

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Piotr SERAFIN****Budget, Anti-fraud, Public Administrations****1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

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

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

I have always been committed to the idea of a strong and united European continent. I have carried out my entire professional and political career in public service, and Europe and the European Union have always formed the broader framework of my work. I have held a range of positions related to EU affairs both within the Polish and European administration, many of them directly linked with budget-related issues. In my first job, I was proud to support the Chief Negotiator of Poland's accession to the European Union. At the historic 2002 summit in Copenhagen, during which the accession negotiations of ten countries were agreed, I advised on the financial package and on issues related to the EU budget. I was also involved in the campaign ahead of the Polish referendum on accession to the European Union, including as co-author of a report on the costs and benefits of EU membership. In the Polish government, I have held both civil service and political roles, including as Secretary of State for European Affairs in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as the Prime Minister's EU Sherpa and, most recently, as the Permanent Representative of Poland to the EU. My experience in the EU institutions includes working for the Member of the European Commission for Financial Programming and Budget, Mr Janusz Lewandowski, and for the General-Secretariat of the Council of the European Union as Director for energy, transport and telecommunication. But my most important, and in many respects most formative role was working for the President of the European Council, Mr Donald Tusk, as Head of his Cabinet. Throughout these experiences, I have developed a comprehensive understanding of the EU, covering virtually all its political, financial and legal aspects. At the same time, I have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the European interest, Europe's unity and my own professional independence, both in the agreements and decisions I have helped to prepare.

I am keen to strengthen the European Union and its unity, in order to continue improving the security of Europeans, the competitiveness of the European economy and the quality of people's lives. If I am confirmed and entrusted with responsibility for the EU budget, I will contribute towards this Commission becoming an Investment Commission. I will strive to turn our current and future political priorities into results that make a real difference to people throughout the continent. In this spirit, if confirmed, I will make every effort to reach a timely agreement on a Multiannual Financial Framework that is fit for purpose. At the same time, I will engage relentlessly to ensure that every cent of European taxpayers' money is protected from fraud and other irregularities.

Furthermore, I will strive to achieve an even more modern, diverse and flexible European civil service with a talented and committed workforce. Our European civil service, and in particular the workforce of the European Commission, will lead the way in delivering the political priorities for the upcoming mandate. If confirmed, I would like to make the Commission more representative of the people we serve. We have made much progress in terms of gender balance across management, but further efforts are necessary. More broadly speaking, our Union must have at its disposal a dedicated and highly skilled civil service. This is essential in view of the continuously growing number of tasks conferred to the EU level. If confirmed, these would be key parts of my mission.

In accordance with the obligation in the interinstitutional agreement, I will work towards further developing the gender mainstreaming methodology in the current EU budget. As part of the preparation of the future long-term budget, in line with the requirement of the Financial Regulation, I will seek to ensure that programmes and activities are, where feasible and appropriate, in accordance with the relevant sector-specific rules, implemented taking into account the principle of gender equality and in accordance with an appropriate gender mainstreaming methodology.

I fully share the European Parliament's ambition to consider young people's perspectives in shaping EU policies. We have to listen very closely to the needs and concerns of young Europeans coming from different backgrounds, regardless of their social and economic status. If confirmed by the European Parliament, I will organise a Youth Policy Dialogue within the first 100 days of the mandate, alongside other members of the College, and follow this up with a further dialogue each year.

Finally, I would like to confirm that I have met all of the obligations towards the institutions that I have worked for, including by ensuring the timely and complete delivery of declarations of financial interests. As in previous functions, I will continue to follow the letter and spirit of the Treaty in all respects, in particular the duty to act in the European interest, without taking any instructions. I will fully adhere to all the applicable integrity, impartiality and ethical rules, honouring the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflicts of interest. My declaration of interests is complete and will be amended in case of any changes to report. I shall avoid any position or situation which could put into question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission. I fully commit to informing the President of the Commission of any situation which might involve a conflict of interests in the performance of my official duties.

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

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

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

If I am confirmed, as Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration I will commit fully to informing the European Parliament about my actions and those of my departments. This is a key precondition for a well-functioning and efficient EU. Furthermore, I will take political responsibility for the actions in my area of competence, as stated in my Mission letter.

Constructive and timely engagement with the European Parliament is crucial in order to achieve political ownership and deliver meaningful results for Europeans. This cooperation is even more important in the remit of my portfolio, given the role of the European Parliament as budgetary and discharge authority, as co-legislator (notably for the next generation of EU programmes), and in the procedure for the adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework.

For these reasons, if confirmed, I will establish a close working relationship with the Parliament and the relevant committees in every phase of the policy-making process as well as the political dialogue. My approach will focus on an efficient and regular exchange of information, based on openness and mutual trust. These principles are expressed in President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines and Mission letters, which also highlight the importance of strengthening the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. If confirmed, I will fully respect the provisions of the announced new Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and Commission. I will also fully implement the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources.

I am fully aware of the importance of equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council as regards in particular provision of information. This is not only a Treaty requirement, but also a democratic imperative for a Commissioner who is, as a Member of the College, accountable to the directly elected Members of the European Parliament.

If confirmed, I will ensure my participation in plenary sessions, all relevant committee meetings and trilogue exchanges. I will also maintain a regular flow of information with the Chairs and the members of relevant parliamentary committees. My door will always be open to hold bilateral meetings and consult extensively on matters of importance. Finally, as regards questions from Members of the European Parliament to the Commission that fall under my responsibility, I will make certain that they are responded to swiftly, accurately and constructively.

Questions from the Committee on Budgets

The discussions on the next multiannual financial framework have already begun, with the EU facing unprecedented challenges. The President-elect acknowledged the need for an in-depth overhaul of the EU budget in order to live up to these challenges, calling for "simplicity and flexibility, speed and strategic focus in our spending" and committing to a proposal for a more focused, simpler and impactful long-term budget with fewer programmes, a stronger linkage between national reforms and investment and a revamp of external action financing.

The written questions to the Commissioner-designate for Budget intend to shed some light on the practical consequences of this commitment:

3. Expenditure and the EU budget post-2027:

Beyond the requirement to reimburse the NextGenerationEU debt, the political guidelines of the President-elect list a number of new and existing priorities to be funded under the next MFF. In this context, what is your assessment of the amounts that will be required to deliver on current policies, finance new priorities and reimburse the NextGenerationEU debt?

This implies a profound overhaul of the EU budget towards a more focused, flexible, impactful and simpler long-term budget. What will the architecture of the MFF look like and what are the practical implications of the shift from a programme-based to a policy-based budget? Specifically, how will this affect the number and nature of spending programmes and how will you ensure that the reimbursement of NGEU debt does not reduce the funding for EU policies?

Europe is in an era of profound change – for our society and our security, our planet and our economy. The speed of change creates challenges which can only be solved through joint action in a united Europe. The EU budget has shown that it delivers where it matters most for our citizens, for farmers, researchers, businesses and regions across Europe and beyond. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will use all the tools at my disposal to empower Europe's future with our budget in the best possible way.

The direction of travel is clear. The guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen for the new Commission 2024-2029 outline our common priorities and challenges for the future. These range from sustainable prosperity and competitiveness to defence and security, from supporting people and strengthening our societies and quality of life, to leveraging our global Europe to uphold democracy and values. The EU budget cuts across all priorities and will require a team effort by all institutions. Let me be clear: I find the distinction between 'old or new', 'traditional or modern' completely artificial – there are only *European* needs and priorities, to which the budget must respond in the most efficient manner.

Taking all these elements into consideration, I firmly believe that the challenges ahead of us require an ambitious EU budget in size and design. To be an 'Investment Commission', we need a more efficient and impactful financial architecture for the Union. The EU budget must be the driver to leverage private and institutional funding and ensure coherence with national budgets, including via co-financing, to deliver on EU priorities. Strengthened and modernised revenues, notably via new own resources, will be essential for the EU budget's ability to deliver on our common objectives. Moreover, the start of the repayment of NextGenerationEU debt will have to be duly taken into account.

The current multiannual financial framework has provided the very basis for tackling the many challenges the EU has experienced in recent years, also thanks to the support of the European Parliament. Yet it has also revealed structural shortcomings in its ability to respond swiftly to new priorities and needs, given its complexity and rigidity.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will commit to working with the European Parliament and the Member States towards a future budget fit for our ambitions: more focused, simpler, and more impactful.

Focused. I will promote a policy-based budget to achieve the objectives of our Union. In practical terms, this means a budget that supports European public goods and positive spillover to reach our common goals, notably defence and security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness, and democracy and social fairness. This requires fewer, more focused programmes, and a plan for each country linking key reforms with investment targeted to where EU action is most needed. It requires coordinating, and in some cases, adapting, our different policies and tools to attain our objectives. For instance, this will include a strengthened cohesion and growth policy with regions at the centre, designed in partnership with national, regional and local authorities. Economic, social and territorial cohesion is the backbone of a united Europe. To enhance the EU's competitiveness and cohesion, we need to adapt our policies and tools to the specific challenges of Member States and their regions, which should be closely involved in their design, and strengthen the link between investments and reforms to foster synergies. A policy-based budget is well-adapted to promote innovation and ingenuity in Europe. Research and innovation, science and technology are at the centre of our economy. We need to bring out Europe's full strengths as an innovation powerhouse. A European Competitiveness Fund will provide the investment capacity to support strategic sectors critical to the EU's competitiveness. It will be targeted towards the needs of our economy and companies, starting with our small and medium enterprises, thereby contributing to addressing issues identified in the Draghi Report.

Simpler. Accessing EU funds should be easy and fast for beneficiaries, if we want to make a difference to people's lives. EU spending is spread over too many programmes, some of which fund the same type of actions but with different requirements and difficulties to combine funding effectively. As indicated in the Draghi report, 'where the EU does spend collectively, its effectiveness is hampered by fragmentation, complexity and rigidity'. Therefore, I will promote fewer, more focused programmes, as well as simpler rules and procedures for access to EU funds. Our businesses, small and medium enterprises, students, researchers and regions should not have to navigate a complex system of multiple instruments. Access to information, simple and predictable eligibility rules, and feedback-loops on our procedures are key elements to facilitate access to EU funding.

More impactful. Every euro spent via the Union budget must make a difference. The EU budget can further contribute to leverage and de-risk private capital, with the support of promotional banks, *in primis* the European Investment Bank Group. This will also be important in the area of defence, where we will work with Member States and in close cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. More broadly, better leveraging on the EU budget will be one key to unlock the financing needed for the green and digital transition. Similarly, a revamped external action financing will promote mutually beneficial partnerships, making the support more impactful and targeted for our partners as well as more aligned with our strategic interests.

More flexible. The present multiannual financial framework is still not suited well enough for today's and tomorrow's changing world. Despite the first ever successful mid-term revision of the framework, this is the key lesson of the past four years. I will work towards increasing the flexibility of the budget. We need to reduce rigidity in terms of strictly pre-defined budgets and overengineered planning of resources, to make the annual budgetary procedure more relevant and responsive to fast changing needs. The Commission and the budgetary authority have a shared responsibility in this regard. I will strongly support a better and more strategic use of the annual budgetary procedure that can meaningfully address evolving priorities and – at times unforeseen – needs.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will commit to consulting and exchanging broadly with all stakeholders, in particular the European Parliament and Member States, ahead of the Commission's proposal on the next multiannual financial framework. I look forward to receiving the Parliament's ideas and contributions to design a new budget fit for our future ambitions.

4. Revenue and financing of the EU budget post-2027:

The President-elect's guidelines are silent on resources beyond the call for "strengthened and modernised revenues for the EU budget". In her mission letter, she goes a step further asking you to "explore all sources of financing".

How will you ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for our common priorities? How will you push the Council and Member States to take a decision on the current proposals for new own resources and what is the fall-back option, should that not happen? The estimation by the Commission of the revenue was that its 2023 amending proposal on Own Resources could generate EUR 36 billion per year as of 2028, do you confirm this estimation?

Do you intend to put forward an amending and/or a new proposal? If so, what type of new own resources or new sources of revenue will it explore and what adjustments will this entail to the existing and proposed own resources? How will you ensure that the budget is balanced?

The EU budget will always have to be balanced. It is a requirement of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The Union will always honour its financial obligations. The Treaty also requires that the Union provides itself with the means necessary to attain its objectives and carry through its policies. Today, the EU budget is financed by several sources, the largest of them being the national contributions based on Member States' Gross National Income (GNI) share in the EU GNI.

The repayment of the amounts borrowed under NextGenerationEU and the related interest will be ensured in full and in time in any event. This is beyond doubt, as demonstrated by the triple-A rating for EU borrowing.

The Own Resources Decision sets two clear parameters when it comes to the reimbursement of NextGenerationEU borrowing: all liabilities will be fully repaid at the latest by 31 December 2058 and decline in a steady and predictable manner towards this date.

For the next multiannual financial framework, we will be faced with clear choices: there cannot be, at the same time, the reimbursement of NextGenerationEU, no increase in national contributions to the EU budget, an EU budget fit for our ambition, and no new own resources.

It is with this in mind that the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 called for the introduction of new own resources by 2026. To this effect, in June 2023 the Commission presented the adjusted package, which is estimated to provide revenues of around EUR 36 billion (2018 prices) per year from 2028 onwards. Based on the existing estimates, the existing proposals would bring the necessary revenues and can be implemented immediately. Updated estimates will be provided whenever necessary.

I will spare no effort to make progress on this front, with an open mind and actively engaging with the upcoming Council presidencies. Time is very short to deliver, but it can still be done. I know I can count on the European Parliament's support.

5. The prerogatives and role of the Parliament:

While Parliament acknowledges the need for simplicity and flexibility, speed and strategic focus in our spending and notes, in that regard, the President-elect's intention to propose "a policy-based budget, not a programme-based budget", its prerogatives must be upheld in line with the Treaties, the Framework Agreement and the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020.

In this context, how will you ensure full respect for the prerogatives, democratic scrutiny and the role of the Parliament:

- *as a co-legislator, in particular by limiting the use of secondary legislation in laying down essential elements of EU spending programmes (such as policy objectives, eligibility criteria, etc), and the recourse to Article 122 TFEU and urgency procedures;*
- *as one arm of the budgetary authority, in the allocation of the annual budget to specific political priorities, for example by proposing a sufficiently granular nomenclature, for the budgetary authority to take informed decisions;*
- *in the scrutiny of the implementation of the EU budget and relevant legislation, including the rule of law conditionality mechanism, by providing regular, timely and detailed information on implementation, in order to enable democratic oversight;*
- *throughout the MFF process, for example by proposing concrete measures and working arrangements to ensure interinstitutional cooperation, dialogue and regular and timely information to the Parliament from day one of your term in office and in compliance with the role of the Commission as honest broker?*

Democratic legitimacy and accountability are essential to ensure public trust in the European Union and its institutions.

I am committed to strengthening the cooperation and dialogue between our two institutions, whether in the context of the annual budgetary procedure, the multiannual financial framework or any other budgetary aspects. If confirmed, I will fully respect and implement the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 on budgetary discipline, cooperation on budgetary matters and sound financial management as well as on new own resources.

In many cases, in order to provide adequate response to the crises faced by the EU during the last mandate, the situation called for exceptional financial measures, requiring recourse to Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. As underlined in the Political Guidelines of the President, the Commission will continue to ensure that the recourse to such tools is limited to exceptional circumstances, in accordance with the terms of that provision. Should there be a need to resort to article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, for any such files falling within my portfolio, I will personally attend the Parliament meetings with the Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency to fully justify its use, in full respect of the budgetary scrutiny procedure agreed in 2020.

We owe EU citizens and their representatives full commitment to maximum transparency regarding the performance of our budgetary spending and the effective protection of the EU financial interests, notably against fraud, conflict of interests and rule of law breaches. I will personally lead the Commission's work on the annual discharge process, coordinate relations with the European Parliament acting as the discharge authority and with the European Court of Auditors. I am deeply committed to transparency, to allow for meaningful scrutiny of the implementation of the EU budget in all its dimensions. This naturally includes the implementation of the rule of law conditionality regulation. I will personally see to it that the Parliament is kept regularly informed of any progress on ongoing procedures.

Furthermore, a simpler and more flexible budget, with fewer programmes, would enhance the importance of annual budget negotiations. Consequently, the role of the European Parliament as one arm of the budgetary authority in the allocation of the annual budget to specific, and fast evolving, political priorities would be reinforced.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will make sure that the Parliament has access to all relevant information to exercise its prerogatives and take informed decisions.

I intend to consult and exchange broadly before the adoption of the future multiannual financial framework and work closely with the European Parliament throughout the negotiations to ensure a swift and timely agreement. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will propose as of my first days in office to hold a regular dialogue with the Parliament Rapporteurs on the future multiannual framework, so that we have the opportunity to exchange views. I deeply value the opinion and suggestions of the European Parliament and look forward to engaging with you in the context of our future proposal to make the most of the lessons learned from the current multiannual financial framework and NextGenerationEU. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the next EU budget serves our common policy objectives in the most effective and efficient way.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will always promote partnership and cooperation between the European institutions. It is the Commission's role and duty to act as an honest broker by providing sound technical expertise and ensuring that all voices are heard and considered. I am committed in this regard to facilitating a continuous dialogue with the European Parliament and the Council and between our three institutions, in line with our respective prerogatives as set out in the treaties. I stand ready to assess, together with all parties concerned, whether and how our existing collaboration could be improved in the future.

Questions from the Committee on Budgetary Control

6. RRF funds and future performance-based funding:

The delivery model of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) constitutes a significant change of EU financing in so far as the disbursement of funds is based on the fulfilment of targets and milestones and not linked to costs. Both ECA and the Parliament have pointed to serious shortcomings in the model when it comes to control and transparency. Without major improvements, this new delivery cannot serve as a blueprint for future EU spending. What would be your plans to improve the monitoring of the RRF spending, especially in avoiding double-funding, ensuring transparency by reporting the final recipients of funds and ensuring respect of national and European

legal requirements? How will you apply the lessons learnt from the design and implementation of the RRF to other performance-based facilities and what is your stance on the creation of future performance based facilities, especially in the next MFF? How would you ensure that the mechanisms for measuring performance focus on results rather than on outputs and avoid greenwashing? In the implementation of both direct management funds (as is the case for the RRF) and shared management ones, what concrete actions will you take to significantly reduce bureaucratic burden, including through an increase of digitalisation, and ensure that EU funds generate growth?

The performance orientation of the EU budget has been substantially reinforced over time. The support of the European Parliament has been instrumental in improving the robustness of indicators and setting up specific mechanisms such as: performance frameworks where allocations are partly distributed upon objectives achieved; the introduction of financing not linked to costs as a possibility for the cohesion policy funds and as a rule under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Social Climate Fund, the Ukraine Facility or the Western Balkans Facility; and a stronger performance orientation in the Common Agricultural Policy now delivered through Strategic Plans.

Nevertheless, there is still much to learn from past experience, both in terms of the elements that work well and those that need to be improved. In this respect, I recognise and appreciate the role of the Parliament and, notably of the Committee on Budgetary Control, and the European Court of Auditors in assessing the functioning of different instruments and programmes with the objective of making them more efficient and effective, and better protecting the financial interests of the Union. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will take their findings and recommendations duly into account while designing the next multiannual financial framework architecture.

As mentioned in the previous answer, we owe EU citizens and their representatives full commitment to maximum transparency. In this context, I very much welcome the revised Financial Regulation which will ensure, as from 2028, the publication of the data on recipients of EU funding for the entire EU budget, for all management modes including performance-based programmes for the Member States.

Member States' and stakeholders' requests for simplification are fully justified and, if I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will respond to them. We need to reduce the administrative burden for all beneficiaries, i.e. businesses, farmers, citizens and non-governmental organisations, national, regional and local authorities, while continuing to ensure effective control of EU funds. The more complex the rules are, the higher the risk of spending errors. A simpler and more focused EU budget will reduce the risks of errors by design and strengthen the sound financial management of the budget.

With this in mind, I will strongly promote digitalisation to reduce the administrative burden for the beneficiaries of EU funding. Digitalisation should also improve the data mining and risk-scoring tool that the Commission provides for Member States to enhance control and audit. Among other objectives, it aims to prevent serious irregularities such as double funding, fraud and conflict of interest. I will do my utmost to convince all Member States to introduce a compulsory roll-out of this data-mining and risk-scoring tool. The tool should be interoperable with Member States' own databases to make sure that data is collected and stored only once. This centralisation of information should go hand in hand with other actions to reduce the administrative burden while continuing to ensure the highest standards of protection of the EU financial interests, such as the single audit approach or setting up a one-stop-shop for beneficiaries of EU funds. This is one example to show that there is ample scope to further streamline and simplify the rules that govern EU spending.

I will engage with all stakeholders in the design of the future Union budget programmes, drawing lessons from today's experiences, notably in terms of performance, simplicity and flexibility, speed, strategic focus, while paying specific attention to the protection of the EU's financial interests.

7. Anti-Fraud architecture:

With the creation of the EPPO, the EU Anti-Fraud architecture reached a further important milestone, but in the absence of any coordination of the many components involved, the results in protecting the EU budget appear to be suboptimal.

What measures do you intend to take to improve the protection of the EU's financial interests in a tangible and measurable way? In order to improve your accountability as Commissioner responsible for the anti-fraud

architecture, which measures will you propose to ensure better coordination between all components of the anti-fraud landscape, including OLAF, the EPPO, Europol and Eurojust? Might a merger e.g. of OLAF and the EPPO lead to better synergies and results and how can the recoveries from fraudulent and irregular expenditure be improved?

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, it would be part of my daily tasks to ensure that the Commission upholds the highest standards of financial control and protect the EU budget in the most effective way, notably against the most serious risks such as fraud, corruption, organised crime, and conflicts of interest. I am convinced that effective mechanisms protecting the EU budget against fraud should be considered as an integral part of the next multiannual financial framework. The protection of the Union financial interests will drive my efforts to develop/strengthen the anti-fraud architecture, which is a key responsibility of the Commission, together with existing independent investigative bodies, such as the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

I will continue to improve the overall performance of our budgetary spending and enhance the fight against fraud and corruption, with the adoption of tangible measures and initiatives, and in coordination with the Commissioners in charge of the different policy areas. For instance, I plan to reinforce and improve the preventive anti-fraud actions of the Commission. The Commission's Anti-Fraud Strategy puts increased use of digital tools, cooperation and a reinforced anti-fraud architecture at the top of the anti-fraud agenda, and I will work towards these objectives. Following the revision of the Financial Regulation, the full potential of the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) should be used to exclude all cases threatening the EU budget. It also requires enhancing the use of data mining and risk-scoring tools to avoid serious irregularities such as conflicts of interests or double funding. I also intend to encourage Member States to make full use of the Irregularity Management System (IMS), the IT tool used by them to report irregularities and fraud. Complete and quality data will allow for better analysis and a better understanding of developments in this area.

I plan to work closely with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and Rule of Law to ensure that the future long-term budget has strong anti-corruption safeguards applying to all funds, and that European funding is dedicated to supporting national measures on fighting corruption and protecting the financial interests of both the Union and its Member States.

As regards ex-post measures to protect the Union budget, I will thoroughly assess whether and how the Commission's own audit system on fraud detection can be improved, as well as in the framework of audits carried out by national authorities. Furthermore, together with the relevant Commissioners, I intend to look at ways to facilitate the prosecution of cross-border corruption cases that impact Union funds and cannot be handled alone by Member States.

Ensuring effective cooperation between all anti-fraud actors is crucial in the fight against fraud affecting the financial interests both at the Union, as well as the Member States' level. Thus, to further strengthen the coordination between them, I plan to lead a review of the EU anti-fraud architecture. In this context, and working closely with the Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Justice, and the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, I will draw on the ongoing and upcoming evaluations of the regulations of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the European Anti-Fraud Office, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (EUROJUST). Based on the outcome of these evaluations, a possible revision of the related legal instruments could also be an opportunity to create more synergies and exploit to the maximum potential complementarities. I would also encourage a revision of their working arrangements where necessary, to facilitate seamless cooperation. In that context, I also intend to work closely with the Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Justice, and the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, to coordinate a framework for timely and effective information exchanges and cooperation between the various investigative, prosecution and law enforcement bodies at the EU level.

With specific regard to the European Anti-Fraud Office, I will continue supporting it in the successful performance of its important mission to conduct administrative investigations on irregularities and fraud affecting the Union's financial interests. I will also assess the necessity to review its mandate, e.g. to strengthen the support to the enforcement of EU law for fraud cases spanning different Member States. Furthermore, I will lead the discussion on the Commission's internal guidelines on the use of the reports of the European Anti-Fraud Office.

The Commission has been supporting and cooperating with the European Public Prosecutor's Office to protect the Union's financial interests since June 2021, when then European Public Prosecutor's Office started its operational

activities. It is my intention to encourage and continue supporting the European Public Prosecutor's Office in the successful performance of its mission to investigate and prosecute crimes affecting the financial interests of the Union and its Member States. This should ultimately lead to higher recovery of EU funds. If confirmed, I will also commit to strengthening the use of the Early Detection and Exclusion System based on facts established by the European Public Prosecutor's Office in its investigations. The ongoing evaluation of the European Public Prosecutor's Office Regulation will provide a foundation for potential future actions aimed at strengthening the European Public Prosecutor's Office's role in combating serious crimes affecting the Union's financial interests. I also plan to support deepened exchanges at technical level between the Commission services and the European Public Prosecutor's Office, for example to identify solutions for information exchange, or discuss any alleged fraud detection gaps.

The European Anti-Fraud Office and the European Public Prosecutor's Office have different but complementary roles and prerogatives within the anti-fraud architecture. On the one hand, the European Public Prosecutor's Office is an independent public prosecution office of the European Union, responsible for conducting criminal investigations, prosecuting and bringing to judgment crimes against the financial interests of the Union and its Member States. On the other hand, the European Anti-Fraud Office develops anti-fraud policy for the Commission, and it conducts administrative investigations on fraud and other illegal activity against the EU budget, corruption and serious misconduct at administrative level, without the power to carry out criminal investigations and prosecutions. Rather than discussing a merger of these two bodies, the feasibility of which is doubtful in legal terms, I believe we should focus on enhancing their cooperation and complementarity to ensure the EU financial interest protection, and a priority for my mandate. For a comprehensive protection of the EU budget, both criminal and administrative means are needed to protect our EU money.

My ultimate objective, if confirmed as Commissioner, is to ensure that any irregularly obtained funds are recovered and returned to the EU budget, that those who commit crimes against the financial interests of the Union and its Member States are brought to justice rapidly and efficiently, and that effective and deterrent penalties are imposed on them.

8. Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism:

The Regulation on the Rule of law Conditionality was a key achievement under the past legislative term since it made the disbursing EU funds to Member States conditional upon the respect of rule of law standards. Despite clear legal obligations for the Commission to keep the European Parliament informed, it was usually the media that were better informed than the Parliament.

What measures will you take to live up to your legal obligations to inform the European Parliament fully and without delay, and to be available without restriction for a structured dialogue?

How will you ensure the full respect of the rule of law and Union values in the implementation of current and future EU funds? How will you avoid contradictions and ensure a coherent approach in the application of the existing tools, including the conditionality mechanism, the horizontal enabling conditions and the rule of law report to fulfil this objective? What working arrangements will you put in place to cooperate with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law?

I will strongly support President-elect von der Leyen's commitment to strengthening the rule of law during the term of the incoming Commission and, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Parliament on this critical topic. Respect for the rule of law is a 'must' for EU funds.

The Parliament has been crucial in introducing the general regime of conditionality. In accordance with the Conditionality Regulation, I will immediately be informing the Parliament of any measures proposed, adopted or lifted pursuant to it. Moreover, I will look forward to the continuous cooperation between the two institutions on these issues.

Looking ahead, if I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will propose strong safeguards on the protection of the rule of law in the next multiannual financial framework. They would build on the application of the general regime of conditionality to all funds. Second, we will need to draw lessons from the experience gathered with the implementation of the current budget and NextGenerationEU. For instance, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the enabling conditions under Cohesion Policy have demonstrated how the EU budget can promote reforms that strengthen the rule of law in the Member States. At the same time, the application of rule of law-related

conditions linked to funding in different instruments has shown that there is potential to streamline the rules to be even more effective.

Corruption undermines citizens' trust in public administration, as well as its effectiveness – and thus damages what we are trying to achieve with the EU budget: we need to maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and Rule of Law, as well as other relevant Commissioners, to help develop a comprehensive and clear-cut EU approach to anti-corruption and to ensure that EU funding is dedicated to national measures aimed at strengthening the rule of law, for example through financing measures for preventing and fighting corruption and protecting EU financial interests.

The Rule of Law Report and its recommendations are an important source for monitoring rule of law issues in the Member States. The Report is central to the assessments conducted under the Conditionality Regulation. The findings under the Conditionality Regulation, including when they originate from the Rule of Law report, must demonstrate the link with the EU budget in line with the requirements of the Conditionality Regulation, an assessment that must be evidence-based as confirmed by the Court of Justice.

Going forward, we will need to work towards further reinforcing the link between financial support and the Member State recommendations from the Rule of Law Report.

Question from the Committee on Legal Affairs

9. Public administration

As Commissioner-designate responsible for Public Administration, how will you ensure that Europe can draw on a modern, efficient public administration to deliver on Union policies and make a difference for Europeans in their everyday life, taking into account also the recommendations to the Commission, adopted by the Parliament on 22 November 2023 in accordance with Article 225 TFEU, on a legislative proposal, on the basis of Article 298 TFEU, for a regulation on an open, efficient and independent European Union administration (see EP resolution A9-0309/2023-2021/2161(INL), as well as on the principles guiding digitalisation of the administrative procedures and on the principles for the development and deployment of digital solutions?

Europe has to live up to the scale of the concerns and challenges that people face in their lives, and deliver comprehensive solutions that deliver profound change to our societies in such a way that no one is left behind. If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will be fully committed to ensuring a modern and efficient administration that delivers our political priorities as outlined in my mission letter from the President-elect. I want an administration that is not only effective but also adaptive to the opportunities and challenges it faces, from high pressure on resources and to making use of new technologies, to preparing for a future larger union.

In pursuing this vision, I will be both creative and ambitious, considering the potential for a further modernisation of our public administration. To achieve this, I will carry out a large-scale review of the Commission's organisation and operations, which will be complemented by an external benchmarking exercise. I recognise this comprehensive exercise cannot be undertaken alone. This is why I will assemble a High-Level reflection group, whose insights and expertise will be valuable contribution to the process of defining the future of the Commission's civil service. I also intend to leverage the extensive knowledge available within existing networks, such as the European Public Administration Network, and draw upon the experience from previous reviews.

Building on the progress made, notably on gender balance, I will continue our efforts towards a diverse and inclusive workforce that becomes more representative of the people we serve. A safe workplace is a fundamental prerequisite to this end, and – if confirmed – I will leverage the Commission's revamped anti-harassment policy to the fullest extent to nourish a culture of respect and trust. I will also pay particular attention to improving the geographical balance of the Commission's staff. Finally, I will continue the work on improving the security of our staff and buildings.

An equally important cornerstone to deliver the civil service of the future, is highly effective talent management. The Commission will need to enhance its ability to attract the best talent across all Member States and engage and develop them throughout their careers, underpinned by a mobility policy that enables staff to thrive and contribute to our priorities.

Considerable progress has already been made towards a green and digital civil service, creating an efficient, modern and sustainable work environment, with staff now operating in a fully hybrid work environment and making efficient use of new digital technologies and knowledge management tools. My aim is to build on this progress and take even greater steps toward agile and collaborative working methods and structures, supported by streamlined and simplified HR processes and policies. These are imperative for the Commission services to be able to deliver on growing policy priorities with limited resources.

In my commitment to these goals, I pledge to champion increased harmonisation, cooperation and synergies with other EU institutions, agencies and bodies – including in the context of the large-scale review of the Commission’s organisation and operations – striving for a modern, efficient public administration for the whole EU civil service.

I also share the Parliament’s objective of providing citizens and businesses with a transparent, accessible, fair, and efficient EU administration, based on a clear set of guiding principles for digitalised administrative procedures, as emphasised by Professor Draghi in his recent report.

The Commission has made significant advancements toward this objective, including developing its own AI model for machine translation to overcome language barriers and facilitate citizens’ interaction with the EU administration. My aim is to build on this expertise to further support multilingualism in EU large language model, offering advanced AI-based multi-lingual services in all EU languages, improving EU administration and digital public service accessibility.

I am aware of the European Parliament’s long-standing call for one common regulation on administrative procedure, notably in its November 2023 resolution under Article 225 TFEU. The Commission replied in February 2024, and announced preparatory work on the most appropriate follow-up for a positive response. This ongoing work will enable the next College to decide on the concrete measures – including possible legislative action – to best address the Parliament’s recommendations.

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

10. How will you plan to continue enforcing the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation, especially regarding inconsistencies in evaluating rule of law benchmarks under the Common Provisions Regulation, the RRF Regulation and the newly recast Financial Regulation? Are you prepared to commit to use these instruments fully, subject to the other conditions provided by these instruments being fulfilled, for instance in cases where the Commission itself identifies the breaches of Union values (such as in the Rule of Law Report or other reports) and where Member States do not comply with the Commission’s recommendations or relevant EU Court of Justice and ECHR case law. What improvements will you propose for this legal framework ahead of the new Multiannual Financial Framework? How will you ensure that the de-freezing of funds is done only when the related Rule of Law milestones in the Member States RRFs are fulfilled? How will you ensure a coherent anti-fraud architecture and an effective cooperation between the different actors at EU level, including the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO) and OLAF? What actions will you take to combat fraud affecting the Union’s financial interests through criminal law, particularly to strengthen the EPPO in terms of subject-matter competence and resources? How will you ensure effective cooperation between law enforcement, national, and EU prosecutors, especially regarding information sharing?

I am committed to continuing to monitor the rule of law situation closely in all Member States, ensuring fair and equal treatment under the Conditionality Regulation. This allows the EU to take measures, for example the suspension of payments or financial corrections, to protect the Union budget from breaches of the principles of the rule of law in the Member States. However, the Conditionality Regulation is not intended to react to breaches of EU values per se, but it is an instrument to address situations that are directly relevant for the protection of the Union’s financial interests. Recourse to the Conditionality Regulation happens if other Union budget protection tools cannot be used more effectively. Measures can be taken under the Conditionality Regulation in parallel to other instruments, as is the case for Hungary, where the conditions were also met for the Commission to use the horizontal enabling condition on the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the Common Provisions Regulation and milestones under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

While each instrument has its own objectives and its own procedural rules, I will ensure full coordination and coherence in their respective use, together with the other Members of the College in charge of their application. I

will not hesitate to support the full recourse to the powers granted under each instrument with a view to effectively protecting the financial interests of the Union, in compliance with the applicable rules.

Looking ahead, I am committed to introducing strong safeguards on the rule of law in the next multiannual financial framework. The Political Guidelines made clear that an important task for the next Commission will be to determine how best the EU budget can promote reforms that strengthen the rule of law. We will draw lessons in that respect from NextGenerationEU, which in numerous cases has shown how the EU budget can also promote reforms that strengthen the rule of law. For instance, under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, in the case of milestones linked to the protection of the EU financial interest, and in some cases including milestones in the field of the rule of law, no payments can be made until the necessary reforms have been introduced by the Member State concerned. And in case of a future reversal of such a reform, the Commission can suspend part of future payments.

Ensuring a coherent anti-fraud architecture and effective cooperation between the different actors at EU level is crucial to protect the EU's financial interests and maintain the trust of EU citizens. The rise of organised crime in the EU calls for a strengthening of EU anti-fraud structures, with a focus on avoiding duplications, exploiting complementarities and creating more synergies. This is why I will lead a review of the overall anti-fraud architecture linked to the protection of the EU financial interests. This review will take into account the results of ongoing and upcoming evaluations of the actors and offices involved, which will provide valuable insights to shape this process.

In this context I will strongly prioritise work to promote a more cohesive and coordinated approach to anti-fraud efforts at the EU level. This will involve fostering closer cooperation between the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the European Anti-Fraud Office, and other relevant actors, as well as exploring opportunities for increased synergies and information-sharing. In particular, together with the future Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law, I will take the necessary initiatives to step up the complementarity between the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European Anti-Fraud Office.

Acknowledging the importance of the European Public Prosecutor's Office's role in the fight against fraud and corruption, and despite the strict constraints of this multiannual financial framework, the Budgetary Authority found the means to support the European Public Prosecutor's Office to deliver on its mission effectively and efficiently. A well-functioning anti-fraud architecture, which includes the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European Anti-Fraud Office, is one of the best defences and guarantees for our Union budget, and at the same time beneficial for Member States' national budgets. It will therefore be my priority to ensure that all actors in the EU anti-fraud architecture receive the necessary support.

In this respect, the ongoing evaluation of the European Public Prosecutor's Office Regulation and other review activities will provide a foundation for potential future actions aimed at strengthening the European Public Prosecutor's Office's role in combating crimes affecting the Union's financial interests. It is my intention to encourage and continue to support the European Public Prosecutor's Office's successful implementation of its mandate, focusing on investigating and prosecuting offences against the financial interests of the Union and its Member States.

Ensuring effective cooperation between law enforcement, national, and EU prosecutors is crucial in the fight against crimes affecting the financial interests of the Union and its Member States, and I will continue to closely monitor the cooperation of Member States with the European Public Prosecutor's Office under the Conditionality Regulation.

To strengthen cooperation among the different actors, I will be working on developing a robust framework for the exchange of information. I will encourage the set-up of possible initiatives to boost a more timely and effective information exchange between the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European Anti-Fraud Office, including by encouraging the revision of their working arrangements where necessary, to facilitate seamless cooperation, while fully respecting their independence in conducting investigations. This will also ensure swift recovery of EU funds, application of administrative measures and the identification of possible breaches of EU law which may affect the financial interests of the EU and its Member States.

Finally, if confirmed as Commissioner, I will reinforce the preventive anti-fraud actions of the Commission and explore ways to facilitate the prosecution of cross-border crimes that impact Union funds and cannot be handled alone by Member States. By doing so, we can ensure a more robust and effective protection of the EU's financial

interests both at the EU and Member States level, and increase the trust of EU citizens in the institutions and the way we manage taxpayers' money.