

**QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE****Magnus BRUNNER****Internal Affairs and Migration****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?*

During my whole career in politics – in particular as a member of the Austrian parliament (Bundesrat) and as Austria's Finance Minister – my objective has always been to build bridges across interest groups, stakeholder communities and parties, in order to pursue the common interest of Austria's citizens. It is this pursuit of the general interest that I want to bring to the European level, if I am confirmed as Commissioner. Promoting the general interest and European values is, in my view, indispensable in particular in the areas of migration, borders and security. I will work hard to ensure that, both at European and at national level, our system (grounded on the Pact on Migration and Asylum) is well-prepared, fair, coherent and – crucially – able to inspire the trust of citizens and governments alike.

In line with the political guidelines, my strong focus will be on helping to improve the Union's overall security landscape on which our societies depend. In the same vein, I will work with all stakeholders involved on the internal and the external dimensions of migration. In the area of migration, I will follow a two-track approach, pursuing both legislative and operational tracks, so that together we can put in place an ambitious and fair way forward. I will work to ensure strong common external borders that provide safety to European citizens as well as their digitalisation to facilitate business, tourism, work and studies. I will work on internal security strategy for the EU which would ensure that citizens can enjoy the benefits of an area of freedom security and justice.

I strongly believe in the Commission as a collegiate body, where all Members participate in the debates and contribute transparently to well-informed decisions that are aligned with the best interest of European citizens. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will be a committed Member of the College as a whole and I will work closely with other College Members as a team, in a spirit of collegiality, taking full ownership of what the Commission will agree.

Mainstreaming gender and youth considerations in the EU's migration and security policies is crucial for addressing the unique challenges faced by these groups. When women and children seek asylum, it is key to ensure that their rights are respected and the particular risks they face are mitigated. They also require targeted support in accessing education, accommodation, healthcare, and professional training, enabling them to fully participate in our societies, if their refugee status is confirmed. I intend to continue to support Member States with the necessary targeted support in this regard, leveraging the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion and EU funding.

Women and children represent the majority of victims of various crimes, including sexual abuse and exploitation and human trafficking. When they fall victims of such heinous acts, they need immediate assistance and protection due to their heightened vulnerability. I am committed to ensure that EU legislation and policies prioritise the

perspectives of women and children to guarantee their safety. At the same time, mainstreaming these considerations is essential for effective crime prevention.

I will ensure gender equality in the composition of my Cabinet, as well as in all areas of my responsibility. As a matter of fact, I have a solid track record in this respect: during my tenure as Finance Minister, the Ministry's top management ("Sektionschef") level reached gender balance for the first time in its 170-year history.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will fully respect the obligation to act in the European interest, and without taking any instructions, as set out in the Treaties. I commit to avoiding any situation where my independence or impartiality could be questioned. I will honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflict of interest. My Declaration of Interests is complete, and I commit to updating it if and when necessary. If confirmed as Commissioner, I and the members of my Cabinet will only meet interested parties and stakeholders' representatives registered in the Transparency Register.

## **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 that our dialogues need to be both regular and strategic, covering priorities and the state of affairs in the areas covered by my portfolio. I am convinced that this will be a useful moment for us to take political stock, for both Members of the European Parliament and for myself; and I have no doubt that new ideas and constructive proposals will emerge. As set out in the Political Guidelines of the President-elect, we should also exchange on implementation issues: the Pact offers the opportunity of finding new ways for the EU level and Member States to work together on delivery, and the support of the European Parliament can play an essential part in making it work well.

Having been Member of Parliament in my own country, I fully appreciate the Parliament's role as representative of the European citizens, and I do want to have an open and continuous political dialogue with you at all levels. I intend to participate in all plenary sessions where the topics under my responsibility are discussed, and to respond, to the extent possible, to your calls to exchange views on issues of major importance.

In recent weeks, I already had the opportunity to meet a number of Members of the European Parliament individually, including the Chair of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, with whom I plan to set up a regular and open channel of communication. If confirmed as Commissioner, I intend to make this my standard practice and to do my utmost to ensure that replies to questions from Members of the European Parliament to the Commission that come under my responsibility are delivered within the agreed timeframe.

President-elect von der Leyen made a commitment before you in July that we should go local with our policies, with our presence among European citizens, their aspirations and their daily concerns. I am committed to do just that, including to visit projects where European action is helping our citizens feel safe, where migration management provides EU added value or where EU-funded equipment helps protect our borders and facilitate legitimate travel. I want to meet citizens and authorities that are facing head-on challenges related to the policies that I will work on.

When it comes to the fundamental issue of transparency, the Commission has put in place many tools to share information in the Home Affairs area with the European Parliament, beyond the regular mechanisms of oversight. I am thinking here of the reports on returns and readmission figures that are provided twice a year to the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee, or the participation of a European Parliament representative in the Management Board of Frontex, and the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) of Europol. The Commission will inform you regularly on the implementation of the Pact for Migration and Asylum and subsequently with its Annual Asylum and Migration report. We will also prepare an Annual Progress Report on Enforcement and Implementation. I am convinced that this reporting will further enhance the transparency and accountability of our executive action.

With regard to the external dimension of migration more specifically, I will seek to increase the level of transparency and information visibility that you receive, and to propose that my services debrief you on the external missions carried out, their outcomes and next steps.

I am committed to respect the Commission's long-standing practice of providing written responses to Parliament's resolutions within three months. As requested by President-elect von der Leyen, I will organise a structured dialogue with the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee to chart a way forward for any Article 225 Resolutions adopted by the Parliament calling for legislative proposals, and like President-elect von der Leyen, I support the Parliament's right of initiative.

Finally, as a former Member of a national Parliament, I value the principle of equal treatment of the European Parliament and the Council, particularly as regards access to meetings, such as conferences, workshops and high-level meetings; but equally, when it comes to providing contributions or other information, including on legislative and budgetary matters. I am committed to respect the principle of equality, in particular before major events.

#### Questions from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

### **3. Migration and Asylum**

*The new Pact on Migration and Asylum introduces a legislative framework that establishes a comprehensive system in the areas of asylum and migration management, balancing between solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility in accordance with Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and protecting fundamental rights, while reinforcing mutual trust between Member States.*

*How will you monitor the timely progress of the administrative, operational, and legal steps required to be taken by Member States and EU agencies for the full entry into application of the Pact by summer 2026, and how will you address any delays in meeting the Common Implementation Plan benchmarks? What steps do you plan to take to ensure sufficient and timely EU funding for Member States and agencies for the smooth application of the Pact? Given that accurate data from Member States to EU agencies and the Commission is vital for identifying the preparedness and the actual needs of each Member State to be able to manage a situation of migratory pressure or crisis, what actions will you take to foster a culture of data sharing and mutual trust?*

*Working with Member States on a stronger coordination of rescue operations is also part of your mission letter. How do you see your role and that of the EU in this area?*

*According to your mission letter you should be developing a new common approach to the return of irregularly staying migrants based on modern rules; what legislative steps do you intend to take? What role do you consider mutually recognised return decisions to play in this context, and how will you strengthen readmission policies to ensure effective returns? How will you ensure that migration issues are an operational part of our comprehensive partnerships with third countries while fully respecting fundamental rights and how will you involve the Parliament, ensuring that it is able to exercise effective oversight and its budgetary prerogatives? What is your understanding of 'innovative operational solutions to counter irregular migration' that your mission letter requires you to steer reflection on? What steps do you plan in the fight against migrant smugglers and human traffickers?*

*A successful EU common approach on migration needs to be complemented by safe and viable legal pathways, including resettlement for refugees and their successful integration in communities and labour markets. What steps will you take to ensure that Member States participate fully and meaningfully in the EU Resettlement Framework? As regards legal migration, your mission letter states that you will work on how to attract third-country nationals with the right skills to match local labour market needs in the EU; what steps will you take to support the co-legislators in their work on the establishment of an EU Talent Pool, the promotion of measures simplifying the recognition of foreign qualifications, and the finalisation of the negotiations on the Long-Term Residents Directive? Which other steps, legislative or non-legislative, do you plan to take in this area?*

Making a reality of all elements of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, in a timely and complete way, will be my focus if I am confirmed by the European Parliament. I intend to rigorously monitor the implementation of the Pact, in line with the Common Implementation Plan, to ensure that all steps required for the full entry into application of the Pact are taken by Member States and relevant EU Agencies by mid-2026. I will also be ready to work on accelerating implementation while ensuring a balanced approach between responsibility and solidarity as well as the internal and external dimension of the Pact. The Pact is an example of how the EU level and Member States can work closely together to deliver on far-reaching and complex legislation: I intend to be in close contact with Member States, through regular bilateral meetings and visits, to back up contacts at technical and operational level. In addition to our regular dialogues and exchanges, I would regularly provide information to the European Parliament and the Council on the state of play. I intend to use the Pact Coordination Platform being set up by the

Commission to oversee activities and ensure adequate cooperation at EU and national levels. Member States will receive targeted and tailor-made support to ensure coherence at EU level, and assistance from the relevant EU Agencies.

Support for Member States must include help with the necessary financial capacity to meet legal commitments under the Pact in practice. The budgetary authority has recognised these needs through additional funding, with the EUR 1.8 billion made available under the mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and EUR 1.6 billion resulting from the mid-term review of the Home Affairs Funds and the national programmes under these instruments. EU funding will contribute to addressing the needs identified by Member States in their National Implementation Plans. That said, funding remains limited and will not be able to cover all costs, considering that it is also needed to support Member States with Ukrainian refugees, and should therefore be allocated where it can add most value to the implementation of the Pact.

If I am confirmed, I would foster mutual trust and information sharing. I will closely steer, as a core part of the implementation of the Pact, the annual migration management cycle, with the first Annual Migration Management Report. To shed an accurate light on the migratory situation in the EU, the Report must be based on reliable, quality, and timely data provided by Member States, according to their reporting obligations. I intend to further promote the role of the Blueprint Network during my mandate and encourage open sharing and active participation from EU Agencies and Member States. The timely implementation of the new Eurodac is crucial. I would support the rolling out and the full use of the interoperability framework and the new Eurodac to facilitate efficient migration data collection and sharing, ensuring both EU-wide oversight and daily operational use by Member States. I would also promote a culture of preparedness, cooperation and resilience, by supporting Member States in their new responsibilities to put in place contingency planning on all aspects of migration management.

The EU needs a modern set of rules to speed up and simplify the return of persons with no right to stay in the EU. With the 2018 proposal still without agreement, and in line with the Political Guidelines, I intend to work urgently on a new common approach on returns. This means a new proposal for legislation, to speed up and simplify returns, defining clear obligations of cooperation for the returnee, effectively streamlining the process, digitalising case management and making provision for mutual recognition of each other's return decisions.

In addition, in close cooperation with the High Representative/Vice-President and other Commissioners, I would work at the EU-level and with Member States to use all available tools and policies, including diplomacy, visa, trade and development, to foster cooperation on readmission with third countries. Our policies need to be leveraged to ensure that countries accept to take back own nationals. In parallel, it is essential to offer legal pathways and resettlement opportunities for those in need of protection, which can act as incentives to enhance cooperation on readmission.

This combination means a fair, humane and comprehensive approach to migration that benefits both Europe and our partners.

The external dimension of migration is a cornerstone of the European border and migration management system. Migration is complex and often begins far from our borders. To manage it effectively and humanely, we must consider the entire journey of migrants, by implementing a "whole-of-route" approach – from the country of origin, through the countries of transit, to the destination – while respecting national sovereignty, the EU's values and legal framework, fundamental rights and international obligations. These requirements will remain central to all cooperation efforts with third countries, including in all comprehensive partnerships. If I am confirmed, I will work closely with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean including on the new Pact for the Mediterranean, and with the Commissioner for International Partnerships. Building on the Association Agreements concluded with our partner countries, the strategic and comprehensive partnerships remain non-binding instruments. If confirmed as Commissioner, I am committed to providing the Parliament's with the necessary information on migration related aspects, including early discussions and exchanges of views, to allow it to exercise its democratic oversight at various stages of the process. I remain fully committed to providing the necessary information on any such arrangements and to engaging with you on our initiatives.

As stressed in the Political Guidelines, migrant smugglers and human traffickers cannot be those deciding who comes to Europe and under which circumstances. Therefore, I intend to take forward the Global Alliance to counter migrant smuggling and develop new operational partnerships with key countries of transit and origin, including neighbouring countries. If I am confirmed, I will also reinforce the fight against trafficking in human beings, through a comprehensive approach including prevention and protection of victims from all forms of exploitation. I would work on targeted information and awareness raising so that people do not put their lives in the hand of

unscrupulous smugglers and think twice before taking dangerous journeys. To that end, I would work closely with the co-legislators to prioritise the conclusion of the negotiations on the new anti-smuggling legislation. Europol would thus have a strengthened role in this area, as we need a modern legal framework to better investigate and prosecute the criminals who undermine the security of our borders and profit from migrants in vulnerable situations. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling can both have a link with the exploitation of workers, including of those with an irregular status. I would work with Member States to step up enforcement of relevant EU law, review its implementation, and assess the need for possible new initiatives.

At the same time, I intend to continue the reflection on reducing incentives for irregular migration. If confirmed, I will explore further ideas that can complement and support our work on the Pact, including on returns, as well as on the route-based approach being developed by UNHCR and IOM, and on the application of the safe third country concept. The Asylum Procedure Regulation provides for a review of this concept by mid-2025, which I intend to prepare listening to all stakeholders.

Developing safe and legal pathways will help prevent dangerous and irregular journeys. I aim to increase the EU's resettlement and humanitarian admission efforts and strengthen the Union's partnerships with third countries hosting large populations of refugees. My objective would be to use the newly adopted Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework Regulation to its full potential. It includes new tools, involving both the European Parliament and Member States, to increase resettlement efforts over the coming years.

I would work on consolidating and expanding the Talent Partnership initiative as part of the comprehensive approach to migration management, and with a view to attracting the skills the EU labour market needs. Legal migration remains a critical component of our response to labour shortages in selected sectors and occupations and to demographic challenges. With a view to contributing to the Union of Skills, I would work closely with the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness to support the work of the co-legislators on the EU Talent Pool, and, thereafter, support its swift implementation, to facilitate international recruitment in particular in selected sectors and occupations where labour shortages have been identified. I would also work closely with the Executive Vice-President to help attract the right talent to Europe, and on measures to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and skills of non-EU nationals and their mobility towards the EU. Additionally, I would encourage the swift conclusion of the negotiations on the Long-Term Residents Directive recast, to facilitate talent and skills retention and improve the integration of migrants already living in the EU. I also intend to take forward the implementation of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for 2021-2027, and I would propose a follow-up strategy for integration within communities and the labour market.

Each life lost at sea is a tragedy. Assisting persons in distress at sea is an international obligation of the Member States and of any ship flying the flag of a Member State, regardless of circumstances. Whilst the legal responsibility to initiate and oversee search and rescue operations lies with the responsible national coordination centres, the Commission has played the role of an honest broker to build trust among Member States. If I am confirmed, I will stand by this position, and I will work with Member States to ensure stronger coordination of search and rescue operations, including with neighbouring third countries. I would build on the European Contact Group on Search and Rescue, as a platform allowing for a structured exchange, and I would pursue dialogue with other stakeholders, including civil society. I also intend to work with Frontex, which has increasingly contributed towards saving lives at sea, to ensure that Member States receive the support they need in conducting their rescue responsibilities, including through adequate surveillance capabilities.

I am committed to the effective delivery of our rules on migration. The annual implementation dialogues will be an opportunity to identify potential obstacles to implementation, but also possible solutions. I look forward to discussing the results of these dialogues in the European Parliament and to working together on effective implementation. The Pact shows how structured cooperation should be the best path to ensure delivery: but I would also underline that where we find that proper implementation of EU law is systematically blocked, I will not hesitate to propose infringement procedures.

#### 4. External borders

*With a view to securing stronger external borders and strengthening Frontex, Commission President von der Leyen intends to triple the number of European border and coast guards reaching a Standing Corps of 30,000. You would be responsible for overseeing this process and promoting integrated border management. How do you assess the impact of providing Frontex with those additional resources on enhancing the EU's ability to address current and emerging threats at its external borders? What changes to the mandate of Frontex, if any, do you consider necessary to accompany the planned growth of the agency, while maintaining its accountability to the Parliament?*

*What counter measures and steps are you planning to undertake, working closely with Member States and stakeholders to prepare and respond to hybrid attacks and the instrumentalisation of migrants at the EU's external borders?*

*How do you envisage to observe the use of technologies in compliance with primary law and the AI Act in the context of the European digital border management? What steps will you take to avoid further delays to the start of operation of the Entry/Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System and to the implementation of the overall reform of the EU information systems for borders, security and migration?*

*What measures should, in your view, be part of the announced visa policy strategy? In this context, what initiatives do you envisage in order to guarantee that visa-free travel into the EU is not abused, including by visa-free third countries operating investor citizenship schemes, and to preserve the social and economic benefits of visa-free travel? Are you ready to act against the risks of so-called "golden visa" programmes adopted by some Member States, as requested by the European Parliament?*

Frontex has delivered important results on border management and has a key, ever-growing role, whilst Member States retain primary responsibility for the management of the external borders. The proposal announced in the Political Guidelines to triple the number of the Standing Corps to 30 000 would have a positive impact on the Agency's future capabilities. It could lead to, for example, a strengthened mandate of Frontex in supporting Member States on returns, a more ambitious role of Frontex in third countries, as well as a stronger and more agile response by Frontex to hybrid threats at EU borders.

Such reinforcement will require a legislative change through an amendment of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation. If I am confirmed, I will consider all available options, with a thorough assessment of the needs, the impacts, the implications for different stakeholders as well as the costs of such an amendment. I would work closely with Member States to evaluate their capacity to contribute to reaching this objective. I am committed to working closely with the European Parliament and to regularly update you on the progress of preparations and to engage closely with you in the legislative procedure. A strengthening of Frontex will also need to be resourced well and this will need to be taken into account in reflections on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Hostile state actors, like Russia and Belarus, exploit not only desperate people but also our legal framework. I consider the instrumentalisation of migrants as a hybrid attack at the EU's external borders. If confirmed, I will stand firmly with Member States facing these potential threats to their security and territorial integrity. In close cooperation with the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, I will work to make sure that Member States faced with a situation where a hostile State is exerting pressure at the external borders have the right tools to effectively respond. In this context, I will see how the responses brought by the Schengen Borders Code and the Crisis and force majeure Regulation could be further complemented, and with the High Representative/Vice-President, to explore all possible avenues for addressing this challenge in our external relations. We have a duty to protect the territorial integrity as well as the security of our Union, and that of our citizens.

The EU is building one of the most advanced border management systems in the world. A digital Schengen area will improve the trust between Member States, increase security at the external borders, and facilitate legitimate travel to the EU. If confirmed, I am committed to making the digitalisation of Schengen a reality. I would work on the implementation of the digitalisation of visa procedures, to set up a common EU visa application platform and to introduce the digital visa. I would support the co-legislators in the negotiations to reach swiftly an agreement on the recently proposed legislative package on the digitalisation of travel documents. Seamless, safe and secure travel in a digital Schengen area also means making the interoperability architecture fully operational. Therefore, I would strive for the Entry/Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System to start operations as soon as possible, including through a phased-approach, and for all large-scale IT systems to become interoperable, to enhance the security and efficiency of border crossings. I understand immense preparations have already been made and I am aware of the challenges relating to the start of the operations of such advanced and

complex systems. I am committed to working closely with all parties involved, particularly with eu-LISA and the Member States, to find as swiftly as possible a secure, pragmatic, and successful way forward.

The Schengen area and border management will continue to be impacted by the development of new technologies and artificial intelligence. Border surveillance has changed considerably with drones, airplanes, satellites and advanced sensors, as have border checks with the new interoperable IT architecture introducing a seamless and much faster exchange of data within the framework of various Schengen or EU information systems. Technology, as all other tools, should be implemented in strict compliance with the legal framework and the protection of fundamental rights. I am committed to ensuring that technology and innovation for border management are used in a proportionate and effective manner, in full compliance with EU legislation, fundamental rights and European values. An example is the AI Act, which sets the legal framework for trustworthy use of these technologies. I would cooperate closely with the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy to ensure that the responsible authorities are involved in developing guidance on the use of AI in border management. I would also support cooperation with Member States and EU Agencies, including in the context of the EU Innovation Hub for internal security, to make the best use of innovative tools in full compliance with European values, as well as primary and secondary law, including the AI Act.

I intend to develop the new Visa Policy Strategy set out in the Political Guidelines, working with the High Representative/Vice-President and other Commissioners. The Strategy should focus on a visa system that allows us to fully reap the benefits of international travel by tourists, business people and students, while making full use of the leverage visa policy can provide to strengthen cooperation with third countries and preventing abuses of our visa system. To harness the full potential of the mechanism linking visa and readmission, the Strategy should aim to incentivise Member States to truly embrace a Team Europe approach and be ready to use the mechanism in solidarity with other Member States. Beyond readmission, visa policy could be used to further engage with third countries on security-related matters, in cooperation with Europol and Frontex. I would aim to put in place a more structured approach to reviewing the visa lists, reflecting the EU's strategic interests, and grounded in clear and objective criteria. The strategy should also propose ways to better monitor third countries whose nationals benefit from visa free travel to the EU, with increased monitoring of security and migration risks. The strategy will therefore aim to address any increase in the number of visa-free third-country nationals applying for asylum in the EU. The strategy will also be supported by the start of operations of the Entry-Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System.

In addition, it remains the case that many people who arrive irregularly in the EU have first arrived visa-free in our neighbourhood. Therefore, if I am confirmed, I will further promote visa policy alignment with the EU by our neighbouring countries, notably the candidates for accession to the EU. Swift approval of the Commission proposal to revise the Visa Suspension Mechanism is crucial and will strengthen the EU's ability to address this issue. Once adopted, I intend to make full use of the deterrent effect of the revised mechanism, for triggering the suspension of a visa exemption, such as lack of visa policy alignment, or the operation by visa-free third countries of investor citizenship schemes, as appropriate. Visa-free access to the EU should not be used by third countries as a tool for leveraging individual investment in return for citizenship.

I fully agree with the European Parliament that investor residence schemes ('golden visa') raise serious risks with regard to security, money-laundering, tax evasion and corruption. These national schemes have implications for all other Member States and for the EU as a whole, because residence permits delivered by EU Member State grant certain rights to third-country nationals holding them, notably to freely circulate within the Schengen area for short stays. Given that the granting of residence permits is a national competence, the Commission has welcomed the steps taken by some Member States towards abolishing or restricting these investor residence schemes. If confirmed, I will continue working with Member States and I will make full use of the EU's tools to tackle such schemes and to address the risks they pose.

## 5. Internal borders

*The Schengen area is one of the most valued achievements of the Union. Yet several Member States have reintroduced and maintained border control at internal borders since 2015. How do you intend to ensure that the integrity of the Schengen area is restored and preserved? What steps do you envisage in order to reinforce sincere cooperation and mutual trust among the Member States and to ensure that all Member States fully respect the Schengen acquis? Will those measures include infringement proceedings against the Member States that do not respect the rules of the recently amended Schengen Borders Code? What steps will you propose that will lead to the lifting of controls at the internal land borders with Bulgaria and Romania?*

Schengen is one of the EU's most tangible achievements and the largest area of free movement in the world. It contributes to the competitiveness of the Single Market and to the growth of the Union's economy, and it is highly appreciated by citizens and businesses. In 2023 alone, it facilitated travel for more than half a billion visitors. I truly believe Schengen embodies the core objectives of the Union: to offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, based on a strong protection of our external borders.

Over the past decade, irregular migration peaks, internal security threats and the COVID-19 pandemic have presented formidable challenges. While the reintroduction of internal border controls is a tool available to Member States as a measure of last resort, it poses real problems to citizens and business that rely on the right to free movement. Cross-border police and law enforcement cooperation between Member States to counter security threats are in the vast majority of cases more effective than internal border controls.

If I am confirmed, I will continue the constructive dialogue with Member States on how to best address their specific needs and facilitate and enhance police and law enforcement cooperation, in particular in border areas. This includes making sure that Member States put in place the necessary administrative arrangements for the application of the procedure for the transfer of irregular migrants introduced with the recently amended Schengen Borders Code. The correct and effective use of large-scale IT systems to provide and exchange information, such as the Schengen Information System, Eurodac and the Visa Information System, as well as enhanced preparedness and contingency planning, as required by the Pact, are key for building trust in the system, so that Member States do not consider it necessary to resort to reintroducing internal border controls.

I am committed to ensuring the full and effective implementation and enforcement of the Schengen acquis, including the strict monitoring and reporting obligations in the revised Schengen Borders Code and the issuance of opinions by the Commission as set out in the new rules. Where cooperation on implementation does not bring satisfactory results, I would also be ready to pursue infringement proceedings if required.

While Bulgaria and Romania continue to meet all the conditions to become full members of the Schengen area – since 2011 – it is both the prerogative and the responsibility of the Council to decide on abolishing the remaining controls at the internal land borders. If the Council does not take a decision before the start of the new mandate, if confirmed as a Member of the Commission, I will continue to give full support to this process with the same intensity as my predecessors. Bulgaria and Romania are entitled to reap the full benefits of the Schengen area. And the lifting of land border checks will make our Schengen area stronger and safer.



## 6. Security

*According to your mission letter, one of your most urgent tasks will be to design a new European Internal Security Strategy, which should include strengthening Europol's mandate and resources. What measures would you propose to effectively combat serious and organised crime, terrorism and cybercrime? What legislative initiatives would you consider in this area? How do you plan to make Europol into 'a truly operational police agency', while ensuring that it does not overlap with national and other EU Agencies' competences, and that the Parliament has effective oversight? What role would you foresee for Eurojust in this context? Can we also expect legislative proposals to enable law enforcement and judicial authorities to cooperate better across borders in countering criminal networks? What do you plan to include in the new Counter-Terrorism Agenda and how do you plan to address radicalisation and violent extremism?*

*As the Commissioner in charge for a safer and more secure Europe, how do you view your role in ensuring the effective implementation and updating of the EU strategies aiming to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred and to foster integration? How will you cooperate with the Commissioner for Equality in this field?*

Strengthening the EU's internal security framework, safeguarding the security of people living in the EU and our societal cohesion will be one of my core priorities if I am confirmed. Our societies must become more conscious of the threats we are facing and better prepared to tackle them. I would make it an early priority to present a new European Internal Security Strategy. This would look at all threats, online and offline. It would aim to ensure that all new EU legislation and initiatives are designed with security considerations in mind from the outset, helping us be prepared for evolving threats, emanating both from within and outside the EU. As global developments affect EU security, internal security must become an integral part of the EU's relations with third countries.

Fighting organised crime effectively will be a key workstream of the European Internal Security Strategy. Organised crime is a threat not only to people's life and security, but also to our democracy, society and economic development. If confirmed, I intend to propose an overhaul of the EU legislation in this area, which dates back to 2008. Since then, organised crime groups have become increasingly powerful, poly-criminal and multinational. National law enforcement and judicial authorities must be equipped with legal tools that allow them to dismantle high-risk criminal networks, in particular by facilitating more effective investigations. To dismantle high-risk criminal networks, I intend to propose to enhance cross-border cooperation and financial investigations, and promote a swift implementation of the Confiscation and Asset Recovery Directive. One of the most pernicious activities of organised crime is trafficking in human beings: I stand ready to reinforce the EU Strategy to combat human trafficking beyond 2025.

Drugs trafficking is the most profitable crime area for organised crime groups. I intend to propose a new European action plan against drug trafficking, building on the results of the evaluation of the current Strategy and Action Plan. Building on the European Ports Alliance, I would work with the Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism to develop a comprehensive EU Port Strategy with a strong focus on security and the protection of ports against criminal infiltration. In this context, I would also work closely with the Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Justice to strengthen our fight against corruption, which is a significant enabler of organised crime, and in particular drug trafficking. I would support the European Drugs Agency so that it fully operationalises its new mandate to respond quickly to emerging threats and propose measures to counter the increasing production of synthetic drugs in the EU. If confirmed, I also intend to examine if our rules on illicit drugs trafficking are still fit for purpose, and work with other members of the College to assess the need of updating the legislation to tackle the rise in designer drug precursors.

Given its global and cross-border nature, the fight against transnational serious and organised crime will require strengthening the EU's international cooperation with key third countries through security dialogues, international agreements, and operational law enforcement cooperation, and if confirmed I will play my part in this.

If confirmed, I also intend to propose a new Agenda for Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. A particular focus of the new Agenda should be actions to prevent and counter attacks carried out by individuals acting independently or in small cells, often with limited preparation and using easily accessible weaponry to target densely populated or highly symbolic spaces. Since these lone attackers are often radicalised through online propaganda, tackling the online dimension of radicalisation should be a key component of the new Agenda. As we need to restrict access to the tools used in attacks, I intend to assess the need for new legislation to harmonise criminal offences in the area of firearms trafficking and review the rules on explosives precursors, which may be misused to build home-made explosives. As many terrorist attacks occur in public spaces, such as transport hubs, places of worship or pedestrian areas, I would also support updating the Action Plan on the protection of public spaces with new initiatives for public-private cooperation, including on new technologies and

detection equipment. To counter terrorism financing, I would like to explore the creation of a European Counter-terrorism Financial Data Retrieval System to help national authorities detect and track financial movements of terrorist networks.

To prevent radicalisation, especially online, I will work to ensure that the Terrorist Content Online Regulation is fully applied and assess whether it needs strengthening. I will also consider reinforcing Europol's role to make it a counter-terrorism hub to fight the dissemination of terrorist and violent extremist content online, the misuse of new technologies by terrorists, and facilitating information exchange between security actors. In parallel, the EU Internet Forum should continue to play a vital role in collaborating with the tech industry to tackle online terrorist content, and the EU Knowledge Hub on Radicalisation should guide our prevention efforts.

Cyber-facilitated crime, including online scams, sextortion, ransomware, and identity fraud, is expected to become the world's third 'largest economy' by 2025. If endorsed by the UN General Assembly, the new UN Convention on Cybercrime will substantially enhance international cooperation in this area, while protecting fundamental rights. I would work closely with the Executive Vice President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy and the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law to achieve the signature, ratification and implementation of this Convention. I would also focus on implementing existing and future international agreements that are essential to facilitate cross-border access by law enforcement authorities to electronic evidence held by companies, notably the EU-US agreement on access to electronic evidence that is currently being negotiated. As it is also extremely important that evidence of crimes left online can be used for bringing criminals to justice, if confirmed, I commit to undertake the task to update law enforcement's tools for access to digital information, including looking at rules on data retention, in full respect of fundamental rights. Europol must also continue to support Member States with forensic, operational and analytical assistance.

Europol plays a crucial role in supporting Member States' law enforcement authorities in the fight against serious and organised crime and terrorism. If confirmed, I intend to work to make it a truly operational police agency, with an aim to more than double its staff over time. We need Europol to meet the operational needs of Member States and to work in closer coordination and complementarity with the other EU Agencies. Building on the evaluation of the current Regulation, an in-depth impact assessment and a broad consultation with stakeholders, the European Parliament and Member States, I would propose to strengthen the mandate of Europol, in particular its role in investigating cross-border, large-scale and complex crimes that pose a serious threat to the security of the Union. I would work closely with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law to ensure effective cooperation between Europol and Eurojust, in the fight against organised crime including by making sure that Eurojust is in a position to ensure the judicial follow-up to investigations at law enforcement level supported by Europol.

If confirmed, I will also consider if the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) could be expanded and strengthened to reinforce joint operational law enforcement cooperation against priority crime threats by EU Member States, our Agencies and close external partners. In line with the Political Guidelines, I would also propose to establish an EU Critical Communication System to be used by all law enforcement and emergency response authorities in charge of security and safety.

I welcome being entrusted with the task of fighting antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. The EU must be a safe and secure place for everyone, including Jewish and Muslim communities, free from discrimination, hatred, violence and security concerns especially in the current geopolitical context. Concerning antisemitism, if confirmed I would accelerate the implementation of the EU Strategy on combatting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, continue to assess the needs and threats, and, if necessary, update that EU Strategy. With regard to anti-Muslim hatred, I would consider pursuing a more strategic approach, to fully grasp the extent of anti-Muslim hatred, grounded in improved data collection, and in close cooperation with the Commissioner for Preparedness, Crisis Management and Equality. I would also welcome the opportunity to continue fostering the Commission's dialogue with churches and religious associations or communities, and with philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

I am committed to exploring and supporting avenues to address the issue of polarisation in society, including in the light of the recommendations presented by the European Citizens' Panel on Tackling Hatred in Society to address hate speech and hate crime. Any form of hatred breeds extremism. I am also committed to promoting a coordinated approach across Member States, working closely with national and local authorities, the tech industry, civil society, to build resilience and prevent extremist ideologies from taking hold. The EU Knowledge Hub on the Prevention of Radicalisation will be the cornerstone of our efforts in this area.

## 7. Access to data for law enforcement purposes

*How do you propose to address the key challenge of ensuring effective access to personal data in order to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute criminal offences, while simultaneously complying with the principles of necessity and proportionality and upholding privacy and data protection rights? Which safeguards do you envisage in order to ensure full compliance with the European Court of Justice rulings on data retention and access to data for law enforcement purposes? Will you also address encryption when proposing rules on access? How do you plan to unblock the Child Sexual Abuse online proposal to ensure that its main goal of protecting children is fulfilled and the concerns about safeguarding the right to privacy are addressed? Should there not be a Regulation on this file prior to the lapse of the second extension of the Interim Regulation, due on 3 April 2026, how will you propose to proceed to avoid the legislative gap?*

If confirmed, I am committed to finding a balanced and legally sound approach to ensuring effective access to data for law enforcement and judiciary, while respecting privacy and data protection, as well as cybersecurity requirements and taking into account technological aspects. The EU needs to build a strong digital economy which citizens can see will deliver prosperity, will preserve security, and will protect fundamental rights. At the same time, as society and economy turn digital, so do criminals, terrorists and other threat actors, in order to pursue criminal activities and evade law enforcement. In order to ensure that the competent authorities are equipped with modern and innovative capabilities to fight crime, enabling law enforcement to have proportionate access to data is crucial for connecting crimes to perpetrators, supporting investigations, protecting victims and dismantling criminal networks. However, today, legal and technical barriers, along with the lack of harmonised data retention laws across Member States, hamper national investigations and complicate cross-border cooperation. Despite these challenges, I am convinced that we can find efficient and future-proof solutions to facilitate lawful access to digital information. This is essential to protect our citizens and uphold the rule of law, in full respect of the principles of necessity and proportionality.

At the same time, we must avoid introducing new vulnerabilities that can be exploited by malicious actors or questioning the advantages of encryption. We need to strike a balance which will allow us to safeguard privacy, while providing security and ensuring that our citizens and our societies are protected against evolving threats. The High-Level Group on access to data for law enforcement has set out the operational needs of law enforcement and judicial authorities, and recommendations include a range of different measures, such as capacity building, cooperation with industry, standardisation and legislation. They should serve as a valuable contribution for the work in this area, which requires an in-depth impact assessment.

Crime and insecurity have a stifling effect on society, and if not addressed properly, they prevent people from exercising their freedoms, speaking their mind or walking the streets in comfort. The threats can also be more direct not only offline but also online. Children are especially at risk, and we need to do more to protect them from multiple risks ranging from cyberbullying to sextortion, from online dependencies to radicalisation. I am convinced of the necessity and urgency to adopt the proposed Regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse online. In 2010, there were around 1 million reports of child sexual abuse material and grooming online. By 2023, there have been more than 36 million. The existing “interim” Regulation, which allows voluntary detection of child sexual abuse by the providers of certain online platforms, will expire in April 2026. Without the proposed long-term rules, such form of detection that has helped rescue children and identify offenders for over 10 years will be banned in the EU. I believe we can and should find a viable way to finalise the negotiations on the pending Regulation for it to come into application in time before the interim Regulation expires.

If confirmed, I commit to also work to finalise negotiations on the revision of the Directive on combatting child sexual abuse. The Directive complements the Regulation and provides a common standard for criminal investigations and prosecutions, harmonising definitions of offences and sanctions. It is an essential part of the balance our society demands of the digital world.

### Question from the Committee on Development

*8. In view of your work on external aspects of migration and mobility, and given that the NDICI-Global Europe regulation indicates that 10% of its funding be allocated to addressing migration and forced displacement, how will you concretely go about the assignment in your mission letter to “make migration issues an operational part of partnerships”, more specifically with developing countries, and how will you reflect the principle of Policy Coherence for Development in this work? Can you commit to ensuring comprehensive and early information to the Parliament to allow appropriate scrutiny of migration-related agreements with developing countries, including transparency about informal arrangements on migration such as Memoranda of Understanding? How do you foresee the cooperation and division of work on external aspects of migration with other Commissioners?*

Building comprehensive and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries is an important element of our comprehensive approach to effective and fair migration management. If confirmed, I intend to work closely with Commissioners working on external relations, to ensure that the migration policy is part of a broader 360-degree approach. This means understanding the interests and concerns of our partners, and situating EU interests like migration management alongside other shared interests in other areas like trade or energy as part of mutually beneficial partnerships. Cooperation in areas like these strengthens our voice when it comes to migration issues. The same is true for funding to support capacity building in managing and preventing irregular migration, as well as tackling the root causes of irregular migration. The EU’s Global Gateway investments focus on economic development, education, job creation, healthcare, digital, climate and transport areas. This will help the prosperity and skills base of our partners. Developing safe and legal pathways, and promoting their use, will help prevent dangerous and irregular journeys. I would work with other Commissioners to promote Talent Partnerships that can structure cooperation on labour mobility, with the aim to boost the EU’s competitiveness and address labour shortages in selected sectors and occupations, while also promoting skills development and economic growth in the countries of origin of migrants.

It is inherent to this approach that different Commissioners will cooperate closely in building partnerships. I would work closely with the High Representative/Vice-President, the Commissioner for International Partnerships and the Commissioner for the Mediterranean to bring together the internal and external policies and ensure the overall coherence of EU efforts, including in the context of the Policy Coherence for Development. This will allow us to ensure that the management of migration is fully integrated into partnerships with developing countries, especially countries of origin and transit, while respecting fundamental rights and international legal obligations. We should not overlook that many third countries host large populations of refugees: Europe has a proud tradition of helping countries and communities in the task of hosting them.

As explained above, I would ensure that the Parliament remains well-informed of arrangements with third countries in the area of migration. I remain fully committed to providing the necessary information on any such arrangements and engaging with you on our initiatives.