



The von der Leyen Commission 2.0: Institutional Features, Portfolios and Mission Letters

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Summary

The policy brief outlines the strategic vision and structural reorganisation of the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen's second term. Emphasising "Security, Prosperity, and Democracy," von der Leyen's Commission 2.0 consolidates power through a streamlined, centralised structure with six Executive Vice-Presidents, aiming for a more responsive and efficient EU. Each Commissioner has been assigned specific, often overlapping, missions focusing on key areas such as the Green Deal, technological sovereignty, and European defence. This centralisation marks a shift toward a more presidential model, raising concerns about governance complexity and missed opportunities for deeper citizen engagement and clearer portfolio distinctions. At the same time, it constitutes the core strategic approach to addressing the EU's complex priorities.

- **Vision:** President Ursula von der Leyen prioritises "Security, Prosperity, and Democracy," aiming for a responsive, flexible, and efficient European Union.
- **New Commission Structure:** The von der Leyen Commission 2.0 introduces a centralised structure with six Executive Vice-Presidents, removing traditional Vice-Presidents to streamline leadership.
- **Mission Letters:** Each of the 26 Commissioners-designate received specific missions, with major focuses on the Green Deal, technological sovereignty, industrial sovereignty, and European defence.

- **Presidentialisation:** The Commission's structure reflects increased centralisation, reinforcing von der Leyen's authority and moving towards a presidential model.
- **Challenges:** Overlapping portfolios (e.g., environment, defence, and competitiveness) create complexity and redundancy across roles.
- **Missed Opportunities:** The new structure lacks a dedicated focus on EU governance reform and clearer citizen engagement pathways, which could enhance responsiveness to public concerns.
- **Strategic Approach:** The persistent overlap of portfolios necessitates a centralised, streamlined structure to improve governance and address the EU's complex priorities.

Introduction

Ursula von der Leyen opened the game with a straight ‘*Security, Prosperity, Democracy*’ flush. The Commission President envisions a Europe that is more responsive to its citizens, grounded in local engagement and characterised by greater flexibility and efficiency. This vision is evident in the President’s initial written addresses to the Commissioners-designate. In the [Mission Letters to Commissioners-designate \(2024-2029\)](#), President von der Leyen establishes the priorities and expectations guiding each portfolio, setting a strategic tone for the responsibilities of each Commissioner and the collaborative goals within the Commission.

This policy brief outlines and analyses the revamped structure and key features of the von der Leyen Commission 2.0.

These letters draw upon insights and recommendations from landmark reports commissioned by previous administrations of the European executive. These documents include the [Draghi Report](#), addressing the future of European competitiveness; the [Strategic Dialogue report on the future of EU Agriculture](#); and the [Letta Report](#), which focuses on the development of the Single Market. Additionally, the recent [Niinistö Report](#), which will guide Europe’s civilian and defence preparedness, is also referenced. The incoming Commission will leverage these reports to underpin new proposals and initiatives.

The strategic orientation and concrete directives in each Commissioner-designate portfolio will be thoroughly discussed during the European Parliament’s rigorous screening process, scheduled between November 4th and 12th. This process is of high value in democratic and political terms. It will legitimise the Commission and reveal where prospective Commissioners stand on the more sensitive issues of the next five-year agenda.

This policy brief outlines and analyses the revamped structure and key features of the von der Leyen Commission 2.0. More importantly, it offers a comprehensive overview of the mission letters issued to the Commissioners-designate in anticipation of the forthcoming hearings.

The New Structure of von der Leyen’s Commission 2.0

Reshuffling of portfolios for a new Commission term is standard practice, necessary to accommodate the growing number of Commissioners and changing priorities. [The 2019–2024 College of Commissioners](#) bore some similarities to previous structures but also introduced notable differences. The Commission was directed by the President alongside Executive Vice-presidents (EVPs) and Vice-presidents (VPs). Each one of them was assigned the task of leading groups of Commissioners who focused on specific strategic pillars with a thematic orientation. Key portfolios, such as the European Green Deal, Promoting the European Way of Life, and Stronger Europe in the World, operated under the leadership of an EVP or VP, who in turn reported directly to the Commission President.

The [mission letters addressed to the 2019-2024 College of Commissioners](#) highlighted a clear distinction in structure and roles. Under von der Leyen’s initial leadership model, eight Vice-presidents were entrusted with guiding and coordinating thematic groups of Commissioners, each focused on one of the Commission’s key priorities, with support provided by the Secretariat-General. Every Commissioner was involved in one or more of these groups, with a notable exception: the Commissioner for Budget and Administration, Johannes Hahn, reported directly to the President of the European Commission. Among the eight Vice-presidents, three held the special role of Executive Vice-president, balancing dual responsibilities. These Executive Vice-presidents not only led a specific Commissioners’ Group, but also managed an assigned policy domain, overseeing a Directorate-General

The von der Leyen Commission 2.0 features an increasingly centripetal organizational structure, reminiscent of presidential systems.

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within their remit. A unique feature of this structure was that one of the three, First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, assumed the role of chairing the College in the President's absence.

The von der Leyen Commission 2.0 features an increasingly centripetal organizational structure, reminiscent of presidential systems. Vice-presidents are out and the six Executive Vice-presidents (5 + the High Representative, Kaja Kallas) now oversee a select group of Directorates-General and departments, with their influence varying considerably by position. This resulting organizational structure is simpler, eliminating one layer of command and control, i.e. the Vice-presidents. This new organizational architecture is expected to remain irrespective of how the upcoming hearings of the Commissioners-designate play out.



Source: Politico, 'Who works for whom in the new EU power structure'

Mission Letters in Brief

Reviewing the complete set of all twenty-six mission letters is a formidable task, even for EU enthusiasts. For this reason, we have compiled a table of concise overviews of the portfolios and the respective missions of the 2024–2029 Commissioners-designate.

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Commissioner	Portfolio	Mission
Teresa Ribera Rodríguez	Executive VP for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition	Circular Economy, European Green Deal, growth strategy and competition policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean Industry Deal • European Climate Law: 90% reduction in emissions till 2040 • Social Climate Fund & Just Transition Fund
Henna Virkkunen	Executive VP for Tech Sovereignty, Security, and Democracy	Cybersecurity, AI, Tech Sovereignty and internal security, border management - frontier technology, EU Digital Norms and Standards Internationally, digital public infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe's 2030 Digital Decade Targets • AI Strategy – AI Factories Initiative • European Data Union Strategy • European Democracy Shield
Stéphane Séjourné	Executive VP for Prosperity and Industrial Sovereignty	Productivity, Innovation, competitiveness, industrial strategy, horizontal Single Market strategy, research and development, Critical Raw Materials Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean Industrial Deal • European Competitiveness Fund • Competitiveness Coordination Tool
Kaja Kallas	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and VP of the European Commission	Strengthening security and defence, strategic partnerships, joined-up foreign policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of regular College of Commissioners' debates on foreign policy issues. • Modern and joined up FP (new foreign economic policy, external financial instruments)
Roxana Mînzatu	Executive VP for People, Skills and Preparedness	Training and education, Erasmus+, European Sport Model, Quality Jobs roadmap <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Pillar of Social Rights, New Pact for European Social Dialogue • EU Anti-poverty Strategy • European Affordable Housing Plan

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Raffaele Fitto	Executive VP for Cohesion and Reforms	Productivity, innovation, competitiveness, Next GenerationEU, resilience and sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective right to stay for every citizen • European Affordable Housing Plan / New European Bauhaus Initiative • Climate Adaptation Plan
Maroš Šefčovič	Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security; Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency	Competitiveness, security, sustainability, free and fair trade, World Trade Organization, international negotiations, EU and the G7, new economic security doctrine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Economic Security Strategy • Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships • EU Customs Authority
Valdis Dombrovskis	Commissioner for Economy and Productivity; Implementation and Simplification	Stability, Growth, NextGenerationEU, European Semester, competitiveness, digital euro <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability and Growth Pact • Recovery and Resilience Facility • Competitiveness Coordination Tool
Dubravka Šuica	Commissioner for Mediterranean	Mediterranean, demography, external aspects of migration policy, security, crime, terrorism, Southern Neighbourhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Pact for the Mediterranean • Trans-Mediterranean Energy and Green Tech Cooperation Initiative • Reconstruction plan for Gaza • Gulf Strategy
Olivér Várhelyi	Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare	Health and Animal Welfare, European Health Union, modernisation of rules on animal welfare, food safety standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Medicines Act • European Biotech Act • European Health Data Space

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Wopke Hoekstra	Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth	Climate risks, climate diplomacy, security, ecological transition, emissions trading scheme and taxation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Climate Law • Clean Industrial Deal / European Climate Adaptation Plan • Revision of the Energy Taxation Directive
Andrius Kubilius	Commissioner for Defence and Space	European Defence Union, space, military mobility, civil-military, EU-NATO strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Paper on the Future of European Defence • EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence / EU Space Law • European Defence Fund / European Defence Industrial Strategy
Marta Kos	Commissioner for Enlargement	Enlargement, EU neighbourhood policy, Ukraine, Turkey, Balkans, Southern Caucasus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual integration of candidate countries • Black Sea Strategy
Jozef Síkela	Commissioner for International Partnerships	Clean trade and investment partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team Europe approach • Global Gateway
Costas Kadis	Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans	Coastal communities, food security, food sovereignty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Fisheries Policy • EU Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy • Climate Adaptation Plan
Maria Luís Albuquerque	Commissioner for Financial Services and the Savings and Investments Union	Financing green, social and digital transition, EU as global leader in sustainable finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banking Union / European Deposit Insurance Scheme • European Savings and Investments Union

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Hadja Lahbib	Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management; Equality	<p>Civil preparedness, integrated approach to crisis management, international humanitarian law, roadmap for women’s rights, antiracist action, LGBTIQ rights, People with Disability Rights, and rights of minorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Preparedness Union Strategy / EU Preparedness Law • European Civil Defence Mechanism • Gender Equality Strategy • Anti-racism Strategy • LGBTIQ Equality Strategy • Strategy for the Persons with Disabilities
Magnus Brunner	Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration	<p>Internal security, strong common borders, migration, fight against organised crime, cybercrime, improvements of Schengen framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Internal Security Strategy • EU Visa-Policy Strategy • Pact on Migration and Asylum
Jessika Roswall	Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy	<p>European Green Deal, water security and resilience, natural world, bioeconomy, global water leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Water Resilience Strategy • Climate Adaptation Plan • New European Bauhaus
Piotr Serafin	Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration	<p>Responsive budget, anti-fraud, modern public administration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Competitiveness Fund • Conditionality Regulation • European Anti-Fraud Office
Dan Jørgensen	Commissioner for Energy and Housing	<p>Energy Union, sustainable and affordable housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Affordable Housing Plan • Clean Industrial Deal • Electrification Action Plan

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Ekaterina Zaharieva	Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation	Startups, research and development, innovation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Innovation Council / European Research Council • European Innovation Act • European Research Area
Michael McGrath	Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, and the Rule of Law	Democracy, Justice and Rule of Law, fairness and integrity, single market <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Democracy Shield • Rule of Law Report • Consumer Agenda 2025-2030
Apostolos Tzitzikostas	Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism	Resilient and competitive tourism sector, sustainable transport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trans-European Transport Corridor • Single Market for Transport Services • Comprehensive EU Port Strategy
Christophe Hansen	Commissioner for Agriculture and Food	Food security, rural areas, food sovereignty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Water Resilience Strategy • Vision for Agriculture and Food
Glenn Micallef	Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport	Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness, youth participation, Culture Compass, European Sport Diplomacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Policy Dialogues • President's Youth Advisory Board • EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

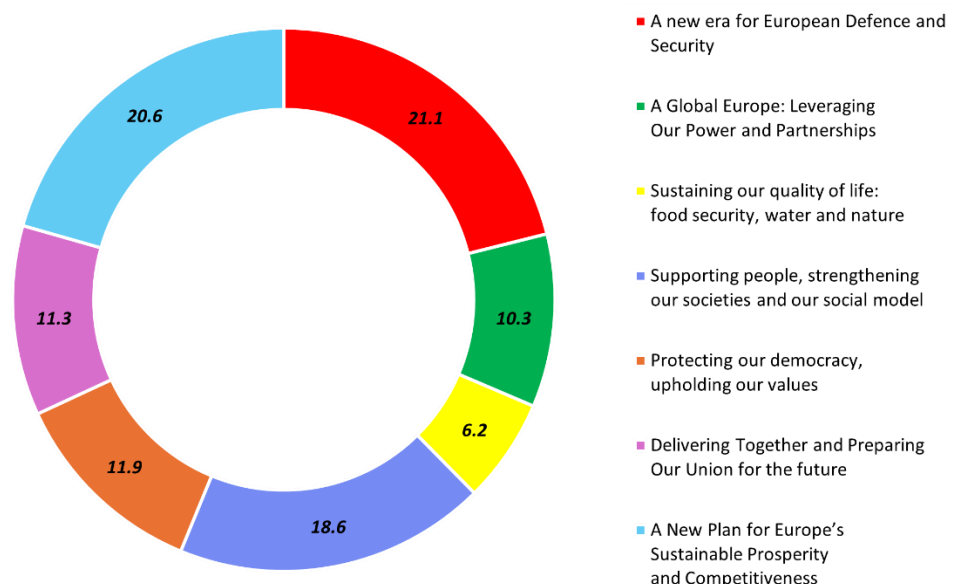
The Keywords of the new Commission: Presidentialisation, Overlap and Missed Opportunities

In her re-election speech to the European Parliament and subsequent [political guidelines for the 2024-2029 European Commission](#), Ursula von der Leyen has outlined a strategic framework of action centred around seven key pillars. These define the focal areas of her vision and include:

- A New Plan for Europe’s Sustainable Prosperity and Competitiveness
- A new era for European Defence and Security
- Supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model
- Sustaining our quality of life: food security, water and nature
- Protecting our democracy, upholding our values
- A global Europe: Leveraging our power and partnerships
- Delivering together and preparing our Union for the future.

In their in-depth analysis of the political guidelines and mission letters [Levente Kocsis and Eric Maurice](#), identify 194 specific commitments made by the President of the Commission. These commitments are broadly organised across the strategic pillars mentioned in the guidelines, as seen in the following graph, in percentage terms. They also align closely with the priorities defined in the [Strategic Agenda](#) adopted in June 2024, as well as with [those of the European political parties](#) whose support was essential for von der Leyen’s re-election by the Parliament.

Distribution of Political Guidelines - European Commission 2024-2029



Source: EPC, COMPENDIUM EUROPEAN POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS PROGRAMME 24 OCTOBER 2024

When considering the new structure of the Commission (absent of Vice-presidents) in tandem with the study of specific policy areas in each portfolio, three features emerge: increased presidentialisation, continuity of overlapping mandates, and missed opportunities to upgrade policies and streamline Commission's work.

Presidentialisation

Von der Leyen's first term has been characterised by a slow but undoubtable shift of power to the Commission's centre, i.e. a presidentialisation of the institution, that is especially poignant compared to the two previous office holders, namely José Manuel Barroso and Jean-Claude Juncker (Kassim 2021). The initial presidentialist thrust owes much to the first use of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process in 2014 (Dimitrakopoulos et al. 2024: 8). The multi-faceted and continuous crisis environment, from the global pandemic to the land war at the EU's doorstep, have created windows of opportunity for the incremental centralisation of power and authority in the hands of the Commission President ([Moens et al 2024](#)). Von der Leyen has capitalised on all the above. This trend conflicts with the traditional Commission ethos of *purely* collegial pluralism, wherein Commissioners are of *de facto* equal rank and free to exercise independent judgment, as enshrined in the Treaties (Article 17(8) TEU and Articles 234 and 250 TFEU).

...centralisation may allow for greater effectiveness, especially in a poly- and perma-crisis environment.

Still, there are references in the Treaties that pave the way for a different conceptualisation of the Commission President's role. Such alternative approaches could be justified by the fact that Commission Presidents are elected first (as President-elect) and exercise considerable control over the subsequent composition of the College (Article 17(7) TEU). Furthermore, after the confirmation of the Commissioners, the President retains full control of the body. Their power to unilaterally compel the resignation of an individual Commissioner, except the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is proof of this (Article 18(1) TEU). Finally, the Commission President has wide-ranging organisational powers that allow them to exert significant control over individual Commissioners, whether through re-shuffling of portfolios or division of portfolios (Article 17(6) TEU and Article 248 TFEU) ([Cotter 2024](#)).

The ongoing centralisation is accompanied by greater politicisation that risks undermining the technocratic nature of the Commission. The fusion of politics and technocracy may be anathema to many, whilst others may see it as a necessary step towards further political integration in the European project. Nevertheless, centralisation may allow for greater effectiveness, especially in a poly- and perma-crisis environment. While acknowledging the legitimacy concerns of such a development, its positive effect may prove catalytic for the association between European demos and the – oft demonised – EU institutional architecture.

Regardless of one's disposition towards the Commission's presidentialisation, what appeared to be an unorganized and seemingly improvisational manoeuvre in von der Leyen's first term now seems baked into her strategy. The Commission's new structure, with its murky portfolios and downgraded Vice-presidents now limited to a seemingly obedient executive role, hints at a transformation of the Commission from a collegial body into a Presidential office, as [Alberto Alemanno argues](#). This restructuring is designed to drive key priorities forward by simplifying the 'line of command'. In the new format, Executive Vice-presidents oversee only a select few Directorates-General and departments, with their influence varying significantly across roles. Certain Commissioners—including 'heavy guns' like former Vice-presidents Valdis Dombrovskis and Maros Šefčovič but also Piotr Serafin who will handle the EU budget 'hot potato' during the Multi-Annual Financial Framework negotiations—will report directly to the

President. The new setup clearly indicates a Commission that operates under the strict supervision and guidance of President von der Leyen in most if not all key issues, including economic security and productivity. Thus, [the structure of the new Commission is clearly hierarchical, which testifies to its further presidentialisation.](#)

Overlaps

Each new College of Commissioners is typically prefaced by discussions around “overlap,” an issue recognised as fact rather than speculation. After successive enlargements, the number of Commissioners now exceeds the scope of EU competences, raising valid questions about the substantive content of certain portfolios. This presents a structural problem that underlies any discussion about the inevitable overlap of individual portfolios.

Clear examples of overlap include **Teresa Ribera Rodríguez**, Executive VP for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition and **Stéphane Séjourné**, Executive VP for Prosperity and Industrial Sovereignty. The authority of Ribera Rodriguez appears somewhat uncertain. Although officially tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Green Deal, her remit includes control over the powerful [Directorate-General for Competition \(DG COMP\)](#), the EU body with exclusive competence over competition; this is a policy area currently being transfigured by economic sovereignty concerns. She is tasked, among others, with the Circular Economy (although there is a Commissioner on Circular Economy: **Jessika Roswall**), the European Green Deal, growth strategy and competition policy, the Clean Industry Deal and the Social Climate Fund & Just Transition Fund. Crucially, Séjourné, responsible for prosperity and industrial sovereignty (and not competitiveness), is also responsible (among others) for Productivity (as opposed to growth strategy), competitiveness, industrial strategy the Clean Industrial Deal, the European Competitiveness Fund and the Competitiveness Coordination Tool.

Furthermore, an even more weirded situation exists between **Roxana Mînzatu**, Executive VP for People, Skills and Preparedness, in a triple (or more) partial overlap with Executive VP of Cohesion and Reforms **Raffaele Fitto**; and Commissioners-designate **Glenn Micallef**, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport; and **Dan Jørgensen**, Commissioner on Energy and Housing. The first focuses on skills and labour gaps, training and education, Erasmus+, the European Sport Model, the Quality Jobs roadmap, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the New Pact for European Social Dialogue, the EU Anti-poverty Strategy and the European Affordable Housing Plan. The second, Raffaele Fitto, also focuses on the European Affordable Housing Plan and New European Bauhaus Initiative, the Climate Adaptation Plan, competitiveness and NextGenerationEU. Glenn Micallef follows with every youth and culture-related topic before going back to Dan Jørgensen and sustainable and affordable housing, specifically the European Affordable Housing Plan and the Clean Industrial Deal (among other things).

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency, has a portfolio that overlaps with the International Partnerships portfolio of Commissioner **Jozef Síkela**.

Executive Vice-president **Henna Virkkunen**, overseeing Tech Sovereignty, Security, and Democracy, manages a portfolio that intersects significantly with technology—particularly AI—and the strengthening of external borders, especially in relation to managing migration flows. Her role directly references the Pact on Asylum and Migration and is closely aligned with the operations of Frontex. This creates a reciprocal overlap with **Andrius Kubilius**, Commissioner for Defence and Space; **Magnus Brunner**, Commissioner

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for Internal Affairs and Migration; and **Dubravka Šuica**, Commissioner for the Mediterranean, highlighting a cohesive yet complex interrelation across portfolios.

Having already highlighted the overlap between Executive Vice-president **Henna Virkkunen** and Commissioner for Defence and Space **Andrius Kubilius**, it is essential to address another area of significant overlap—namely, the intersection of foreign policy and defence. **Kaja Kallas**, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and VP of the European Commission, among others, also operates with a mandate to strengthen security and defence (focusing on Ukraine, European Defence Union, NATO, and sanctions).

Bearing in mind the above discussion, three features characterise the structure of the new College: overlapping hierarchy; significant differences between executive Vice-presidential portfolios; and reporting lines that run in different directions with several Executive Vice-presidents responsible for several Commissioners and von der Leyen being directly responsible for some parts of the Commissioners' portfolios ([Patrin 2024](#)).

The new Commission has missed the opportunity to sharpen its objectives and distribute more clearly defined portfolios.

Missed Opportunities

The new Commission has missed the opportunity to sharpen its objectives and distribute more clearly defined portfolios. An example is that of the Belgian Commissioner-designate, **Hadja Lahbib**, who is responsible for "preparedness", encompassing mainly prevention and crisis management. However, her portfolio also includes the promotion of gender equality and the combating of discrimination—two areas of competence notably distinct from her primary crisis-related duties, creating some confusion and raising doubts about the rationale behind this competence allocation. Moreover, considering the portfolio of **Olivér Várhelyi**, integrating public health policy with animal health could inadvertently undermine the efforts within his primary sector—a potentially shortsighted approach. Health policy is intricately connected to economic drivers such as biotechnology and pharmaceuticals and is essential in addressing significant challenges, including demographic shifts, the implications of an ageing population, workforce sustainability, and the potential emergence of future health crises, such as pandemics.

A second missed opportunity regards interaction with European citizens. Although the Mission Letters broadly state that the Commission intends to usher in a new era of dialogue with citizens, this commitment is not clearly reflected in the responsibilities assigned in the mission statements. If the new Commission aims to integrate citizens into its work, this priority should have been explicitly incorporated into the Commission's structure, ideally through the defined role of at least one Executive Vice-President ([Zuleeg and Emmanouilidis, 2024](#)).

Finally, the overarching goal of strengthening EU governance, rendered especially important in response to numerous internal and external challenges and the potential expansion to over 30 member states, is notably absent in the new Commission's structure. This priority is only lightly touched upon in the general section of the Mission Letters and is not evident in the distribution of major portfolios. Such omissions strongly suggest that governance reform within the EU is not a central focus of the second von der Leyen Commission.

Conclusion

...a much more centralised, compact and centripetal approach is required. Adopting a more streamlined, hierarchical structure is a strategic decision to enhance proactive and better-coordinated governance within the Commission.

As previously noted, portfolio reshuffling and overlap among Commissioners is not uncommon. On the contrary, it has become the norm. The Treaty-enshrined high number of Commissioners, directly linked with the number of member-states, and the challenge of accommodating all of them in different portfolios remain ongoing concerns. This was a notable feature of the prior political cycle and continues to be so in the new Commission structure. Restructuring and reshuffling have not yet solved the major problem of overlap as evidenced by the priorities of the Commissioners-designate discussed in the first section of this policy brief. The shift toward a more centripetal approach, therefore, may not be an unforeseen or undesirable development, especially given the ambitious and highly complex triptych of ‘Security, Prosperity, Democracy’ put forward by Von der Leyen herself. To achieve these goals, a much more centralised, compact and centripetal approach is required. Given the inevitability of portfolio overlaps, adopting a more streamlined, hierarchical structure is a strategic decision to enhance proactive and better-coordinated governance within the Commission.

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