



Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Mission letter

Brussels, 1 December 2019

Olivér Várhelyi

Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement

Dear Olivér,

Earlier this year, the people of Europe made their voices heard in record numbers at the European elections. They presented us with a mission to be decisive and ambitious on the big issues of our time that are shaping the future of our society, economy and planet.

Changes in climate, digital technologies and geopolitics are already having a profound effect on the lives of Europeans. We are witnessing major shifts all the way from global power structures to local politics. While these transformations may be different in nature, we must show the same ambition and determination in our response. What we do now will determine what kind of world our children live in and will define Europe's place in the world.

Our job as the European Commission will be to lead, to grasp the opportunities and to tackle the challenges that these changes present, working hand in hand with people from across Europe and with the governments, parliaments and institutions that serve them.

This is the guiding principle behind my Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024, which I presented to the European Parliament on 16 July 2019. I outlined six headline ambitions on which I want the European Commission's work to focus. These priorities are interlocking and are part of the same picture. In this spirit, I have put together a College in which we will all work, decide and deliver together.

An open and inclusive way of working

This approach reflects the open, inclusive and cooperative way of working that I will instil throughout the Commission, as well as in our relationships with others.

The College: One team

The European Commission functions on the **principle of collegiality**. This means we are one team: we all work together following a whole-of-government approach, we all have our say, we all decide collectively and we all take ownership of what is agreed.

To help us deliver on our ambitions and commitments, **I will empower eight Vice-Presidents** to steer and coordinate thematic Commissioners' Groups on each of the Commission's priorities. They will be supported in this role by the Secretariat-General. All Commissioners will be in one or more Groups. The Commissioner for Budget and Administration will report directly to me.

Of the eight Vice-Presidents, the **three Executive Vice-Presidents** will have a dual function. As Vice-Presidents, they will lead a Commissioners' Group and be supported by the Secretariat-General. In addition, they will also manage a policy area and have a Directorate-General under their authority for this part of their job. One of the three Executives, First Vice-President Timmermans, will chair the College in my absence.

The High Representative/Vice-President will support me in coordinating the external dimension of all Commissioners' work. To ensure our external action becomes more strategic and coherent, it will be systematically discussed and decided on by the College. To support this, all services and Cabinets will prepare the external aspects of College meetings on a weekly basis, mirroring the process already in place for interinstitutional relations. This should also better align the internal and external aspects of our work. This will be a **'Geopolitical Commission'**.

I believe that we need to **speak and listen more to one another**, starting from within the Commission. College meetings will be places of open and honest discussion. As President I will set the agenda, but all College decisions will be taken collectively. In line with our commitment to fully digitalise the Commission and the need to use resources conscientiously, College meetings will be paperless and digital.

Each Commissioner will ensure the delivery of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** within their policy area. The College as a whole will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Goals.

Interinstitutional relations and better policy making

Along with our close relations with the Council, I want to strengthen the Commission's **special partnership with the European Parliament**. This priority must cut through the work of each Member of the College, starting with myself.

I will expect you to ensure the European Parliament is regularly briefed, notably before major events and at key stages of international negotiations. In light of my support for a right of initiative for the Parliament, you should work closely with the relevant Committees, and be active and present during the preparation of resolutions requesting that the Commission legislate.

The more we build a consensus when designing policy, the quicker it can become law and make a difference to people's lives. This is why we need an **open and cooperative approach throughout the legislative process**, from policy design to final agreement. I will expect you to attend all political negotiations, known as trilogue meetings, with the other institutions.

We need to ensure that regulation is targeted, easy to comply with and does not add unnecessary regulatory burdens. The Commission must always have the leeway to act where needed. At the same time, we must send a clear signal to citizens that **our policies and proposals deliver and make life easier** for people and for businesses.

In this spirit, the Commission will develop a new instrument to deliver on a '**One In, One Out**' principle. Every legislative proposal creating new burdens should relieve people and businesses of an equivalent existing burden at EU level in the same policy area. We will also work with Member States to ensure that, when transposing EU legislation, they do not add unnecessary administrative burdens.

Proposals must be evidence based, widely consulted upon and subject to an impact assessment reviewed by the independent Regulatory Scrutiny Board. You will ensure that they respect the principles of **proportionality and subsidiarity** and show the clear benefit of European action.

Given that any legislation is only as good as its implementation, I want you to **focus on the application and enforcement of EU law** within your field. You should provide support and continuous guidance to Member States on implementation, and be ready to take swift action if EU law is breached.

Bringing Europe closer to home

I want to **strengthen the links between people and the institutions that serve them**, to narrow the gap between expectation and reality and to communicate about what Europe is doing.

We must engage with all Europeans, not just those who live in the capitals or are knowledgeable about the European Union. I will expect you to **visit every Member State within the first half of our mandate** at the latest. You should meet regularly with national parliaments and take part in Citizens' Dialogues across our Union, notably as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

A stronger relationship with citizens starts with building trust and confidence. I will insist on the **highest levels of transparency and ethics** for the College as a whole. There can be no room for doubt about our behaviour or our integrity. The Code of Conduct for Commissioners sets out the standards and the rules to follow.

You will ensure budgetary spending represents value for taxpayers and follows the principles of sound financial management.

Making the most of our potential

The College which takes office today is the **most gender-balanced to date**. It makes good on my pledge to put together a Commission that is more representative and draws on all of our potential. This is a good start, but there is plenty more work to be done.

I expect you to **draw on all of Europe's talents** when it comes to setting up your own Cabinets. That means striking an appropriate balance in terms of gender, experience and geography.

The Commission should also lead by example when it comes to ensuring better representation and a diversity of voices in our public life. With this in mind, all public events organised by the Commission should aim to feature gender-balanced panels and a broad range of perspectives from across Europe.

Your mission

I would like to entrust you with the role of Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement.

The European Union's future is shaped and tied in with the future of its neighbours and its partners. A stable, secure and prosperous region around our Union is therefore of paramount importance. The EU should be present and active across our neighbourhood, cooperating on common challenges and opportunities and providing support for essential reforms. The respect for human rights and the rule of law should be the foundations for our international cooperation.

A credible European Union perspective for the Western Balkans

The EU perspective of the Western Balkan region has helped to overcome historic divisions and set in motion substantial political and economic reforms. At the same time, external influence in the region has been growing significantly.

- It is imperative that we sustain and accelerate progress in the next five years, through a merit-based assessment of each candidate country, **keeping a credible perspective on future accession**.
- The Commission will stand by the proposals made to open enlargement negotiations with the **Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania**.
- You should work on **speeding up structural and institutional reforms**, with a strong focus on the fundamentals of the rule of law, economic development and public administration reforms. You should also support all efforts in the fight against corruption across the region and support all efforts towards good neighbourly relations and the resolution of bilateral disputes.

Turkey

You will work closely with High Representative/Vice-President on relations with Turkey. Turkey's accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill, and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing, as Turkey continues to move away from the European Union. It does, however, remain a key partner, with common challenges and interests such as on security, migration, economy or trade.

Taking the Eastern Partnership to the next level

In our **Eastern neighbourhood**, you will strengthen relations with the six countries in the Eastern Partnership.

- Based on the ongoing consultation, you should put forward a new set of **long-term policy objectives for the Eastern Partnership by mid 2020**. In doing so, you should reflect on future frameworks of engagement that are both innovative and realistic. They should reflect the political and economic choices of our partners and build on their current obligations, while fully respecting the Union's own capacities and interests.
- In parallel, you should focus on the outstanding issues from the current objectives, notably on the rule of law, the fight against corruption and the role of an independent media and civil society.
- You will seek to accelerate the implementation of the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with **Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova**, and look to deepen sectoral cooperation where appropriate.
- You should make full use of the dedicated **Support Group for Ukraine** to support reforms and promote the European Union's steadfast commitment to the country's territorial integrity.

Neighbourhood South

Recognising the needs, interests and situations in the different countries in our southern neighbourhood, I want you to **review and update the priorities** and Association Agendas we have with each of our partners. These should set realistic but ambitious objectives for reforms and economic development. I want you to explore how we can better promote good governance, protect our common environment, aim for a comprehensive partnership on effective migration management and support economic growth and employment across the region as a whole.

For all of the above, you should ensure we make the best use of our financial instruments, including through innovative approaches to financial support and public-private partnerships.

In consultation with the High Representative/Vice-President, you should ensure the coordination of relations with the European Economic Area.

You will represent the Commission in the Foreign Affairs Council and coordinate the presence of other Members of the College as required.

As a rule, you will work under the guidance of the High Representative/Vice-President. The Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations will support you in your work.

The way forward

The mission outlined above is not exhaustive or prescriptive. Other opportunities and challenges will no doubt appear over the course of the next five years. On all of these issues, I will ask you to work closely with me, and with other Members of the College.

Once there is more clarity, we should be ready to pave the way for an ambitious and strategic partnership with the United Kingdom.

I look forward to working closely together at what is an exciting and testing time for our Union. You can of course count on my full personal and political support throughout our mandate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ursula v. der Leyen', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen

President of the European Commission

