

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Jozef SÍKELA****International Partnerships****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 belong to a generation that had to fight for its freedom. In 1989, when we won that freedom, I was 22 years old, standing in the heart of Prague alongside fellow students at demonstrations against the communist regime. Later, our generation pursued another dream: joining the European Union. The day we realised that dream was momentous. This is why I profoundly understand the attraction of the European Union and the values it represents. It would be a tremendous honour to have the opportunity – as Commissioner for International Partnerships – to leverage that attraction and extend the benefits of these values to millions of people around the world.

Over the past 30 years, the Czech gross domestic product has increased more than fivefold. This achievement would not have been possible without significant investments in infrastructure, domestic manufacturing, and human capital, all of which enabled us to integrate into global trade and investment networks. None of this would have been achievable without Europe.

How can I contribute to these efforts? First and foremost, through my extensive international experience in both the public and private sectors. As a board member of Erste Group Bank AG, I oversaw operations across twelve European countries, as well as branches in New York and Hong Kong. This role gave me a deep understanding of international financial markets and large-scale project financing – expertise that would allow me to steer the rollout of the Global Gateway strategy, including the mobilisation of investments and the structuring of financial instruments.

I have also served as a politician. As Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, I focused on modernising our energy sector, strengthening energy security, and attracting strategic investments. I worked to diversify energy supplies, invest in critical infrastructure projects such as LNG terminals, and promote renewable energy sources. These initiatives directly contribute to the European Union's strategic objectives of sustainability, energy independence, and economic security. This experience has equipped me with the skills necessary to advance the green and digital transitions beyond Europe's borders. The International Partnerships portfolio, a cornerstone of the EU's new foreign economic policy, aligns closely with my professional priorities and experience.

To advance the Commission's strategic agenda, I plan to apply my expertise in securing financing for large-scale international projects. My focus will be on fostering comprehensive partnerships built on equality, mutual respect, and shared values, while promoting the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that no country is left behind. I aim to fully unlock the potential of initiatives such as the Global Gateway as part of the EU's foreign economic policy. By promoting investments in critical sectors – such as green energy, digital infrastructure, transport, education, and health – we can simultaneously promote sustainable development, reduce poverty, address the root causes of irregular migration and bolster economic security. and one.

I am also deeply committed to addressing inequalities and integrating gender and youth perspectives across my portfolio. Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also an economic necessity. Full participation of women and girls in all aspects of public life, including decision-making and economic activity, is essential for building sustainable and prosperous societies. If confirmed, I would ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remain at the forefront of the EU's international partnerships, in line with the ambitious targets set out in the Gender Action Plan III. The Youth Action Plan in EU external action should continue to guide our efforts in engaging, empowering, and connecting youth globally. I will also ensure gender balance in my team.

I am committed to upholding the highest ethical standards, as I have done throughout my career in both the private and public sectors. If confirmed, I would adhere strictly to the Code of Conduct for Members of the European Commission, serve the European Union's general interests to the best of my abilities, and take great care to avoid any conflicts of interest. Should a potential conflict arise, I would promptly notify the President. I would conduct all my activities with integrity and transparency.

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

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

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

I believe strongly in parliamentary democracy. If confirmed by the European Parliament, I would take political responsibilities for the activities falling under my portfolio, without prejudice to the principle of collegiality, as set out in my Mission Letter.

I fully subscribe to the words of my Mission Letter which state that "We will strengthen our democracy, rally around our values and ensure that we are stronger at home. We will work with our partners and better assert our interests around the world". Our European values are the centrepiece of our offer to partner countries.

As Minister of Industry and Trade in the Czech Republic, I worked in a senior position in a coalition government. In this role, I worked hand in hand with the Czech Parliament; if confirmed as Commissioner, I would intend to take the same approach with the European Parliament. Strong inter-institutional cooperation and building consensus across different parties can only strengthen European democracy.

I commit to implement the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.

I would be present in the European Parliament, both in plenary debates and in Committee meetings and would regularly inform the Parliament about my actions and those of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships. I will follow the commitment set out in the Framework Agreement to respond to European Parliament resolutions within 3 months. I am also committed to ensuring the College responds to Parliament's Article 225 resolutions in a timely manner and in respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. I will work engage in a structured dialogue with the responsible European Parliament to ensure timely follow-up to on all Article 225 TFEU Resolutions.

If confirmed, I would also organise a regular structured dialogue with the DEVE Committee and ensure transparency and information flow with Parliament before major events and key stages of international negotiations. I would also continue to hold the biannual High-Level Geopolitical Dialogue established under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe), – an indispensable forum to exchange on key political issues, including Global Gateway. I intend to work with you, the HRVP and my fellow Commissioners to further strengthen our interaction.

If confirmed by the European Parliament, I would also wish to explore with you how Members of the European Parliament can be more regularly included in Team Europe missions to partner countries.

I also commit to introduce an effective and visible tracking and reporting of Global Gateway and overhaul the way that we communicate Europe's offer in partner countries and to European taxpayers.

I would aim to strengthen stakeholder dialogue in the EU and partner countries, with a particular focus on engaging with civil society organisations and introducing annual Youth Policy Dialogues.

In this sense, I commit to listen, build consensus, improve dialogue and build a working relationship with you so that we can achieve our joint commitment to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Questions from the Committee on Development

3. Development cooperation in relation to economic foreign policy and the Global Gateway strategy

The primary objective of European Union development cooperation according to the treaties (Art. 208 TFEU) is "the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty". The political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029, presented by the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and your mission letter, put forward also the concept of a new "economic foreign policy".

Against this background, what are the EU's development policy goals from your perspective, how will you pursue them in the geopolitical battle of offers and narratives and in particular how will you implement the Global Gateway strategy? In this context, how do you want to scale up the Global Gateway initiative and incentivise private sector investments, including from European companies, in developing regions, which are mutually beneficial? What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that these investments align with local development needs, respect the primary objective of EU development cooperation policy and involve partner governments and civil society actors? How will you set up a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for projects funded under the Global Gateway initiative, and ensure transparency and parliamentary scrutiny over the strategic planning and implementation in line with the NDICI-Global Europe regulation and our Treaty obligations?

Eradicating poverty is the primary objective of the European Union's work in developing countries, as set out in the Treaties. At global level, our compass is the universally endorsed 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. If confirmed, this would set the frame for my work.

The question is then how best to contribute to these objectives. And here, I will pay careful attention to what has worked in practice. Throughout my professional life, my priority has been to deliver results. And I know first-hand that inclusive and sustainable economic growth is the main engine of sustainable development.

Over the past decades, the traditional donor-recipient model has showed its limitations. The countries that have most successfully reduced poverty are those that have invested in infrastructure development, domestic manufacturing, and education, thereby integrating their economies into world trade and investment circuits.

This is where, today, Emerging Markets and Developing Economies seek support. In the 21st century, countries want partnerships, not dependencies. They seek to strengthen their resilience to external shocks, just like we do. They need to create jobs for their growing populations. Where the EU does not respond to this demand, others will. Do we leave it to them? This is the political choice we face. In my view, the EU can and must seize opportunities to engage with partners in a mutually beneficial manner. And we will do so in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way.

Moreover, there is a fundamental question of scale. Official Development Assistance alone is not sufficient to tackle today's challenges. It plays a crucial role but to truly make a difference it needs to be accompanied by robust private investments. We must tailor our action to that end. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development estimates that the annual investment gap to reach the Sustainable Development Goals in developing countries today stands at about EUR 4 trillion annually, whereas Global Official Development Assistance is in the range of EUR 0.2 trillion a year. The ability to mobilise private sustainable finance at scale is therefore critical.

These considerations underpin the paradigm shift in the EU's approach to international partnerships, captured by the Global Gateway strategy.

It is also crucial for the EU to adapt its offer to today's geopolitical context. Over recent years, there has been a multiplication of alternative offers. Emerging Markets and Developing Economies have more options to choose from. This has led to a new fluidity in international affairs, where ad hoc coalitions and more transactional relations

have replaced exclusive bloc alliances. Some of the offers come with strings attached and are used to promote rival governance models.

We must demonstrate that Europe's offer is a better option. A comprehensive, qualitative, and sustainable offer, rooted in our shared values, norms and standards. This offer is superior to those of our competitors. I am convinced of that, and we must do more to convince our partners.

If confirmed, I would work to "take Global Gateway from start-up to scale-up", as mandated in my Mission Letter. Working closely with the High Representative / Vice President and other members of the College, this includes refining our offer, placing it in the context of a broader foreign economic policy, and accelerating implementation, including by scaling up private investment. With extensive experience in international trade and business, I feel uniquely positioned to deliver on this mandate.

In order to do so, the Team Europe approach is fundamental. Continuing to build on it would be a priority for my mandate, if I was confirmed. For reasons of scale and impact, we have to strengthen coordination with EU Member States, their Development Banks and Financial Institutions, and their implementing agencies. So they can all contribute with what they do best. I am well placed to understand the challenges that smaller national agencies are facing. Yet, I see that some of the smaller agencies are already providing valuable inputs with specific public expertise and targeted financial contributions. Every EU Member State has something meaningful to contribute. To reach scale, we have to step up the mobilisation of innovative financing tools, relying on de-risking instruments like guarantees and blended financing. These tools are crucial to scale up private finance. In parallel, we need to work with our partners to improve conditions for private sector investment as they can bring significant added value to deliver sustainable development. If confirmed, I would encourage all EU Member States to proactively participate to this effort. This starts by coordinating of all relevant actors at national level, and identifying the areas where they can contribute in the most efficient way.

A strong international partnerships policy, part of a new foreign economic policy also means working more closely with the European Parliament. The European Parliament has a key role to play when it comes to nurturing a more strategic culture of cooperation. You also have a central role to ensure the policy coherence of our internal legislation – the external impact of our domestic policies should never be an afterthought. I would therefore be keen to work closely with you on these issues.

If confirmed, my agenda would of course go beyond Global Gateway, which does not capture the full breadth of the EU's international partnerships. As much as I am convinced that Global Gateway is the most efficient way to contribute to the poverty eradication objectives in most countries, I believe that it is not applicable everywhere. In Least Developed Countries, conflict areas, countries facing instability or in complex settings, we have to focus on the population's most immediate needs in terms of food, health and education.

And I also think that the EU should remain a key player on public policies, notably through our contributions to global initiatives and global funds. The EU's agenda, including Global Gateway, promotes the global rules-based order and its values. I would be keen to strengthen policy coordination with multilateral organisations. Multilateral organisations also remain important implementing partners. I will support the High Representative / Vice President in ensuring that the EU continues to play a leading role in reforming the international system, including the United Nations.

Our International Partnerships policy responds to a demand from our partner countries. The programming process of EU funds ensures that investments support partner countries' sustainable development strategies and align with local development needs. Strengthening the resilience of our partner countries is in our mutual interest; but our ability to act is primarily in response to a request from partner countries. They want to be treated as equal partners, and not as junior recipients. Through Global Gateway, we are seeking mutually beneficial relationships.

I consider civil society's participation key to Global Gateway's success, for at least two reasons. First, inclusiveness and ownership. Civil society involvement is essential to ensure that our interventions and investments resonate with local realities. At global level, the EU has a long-standing and regular engagement with civil society organisations, to which has now been added a specific Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform. At country level, we have a structured dialogue with civil society organisations, including on programming.

Second, transparency and accountability. The delivery of the Global Gateway Strategy will require transparency and accountability – civil society involvement should contribute to this. Where we can roll out our partnerships

with reliable state actors, my focus will be to make sure that civil society are ‘actors of governance’, above and beyond ‘service providers’. Where we are confronted with fragility, civil society will remain our preferred and, in some circumstances, exclusive counterpart.

Transparent monitoring and evaluation are crucial both from an efficiency point of view and to showcase results – I am keenly aware of this from my days in the private sector. For projects funded by the EU budget, the monitoring and evaluation framework of NDICI-Global Europe applies. The Global Europe Performance Monitoring System, including the Global Europe Results Framework, is a robust framework, used for reporting obligations under NDICI – Global Europe (e.g. Annual Report on the implementation of the EU’s External Action Instruments). A methodology to track investments mobilised has been agreed with Member States, and work is ongoing to further refine this methodology and collective reporting. If confirmed, I would ensure that this work advances swiftly and in full transparency vis-à-vis the European Parliament.

I am committed to democratic scrutiny and value the role of the European Parliament. I am determined to work closely with the European Parliament, including its Committee on Development as envisaged in the framework of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation – Global Europe Instrument.

4. Delivering on the SDGs, addressing inequalities and policy coherence

The mission letter makes no reference to core human development policy areas, such as health, education, or food security. Which concrete measures will you take to strengthen the implementation of and reporting on the SDGs, including those regarding inclusive human development on the basis of commitments undertaken by the Commission, especially the minimum 10% for education from the International Partnerships budget, health, gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and the protection of children, while involving local partners, as well as to reinforce and broaden the use of the inequality marker? Will you operationalise Policy Coherence for Development throughout the legislative and political processes, including an ex-ante assessment and reporting on the impact of all Commission initiatives on our Global South partners, to ensure that European policies in areas such as trade, finance, security, agriculture, fisheries, climate, biodiversity, energy, raw materials and migration will create synergies, rather than undermine the EU’s role in promoting the achievement of the SDGs globally?

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals are the guiding lights for EU policymaking and would remain my compass if I am confirmed. Each Member of the College has been tasked with ensuring the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in their policy area, building on the conclusions of the EU’s Voluntary Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda presented to the UN in 2023; a mandate that was confirmed in my Mission Letter: ‘You will continue to ensure that the EU promotes the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals’.

Global Gateway is the EU’s main contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda beyond our borders. It helps focus the EU’s limited resources to where they can make the biggest sustainable development impact.

Improving lives and curbing inequalities is at the heart of the International Partnerships portfolio. Investing in human development across the life cycle should remain an essential and distinctive element of our offer. In the battle of offers, the EU social model is in many ways our best business card.

What sets Global Gateway apart is precisely its 360-degree approach. It combines investments in infrastructure (e.g. roads, cables, solar plants) with investments in the enabling environment (e.g. education, skills, research, regulatory frameworks, good governance) to support human development and strengthen the capacity of our partners. Education and health are not just thematic priorities in their own rights – they are prerequisites for attaining the other Global Gateway goals and are embedded in them. Two examples to illustrate how I view the 360-degree approach.

1. Education is an enabler of Global Gateway. Economic growth depends on a skilled and educated workforce. A strong education system is key to driving innovation and supporting the digital and green transformations. If confirmed, I intend to continue investing in strengthening education systems, in early childhood development and girls’ education, in technical and vocational education, and in digital infrastructure to help young people acquire the skills needed to become actors in the digital transition.

2. The same is true for health. Effective, resilient and accessible health systems are essential. They require physical infrastructure like clinics, factories, and roads to produce and distribute health products, but also trained

workforce, sound regulation, and research. This is why accelerating the implementation of the EU Global Health Strategy and strengthening health systems globally will be a priority over the next five years.

While deploying international partnerships, fighting poverty and addressing inequalities would be at the heart of my approach. Rising inequality undermines progress across all Sustainable Development Goals; we need to ensure that all our action, including Global Gateway investments, tackles inequalities, be it in terms of equal access to the job market, education, digital connectivity or universal health and social protection systems. If confirmed, I intend to work with you to ensure that we leverage the Inequality Marker to guide our investments, ensuring that they have a real, measurable impact on inequalities. I intend to promote the use of the Marker across and beyond the Commission.

I am also determined to keep up the EU's impressive track record on gender equality, by embedding it throughout EU external actions, ensuring that our work contributes directly to the empowerment of women and girls. The Gender Action Plan III puts the EU in a position of global leadership; if confirmed, I intend to maintain and strengthen that lead.

The European Parliament, as co-legislator, will have an essential role to play in strengthening the coherence of our internal and external actions. And to deliver maximum results, the EU has to factor in the external impact of our internal policies, through proactive engagement with partners, and – where relevant – thorough ex ante impact assessments, ex post surveillance/evaluation, and support measures to mitigate negative spill-over effects on trade and investment. Internal and external policies should be approached in an integrated fashion, because they are a continuum. The objective of policy coherence is already enshrined in the Treaties. If confirmed, I would work to *mainstream geopolitical and geoeconomic considerations in the College's policymaking*.

5. EU-Africa partnership and relations with other regions

What specific areas will you prioritise in the EU-Africa partnership, how do you expect to earn the trust of our African partners and will you update the EU-Africa strategy? How will you ensure a balanced approach to engaging with other geographic regions under your portfolio? What new EU measures or legislative initiatives, if any, would you propose to achieve those objectives? How do you intend to interact with the BRICS+ member countries, considering the consequences of the groups' expansion and integration for EU development policy?

A well-functioning, mutually beneficial partnership of equals between Africa and the EU would be a priority for my mandate. Africa is Europe's closest neighbour, and a continent of opportunities. It is home to about half of the world's 20 fastest growing economies, a young and dynamic workforce, and abundant natural resources.

The EU's strategy for our engagement with Africa is the Joint Vision 2030, which African and EU leaders endorsed at the last EU-AU Summit in 2022. It outlines the objectives for our cooperation in the years to come. If confirmed, I will advance the implementation of this vision.

In many African countries, unlocking sustainable growth is within reach. I am determined to strengthen and deepen the EU-Africa- partnership by delivering and scaling up 360-degree Global Gateway packages around transformative and jointly agreed objectives and concrete investment opportunities. I would pay particular attention to ensuring that the private sector contributes to its full potential to the Team Europe approach.

Under my leadership, if I am confirmed, we would focus on building local value chains and supporting industrialisation in key sectors like transport, digital technologies, and sustainable energy. The Global Gateway strategy is a key enabler, financing infrastructure projects that not only enhances regional trade but also promotes job creation and economic diversification.

Africa is a diverse continent: it will be important to tailor the EU's engagement to regional, national and local contexts. Parts of the continent continue to suffer from conflict and political instability – from the Central Sahel to the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. Beyond Global Gateway, the EU should support a differentiated approach and remain engaged in fragile contexts, support populations and promote dialogue in politically estranged contexts. If confirmed, I would put emphasis on dialogue with African partners to respond to their aspirations in a changing geopolitical context.

Half of Global Gateway's EUR 300 billion in investments by 2027 go to Africa. We should use these funds to focus on concrete projects that benefit our African partners while upholding our values. Priority areas for the Africa-EU partnership include: sustainable economic development and industrialisation (local value chains);

infrastructure projects (e.g. transport networks, energy systems, logistical hubs); the green transition and climate resilience (to harness the continent's renewable energy potential); digital transformation (digital infrastructure, broadband access, digital literacy and entrepreneurship); security (root causes of instability).

Global Gateway is a global strategy, which is being deployed on all continents. For instance, EU and Member States have committed to leverage at least EUR 45 billion by 2027 as part of the EU – Latin American and the Caribbean Global Gateway Investment Agenda, a EUR 10 billion Global Gateway package was endorsed for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region, EUR 10 billion of investment were announced to develop the Trans-Caspian Corridor connecting Central Asia and Europe.

Projects have to be tailored to the different local contexts. For instance, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have clearly requested an investment agenda and have the potential to benefit from global value chains, but they need capital, technology, training, and standards to close the investment gap. Central Asia is trying to diversify its external policy options, develop alternative connections and transportation corridors, and deepen intra-regional cooperation. In the Asia-Pacific region, climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as digital connectivity are the priorities.

If confirmed, I would promote a balanced and results-oriented approach to the different regions we operate in, building on existing investment packages.

In fragile contexts, the EU should be principled yet pragmatic, tailoring its engagement to the constraints and needs of partner countries in light of the EU's policy priorities. Our primary objective in these settings should be to address the root causes of fragility while providing access to life-saving basic services and promoting the resilience of populations, furthering human rights and human security, reducing vulnerabilities, encouraging peaceful solutions, and ultimately fostering conflict prevention. I am a believer in integrated approaches, in line with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus.

Whilst I am obviously keen to engage with all our partners, including major emerging economies, the BRICS countries have little in common and lack internal coherence as a group. The group's recent "enlargement" has to date mainly been a communication exercise. If confirmed as Commissioner, I would continue to engage bilaterally with the group's members, except Russia.

6. Migration and development cooperation

How do you see the interlinkage between migration and the EU's development cooperation, particularly in the context of our obligations on Policy Coherence for Development? How will you address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and do you commit to ensuring that the relevant provisions and targets in the NDICI-Global Europe regulation as well as the EU's human rights obligations are fully respected? How do you foresee the cooperation and division of work on external aspects of migration and mobility with other Commissioners, in particular on migration-related agreements, and in ensuring the EP's scrutiny over such agreements? How will you enhance transparency about the use of NDICI-Global Europe funds in the area of migration, and engage with civil society organisations, diaspora groups and migrant communities in the design and implementation of migration related development programs?

Factors such as unemployment, conflict and insecurity, climate change and environmental challenges all play significant roles in driving migration globally. Part of it is irregular. Establishing clear causality is difficult due to the complex interplay of push and pull factors.

Effectively addressing the root causes of irregular migration therefore requires a comprehensive approach that considers the variety of factors at play. We must work with partners to increase their capacity for border management and security, dismantle human trafficking and smuggling networks, and work hand in hand with international partners, including through the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling. We must lever all the tools at our disposal, starting with diplomacy, visa policy, and trade and investment incentives. And we must address the root causes of irregular migration by creating job opportunities for young people allowing them to contribute to the prosperity of their home country rather than risking their lives on dangerous journeys.

We must act decisively and pragmatically to limit irregular departures and crossings, in partnership with key countries of origin and transit. I am committed to a whole-of-route approach for effective migration management.

Migration is a multifaceted challenge that demands a coordinated and comprehensive response, and coherence between internal and external efforts in this field.

If confirmed, I intend to work closely with the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, and Executive Vice President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, to ensure migration policy is part of a comprehensive strategy that includes tackling the root causes of irregular migration. I would also collaborate with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean on the New Pact for the Mediterranean, focusing on partnerships with countries of origin and transit. Enhanced cross-border cooperation among Neighbourhood/sub-Saharan African countries is essential to counter migrant smuggling and strengthen the management of external borders.

Over recent years, the EU has already ramped up its engagement with partner countries, exceeding the indicative target of 10% of the NDICI-Global Europe budget for migration and forced displacement-related actions. Over 190 actions are currently being implemented, worth EUR 5.3 billion, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Asia-Pacific. I commit to do my utmost to reach the targets we have agreed together.

I am convinced that our international partnerships can play a positive role in preventing irregular migration, by targeting our Global Gateway investments where they matter the most (e.g. economic development, education, healthcare). By fostering local opportunities, we reduce the incentive to move elsewhere. The EU's partnership with Mauritania stands as a blueprint – investing in green energy, health and education not only drives growth but creates the jobs and futures people seek at home.

If confirmed, I also intend to pursue the “more for more” logic. The NDICI-Global Europe's “flexible incentive-based approach” is a good example of how EU Official Development Assistance can foster good cooperation on migration by helping both sides to make progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and support populations in their efforts to build their own future at home.

I also believe that it is in the EU's interest to remain engaged in conflict areas, fragile countries and other complex settings, including to avoid negative spillover on the EU in the form of irregular migration. Here, we have to focus even more on stabilising communities through economic development, local governance support, and conflict prevention.

Cooperation on new legal pathways can also contribute to reducing irregular migration to the EU. Talent Partnerships can help structure cooperation on labour mobility to boost the EU's competitiveness and address labour shortages in selected sectors and occupations, while also promoting skills development and economic growth in countries of origin.

I want to emphasize one point: every action we take must be firmly rooted in the respect for EU and international law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights.

I am committed to work with the European Parliament in this area too, including by making the most of the high-level geopolitical dialogues and keeping it fully informed. I believe in transparency, including on progress in relation to the indicative migration spending target foreseen in the NDICI-Global Europe regulation.

Through the Policy Forum for Development and EU Delegation consultations, the EU should actively engage civil society organisations, diaspora groups, and migrant communities in our migration dialogues.

7. Financing for development and needs of fragile countries

How do you intend to make sure that EU Official Development Assistance delivers more efficiently, including through localisation, and provides sufficient funding for Least Developed Countries and countries in fragile contexts, implementing the “differentiated approach” and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, while preventing any misuse of funds? In view of the development funding gap and increasing debt burdens faced by many developing countries, what initiatives will you take, at EU, Team Europe and multilateral level, on domestic resource mobilisation, illicit financial flows, as well as debt relief and debt restructuring management? How do you plan to engage private sector investments, including European companies and European Development Finance Institutions as well as Member States' funding agencies to scale up financing? What concrete approach in the proposal of the next long-term budget will you suggest for your portfolio and how will you contribute to the College work on a “revamped external action financing” in terms of resources and programmes to strengthen EU partnerships with developing countries?

I will work to ensure that the EU contributes efficiently to the global efforts to get the Sustainable Development Goals back on track and close the EUR 4 trillion annual financing gap. I see several steps ahead, so our Official Development Assistance delivers more efficiently, including for our most vulnerable partners.

First, we can no longer afford to overreach, to be fragmented, or to duplicate efforts within the EU. We must optimise the use of EU and Member States' funds through a differentiated approach, ensuring that our assistance is responsive to the specific needs of each country and region while preventing misuse of funds. We need to continue building on the Team Europe approach and deploy its full potential through coordination at all levels – including with Member States in Europe and on the ground in partner countries, with their diplomatic networks, with their development finance institutions and Export Credit Agencies, and with the European private sector. This will not only allow for more scale, impact and visibility, and it will also increase the effectiveness of our Official Development Assistance.

Second, private sector mobilisation is essential. We should intensify our engagement with local and European companies and unlock more sustainable private finance by de-risking investments (including by using innovative financial instruments, for example our European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus' guarantee programme) to deliver on our public policy goals. Collaboration with institutions like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) also allows to leverage blended finance tools. There, public money will enable strategic actions and innovative financial tools to mobilise additional private investments. They are essential to move the needle towards a decarbonised and digital transition.

Third, we should work with international partners to find global solutions to mobilise more concessional finance and reform the international financial architecture so that it is fit for purpose. The EU has been playing an active and constructive role in discussions to revamp the Bretton Woods system, and if confirmed, I would ensure that we continue to do so in the future.

Of course, these measures can only support structural reforms in partner countries if there is sound public finance management. Promoting improvements in Domestic Resource Mobilisation, sustainable debt management and tackling illicit financial flows has to be a priority: this is where the main sustainable development potential lies. The EU should continue to support these efforts through initiatives such as “Collect More Spend Better” or the Team Europe Initiative on combatting Illicit Financial Flows and related Transnational Organised Crimes.

Over the coming years, we will also need to strengthen multilateral debt restructuring initiatives, such as the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment, to make them timelier and more transparent. We also have to find effective solutions for vulnerable Middle-Income countries not eligible to the Common Framework.

The 2025 UN Financing for Development Conference in Seville will be a key moment to take stock of progress and develop a roadmap for the years to come.

At EU level, the next Multiannual Financial Framework will be an opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. The adoption of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe represented a breakthrough in terms of simplification, transparency and effectiveness. Going forward, I believe that we should give a more strategic direction to our external action, make our instruments more flexible, and further align our internal and external policies to reflect European strategic priorities. At the same time, in countries in complex settings, we should continue to focus on the basic needs of vulnerable populations in the spirit of Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, ensuring that our efforts remain impactful.

Question from the Committee on Foreign Affairs

8. You have been tasked to develop the “brand” Global Gateway with “effective and visible tracking and reporting, including on the mobilisation of private funding”. How do you concretely intend to measure the impact and results of Global Gateway? How will you ensure that the private sector in the EU will join the efforts to a sufficient degree to generate the necessary financial leverage that is not possible with public funds alone, especially where political instability or weak governance create uncertainty? How do you plan to sufficiently enhance the communication, visibility and impact of the “brand” Global Gateway in order to counterbalance false narratives and disinformation? How do you intend to structure development cooperation in instable contexts, where the brand Global Gateway is not implementable and ensure a human rights approach in fostering, maintaining, and boosting relationships with international partners and ensure that the Global Gateway keeps its aim of being a values-

based offer? How do you plan to address the challenges posed by other less regulated cooperation models, for example China's Belt and Road Initiative?

On visible tracking and reporting, including on the mobilisation of private funding, please see my response to Question 3. On instable contexts, see my replies to questions 3, 4 and 5.

Global Gateway seeks to create the right incentives and environment for the private sector to sustainably invest in partner countries to respond to our partners' ambitions and demands and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. If confirmed, I would propose the following to scale up the private sector's participation:

- (1) To deepen collaboration with the EIB and EBRD to scale up financing for development projects in developing countries. We can combine EU grants with private sector investments, ensuring that projects remain financially viable while contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.
- (2) Make sure that investments in infrastructure are accompanied by investments in the enabling business environment including human capital.
- (3) Provide the right incentives for companies to be part of our endeavour to create sustainable development, including through innovative financial tools like the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus to help derisk investments.
- (4) Tap into the full potential of the Global Gateway Business Advisory Group to gather input for, and feedback on, the strategic orientation of the strategy.
- (5) Strengthen awareness-raising, at the levels of both the European Commission and Member States. Business fora can for instance help create new connections and opportunities.

The most effective way to counter disinformation is to invest in positive communication on Europe's offer to partner countries. As Global Gateway moves from start up to scale up and responds to our partners' request for strategic investments with a qualitative offer, the EU should also adapt its communication to enhance awareness of Global Gateway as a trusted and reliable brand. We must proactively move to a campaigning mode, showcasing the EU's positive Global Gateway offer to the general public. That calls for a more strategic and focused approach, driven by professional campaigns that reach new audiences through the channels they use, and with a message that matters to them. None of our competitors proposes an offer that matches ours; we must make sure that the world knows it.

Ultimately, the Global Gateway brand's impact will be driven by the successful roll-out of concrete projects on the ground. We must communicate in a Team Europe approach, with one voice, around successful flagship project results. We must also ensure that potential investors learn about the benefits of our projects.

Beyond Global Gateway, the EU should maintain dedicated resources to engage in fragile and conflict settings. There, the focus should be the population's most immediate needs in terms of food, health and education. In countries ruled by unconstitutional governments, if confirmed, my approach would be clear: avoid legitimising the government but remain engaged for and with the people. Full disengagement would come with significant costs, leave a vacuum, and collectively punish populations that are already vulnerable. We must therefore find a middle ground, to be tailored to each specific country situation.

Global Gateway is Europe's offer in an increasingly crowded geoeconomic environment. The best way to compete is to deliver results; impact is our strongest argument.

Question from the Committee on International Trade

9. With regard to trade relations with partner countries, including improved access to critical resources, what concrete measures will you take to ensure that trade aspects become more prominent in the design and implementation of the Global Gateway strategy? Specifically, how do you intend to reinforce links and overlaps between the investment facilitation agreements and the Global Gateway strategy and how will you ensure synergies with the new Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships to the mutual benefit of the Union and partner countries? How will you adapt the Global Gateway strategy to deal with the increasing geopolitical trade tensions

and the stronger role of emerging economies (e.g. China, India), including on the African continent? How will you involve the International Trade Committee in the design and implementation of the strategy

Over the past few years, new global realities have emerged: geopolitics and geoeconomics are now intertwined, with rising trade tensions and conflicts; key countries behave more assertively, contesting the established international order and promoting alternative governance models; dependencies are being weaponised. There is a battle of offers.

The EU has already adapted its model of development cooperation in line with these new realities. This is embodied by the Global Gateway strategy, which responds to our partner countries' demand for better connection with global value chains, creation of local value addition, and resilience to external shocks.

As a former Trade Minister, I know the importance and potential of trade. It is a major engine of sustainable development – from 1990 to 2017, developing countries increased their share of global exports from 16% to 30%; over the same period, the global poverty rate fell from 36% to 9%.

The EU therefore supports trade facilitation, in particular by strengthening the investment climate through soft measures (e.g. capacity building, training, regulatory environment) and by mobilising companies to partner and invest, thereby helping partner countries create more local value addition and move up global value chains. If confirmed as Commissioner, I would contribute to pursuing this course.

If confirmed, I would work to ensure that Global Gateway investments are developed in full synergy with the newly proposed Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships, as complementary components of the EU's new foreign economic policy, in close cooperation with Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security. We should aim to establish mutually beneficial long-term partnerships with key partners, that can bolster competitiveness and diversify supply chains while enhancing sustainability and value addition, thus also boosting our partners' economies and supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Political support and input from the European Parliament on Global Gateway will be key. In both plenary debates and Committee meetings, if confirmed, I would therefore like to regularly inform Parliament on the implementation of the strategy and exchange on its scale up. I would also encourage the European Parliament to make full use of its participation to the Global Gateway Board.

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

10. According to your mission letter, you should work on building comprehensive and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries with an integrated approach so that economic, humanitarian, development, peace and security policies all contribute to strengthening these partnerships. The aim is to address the root causes and key drivers of irregular migration and to fight the networks of smugglers in full respect of human rights. What measures will you undertake to ensure that, particularly in the area of migration, these partnerships function effectively? How will you ensure that Parliament can exercise its oversight throughout the process of building such partnerships, especially when some of their aspects could impact its legislative prerogatives?

The European Parliament's political guidance on matters related to migration is crucial. If confirmed, I commit to keeping the European Parliament regularly informed. As for the rest of my portfolio, I would ensure that my services and I adhere to legal and procedural requirements, with a view to allow democratic scrutiny, transparency and accountability.

Cooperation with our international partners is crucial to achieve EU security, global stability, and economic development. It is an important instrument to contribute to an effective and fair management of migration, allowing to address the root causes of irregular migration and to combat the criminal networks that benefit from it. As outlined in the Pact on Migration and Asylum, building comprehensive and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries will remain an important element of the EU's comprehensive approach. If confirmed, my objective would be to enhance this cooperation with key countries of origin and transit and support the effective implementation of the external dimension of the Pact.

In cooperation with the Executive Vice President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, and the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, I would put

emphasis on working towards concrete actions and operational law enforcement cooperation to disrupt cross-border organised crime involved in smuggling of migrants, trafficking in human beings, terrorism and drug trafficking. I would work with international partners and third countries to ensure the protection of asylum seekers and refugees in host third countries, as well as to support host communities. The comprehensive effort also includes the development with Member States of legal pathways, including through EU Talent Partnerships and circular migration schemes.

Our migration strategy must remain grounded in international law, with a commitment to respect human rights. All measures taken to curb irregular migration must fully comply with EU and international legal frameworks. This includes adherence to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights. Implementing partners should continue to be contractually obliged to provide regular and comprehensive reporting on their action and the situation in the country where the EU funded action is implemented.

Coherence between internal and external policies is key, notably when it comes to migration. In line with the Political Guidelines, I would also contribute to an EU Visa Policy Strategy and a new Pact for the Mediterranean to better secure borders and manage migration.

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

11. According to your mission letter, you will continue to ensure that the EU promotes the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5 on gender equality and that gender equality and empowerment of women and girls continue to be on top of EU international cooperation and development policies. Are there any new initiatives that you plan to take to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the Women, Peace and Security agenda at EU level and how will you work to make the situation of women and girls in armed conflicts an EU priority? Will you commit to develop GAP IV? How will the Commission tackle the provision of sexual and reproductive health and rights services as part of its humanitarian aid and development cooperation and especially in the case of pregnant women coming from conflict areas, some of whom survived violence and rape? Given global attacks against gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights, how are you planning to ensure that the EU allocates adequate and direct access to resources to local civil society organisations, LGBTIQ+ and women's rights defenders and their organisations?

Gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU and a political priority of the EU's external action. It is also simply good economics. Research by the International Monetary Fund shows that the GDP of developing countries could increase by almost 8% by narrowing the gender gap in labour markets. Fully closing the gap could raise GDP by 23% on average. If confirmed, I would maintain focus on gender equality – as a goal in itself but also as a catalyst for sustainable development, robust economic growth, sound governance, and enduring peace and security.

The Gender Action Plan III has significantly advanced gender equality as a strategic priority in the EU's external action. It has led to a more integrated approach across policies and increased support for partner countries. If confirmed, I would ensure that the follow up plan is ambitious. I would work in close coordination with other Commissioners, including the Commissioner for Equality and the High Representative / Vice President. I would launch a broad consultation with all partners, including the European Parliament, and involve civil society.

If confirmed, I would enhance gender mainstreaming across our international partnerships, increase gender-targeted actions, support women's empowerment and develop new initiatives to bridge the gender gaps in education labour market participation, income and access to resources and services.

The anniversary of the Beijing Declaration on Gender Equality and of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2025 represent an opportunity to strengthen EU leadership and take decisive action to advance gender equality. I would make sure the EU honours these milestones, in close cooperation with the High Representative / Vice President.

Women and girls in armed conflict require specific attention, because they face specific risks (e.g. use of rape as weapon of war) and because they are often not given a seat at the negotiation table. The EU must advocate more forcefully for women's equal and meaningful participation in conflict prevention and resolution. In fragile contexts, focus on child protection, youth and women's needs should be a priority (e.g. "by women for women" approach in Afghanistan).

Fighting gender-based violence is an important aspect of building resilience to security threats, including at community level. But gender-based violence is above all a horrific human rights violation. If confirmed, I would do all I can to contribute to the eradication of this curse.

There is a significant gender gap in health care. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is important not only to ensure that women and girls receive the care they need, but also to give them the agency to shape their lives.

Women's organisations and civil society are on the frontline of the fight for gender equality. They are a crucial ally in advancing lasting gender-transformative change and in reaching the most marginalised women and girls. Half of the Spotlight activity funds went to over 1750 civil society organisations. The EU also supports human rights defenders, including LGBTI advocates. Over half of the beneficiaries of the EU Protect Defenders Programme are women human rights defenders. These are just some of many examples of the EU's strategic engagement with civil society on gender and LGBTI equality.