

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Kaja KALLAS****High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy****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?

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?

I have personally experienced life without the European Union and with it - life without freedom and with it. This has had a profound impact on me as an individual and it has given me an unwavering determination to defend and promote the European values and general interest to the best of my abilities.

When Estonia regained its independence from Soviet occupation in 1991, I witnessed the fall of dictatorship and the transformational but challenging process re-establishing freedom, a democratic relationship between citizens and the state, the rule of law, and a free market economy. But however hard this process was, breaking away from the horrors of our past was an imperative for every Estonian. Today, I am acutely aware of how necessary it is to cherish what we have built, the values that exist in Europe and on which the European Union is founded. As High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /Vice-President of the European Commission, I will defend the values and general interest of the European Union with my heart and soul.

Professionally, my first encounter with European policy was as a lawyer specialising in European competition law. I left the profession as a partner in the law firm having proven my grasp of competition policy, my skills as an attorney, but also my capacity to manage. This is a skill that I went on to develop as a lecturer at the Estonian Business School. This early experience in leadership helped me become the person I am today, with a firm belief in empathy, kindness, and compassion as key assets for any leader, and especially when engaged in diplomacy.

When I was elected to the European Parliament in 2014, I had already served in the Estonian Parliament and was intellectually prepared in many ways for a political career in Europe. Having a father who had been a European Commissioner certainly left a positive mark. However, my tenure as an MEP helped me develop knowledge that I see as relevant to the position of HR/VP too. For example, as a member of the Committee on Industry, Research, and Energy (ITRE), I led the Parliament's work on six major reports including on the Digital Single Market strategy and on legislation for customs infringements and sanctions. Both files involved working across party lines and national boundaries to build consensus that reflected the diverse views of EU Member States with the right balance as an outcome, always keeping in mind the interest of European citizens. When I was elected as Prime Minister, I returned to Estonia with a renewed sense of Estonia's responsibility as a Member State of the European Union and my personal responsibility in defending Estonia's place in it.

My government steered Estonia through multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and energy price shocks that hit the Baltic region particularly hard. In addition to proving myself capable as an effective crisis manager, I am particularly proud of the positive progress we made in parallel: legalising same-sex marriage in 2023, despite considerable resistance or creating a new Ministry of Climate and expanding production of renewable energy with one of the most ambitious targets in the EU regarding electricity production for the green transition. I was determined to remain a steadfast champion of European values, including fundamental rights and equality for all. I carry this commitment with me every day.

My mandate as Prime Minister was also full of opportunities to engage with international partners and over the past three years, I have been at the heart of high-level multilateral diplomacy, participating in negotiations within NATO and the EU, and representing Estonia on the global stage in high-level summits and meetings. This experience in particular stands me in good stead for the road ahead. From the start of my political career building consensus amongst members of the Estonian parliament, to seeking common ground between Members of the European Parliament, to forging compromises among Member States and internationally, today I have a strong understanding of how to navigate complex, high-level negotiations while delicately balancing national priorities with the broader European agenda.

European security is deeply personal to me as a native of a country that has long told others that Russia's imperialistic dream never died. But I firmly believe every country must pull its weight regardless of their geographic proximity to hostile neighbours. I pushed for an increase in Estonia's defence spending above 3% of GDP only a year after Russia's invasion, but I also ensured Estonia became proportionally one of Ukraine's biggest donors. I wanted Estonia to lead by example. This is also why I consistently advocated for stronger EU engagement, a common position on accountability for crimes committed by Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine, using frozen Russian assets as a basis for reconstruction efforts, and the "million rounds" initiative to provide ammunition for Ukraine. The strongest protection we have against Russia's aggression, and for Europe's position in the world, is European unity. Europe must lead by example.

Should I be confirmed, these are the skills I bring to the job, coupled with an immense personal dedication to Europe's future and success as a global leader.

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?

If confirmed, as a Member of College and Vice President of the Commission my priority will be to make a substantial contribution to the implementation of the Political Guidelines of the Commission. The Guidelines and my mission letter will be my compass. I will strive to design a more strategic, assertive and united foreign and security policy, fit to address the challenges of today's world and to promote the EU's values and interests. I will strengthen the EU's security and defence, while driving forward a more strategic approach to our neighbourhood and partnerships. I will foster a modern and joined-up foreign policy. In a full spirit of collegiality, I will work with every Member of College to ensure that we collectively deliver on the Commission's priorities.

I am convinced that gender-responsive policies and programmes, and gender-balanced teams, lead to more effective and sustainable results. I will work to integrate a gender perspective in our external action, as women's equality is a matter of human rights, but also of common sense. The Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) remains the main framework to ensure that gender is mainstreamed across our foreign policy.

Young Europeans expect the EU to act on preservation of peace, reinforcement of international security, and promotion of international cooperation. I believe that giving young people a stronger voice and role in the development of EU policies will strengthen Europe's democracy and society. I would plan to hold regular Youth Dialogues to listen to the needs and concerns of young people, with the first dialogue taking place within the first 100 days of my mandate.

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 commit to comply without fail, as soon as I am confirmed as Vice-President, with the letter and spirit of the EU Treaties on independence, transparency, impartiality and availability, as defined in Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). I will comply with the obligation of professional secrecy, as defined in Article 339 TFEU. I will also honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflicts of interest, and will avoid any position or situation which could put into question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I will update it rapidly should any change be required.

As a former MEP, I have already demonstrated my commitment to the highest ethical standards, and my full respect of the letter and spirit of the EU Treaties and the obligation to act in the European interest.

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?

With collegiality as the guiding principle for the action of the next Commission, I will work closely with my colleagues in the College to make sure Europe becomes more strategic, more assertive and united in pursuing its interests and in promoting the rules-based international order and our common universal values.

Can you commit to duly informing Parliament about your actions and those of your departments?

As a former MEP, I truly believe – and have experienced firsthand – that effective interinstitutional cooperation improves the European Union's work. In the role of HR/VP I commit to maintaining this important cooperation. I also see this relationship working both ways in the common European interest. When I was a member of European Parliamentary Delegations, including Vice-Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, Member of the Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and Delegation for relations with the United States, I saw the significant benefit of strong inter-parliamentary relations and how this can be a basis for strong interinstitutional cooperation within the EU on the basis of information sharing. Ensuring regular exchanges with the European Parliament, members of its Committees and its Parliamentary Delegations will also be an asset for my work as HR/VP. I will make this point within the College and in particular to College members working on international relations.

Furthermore, President-elect von der Leyen's Mission Letters underline the objective of the European Commission to further harness the special relationship between the Commission and the European Parliament which is an objective I fully abide to and will invest time and my abilities to respect.

In what respect do you consider yourself accountable to Parliament?

I will act in the spirit of the Treaties and with a deep conviction that the trust and confidence of European citizens can only be attained through listening to their voices and engaging in democratic debate, including most importantly in the European Parliament.

I will seek a close relationship with the Parliament, based on openness, transparency, mutual trust and regular exchanges, to allow the Parliament to exercise its democratic oversight effectively. I will mobilise Parliamentary diplomacy in support of my efforts.

I am fully aware of the requirement to regularly consult the European Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), in line with Article 36 TEU. I personally believe that this ensures accountability, increases the democratic

legitimacy of the EU's foreign and security policy, and strengthens the EU's visibility and communication with citizens in that regard.

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 the exercise of my duty, if confirmed, I commit to the full implementation of the applicable Treaty provisions, in particular Article 36 TEU, and the 2010 Declaration on Political Accountability. I will fully respect the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement between the European Parliament, the Commission and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making and the 2020 Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on budgetary discipline, cooperation in budgetary matters and sound financial management

In accordance with Art 36 TEU I will regularly consult and inform the European Parliament on the main aspects of my work and the fundamental choices of our Common Foreign and Security Policy. I commit specifically to regular dialogue with the Committee of Foreign Affairs and through Plenary debates, notably for the adoption of European Parliament's annual report on the implementation of CFSP and CSDP and the annual report on Human Rights and democracy in the world. I also commit to regular dialogue on foreign affairs via exchanges with the relevant Committees and individual exchanges. In the specific field of negotiation of international agreements, as provided in Article 218 (10) TFEU and the relevant case-law of the EU Court of Justice, I will ensure that the European Parliament is informed fully and immediately at all stages of the procedure, both on non-CFSP and CFSP agreements under my responsibility, in the appropriate format. As a result, the Parliament will be able to exercise democratic scrutiny of the Union's external action according to the Treaties, in line with the institutional balance and the preservation of the relevant prerogatives of all institutions involved.

I intend to continue involving the European Parliament in the strategic steering of the financial instruments following the blueprint of the High-Level Geopolitical Dialogue established under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe). I will also keep high on our joint agenda the exchanges in the Special Committee. I also intend to regularly attend, where possible, the Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on CFSP and CSDP. In that respect, the practice of organising them back-to-back with Gymnich meetings has proven helpful and is a practice worth continuing.

Inviting the Chairs of the different Committees dealing with foreign affairs to the informal meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council in its different configurations is a matter on which I will engage actively with the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU.

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 commit to fully implementing the relevant provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement, of the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making which aims at deepening the partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission.

If confirmed, I will ensure, as a matter of principle, that Parliamentary Committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility, at the same time as and on equal footing with the Council, in line with the principle of institutional balance and the preservation of the relevant prerogatives of all institutions involved.

If confirmed, I will ensure that the European Parliament is involved in any major developments under my responsibility, at the same time and on equal footing with the Council when both institution's competences are equal. Additionally, in line with the Declaration on political accountability, I commit myself and the services under my authority to continue and intensify the practice of holding exchanges of views in the planning phase of initiatives and strategies in the area of CFSP.

Questions from the Committee on Foreign Affairs

3. The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029 set out, inter alia, that the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) must be designed with the current global reality in mind and that EU needs to be more assertive in pursuing its strategic interests. Without prejudice to the Commission's decision-making processes, what would be your concrete priorities and objectives/goals in the short, medium and long term (for the duration of your mandate) on the way to a more strategic, assertive, united and human rights centred CFSP, guided by EU's values and principles? What are the main challenges (international, regional, bilateral, institutional, etc) that you see on the way of pursuing those priorities and objectives, and how do you intend to overcome them?

In a violent, unstable, and dangerous world where democracy, the rule of law and human rights, are continuously at risk, the EU has an extremely important role to play as a champion of these values and a defender of the rules-based international order, and in partnering with others in doing so. Our priorities over the next five years – based on the Political Guidelines – will define Europe's place in the world for the next five decades. Making the right decisions now will ensure the EU's future is not victim to events or determined by the will of others. Broadly speaking, these are the objectives and values on which I believe our Common Foreign and Security Policy must be based. Should I be confirmed, I will ensure my work is inclusive and carried out in coordination with my colleagues in the College, the European Parliament, Council, Member States and aspiring candidate countries. I also agree that the EU's decision-making in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) must be faster and more efficient, including through the use of constructive abstention, as well as Qualified Majority Voting where it is foreseen in the Treaty. I will engage with Council and Member States and prioritise overcoming existing hurdles to make full use of my prerogatives under the Treaty, but I also want there to be a sense of shared ownership of the EU's external action.

My short-term priority must be to address the pressing global concerns: Russia's war against Ukraine and strengthening the EU's security and defence. How we respond to Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine tells the world who we are and the values we stand for. Apart from the fact that it is morally the right thing to do, I also believe that supporting Ukraine – politically, economically, militarily – for as long as it takes to win this war, is how the EU can be truly credible on the global stage with a more strategic, assertive, united and human-rights centred CFSP. EU support to the reconstruction of the country is also key to its preparations for EU Membership. Part of this process is ensuring justice for every victim of war crimes committed and that Russia pays for the damage it has caused.

We find ourselves today in a position of needing to strengthen the EU's security and defence while both are at risk. We must act with urgency. In the first 100 days of the mandate, together with the Commissioner for Defence and Space, I will propose a White Paper on the future of European Defence. In it, we will identify the investment needed and present ideas for a longer-term approach for building a European Defence Union. Preparedness is a fundamental part of effective security and defence and I will contribute to shaping the Preparedness Union Strategy. I will work to boost the EU's operational capabilities, strengthen civilian and military CSDP missions and put to use the new horizontal set of restrictive measures against hybrid threats. I will also make it a priority to further deepen the EU-NATO partnership across the full spectrum of security and defence issues.

While Russia's war against Ukraine threatens the integrity of the European Union, there is an undeniable spillover effect of the crisis in the Middle East in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023, both as regards the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East and the highest level of antisemitism seen in Europe since the Holocaust. The EU must remain at the forefront of humanitarian efforts, working with all actors to support the pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace in the region, with a focus on promoting the two-state solution and strengthening partnerships with key regional stakeholders. If I am confirmed, I am thus determined to deploy all my efforts in my capacity as HR/VP, and cooperating closely with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, to put forward a comprehensive EU-Middle East Strategy and forge common EU positions.

From the multilateral to the regional, together with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean I will present ideas to reshape the EU's relationship with the region, with a new Pact for the Mediterranean.

By the end of my mandate, together with the Commissioner for International Partnerships, I want the EU to have strengthened long-term and mutually beneficial partnerships across the globe – from Latin America and the Caribbean to the Indo-Pacific, including with a new Strategic EU-India Agenda, and from Central Asia to Africa. A short-term priority in this regard is our preparation for the EU-African Union Summit in 2025. Our partners matter. I will be relentless in my pursuit of stronger ties across the world.

And from the regional to the bilateral, I will work with our strategic and like-minded partners, including those in the G7, to pursue shared goals and interests. This of course includes the United Kingdom, as well as the United States which will remain the EU's most consequential partner and ally.

I will also spare no effort in defending the EU's values and protecting the EU's interest vis-a-vis systemic rivals. My priority in engaging with China will be to safeguard the EU's geopolitical and economic security, by working with the responsible colleagues in the College of Commissioners as well as with the EU's Member States. The most pressing challenges here are China's support for Russia as well as structural imbalances between the EU and China that result from non-market policies and practices, which create unfair competition and an unlevel playing field.

In view of the increasingly important external dimensions of EU internal policies from migration to climate change, digitalisation to economic security, energy and access to critical raw materials, I will ensure close coordination with the relevant members of the College and engage with our international partners where needed. With regard to migration, which is a major challenge and clear priority for many EU Member States we will continue developing strategic relations on migration and security with non-EU countries, especially countries of origin and transit, and fighting the instrumentalisation of migrants at the EU's external borders. For this, I will work closely together with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, the Commissioner for International Partnerships, and the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration.

How the EU builds its relations with third countries on the other side of the world has a profound impact on those with our closest neighbours, and particularly those which seek membership of the EU. With the Commissioner for Enlargement, I will not only prioritise relations with enlargement countries, contribute to pre-enlargement policy reviews, including on security and defence, encourage good neighbourly relations, reconciliation and help address bilateral issues in the enlargement process, I will do my utmost in my work across the globe to ensure that new European citizens are also proud of the Union they are joining.

Underpinning all this is the fundamental respect of international law, the United Nations Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which have recently been under pressure from alternative models. I believe the EU has a fundamental responsibility to promote multilateralism and contribute to global efforts to reform and modernise the international rules-based system, including the financial architecture.

4. How do you intend to improve the coordination amongst the Commissioners, in particular with the Commissioners-designate for Mediterranean and for International partnerships, in terms of substantially increasing the combined influence of external policies and the external dimension of internal policies? How will you address the increasing lack of clarity in the external representation of the EU and the need to clearly define the competences of all the institutional actors involved in the EU's external action? How do you intend to improve the use of available instruments – or develop new instruments – to maximise the EU's international leverage and the policy impact of the common European external action? In particular, as regards:

- *investing in partnerships around the world, including through the Global Gateway;*
- *the strategic use of the EU's external financing instruments, also in view of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (while ensuring a genuine role of the Parliament in the strategic steering of the instruments);*
- *a coherent, effective and strategic communication on external policies and actions in order to counterbalance false narratives and disinformation in third countries;*
- *ensure that EEAS available financial resources, staff expertise and recruitment policy, including the stricter qualification requirements for the most important positions, match the level of ambition;*

- *the assessment of the effectiveness of ongoing CSDP missions and operations and the establishment of new CSDP missions and operations;*
- *making the EU a stronger power in global affairs, and safe from malign external influence and threats;*
- *a coherent and enforced European sanction policy that not just thwarts Russia's ability to continue its aggression, but also combats circumvention and evasion, including how do you aim to increase information sharing capabilities within the EU institutions and Member States but also with key partner countries, how will you address non-alignment of a large number of countries, including candidate countries, and do you support the establishment of a centralised EU capacity for sanction enforcement and for allowing the Commission to contest a sanction derogation authorised by a Member State under Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014?*

How do you intend to improve the coordination amongst the Commissioners, in particular with the Commissioners-designate for Mediterranean and for International partnerships, in terms of substantially increasing the combined influence of external policies and the external dimension of internal policies?

The Political Guidelines and Mission Letter set out a vision in which all areas of work are connected, and for which all Members of College should work in a spirit of collegiality. In my role as Vice-President of the Commission, if confirmed, I will facilitate regular meetings of the external family of Commissioners to align on key priorities and coordinate action. Given the importance of strengthening coherence between internal and external policies and the need to respond to the concerns of third countries impacted by European legislation I will invite other College members where needed. I will promote shared outreach to partner countries, in the Team Europe approach. I see this as only beneficial for enhancing the EU's global presence and diplomatic influence.

How will you address the increasing lack of clarity in the external representation of the EU and the need to clearly define the competences of all the institutional actors involved in the EU's external action?

The Treaties set out the framework and guiding principles for the Union's external representation and will be respected. This is the framework in which I will work, taking into consideration that many of the EU's priorities over the next mandate have important external dimensions that will require even stronger EU representation on the international stage and more cooperation between all the institutional actors involved in the EU's external action, in full respect of their respective competences.

How do you intend to improve the use of available instruments – or develop new instruments – to maximise the EU's international leverage and the policy impact of the common European external action? In particular, as regards:

- *investing in partnerships around the world, including through the Global Gateway;*

If confirmed, I will work with Commissioners to strategically mobilise and leverage all available EU policies, instruments and resources to maximise the EU's international leverage. I will prioritise the establishment of mutually beneficial comprehensive partnerships grounded in a solid understanding of our geopolitical objectives, our relations with partners and our respective interests. We will implement an integrated approach of economic, humanitarian, development, peace and security policies.

Global Gateway has already strengthened resilience both for the European Union and partner countries while contributing effectively to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As per the Political Guidelines, and in close cooperation with the Commissioner for International Partnerships, I will contribute to taking Global Gateway to the next level, with infrastructure investment, trade and macro-economic support in one integrated offer to our partners. This will be done in a Team Europe approach in the context of our comprehensive partnerships, and in synergy with existing or future partnerships with the countries concerned, including the new Clean Trade and Investment partnerships. In parallel, I will also support a differentiated approach with regard to Least Developed Countries, fragile or conflict-torn countries, and other complex settings.

- *the strategic use of the EU's external financing instruments, also in view of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (while ensuring a genuine role of the Parliament in the strategic steering of the instruments);*

As a co-legislator, the European Parliament has a central role to play in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) sectoral negotiations. If confirmed, together with the relevant Commissioners, I would seek its continued involvement in the strategic steering of external action financing instruments, building on the model established by the High-Level Geopolitical Dialogue under the NDICI-Global Europe. What is crucial is that these instruments position the EU as a global player, enhance our preparedness and underpin the external projection of the EU's geopolitical priorities. This will be my priority here.

- *a coherent, effective and strategic communication on external policies and actions in order to counterbalance false narratives and disinformation in third countries;*

I will prioritise the development of a strong strategic communications strategy for the 2024-2029 mandate, with input from all relevant EU actors. It is in our common interest that we uphold the motto: "One message, multiple

voices". EU Delegations will have a major role in translating this in a way that resonates in a local context. As part of our communications strategy, counterbalancing false narratives and disinformation in third countries must be a clear priority and is a core function of EU diplomats. With specific regard to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), I want to build on the expertise we have, including in the European Parliament, as well as the successful projects already in place such as EUvsDisinfo. At the same time, I want the EEAS to make full use of digital tools and engage with FIMI experts around the world to ensure that the EU remains at the cutting edge of efforts to fight this threat. If confirmed, I will work with my fellow Commissioners to ensure a coordinated approach which ensures synergies.

- *ensure that EEAS available financial resources, staff expertise and recruitment policy, including the stricter qualification requirements for the most important positions, match the level of ambition;*

The EEAS faces financial challenges due to high inflation rates in non-EU countries, particularly since the start of Russia's war of aggression. Between 2021 and 2023, the EEAS non-salary expenditures, which is covered by Heading 7, increased by +8.9% overall and by 18% in delegations, whereas non-salary budget only increased by 2.2% in the same period.

I will ensure the EEAS, together with Commission services, adapts Delegations to the geopolitical reality, while operating more effectively and efficiently. I will also instruct my services to maintain a proactive recruitment strategy, with targeted internal and external competitions focused on emerging diplomatic needs, with selection processes that remain based on merit and on criteria equal to the level and responsibilities of positions. Efforts to instil gender equality and a geographic balance must continue. For the appointment of senior positions in Headquarters and Delegations, a panel of EEAS senior managers, the General Secretariat of the Council and the Commission along with representatives from Member States will be involved in the recruitment procedure to ensure a fair and thorough process.

- *the assessment of the effectiveness of ongoing CSDP missions and operations and the establishment of new CSDP missions and operations;*

If confirmed, I will make it a priority that all EU CSDP missions and operations are regularly reviewed and assessed to ensure they are designed with the right aims, mandates, and resources to serve their purpose. Together with strategic and regular reviews by the Council, this will help identify where they add value, where we need to reprioritise, or identify additional needs.

- *making the EU a stronger power in global affairs, and safe from malign external influence and threats;*

Only by keeping ourselves safe from malign external influence and threats can we ensure the EU is a strong power in global affairs. Actors such as Russia, Iran, North Korea, and partly China, aim at weaponising interdependencies and exploiting the openness of our societies against us. For this, we must be prepared. From the rapid analysis of threats, to using existing instruments to their full potential, including the new horizontal sanctions regime on hybrid threats. I will work tirelessly with my colleagues in the College to protect our citizens, democratic institutions, economy and critical infrastructures from external hostility including in the preparation of a new Preparedness Union Strategy.

- *a coherent and enforced European sanction policy that not just thwarts Russia's ability to continue its aggression, but also combats circumvention and evasion, including how do you aim to increase information sharing capabilities within the EU institutions and Member States but also with key partner countries, how will you address non-alignment of a large number of countries, including candidate countries, and do you support the establishment of a centralised EU capacity for sanction enforcement and for allowing the Commission to contest a sanction derogation authorised by a Member State under Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014?*

The EU's sanctions policy can only be truly effective if it is fully enforced by Member States and not circumvented. I will push for more cooperation to address the many aspects related to circumvention, including information sharing, with key likeminded partners, including in the G7, but also candidate countries which must adhere to the EU values the CFSP is based on as part of the accession process. Within my responsibilities, I will work with the Commissioner in charge of Financial Services, Savings and Investments Union to support the uniform implementation of EU sanctions across the EU.

5. In the mission letter addressed to you, you have been tasked to seek a trigger for the use of the clauses enshrined in the Treaties - in particular as referred to in Articles 31(2), 41(3), 45(2), 46(2)-(5) of the Treaty on the European Union - that allow for decisions in the CFSP to be taken by qualified majority voting. What obstacles do you foresee in executing this mandated task and how do you intend to build consensus to allow for the widest possible use of qualified majority voting on CFSP decisions, particularly in the context of Parliament's call for the Council to gradually switch to qualified majority voting for decisions in areas of the CFSP that do not have military or defence implications, bearing in mind the concerns of some Member States? Additionally, how do you plan to come to a common understanding on topics that are divisive among Member States?

According to the Treaties, the area of CFSP is subject to specific rules, including unanimous voting in the Council as the general decision-making rule. While unanimity projects EU unity and strength, it should not, however, slow our determination and ability to respond to urgent major challenges. This has been witnessed recently with the inability of the Council to agree on EU statements, or the Union to take the floor in international organisations and speak with a single unified voice. Unfortunately, this has also hampered EU support for Ukraine, most notably in making full use of the European Peace Facility (EPF). To be a global leader, the Union needs to be able to take decisions in a faster and more efficient way, overcoming constraints in decision-making. In my capacity as High Representative/Vice President, I will seek, in line with my Mission Letter, to convince all that this goal plays in the general interest. Different solutions have been explored to allow decisions to be taken by Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) and to enhance the efficiency of the Union's action in the area of CFSP:

- The use of constructive abstention, especially in the early days of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine [allowed Member States of military neutrality to not oppose the decisions taken under the EPF to reimburse those Member States who decided to deliver lethal weapons to Ukraine];
- The use of the existing 'passerelle clauses' enshrined in the Treaties that would enable the EU to take certain key decisions in CFSP by QMV, i.e. as swiftly and quickly as other global players. But the activation of these clauses requires a unanimous decision of the European Council.

CFSP has traditionally been a sovereignty-sensitive area, and for different reasons, several Member States do not wish to move towards QMV. I understand that the possibility to veto is seen by some as the ultimate guarantee to protect national interests and safeguard influence in EU decision-making. However, in some cases, unanimity has also been instrumentalised, against the principle of sincere cooperation enshrined in the Treaty.

With this in mind, if confirmed, I intend to engage in an open discussion with the Council to ensure that we build the necessary confidence to explore making use of these clauses I believe that using the possibilities already foreseen by the Treaty would be a good test case and allow confidence-building among Member States on the use of QMV. Our collective aim must be to ensure the credibility, consistency and effectiveness of the EU's external action, while ensuring Member States' ownership.

6. *The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029, aim at strengthening the Commission's relationship with the European Parliament. Building on the commitments given by your predecessors (and the best practices established with them), 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;*
- *ensure that the positions of Parliament are duly taken into account in your proposals (including joint proposals) for Council legal acts on all topics relevant for the Committee on Foreign Affairs (including on restrictive measures and sanctions regimes), consultations on EU foreign policy priorities and positions (notably ahead of meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council) and new or updated EU communications and strategies, and ensure that Parliament and notably its Committee on Foreign Affairs is systematically and timely informed of such proposals, consultations and documents;*
- *ensure that within three months after the adoption of Parliament's resolutions also in the field of the CFSP/CSDP, a written follow-up is provided with an assessment of how Parliament's positions have been taken into account;*
- *ensure that Parliament's views are duly taken into consideration before and throughout the process of international negotiations, including that Parliament and notably its Committee on Foreign Affairs is immediately and fully informed at all stages of negotiations of international agreements (including non-binding agreements, arrangements, Memoranda of Understanding) as well as their implementation and review, and that no provisional application of agreements is requested before Parliament has given its consent; in that context, how to progress on a revision of the 2002 Inter-Institutional Agreement on access to sensitive information in the field of*

CFSP/CSDP (including on sanctions, the mandates for CSDP missions, their reports and country strategies sent by EUSRs to Political and Security Committee)?

- *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;*

As a former MEP, I value highly this parliamentary diplomacy. If confirmed, I commit to building on existing good practices and maintaining regular exchanges of views with the European Parliament – in particular with the Committee on Foreign Affairs – on EU foreign policy priorities, its objectives and implementation through the Structured Dialogue on upcoming proposals and communications from the Commission’s Work Programme, as well as participating in ad-hoc exchanges, in the appropriate format.

- *ensure that the positions of Parliament are duly taken into account in your proposals (including joint proposals) for Council legal acts on all topics relevant for the Committee on Foreign Affairs (including on restrictive measures and sanctions regimes), consultations on EU foreign policy priorities and positions (notably ahead of meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council) and new or updated EU communications and strategies, and ensure that Parliament and notably its Committee on Foreign Affairs is systematically and timely informed of such proposals, consultations and documents;*

If confirmed, I commit to taking the views of the European Parliament into account for the proposals that I make to the Council. I will continue using the existing practices of dialogue in a systematic and coherent way. I will also inform and consult the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET). As per established practice, and irrespective of other types of exchanges, I will inform the Chair of AFET in writing of the results of the Council meetings. I believe that comprehensive and substantial dialogue is the most efficient and constructive way to ensure that the views and position of the European Parliament are properly taken into account. For example, the European Parliament’s position and actions have played an important role in the effective outreach to third countries in response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. I commit to pursuing this practice further.

- *ensure that within three months after the adoption of Parliament’s resolutions also in the field of the CFSP/CSDP, a written follow-up is provided with an assessment of how Parliament’s positions have been taken into account;*

I am committed to duly taking into account the Parliament’s positions in my work and will instruct the EEAS accordingly. I propose that we engage in a constant dialogue and follow-up, in which both sides can quickly adjust, adapt and bring on board the most recent developments and take into account the fast-moving pace of international dynamics.

- *ensure that Parliament’s views are duly taken into consideration before and throughout the process of international negotiations, including that Parliament and notably its Committee on Foreign Affairs is immediately and fully informed at all stages of negotiations of international agreements (including non-binding agreements, arrangements, Memoranda of Understanding) as well as their implementation and review, and that no provisional application of agreements is requested before Parliament has given its consent; in that context, how to progress on a revision of the 2002 Inter-Institutional Agreement on access to sensitive information in the field of CFSP/CSDP (including on sanctions, the mandates for CSDP missions, their reports and country strategies sent by EUSRs to Political and Security Committee)?*

If confirmed, I will strive to uphold the principles of transparency, accountability and democratic legitimacy. I will ensure that the European Parliament is immediately and fully informed, at all stages of the procedure for international agreements. This requires that the necessary arrangements are made to ensure confidential treatment where necessary.

On the issue of non-binding agreements, I would like to recall that, as confirmed by the Court, they fall within the policy prerogatives of the Council. I am, nevertheless, ready to look at ways to keep the Parliament informed, at the appropriate moment in time in the procedure, in full respect of Council’s prerogatives.

The instrument in force for the exchange of classified information between the European Parliament and Council in the field of CFSP, dating from 2002, is still to be improved. I am fully committed to work with the Parliament and Council reaching an agreement as soon as possible. In the meantime, I will keep the Members of the European Parliament informed via the meetings of the Special Committee.

7. What are the concrete measures that you intend to take in order to maintain and further improve the cooperation between you (as supported by the Commission/EEAS) and Parliament building on the current well established practice, including providing details on how you intend to:

- maintain regular exchanges of views both in the Plenary and with the Committee on Foreign Affairs (including 'structured dialogue' and to ensure your ad hoc presence in the Committee at a short notice in case of significant events or major developments); ensure your regular attendance of Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on CFSP/CSDP;
- improve in-person briefings to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, in a regular and timely manner both before and after Foreign Affairs Council meetings, including in its Defence Format, and provide pertinent and relevant non-public information (including via 'in camera' meetings only when duly justified) on any current international situations and political reporting from the EEAS;
- continue full engagement with the European Parliament's Special Committee;
- enhance joint consultation meetings on the CFSP in particular via advance written information from your services on all CFSP budgetary decisions;
- ensure the appearance of newly appointed Heads of Delegations and EU Special Representatives before the Committee on Foreign Affairs and that their appointment is conditional upon confirmation by the Parliament, as well as to ensure the appearances of Heads of CSDP missions and senior EEAS officials in the Committee as well as their meaningful contributions, in particular at in camera meetings, and to continue the organisation of the "EP-leg" of the "Annual Ambassadors' Conference"; make sure to maintain proper geographical and gender balance when appointing new Heads of Delegations and high ranking EEAS officials;
- better synchronise Commission/EEAS 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 negotiations on international agreements, human rights dialogues and planning of democracy support activities;
- continue to facilitate the cooperation and synergies between Parliament and the EEAS, including EU Delegations, in the context of official visits of Members of the European Parliament to third countries;
- further develop the External Action Service into an effective European Diplomatic Service;
- enhance the existing good cooperation between EU and EP Elections Observations Missions and the ones covered by other international organisations;
- associate the European Parliament more closely to positions and decisions regarding the accession processes?

- maintain regular exchanges of views both in the Plenary and with the Committee on Foreign Affairs (including 'structured dialogue' and to ensure your ad hoc presence in the Committee at a short notice in case of significant events or major developments); ensure your regular attendance of Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on CFSP/CSDP;

In addition to Plenary debates, notably to wind up the adoption of the European Parliament's annual reports on the implementation of the CFSP and CSDP in accordance with Article 36 TEU, and the annual report: 'Human Rights and Democracy in the World', I believe we can also improve parliamentary discussions by focusing on a targeted number of foreign policy topics, thereby concentrating on timely, frank, and substantial discussions, with results showcasing our determination and engagement to third partners. Ad-hoc meetings in the appropriate format could also be envisaged, especially for quick-moving decisions and situations. If confirmed, I also intend to attend regularly, to the extent possible, the Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on CFSP/CSDP.

- improve in-person briefings to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, in a regular and timely manner both before and after Foreign Affairs Council meetings, including in its Defence Format, and provide pertinent and relevant non-public information (including via 'in camera' meetings only when duly justified) on any current international situations and political reporting from the EEAS;

I will inform and consult AFET, ahead of the meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council and on their results. The sharing of reports and information has contributed to increasing our common knowledge on foreign affairs topics, and to developing a common framework and understanding of our actions. If confirmed, I will continue to fully implement the practical arrangements of the previous legislature (i.e. swifter sharing of information through electronic means) and will instruct the relevant services to work with the European Parliament and to advise me on further possible improvements, while ensuring the appropriate security and confidentiality.

- continue full engagement with the European Parliament's Special Committee;

While the negotiation for a new arrangement between the European Parliament, Council and the High Representative on the Parliament's access to classified information continue, I will keep the Members of the European Parliament informed on classified information in the meetings with the Special Committee, with full respect of the rules related to sharing of this type of information.

- *enhance joint consultation meetings on the CFSP in particular via advance written information from your services on all CFSP budgetary decisions;*

If confirmed, I commit to sharing with the Parliament the budgetary implications of the Council Decisions related to the CFSP budget as soon as possible after their adoption, including through the Joint Consultation Meetings. I will also instruct the Chair of the Political and Security Committee, the Head of Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the EEAS senior management, as appropriate, to continue informing the Chairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Budget, as well as other relevant Members of the European Parliament, about the implementation of the CFSP budget.

- *ensure the appearance of newly appointed Heads of Delegations and EU Special Representatives before the Committee on Foreign Affairs and that their appointment is conditional upon confirmation by the Parliament, as well as to ensure the appearances of Heads of CSDP missions and senior EEAS officials in the Committee as well as their meaningful contributions, in particular at in camera meetings, and to continue the organisation of the "EP-leg" of the "Annual Ambassadors' Conference"; make sure to maintain proper geographical and gender balance when appointing new Heads of Delegations and high ranking EEAS officials;*

I commit to continuing the practice of making newly appointed Ambassadors and EU Special Representatives available for exchanges of views with AFET upon taking up their mandate and during their postings. Regarding the Annual Ambassadors Conference, the European Parliament's participation has a clear added value and continuing the organisation of the "EP-leg" will bring even more opportunities to integrate with the outreach of EU Delegations in third countries with parliamentary diplomacy. EEAS selection procedures are firmly merit-based. If confirmed, I will pay particular attention to ensuring adequate geographical and gender balance. The EEAS is steadily advancing towards the goal of full gender parity at all management levels by 2025 and is also making progress towards greater geographical balance. To consolidate these positive trends and address imbalances, I will collaborate closely with all Member States, and encourage them to propose a well-qualified and gender-balanced pool of candidates.

- *better synchronise Commission/EEAS 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 negotiations on international agreements, human rights dialogues and planning of democracy support activities;*

As regards information to the Parliament and the Council on planning international agreements as part of the annual programming exercise, in addition to my commitment stemming from Article 218(10) TFEU and the relevant case-law of the EU Court of Justice, I am prepared to explore ways to enhance early information sharing on planning in order to better synchronise Commission/EEAS and Parliament activities. I will also keep AFET informed on timelines for official documents, meetings, missions and dialogues. More generally speaking, I intend to be closely involved in the dialogue which the Commission engages in with the European Parliament and Council before and after the adoption of the annual Work Programme.

- *continue to facilitate the cooperation and synergies between Parliament and the EEAS, including EU Delegations, in the context of official visits of Members of the European Parliament to third countries;*

I commit to continuing the current implementation of the Guidelines for visits by the European Parliament Delegations. I will instruct the EEAS to continue working closely with the Parliament's services throughout the process of deciding, preparing and undertaking Parliamentary missions abroad, not least because it will ensure consistency and complementarity between the work of the EU Delegations and parliamentary diplomacy.

- *further develop the External Action Service into an effective European Diplomatic Service;*

If confirmed, developing the EEAS into a 'future-ready EU diplomatic service' will be a top priority. Strategic cooperation with the Commission and the European Parliament will remain essential, including on issues of budget and human resources, to ensure adequate financial and human resources for the EEAS so that the EU can be a credible political and security actor globally. Crucially, emphasis on staff development and training will allow us

to define a common diplomatic and management culture. In this regard, the establishment of a European Diplomatic Academy (EUDA) – as proposed by the European Parliament - will play a pivotal role in shaping a genuine European diplomatic corps.

- *enhance the existing good cooperation between EU and EP Elections Observations Missions and the ones covered by other international organisations;*

The excellent teamwork between the European Parliament, the EEAS, and the European Commission is central to the success of EU Election Observation. Coordination with other international observers should continue, based on the international declaration of principles on electoral observation, including through meetings attended annually by Parliament, EEAS and Commission services.

- *associate the European Parliament more closely to positions and decisions regarding the accession processes?*

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Enlargement to advance the enlargement process in the coming years. The European Parliament's support for the process and engagement with the enlargement partners, in particularly through the Joint Parliamentary Committees with candidate countries, will help encourage the advancement of the enlargement process and focus political energy on the necessary reforms.

Question from the Committee on Development

8. In light of your mission letter, we trust the HR/VP to act as an honest broker in developing a truly balanced foreign policy and champion the SDGs. In view of your overarching role, what approach will you take on the College work for a “revamped external action finance”, so that it will continue to reflect a balanced regional and thematic distribution as currently under NDICI-Global Europe? What concrete measures and initiatives will you take to “ensure a better link between internal and external EU policies” as indicated in your mission letter? How will you effectively operationalise Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development in all legislative and political processes?

In light of your Mission Letter, we trust the HR/VP to act as an honest broker in developing a truly balanced foreign policy and champion the SDGs.

Not only will I do my utmost to be an honest broker in developing a truly balanced foreign policy that is designed to face current geopolitical realities, I also personally believe that the EU's success as a foreign policy actor is entirely dependent on our capacity to speak with one voice, and I will seek to broker this unity by regularly engaging with Council and Member States. This is how the EU can be a successful and practical contributor to global initiatives as we have recently been with the UN and partners, in shaping and ensuring the adoption of an ambitious Pact for the Future.

If confirmed, I will be unwavering in my commitment to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to ensure that they will mainstreamed across EU external action. This is simply good foreign policy and I believe there should be no compromises in this regard. Moreover, the impact of multiple crises – from climate change to the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East – have significantly hindered progress in the implementation of the SDGs. That is why promoting and supporting the achievement of the SDGs will remain a core element of the EU's international partnerships and why the EU's new approach, underpinned by Global Gateway, already allows the EU to contribute more significantly and effectively to the SDGs. With regard to fragile states, countries facing instability or in complex settings and other cases where Global Gateway is not the central instrument of our partnerships — I will also ensure, together with the Commissioner for International Partnerships, that we are able to offer targeted support that leaves no one behind.

In view of your overarching role, what approach will you take on the College work for a “revamped external action finance”, so that it will continue to reflect a balanced regional and thematic distribution as currently under NDICI-Global Europe?

The EU will only be able to meet the challenges ahead with a new budget fit for its ambitions, including revamped external action financing. This must be designed both in a way that fits with the partners we work with and is aligned with our strategic interests in order for it to be impactful. Our reflection needs to start with “what do we want to finance” followed by “how” best we can deliver on our objectives and maximise results on the ground. When designing the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), we will need to draw lessons from the current one notably in terms of simplicity, flexibility, speed and strategic focus. The future MFF will also be designed in a radically different context than the previous one, with much higher geopolitical and geoeconomic stakes, which it should reflect.

While I cannot anticipate the specific content of the Commission’s proposal, I can underline that my personal approach, should you confirm me as Vice-President, will be to fully engage in this process, working closely with the Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration as well as the Commissioners in the external relations family, to ensure that the outcome in the proposal from the Commission involves sound and fit financial instruments that will fully support EU external action.

What concrete measures and initiatives will you take to “ensure a better link between internal and external EU policies” as indicated in your Mission Letter? How will you effectively operationalise Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development in all legislative and political processes?

If confirmed as Vice-President and in line with my Mission Letter, I will ensure regular, timely meetings of the external relations Commissioners to discuss the external aspects of EU policies with an extended invitation to relevant Commissioners where relevant. The aim should be to ensure the external dimension is consistently integrated into our internal policies and vice-versa. With the same purpose, and as specified in my Mission letter, I will prepare regular College debates on key foreign policy issues where I will also underline wherever I see clear crossovers with internal EU policy.

Together with other Members of the College, if confirmed, I will work to embed the external dimension in our internal policies, from policy design to implementation including on budgetary issues where we will develop an even stronger link between external action financing and internal policy priorities. This will ensure, for example, that sustainable development considerations are integrated into all relevant policy areas and decision-making processes. Moreover, I will promote the early assessment and integration of the potential impacts of EU policies in third countries in the policy design phase, including the potential cumulative impacts of various EU policies. This will include continuous outreach to our partners in Brussels and through EU Delegations, to present, explain and defend our policies and engage with partners at the earliest stage, and importantly to listen and respond to concerns. I also want to ensure more targeted support to our partners when needed, accompanying the roll-out of EU policies with flanking measures to help them adjust to and benefit from relevant legislation. This is a fundamental part of operationalising the principle of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and its SDG 17 on partnerships, as well as the commitment of Policy coherence for development under the Treaties (Article 208 TFEU).

Question from the Committee on International Trade

9. You have been tasked with shaping a ‘new foreign economic policy’, working with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy. Could you outline your initial ideas regarding the content of this policy and the envisaged timeline? What is the role of trade and investment in this policy? How do you intend to cooperate with the Commissioner in charge of trade and economic security on the design and implementation of this new foreign economic policy, as well as on shaping the Union’s external relations more generally, while respecting human rights and fundamental values? In your role as Vice-President, how will you ensure that the impact on our trade partners will be taken into consideration more systematically in the design and implementation of Union legislation? How, concretely, do you intend to engage with non-EU countries impacted by Union legislation, and how do you intend to cooperate with other Commissioners on this matter?

You have been tasked with shaping a ‘new foreign economic policy’, working with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy. Could you outline your initial ideas regarding the content of this policy and the envisaged timeline? What is the role of trade and investment in this policy?

In a world marked by the rising weaponisation of dependencies, the EU needs to strike the right balance between economic openness – which remains indispensable to our prosperity – and necessary protection – taking a more assertive stance to enhance our resilience, to defend ourselves from unfair competition, and to address risks. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to shape the “new foreign economic policy” together with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy as per my Mission Letter, and in particular the Commissioners in charge of Trade and Economic Security, International Partnerships and other relevant Commissioners. Geopolitics and geoeconomics go together, and so should our response.

As regards initial ideas, the President-elect has already outlined the general approach in the Political Guidelines around three pillars: economic security, trade, and investment in partnerships. Based on this, I am committed, if confirmed as Vice President, to developing further and implementing the policy, together with the other Members of the College, and drawing from the findings of research around this topic such as the Draghi Report. In doing so, I believe we should also engage with other institutions, including the European Parliament, the relevant Committees and their Members, as well as with international partners.

I will work with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security on Europe’s economic security, building on the implementation the 2023 European Economic Security Strategy, and going further to develop a new economic security doctrine. I believe that our approach must continue to be underpinned by a joint risk assessment and threat analysis with our Member States, on the basis of which targeted and proportionate mitigation measures will be developed.

I want to emphasise the importance of the “partnering” component of the EU’s approach to economic security policy. The EU needs to seek opportunities to strike mutually beneficial partnerships, not least for diversification, while avoiding unwarranted repercussions of our policies on our relations with third countries. The economic security dialogues, as well as diplomatic efforts including through EU Delegations, will play a key role in this regard.

With regards to the second pillar – trade – this is a fundamental component of relations with our partners and we should aim to conclude ongoing negotiations while exploring the scope and opportunity of opening new ones. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security to deepen free and fair trade links with partners around the world. The new Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships will be an important element of our comprehensive partnerships. At the same time, we should also be ready to mobilise our trade defence instruments where and when needed, ensuring a level playing field, and making sure that we fully understand the impacts of the measures we take internally on our partners, and are ready to support them and address their concerns. Reforming and strengthening the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will also continue to be a priority.

On the third pillar – investment in partnerships – today’s reality is such that the EU needs to work with partners to meet the majority of its objectives as a Union. Our aim here must be to create a coherent and integrated “offer” which is beneficial to both the EU and partner countries and allows both sides to foster long-term, sustainable and mutually advantageous partnerships. Bringing Global Gateway to the next level will be essential in this endeavour, by ensuring and enhancing synergies with trade and macro-economic supporting an integrated package, as well as further anchoring Global Gateway in our broader external action and foreign policy.

How do you intend to cooperate with the Commissioner in charge of trade and economic security on the design and implementation of this new foreign economic policy, as well as on shaping the Union’s external relations more generally, while respecting human rights and fundamental values?

Firstly, the EU’s policies must always be guided by the respect for human rights and fundamental values. For example, Global Gateway is rooted in the respect and promotion of the rule of law, human rights and international norms and standards and EU Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have linked human rights provisions to political framework agreements. If confirmed, I will be committed to mainstreaming human rights across all dimensions of our external relations, including in the new economic foreign policy.

Secondly, while not prejudging the working methods of the Commission, therefore I envisage plenty of opportunities for us to discuss the design and implementation of the new economic foreign policy in this configuration, for example. Bearing in mind our respective Mission Letter, there are also a number of specific files on which I expect to closely cooperate with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, such as enhancing the transatlantic partnership with the U.S., managing the complex relations with China, strengthening relations

with the UK, developing a new Strategic EU-India Agenda and more broadly managing and deepening our partnerships around the world.

In your role as Vice-President, how will you ensure that the impact on our trade partners will be taken into consideration more systematically in the design and implementation of Union legislation? How, concretely, do you intend to engage with non-EU countries impacted by Union legislation, and how do you intend to cooperate with other Commissioners on this matter?

As per the Political Guidelines which clearly underline the need to have a more systematic approach to assessing the impact of EU law on non-EU countries, and as per both of our Mission Letters, the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security and I have been entrusted to work together to ensure that Europe engages and responds to the concerns of partners impacted by the choices we make.

If confirmed, I will ensure that the external dimension of our internal policies is fully embedded in the College's decision-making process, from policy design to implementation, including on financing. In practice, I see this as:

- assessing the potential impacts of policy ex-ante;
- engaging in dialogue with partners as early on in the policy-making process as possible;
- developing a stronger link between the EU's external action financing and internal EU policy priorities, from climate and energy to digital and food security
- pro-actively - in Brussels and on the ground through the relevant EU Delegation – communicating on emerging opportunities that EU policies may represent for third countries;
- targeting support to help partners adjust and mitigate impacts, including by mobilising EU actors in a Team Europe approach, when and where needed.

Question from the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

10. Will you continue making the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment a priority throughout all external action initiatives of the EU? What concrete plans do you have to follow-up on the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) and do you commit to adopt, together with relevant Commissioners, a GAP IV? What steps will you take to implement and prioritise the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda, especially with regard to integrating a gender perspective and ensuring women's participation and leadership in all peace and security-related contexts? How will you tackle violations of women's rights in third countries, especially female genital mutilation and violations from other harmful practices, and will you continue supporting women human rights defenders, sexual and reproductive health and rights defenders and LGBTIQ+ rights defenders? How will you cooperate with the European Parliament and involve the FEMM committee in this regard?

Will you continue making the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment a priority throughout all external action initiatives of the EU?

Yes. There are no sustainable solutions to the current global challenges if gender equality is not considered from the start. If confirmed, mainstreaming gender equality – and equality more broadly – in our foreign and security policy is an absolute priority for me, not least because it is crucial for its success. In practice, I will seek to build an alliance amongst the relevant Commissioners for whom gender equality and women's empowerment falls under their portfolios and should be mainstreamed into their work.

What concrete plans do you have to follow-up on the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) and do you commit to adopt, together with relevant Commissioners, a GAP IV?

As the EU's Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) will be in place until 2027, the focus for now must be on its implementation. It has already enabled us to accelerate the progress in advancing women's rights and aligning our

efforts in this regard with the existing Multiannual Financial Framework. Post-2027, a future strategy must ensure an even stronger connection between women's rights and empowerment and the EU's foreign and security policy, aligned with international cooperation. Coherence between internal and external EU actions on gender equality will also be ensured through the renewal of the gender equality strategy in 2025.

What steps will you take to implement and prioritise the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda, especially with regard to integrating a gender perspective and ensuring women's participation and leadership in all peace and security-related contexts?

The UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) is increasingly relevant in the context of current geopolitics and the increase in wars and conflict. The participation of women in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts is fundamental to sustainable peace. The EU must take a clear and firm position here in order to support the implementation of the WPS Agenda. On my side, I will work with EEAS experts, including the EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, to enhance women's participation and leadership in all peace and security related contexts and discussions. I will also work on improving our cooperation with other international and regional organisations to achieve the objectives of the WPS agenda in its current form. Looking forward, we will start our reflections on the second action plan on WPS, aligned with and integrated in GAP III. This will take place in parallel with the implementation of the current agenda, and in partnership with geographically diverse coalitions of states and civil society stakeholders.

In a similar vein, I will ensure the EU is a fervent supporter of victim and survivor-centred approaches and transitional justice mechanisms for addressing conflict related sexual violence, including in close co-operation with the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

How will you tackle violations of women's rights in third countries, especially female genital mutilation and violations from other harmful practices, and will you continue supporting women human rights defenders, sexual and reproductive health and rights defenders and LGBTIQ+ rights defenders? How will you cooperate with the European Parliament and involve the FEMM committee in this regard?

While I would consider there to be more global awareness of the importance of preventing violations as higher today than at any other point in history, the regression in the realisation of human rights for women has been significant. 40% of women and girls still live in countries where levels of discrimination are high or very high; in 46 countries accounting for 16% of the world's population of women, domestic violence is not considered a crime. If confirmed, I will push for the EU to make full use of its toolbox to address different violations, including targeted engagements by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Special Envoys and the EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity.

Ending specific harmful norms and practices, including Female Genital Mutilation, will remain an important issue in the EU's external action. I will push for the implementation of international commitments, including accountability, and will seek to build strong coalitions in multilateral fora to achieve this goal. I see engagement with Members of the FEMM Committee on this as particularly important. Annual work in connection to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a welcome practice that I would very much like to continue.

The EU continues to be perceived as a global leader when it comes to values, human rights and sustainable development. Whether we actually are depends on how we uphold these values in practice, including how we ensure Human Rights Defenders are protected in doing their important work. The protection of Human Rights Defenders, including Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and LGBTIQ rights defenders, will continue to be at the centre of EU's external human rights policy. They will remain amongst the main beneficiaries of EU funds. The universal decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations and will also remain a goal of the EU's work on human rights. Heeding this Parliament's call, I will also assess how we can use political, diplomatic, cooperation and trade tools to further this goal.

I am fully aware of the European Parliament's strong record and support for non-discrimination and all equality matters. I see you as an extremely important ally in my work on in this area, therefore, and I will look for ways in which we can be more strategically engaged.

Question from the Subcommittee on Human Rights

11. Which concrete measures do you intend to take to ensure that the advancement of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a strategic objective of the Union's action on the international scene, in conformity with article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union, in particular regarding implementation/respect of the human rights conditionality in international agreements, the EU financial assistance, and the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime? Do you commit to working for the protection of electoral integrity by updating the EU guidelines on electoral support and enhanced election observation? How do you see the partnership with the European Parliament in these areas?

Which concrete measures do you intend to take to ensure that the advancement of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a strategic objective of the Union's action on the international scene, in conformity with article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union, in particular regarding implementation/respect of the human rights conditionality in international agreements, the EU financial assistance, and the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime?

As per Article 21 (TEU), the Union's action in the international scene has been and will continue to be guided by the principles that have inspired its own creation, including democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law. These are core EU values, and the Political Guidelines make it very clear that one of the priorities of the Commission will be to promote EU values both at home and abroad. It is a matter of EU interest too: the security of EU citizens also depends on the extent to which democracy and human rights are upheld in the rest of the world. If confirmed, I commit to advancing human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, not only as a legal obligation under the Treaty, but also as a strategic priority. I will mainstream this agenda as part of working closely with the relevant Commissioners, Council and Member States, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, and other EU Special Representatives to increase the effectiveness of the EU's action to protect and promote human rights and democracy. I will also seek to work more closely together with international organisations, third countries, and civil society.

If confirmed, I will make sure we address human rights in our dialogue with third countries. We will continue working with partners to support and encourage them to abide by their international human rights obligations and follow up in a systematic way. Human rights are universal values that are inherent to the dignity of every human being. I will task my services, in the Headquarter and in EU Delegations, to engage with third countries and debunk narratives that depict human rights and democracy as an invention of the "West". If confirmed, I will also work with the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration and other relevant Commissioners on the external aspects of migration. In particular, I will seek to ensure that whenever migration issues are an operational part of our comprehensive partnerships, full respect of fundamental rights is guaranteed.

I recognise the European Parliament's interest in ensuring that human rights clauses in EU agreements are both effective and operational. EU Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) concluded with third countries since 2009 are linked to the human rights provisions in political framework agreements. These clauses set clear, mutually agreed expectations and provide institutional channels for regular dialogue on human rights, as well as for cooperation with civil society actors in partner countries. While the suspension of EU agreements, including trade aspects, is provided for in cases of violations of essential elements clauses, it is seen as a measure of last resort. Dialogue is always the preferred approach to the extent possible, as reflected in debates with EU Member States. As part of our trade policy, the conditionality of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) also provides incentives to developing countries to respect human rights and protect the environment. As you know, the Council and the European Parliament agreed on an amendment to the existing GSP Regulation, in order to extend the GSP scheme for the period 2024-2027 while negotiations continue to finalise the review.

The Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR), created in 2020, will remain an important component of our human rights toolbox. As of October 2024, it has been applied to 117 individuals and 33 entities. Sanctions should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a wider policy approach. Applying restrictive measures against individuals, entities and bodies, including state and non-state actors, involved or associated with serious human rights violations and abuses, also sends a strong message to potential perpetrators. In that sense, this instrument

has a preventive function as well. If confirmed, I will not hesitate to propose new listings when we see human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by individuals, entities or bodies anywhere in the world.

EU financial assistance for human rights and democracy is significant and crucial for the effectiveness of our work in this area. Through the thematic programme for Human Rights and Democracy, the EU supports the implementation of its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. This includes a broad range of projects promoting, inter alia, political and civic participation, independent media and media pluralism, anti-corruption, as well as fighting against impunity and the eradication of torture. The EU is also a major provider of urgent support to Human Rights Defenders at risk. Support for democracy and good governance are also mainstreamed in bilateral cooperation where resources are significantly higher. In addition, Global Gateway delivers support to infrastructure projects while ensuring that partner countries adhere to the rule of law and uphold high standards of human, social and workers' rights, especially when these projects impact local communities like in the case of extractive industries. This will continue to be the case.

Do you commit to working for the protection of electoral integrity by updating the EU guidelines on electoral support and enhanced election observation?

EU election observation is a practical and effective foreign policy instrument that remains central to the EU's democracy support policies and strategies. It exemplifies inter-institutional cooperation, as it is a result of excellent teamwork between the European Parliament, the EEAS, and the Commission. I take this opportunity to praise the dedication of the honourable Members who have served as Chief Observers or as members of the European Parliament Election Observation Missions, who are central to the success of our EU Electoral Observation Missions.

The Communication on EU Election Assistance and Observation dates from 2000. Without prejudging the outcome of future College discussions or decisions, I will consider raising and discussing the opportunity of a new Communication during the coming mandate. This could allow us to reaffirm the importance of electoral observation as an instrument, confirm the EU's attachment to electoral assistance as a key instrument of democracy promotion, and assess any adjustments that might be needed to better reflect current challenges to electoral processes. In the meanwhile, the handbook for EU Election Observation has been updated regularly over the past years. A fourth edition should be ready for publication in the course of 2025.

How do you see the partnership with the European Parliament in these areas?

The European Parliament is an essential partner in promoting human rights and democracy in the world through concrete actions, including urgency debates, the annual report on human rights and democracy, election observation missions, country visits, the Sakharov prize and other political actions.

Our partnership is solid, but we can and should make it stronger. If confirmed, I intend to engage regularly with the Parliament. I also commit to the Parliament to receiving information – orally or in writing – on our political and human rights dialogues and other important meetings.

The EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which provides the roadmap for human rights in EU foreign policy, has been extended until 2027. I look forward to the European Parliament's views on the implementation of this but also on the priorities for the next one.

Question from the Subcommittee on Security and Defense

12. The Strategic Compass was launched shortly after Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and during a period of deteriorating security in the EU's Neighbourhood and beyond. Do you consider the need to launch a review of the Strategic Compass, including a threat analysis and mapping-out of vulnerabilities and shortcomings of capabilities and resources of the Member States? The Mission Letters include a commitment that you and the Commissioner for Defence and Space would prepare a White Paper on the Future of European Defence, what relationship, if any, do you consider this should have to the frameworks provided by the Strategic Compass and NATO's Strategic Concept? How will you involve the European Parliament in all these strategic reflections and policy initiatives, in order to take into consideration Parliament's view and enhance democratic oversight of initiatives and decisions related to European defence?

The Strategic Compass was launched shortly after Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and during a period of deteriorating security in the EU's Neighbourhood and beyond. Do you consider the need to launch a review of the Strategic Compass, including a threat analysis and mapping-out of vulnerabilities and shortcomings of capabilities and resources of the Members States?

Since 2022 the Strategic Compass has guided the EU's efforts to strengthen security and defence policy. The EU has delivered meaningfully on its objectives. Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and a rapidly deteriorating threat environment have instilled a sense of urgency. I have witnessed this myself as a former Prime Minister and member of the European Council. There is a common European understanding that the EU needs to do more, do better and do it faster, for our own and global security and defence.

This political will has already been translated into action and the track record of implementation of the Strategic Compass is strong:

- The EU and its Member States provided unprecedented military support to Ukraine;
- New civilian and military missions and operations were launched in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and the Red Sea.
- EU partnerships with NATO and strategic partners were substantially reinforced;
- New strategies and tools were developed to better address security and defence challenges in the maritime, space and cyber domains;
- EU tools to counter hybrid threats, cyber-attacks and foreign information manipulation and interference were strengthened;
- The first EU Live Military Exercise was organised;
- And several key new initiatives were developed to strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base.

While many of the actions have been implemented, much remains to be done. We are still not doing and delivering enough. We need to do everything we can to help Ukraine win the war against Russia. We need to make sure our strategies and toolboxes deliver in concrete terms. We need to improve our defence readiness, and further incentivise Member States' efforts to jointly plan, develop, procure and operate military capabilities, and build a defence industry that is able to deliver. We need to address critical capability gaps and identify options to fund them.

Europe must give itself the means to defend and protect itself and to deter potential adversaries. To understand and respond to the rapidly changing threat environment, I believe a new Threat Analysis is urgently required. If confirmed, based on this new assessment of the challenges the EU has to face, as well as on state of implementation of the actions under the Strategic Compass, I am ready to consider, together with Council and Member States, new concrete ways to strengthen our level of ambition in the field of security and defence, also in relation to the White Paper on the future of European Defence and the future Preparedness Union Strategy.

The Mission Letter include a commitment that you and the Commissioner for Defence and Space would prepare a White Paper on the Future of European Defence, what relationship, if any, do you consider this should have to the frameworks provided by the Strategic Compass and NATO's Strategic Concept?

The Strategic Compass, negotiated and agreed with Member States, has been an essential instrument and will continue to guide our efforts to strengthen the EU's security and defence policy. However, as we have entered a new phase in terms of challenges and initiatives, we need to urgently take bolder steps to enhance Europe's defence and enable the emergence of a true European defence Union. If confirmed, this is exactly what I, together with the Commissioner for Defence and Space, intend to propose in the White Paper, also in my capacity as Head of the European Defence Agency.

Building on, amongst others, the Strategic Compass and the European Defence Industrial Strategy, the White Paper should outline the political ambition to increase the EU's defence readiness, as well as the readiness of Member States, and build a true European Defence Union. Together with the Commissioner for Defence and Space, we

will frame this new approach to defence by identifying investment needs, critical capability gaps and funding options. We need to better support Member States to jointly develop, procure and maintain full-spectrum defence capabilities for their armed forces, readying them for the most extreme military contingencies. We also need to enhance the link between EU-level defence industrial policy and national priorities in procurement and capability development and keep ensuring interoperability and coherence with NATO. We should address how the EU can support Member States to deliver on their commitments, including in the NATO context, for example, in helping to fill capability gaps. The White Paper should provide clear guidelines and objectives to achieve these goals.

The Strategic Compass and the European Defence Industrial Strategy are already fully coherent with NATO's Strategic Concept, and we will continue with the same approach with the White Paper. A stronger EU means a stronger NATO. If confirmed, I will work make it a priority to further improve the EU's strategic partnership with NATO – in full respect of the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and decision-making autonomy of the EU, which are key to our overall security.

How will you involve the European Parliament in all these strategic reflections and policy initiatives, in order to take into consideration Parliament's view and enhance democratic oversight of initiatives and decisions related to European defence?

I am thankful for the European Parliament's continuous engagement and strong support for our efforts to strengthen the EU's role as a security and defence actor. The support of the European Parliament is critical to fully and successfully exercise the dual functions of HR/VP. If I am confirmed, I will pursue an active and transparent exchange of information, involve the Parliament from the earliest stages and ensure that its positions are heard across all topics relevant for the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) including its Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE) and the Sub-Committee on Human Rights (DROI). This would include regular updates in the appropriate format.