as part of energy communities and we must ensure that more people continue to do so. Electricity consumers have seen price decreases worth EUR 100bn during 2021-2023 thanks to electricity generation from newly installed solar PV and wind capacity. This must continue and grow. I will ensure that Member States deliver on faster and leaner permit procedures, reduce bureaucratic burden and duly implement the legal provisions to deploy renewables in newbuilds as well as renovated buildings. Our taxes and pricing policies for the use of energy should be aligned with our long-term sustainable aims while contributing to closing our competitive gap. Phasing out fossil fuel subsidies is essential to this aim, as well as increasing energy efficiency.

Setting out a governance framework fit for a flexible, integrated and digitalized European energy system will be key to completing the transformation and decarbonisation of our generation mix. This is why I will play close attention to the review of the Governance Regulation.

The increase in renewable electricity production requires an upgraded electricity grid as well as supply and demand flexibility and storage solutions to spread the benefits of cheap renewable energy at all hours of the day. I will work with the Commissioner for Energy and Housing to present a strategic roadmap for digitalisation and AI in the energy sector. We will also mobilise the Trans-European Networks for Energy framework to continue the support for key cross-border energy infrastructure for projects as projects of common interest. I will also actively help the implementation of these key infrastructure projects through the Commission's High-Level Groups for

regional cooperation. Improving interconnectivity across Member States' grids is essential not only to manage more efficiently the transition but also to spread the benefits across Europe.

Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs) are a vital tool for investing collectively in the technologies and infrastructures of the future, generating industrial innovation and dynamism and positive spillovers for the wider European economy. This underlies their State aid compatibility. They are critical to deliver European solutions and for Member States to support open access energy infrastructure projects, if deemed of great EU importance. For energy generation, IPCEIs can help to step up the level of innovation in the different clean technologies and increase for instance energy or resource efficiency in various sectors (for example in the approved IPCEI on cloud and edge computing technologies). IPCEI rules encourage co-financing of national measures with EU funds and may benefit from funding redirected under the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). The forthcoming European Competitiveness Fund should support IPCEIs.

I will rely on the Communication on the recommended 2040 climate target and the findings of its detailed Impact Assessment. We need maximum efficiency in the deployment of the different technologies, both those that are mature and new technologies that could support the EU in achieving its decarbonization beyond 2030, while respecting Member States prerogatives on the energy mix, in line with article 194 of the Treaty.

As regards low-carbon nuclear power, it is noteworthy that in February 2024, the Commission launched an Industrial Alliance to facilitate stakeholder's cooperation at EU level, to accelerate the deployment of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and ensure a strong EU supply chain, including a skilled workforce. This will leverage EU's manufacturing and innovation capacities to accelerate the deployment of first SMR projects in the EU by early 2030 under the highest standards of nuclear safety, waste management, environmental sustainability, and industrial competitiveness.

Question from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

12. Your portfolio covers the clean, just and competitive transition, which, according to your mission letter, must be 'for the benefit of people and their jobs'. However, your responsibilities barely mention the social aspects of the just transition. How do you plan to work with Executive Vice-President-designate Roxana Mînzatu? What concrete measures are you going to take to ensure that the most vulnerable households are protected and that the transition is beneficial for workers, that their rights are respected and promoted and no one is left behind? Will you deliver an initiative on anticipation and management of change in the world of work, in the context of the Just Transition?

What concrete measures are you going to take in the better regulation agenda to ensure the EU labour law acquis and to ensure improved employment rights and social standards?

In particular, in view of the national Social Climate Plans expected by June 2025, how will you ensure that the Social Climate Fund does not only provide short-term support to vulnerable households but also triggers long-term changes to lift people out of energy and transport poverty? With the Just Transition Fund ending in 2027, what specific measures do you plan to accompany companies and workers in the transformation towards climate neutrality? How do you intend to contribute to the Union of skills?

If confirmed, I will work to ensure that climate, economic and social objectives go hand-in-hand, focusing on protecting the most vulnerable, advancing together so everyone can seize the opportunities offered by the transition, and promoting a people-centered transition. The new Clean Industrial Deal will support sustainable and competitive industries while also promoting quality jobs. In addition, the Quality Jobs Roadmap, to be developed by the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills, and Preparedness with the social partners, will ensure a just transition. It will support fair wages, high standards for occupational health and safety, good working conditions, training and fair job transitions for workers and self-employed, notably by increasing collective bargaining coverage.

To ensure that the most vulnerable households are protected and nobody is left behind, I will be working with the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills, and Preparedness on the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. This strategy will address the root causes of poverty in a comprehensive manner. Ensuring access to essential services, including energy and transport is key to guaranteeing a fair green transition. The upcoming European Affordable Housing Plan will also play a crucial role in supporting renovations and access to affordable and energy-efficient housing.

The Social Climate Fund (SCF) will provide support to vulnerable households, vulnerable transport users and vulnerable micro-enterprises to address the social impacts of the new Emissions Trading System to buildings and road transport (ETS2), in particular, as regards energy and transport poverty. I will support the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills, and Preparedness to orient the programming and implementation of the Climate Social Fund towards addressing social impacts on the vulnerable groups affected by the ETS2. The SCF will provide temporary direct income support and will include both measures and investments, and the measures must lead to structural change, with significant and lasting impacts. The SCF is designed to trigger structural changes benefitting the vulnerable households and contribute to the effort to achieve the 2030 headline target for reducing poverty, set by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

During my mandate, I will also work closely with the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness to ensure a just transition for all and to create the right conditions for companies to reach our common goals. As announced in the 2024 Action Plan on labour and skills shortages in the EU, the Commission will set up a Just Transition Observatory to facilitate monitoring of progress. The Commission services will analyse the relevant existing frameworks and explore how a joint and proactive vision with realistic pathways can be promoted as part of longer-term change processes. I will also support her work in the field of labour law to ensure that people and their jobs always remain at the heart of our social market economy even as our industries and economies evolve.

Skills are crucial to our competitiveness and to a clean and just transition. The Pact for Skills, and good skills intelligence will be an important part of the Union of Skills, playing a key role in delivering the right skills for critical industries. I will work closely with the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills, and Preparedness to build on the excellent work of the Large-Scale Partnerships under the Pact for Skills, supporting the upskilling and reskilling of workers.

Question from the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection

13. There is wide consensus that the EU's credibility depends on the effective enforcement of its rules, including the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR). What are your enforcement priorities in this regard and how will you ensure the timely and effective enforcement that will result in benefits for EU consumers and businesses and contribute to the proper functioning of the internal market? Given that this work entails a high level of complexity, how will you ensure that you have adequate skilled resources and coordinated action within the European Commission?

One of my priorities, if confirmed as Executive Vice-President, will be to make sure that new tools like the Digital Markets Act and Foreign Subsidies Regulation are effectively enforced and deliver real added value for EU consumers and businesses. These tools are aimed at addressing growing challenges to the EU economy. I intend to enforce the Digital Markets Act, which imposes obligations on the largest digital platforms, ensuring that these platforms operate in a fair and competition-friendly way. Similarly, I will give highest priority to enforcing the Foreign Subsidies Regulation, which enables the Commission to address distortions caused by subsidies granted by countries outside the Union to companies that operate in the Single Market. That allows the EU to ensure a level playing field for all companies operating in the Single Market, while remaining open to trade and investment.

For the Digital Markets Act, three important dimensions will guide the prioritisation of my work with the Executive Vice-President for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy. First, to open up closed ecosystems, be it in mobile phones, results of online search queries or online marketplaces. This will give smaller, innovative businesses the opportunity to propose new services to consumers. Over time it will give them the possibility to challenge entrenched gatekeepers on their own terrain. Second, to give consumers choice. Too often gatekeepers impose their own terms and conditions on consumers, claiming that no alternative is good enough. Third, to ensure that data belongs to those who generate it. Citizens have the right to carry their data wherever they want, and to decide if they want their personal data to be used for ads or not. Gatekeepers should not use the data generated by consumers of merchants selling their products on online marketplaces when they compete with those merchants on their own platform. I want to empower European citizens and businesses in their digital lives, and with that in mind I will require that gatekeepers respect their obligations under the Digital Markets Act. If they fail to do so, I will not hesitate to use all the tools the Digital Markets Act provides, including fines where appropriate.

When it comes to enforcing the Foreign Subsidies Regulation, the two avenues for enforcement are concentrations and ex officio investigations. As regards concentrations involving foreign subsidies, I will be rigorous about transactions that involve subsidies from countries outside the Union, and not hesitate to use the full powers of this new tool where appropriate, including in cases of unfairly subsidised acquisitions of European targets. And as regards ex officio investigations (i.e. investigations at the Commission's own initiative), I will pursue the preliminary ongoing investigations. In full respect of the rules, I cannot prejudge the outcome of these investigations at this stage. And of course, I will ensure that we continuously monitor for new cases that warrant ex officio action, and where appropriate open an investigation. In line with my mission letter I intend to focus our ex officio efforts on the sectors most affected and types of foreign subsidies that are most harmful to fair competition in the Single Market. The many dimensions of the Single Market will require strong coordination, and I will actively contribute so that our actions will be aligned with key European priorities.

Question from the Committee on Transport and Tourism

14. According to the corresponding mission letter, the future Executive Vice-President-designate for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition will be responsible for the legal framework for the EU's decarbonisation targets and the implementation of the Fit for 55 legislation. At the same time, the TRAN Committee has led the EP's legislative work on the decarbonisation of transport (RefuelEU Aviation, FuelEU Maritime, Revision of the Directive on Deployment of Alternative Fuels Infrastructure). What is your assessment of the impact of the Green Deal legislation on the transport sector? What is your vision to prepare a new architecture on the decarbonisation of the transport sector beyond 2030 while ensuring a level playing field for European transport companies, the competitiveness of the European transport sector and high-quality and attractive jobs in Europe? In this respect, how do you envisage your cooperation with the future Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms and the future Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism?

In line with the European Green Deal, all economic sectors must contribute to the EU's climate objectives. In this context, transport, with CO₂ emissions still above their 1990 levels, is crucial for achieving the EU's 2050 climate-neutral commitment. The EU has put in place a comprehensive policy framework, including the Fit for 55 package, and a comprehensive Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy that led among others to the Efficient and Green Mobility package, and the Greening Freight package to decarbonise transport.

Innovation, digitalisation, effective implementation and necessary investments are crucial to achieving our key objectives. For completing the TEN-T core network by 2030, making the EU's infrastructure more resilient to natural disasters or hostile actions, deploying innovative and digital solutions such as sustainable transport fuels and charging infrastructure, modernising our fleets, and organising smarter mobility in cities investment and planning is needed. Proposals to improve the capacity use of our infrastructure, in particular for rail and inland waterways, have already been put forward and I hope that co-legislators will soon reach an agreement on these.

The Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism has been tasked to develop a Sustainable Transport Investment Plan to prioritise decarbonisation investments in the EU. I will fully support this endeavour and embed it in the Clean Industrial Deal. At the same time, we must take into consideration the global dimension. The clean transition needs to go hand in hand with measures enhancing the global competitiveness of the EU transport sector, with ongoing work at the International Civil Aviation Organization and International Maritime Organization being vital.

Public investments will play an important role, for instance through well targeted public aid in accordance with our State aid rules. In a similar vein, I will take action to counter any foreign subsidies and investments that could have distorting effects and put our European transport companies at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, the EU budget cannot be the only investment source. I will support the College of Commissioners' engagement with Member States and regional and local authorities to ensure that they fully reflect our commonly agreed objectives in their own budgets and investment plans. We also need to explore financing opportunities beyond the public sector, and I will therefore contribute to the work on developing innovative sources of funding, which can incentivise and leverage private sector investments. This work should focus on enhanced cooperation with the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to ensure their lending strategies reflect the most pressing policy needs.

The next Commission will focus on widening access to affordable transport options to all Europeans. Tackling transport poverty will also align with the first-ever European Anti-Poverty Strategy for which the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness will be in the lead and to which I will gladly contribute. The next Commission will also work for high health and safety at work standards, invest in re-skilling and up-skilling and

to attract more young people to the sector. Together with other Members of the College, I will steer our investment and financing in a just and social transition also in mobility, notably through the Social Climate Fund.

I stand ready to fully support the Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism in the work outlined above and work closely with the Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms.

Question from the Committee on Regional Development

15. Despite its modest budget, the Just Transition Fund (JTF) was a key achievement of the last legislature and an essential tool for territories facing socio-economic challenges tied to the climate-neutral transition. However, issues with resource allocation, administrative hurdles, and balancing environmental and social objectives limited its effectiveness. As a result, many intended beneficiaries, including thousands of workers from carbon-intensive industries, missed out on support. Currently, a major part of JTF allocations still need to be absorbed by 2026.

How do you plan to support local and regional authorities in accelerating absorption and preventing de-commitments, while ensuring the added value of projects? Are you considering creating a Just Transition Fund 2, or do you intend to incorporate its objectives into other cohesion policy funds, with the principle of just transition applied transversally? Will you allocate more resources to just transition? What measures will you take to ensure that the support reaches the most vulnerable regions and sectors? Do you plan to simplify the requirements for access of workers to support? Do you believe that state aid laws need to be revised to allow for simpler and faster access to support? Finally, do you plan to extend the Fund's support to regions, such as those with automotive industry or intensive farming, and increase the funding proportionately?

In collaboration with the Executive Vice President for Cohesion and Reforms, we will, if confirmed, build on ongoing efforts to support regions affected by the clean transition. The implementation of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) is progressing steadily, with the selection rate at the fund-level growing to 25%. While several JTF regions still need additional support to implement their territorial transition plans, many tools are available and I will continue encouraging Member States to make use of them.

The focus is on ensuring that all funds are effectively used to attract new companies, create jobs, and provide new economic opportunities in areas transitioning away from coal and fossil fuels. With the Executive Vice President for Cohesion and Reforms, I will strive for a regulatory environment that enables all stakeholders, including workers, to fully participate in and benefit from EU funding, ensuring that our policies support local development in an inclusive and efficient manner.

The active engagement of workers in JTF programming and implementation facilitates access to funding. For example, the project “Job after coal” in the Polish subregion of Konin was developed as a bottom-up initiative of lignite mine trade unions. The aim of the project is to support participants on their path towards new and sustainable employment by providing targeted assistance designed with workers' representatives. The project supports the re-skilling and up-skilling former employees of mines and power plants affected by phasing out from lignite energy production.

I will work with my colleagues, the Commissioners for Sustainable Transport and Tourism and Agriculture and food to assess ways of supporting regions which rely on the automotive sector or intensive agriculture for their economic dynamism. The Vision for the future of agriculture and food and the EU industrial action plan for the automotive sector will outline the measures we can take, and I look forward to contributing.

Question from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

16. Agriculture and forestry will have a role to play in a clean, just and competitive transition. They are two of the few sectors that not only emit carbon, but can also actively help to bind carbon, provide renewable raw materials and mitigate climate change, while ensuring food security for our citizens. How do you intend to strengthen the agricultural and forestry sectors amid a just transition? How can incentives be created for agriculture and forestry to increase their contributions as carbon sinks and achieve their sustainable competitive transition? How would you intend to help farmers and foresters to adapt to the challenges of climate change?

How do you plan to strengthen the prospects and contribution of agriculture to enhancing both socio-economic growth and environmental improvement, including by boosting the potential of bioeconomy, circular economy, resilient food supply chains and innovative methods?

Agriculture and forestry are of strategic importance for our security and autonomy. These sectors are key to our natural environment, and central to our fight against climate change and the creation of a circular bioeconomy in 2050. At the same time, these are economic sectors that must be competitive and viable. Farmers and forest owners deserve a fair income, and should be supported, incentivised, and rewarded for the provision of public goods.

To strengthen these sectors in the transition, CAP strategic plans serve as performance-oriented tool to target support for farmers, and some foresters. In the current plans, 32% of CAP funds, amounting to nearly EUR 97 billion of the 2023-2027 allocation, are dedicated to climate, environment and animal welfare objectives. The European Court of Auditors in its recent report on CAP strategic plans of 30 September 2024 recognises that the “green architecture” of the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans Regulation enables greater environmental and climate ambition in the CAP, but this potential needs to be better exploited through national plans.

State aid can also play a key role in support of agriculture and forestry. I will work with Member States to enable them to make use of existing State aid rules that provide a specific, recently revised framework and a block exemption for the agriculture and forestry sectors and rural areas. The framework and the block exemption, designed to be complementary to the Common Agricultural Policy, grant Member States ample scope to support farmers, by promoting economic development and supporting investment. The State aid toolbox is complemented by de minimis support for the agricultural sector as a supplementary tool. If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I intend to make sure that the review of agricultural de minimis support to take account of inflation is swiftly completed.

Strengthening the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability of the agricultural sector, will also require an incentive-based approach complementing public support. This has been underlined by the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture. The Strategic Dialogue also recognised the need for an EU-wide benchmarking system as a prerequisite for the new approach on sustainability. With the new Regulation on Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming (CRCF) we are laying the fundamentals for a new market for sustainability by introducing a standardised approach for sustainability certificates across Europe. The CRCF not only covers carbon removals, but also extends to biodiversity and adaptation by recognising management practices that increase resilience to the impacts of climate change, improve soil fertility and protect and restore nature, bringing win-win solutions for food sovereignty and land productivity. As mentioned above, I believe nature-credits also provide a promising avenue for rewarding farmers for their services and I will support the Commissioner for environment, water resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy in developing this concept further.

Specifically on sustainability in the sector, in 2023 the Commission adopted Guidelines on an exclusion from Article 101 TFEU for sustainability agreements in agriculture. This exclusion allows agricultural producers and other operators in the agri-food supply chain to implement sustainability standards that go beyond what is currently required by existing EU and national legislation. I will stand ready to provide guidance to farmers and their partners in the chain who come forward with sustainability initiatives.

If confirmed, I will strive for the adoption of a new Bioeconomy Strategy. This should allow Europe to reap the potential of a growing sector, ensuring competitiveness and prosperity, including in rural areas. I am committed to delivering a strategy that provides European businesses with a guiding framework to thrive in the green and circular transition.