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STRONG CLIMATE ACTION Footholds IN THE INCOMING EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s proposed new College of Commissioners places the continuation of climate action into dedicated hands and shared political ownership. Mission letters to the Commissioners-designate signal that the European Green Deal and decarbonisation will remain central to Europe’s strategy even as political attention shifts to industrial competitiveness and security amid geopolitical tensions. At their upcoming parliamentary hearings, the Commissioners-designate will still need to spell out their plans for a socially just transition and regulatory continuity.

This orientation briefing makes sense of the new structure, policy priorities, and portfolios of the EU’s executive. It also highlights further commitments that could strengthen climate action in the next term.

Amid a complex political balancing act, climate finds a front row seat

Ursula von der Leyen faced the challenging task of arranging the Commissioners nominated by each member state into a politically and gender-balanced structure that is able to deliver on the cross-cutting set of priorities she presented in July.¹ She formally announced her proposed structure,² including individual “mission letters” setting out the roles and responsibilities of each

¹ E3G, 2024, [Assessing Ursula von der Leyen’s political guidelines for the next five years](#)

² European Commission, 2024, [Commissioners-designate 2024-2029](#)



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Commissioner, on 17 September. The picture coming together is one that reflects the topics which have dominated the political limelight for the past year: competitiveness and industry, security and sovereignty figure prominently. The structure also echoes key features of Mario Draghi's report.³

Top take-aways

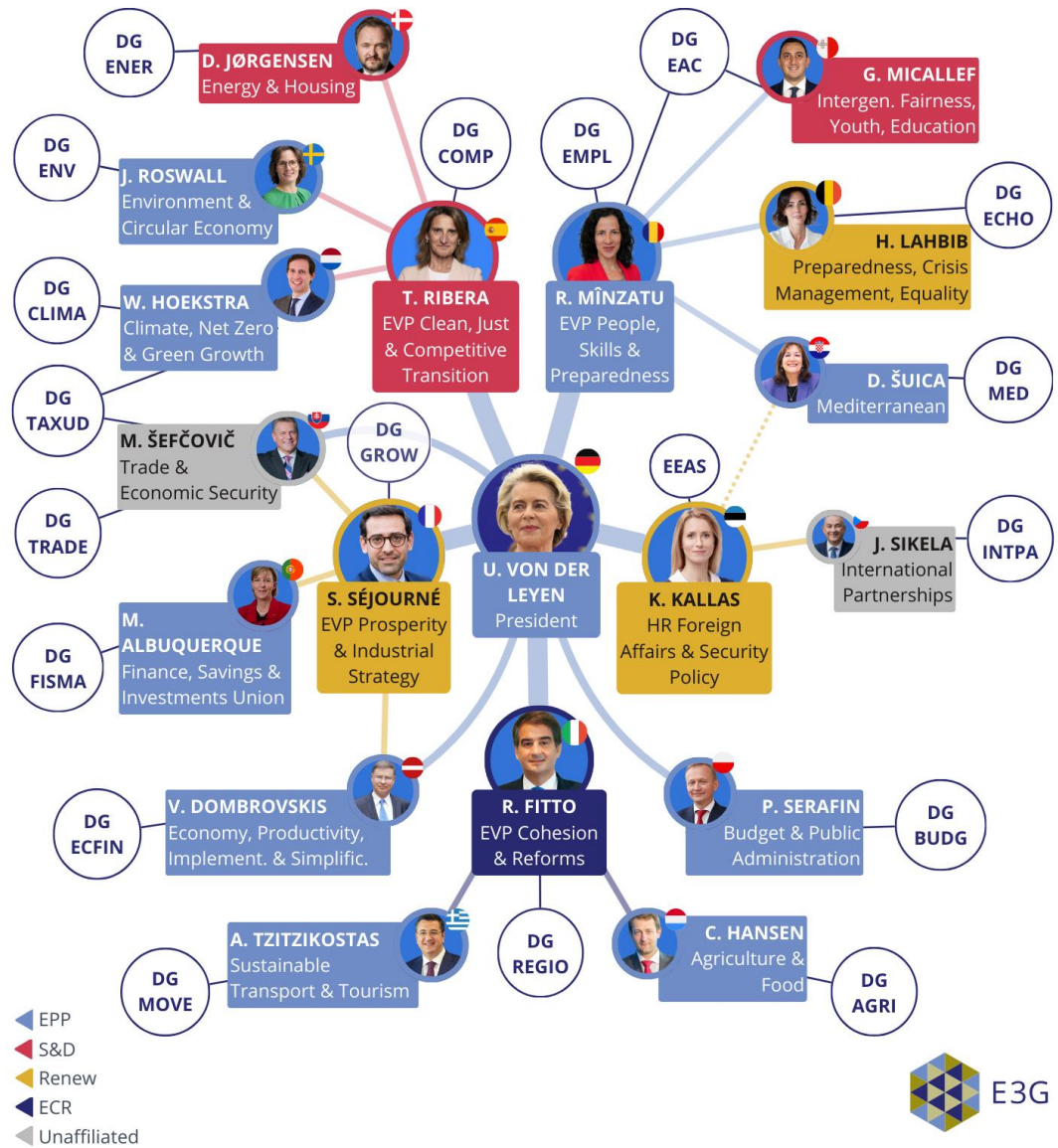
- > **Decarbonisation is a core facet of the future European economy.** The European Green Deal features as a horizontal priority across all of Ursula von der Leyen's mission letters and decarbonisation will be a decisive factor in developing the new flagship initiative of a Clean Industrial Deal. With Spanish socialist Teresa Ribera at the helm of arguably one of the meatiest portfolios as Executive Vice President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, climate action and the European Green Deal are placed at the heart of future EU policymaking. Importantly, merging the clean just transition with competitiveness provides both an opportunity and challenge for Ribera to avoid trade-offs between the two.
- > **Europe's cross-cutting challenges will only be overcome through investment.** Draghi's main message was that Europe must invest to secure its prosperity. The mission letters brand this as the "Investment Commission" and contain hooks to increase private and public funding – notably via new own resources, scaling up sustainable finance, transition finance and investment in climate resilience. However, a clear plan to ensure that the next MFF will be sufficiently targeted at climate mitigation and adaptation is missing.
- > **More European coordination is needed to secure competitiveness and prosperity.** EU-level action will be crucial, notably in the areas of energy planning and infrastructure, industrial strategy and investment coordination.
- > **Shared political ownership puts climate on a solid footing.** The three major political families (EPP, S&D, Renew) each occupy key climate-related portfolios in the new Commission and will therefore share ownership of Europe's climate agenda and the forthcoming Clean Industrial Deal. This co-ownership by Europe's mainstream political parties puts the green transition on relatively solid political footing while at the same time posing questions about the management of overlapping responsibilities and how differing political convictions will be squared in the final product.

³ E3G, 2024, **Mario Draghi's recipe for competitiveness: decarbonise, invest, industrial policy, and more Europe**



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Who will lead the climate transition in the EU's new College of Commissioners?



Note: This figure includes only the Commissioners most relevant for climate action.



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How well-positioned is the incoming Commission to accelerate the green transition?

Despite the overall promising hooks for climate action in the EU's emerging new executive, important gaps and questions remain. Will the promised Clean Industrial Deal go the distance for European citizens, paving a socially just transition that goes beyond the current focus on skills and under-resourced tools such as the Social Climate Fund and Just Transition Fund? Will the focus on regulatory simplification – which features as a prominent section across all mission letters – come into conflict with the critical guardrails of Europe's green and fair transition? And how will the international agenda, which is largely focused on economic security, present a cohesive vision of mutual benefits and EU climate leadership?

The benchmarks below grade Ursula von der Leyen's proposals for the new College of Commissioners on the key elements needed for securing a fast, fair and funded transition in Europe and internationally.

1. A clear and stable trajectory towards climate neutrality and resilience

Approach needed: *A stable and predictable framework, long-term planning.*

Grade: *mixed*

- + The objectives of the European Green Deal are reconfirmed in the mission letters of all Commissioners.
- + Clear assignment to enshrine a 90% 2040 target in the Climate Law and prepare the architecture for post-2030.
- + Climate resilience is on the agenda, with the potential for legislation on resilience and preparedness.
- + Explicit focus on water resilience in the portfolio of the Commissioner for Environment.
- The announced amendment to the internal combustion engine ban undermines predictability of the 2030 framework and sets an unwelcome precedent for how regulatory simplification can be carried out.
- Strong focus on the costs of regulation rather than the benefits for investment, clarity and predictability.



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2. A resilient, fair, and green Clean Industrial Deal

Approach needed: A pan-European industrial plan that future-proofs key industries, enables tech leadership, and positions the European economy towards a fast and fair green transition.

Grade: *has potential*

- + Strong cross-party ownership of the Clean Industrial Deal and the integration of just and competitive objectives into one portfolio.
- + Inclusion of an industry electrification plan that was previously missing in the Political Guidelines.
- + Circularity features relatively prominently.
- No mention of social and environmental conditionalities.
- Competitiveness narrowly framed as reducing energy costs and deploying tech – little mention of energy and material efficiency.

3. A just and green EU social model

Approach needed: All Europeans feel the benefits of the green transition, are protected from economic and climate impacts, and are supported and involved in the EU's industrial transformation.

Grade: *mixed*

- + Energy and Housing Commissioner tasked to ensure a just transition and structurally address energy poverty via affordable and sustainable housing.
- + Social fairness is mentioned as a horizontal objective of the European Semester, which has the potential to steer member states towards investments and reforms in support of the just transition. Just transition bundled with competition under a strong, socially committed Commissioner can prevent a zero-sum game between the two.
- Heavy focus on skills, less attention given to a broader social agenda. No focus on social fairness in the mission of the Commissioner for Prosperity and the Industrial Strategy.
- The promise of a “significant increase in funding” for a just transition in the Political Guidelines is absent from the relevant mission letters, making an already difficult political promise even more vulnerable.



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4. Energy security through cheaper renewable energy sources, connectivity, and flexible demand

Approach needed: A clean and coherent pan-European plan for increased energy security. Secure, sustainable and socially fair access to critical raw materials.

Grade: *has potential*

- + Commissioner-designate with a strong background in diplomacy and phasing out fossil fuels.
- + Framework to scale down and phase out fossil subsidies.
- + An Action Plan for Affordable Energy Prices and an Electrification Action Plan for industry will strengthen the Clean Industrial Deal.
- Demand reduction does not feature and efficiency risks being underutilised.

5. Europe as a credible and reliable leader internationally

Approach needed: Reinforced ambition of external action with partnerships that promote and seize clean economy opportunities, strengthen human and labour rights, and foster resilience; enhanced clean investments abroad; an ambitious 2035 NDC.

Grade: *mixed*

- + Ribera, Jorgensen and Hoekstra form a strong team for climate and green energy diplomacy. The mission letters give a mandate to develop a climate and energy diplomacy vision and for the EU to build on the COP28 pledges to triple renewable energy and double energy efficiency.
- + New Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships and revamp of Global Gateway offer an opportunity to go beyond previous focus on critical raw materials and hydrogen.
- The very strong emphasis on geostrategic threats and economic security and rivalries could undermine the EU's leadership on defending multilateralism.
- No climate mandate for the High Representative or Vice President, and no mention of climate diplomacy, climate security or resilience. Split and unclear mandate for Kallas to lead the work of other external action Commissioners (Šefčovič, Síkela, Šuica and Kos). Awkward inter-institutional position of the European External Action Service with unclear role in core strategic discussions on economic foreign policy, economic security and migration.
- No mention of climate finance, international adaptation and resilience work for the Directorate General responsible for International Partnerships, the High Representative / Vice President or the Commissioner for Enlargement.



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6. Funding and investment at the scale that's required

Approach needed: Clear and coherent strategy that gives the EU a mandate to build financial architecture to deliver on its green objectives at home and internationally.

Grade: *difficult*

- + The ambition to be an “Investment Commission” is restated and the budget Commissioner has a mandate to introduce new own resources for the EU’s multiannual budget.
- The strategy to deliver the Investment Commission is unclear on the scale and direction of public investment. While new own resources, a Competitiveness Fund and developing the EU’s role as an established issuer in global financial markets are mentioned, the mission letters lack the urgency needed to confront member states with the required levels of public investment⁴ to secure prosperity in Europe, especially as the Recovery and Resilience Fund's additional investments approach their expiration.
- The promise of scaling up sustainable finance, although positive, falls short of countering the risk of deregulation. Particularly, the call to reduce sustainability reporting requirements by 25% persists, coupled with a renewed cut of 35% for SMEs.

What's next?

Hearings. After a round of written questions and answers, Commissioner-designates will appear in hearings by committees in the European Parliament starting on 4 November (to be confirmed). If they fail to secure a majority of coordinators representing two-thirds of the Parliament committees, candidates face additional questions.

EP vote on College of Commissioners. In a plenary session of the European Parliament, the entire team of Commissioners will be put to a vote by simple majority: Nov 25–28 (to be confirmed).

New Commission takes office. 1 December (to be confirmed). The von der Leyen II Commission is expected to produce a number of climate-relevant propositions during their first 100 days: a Clean Industrial Deal including a legislative proposal for a 2040 climate target and revision of the European Climate Law; a vision for agriculture and food, and a vision for global climate and energy diplomacy ahead of COP30.

⁴ ECB, 2024, **Massive investment needs to meet EU green and digital targets**



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About E3G

E3G is an independent climate change think tank with a global outlook. We work on the frontier of the climate landscape, tackling the barriers and advancing the solutions to a safe climate. Our goal is to translate climate politics, economics and policies into action.

E3G builds broad-based coalitions to deliver a safe climate, working closely with like-minded partners in government, politics, civil society, science, the media, public interest foundations and elsewhere to leverage change.

More information is available at www.e3g.org

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