

# Dubravka Šuica

## Mediterranean

Confirmation hearing due to be held on Tuesday 5 November, at 14.30.

European Parliament committee responsible: Foreign Affairs (AFET)

Dubravka Šuica has served as a Member of the European Commission and Vice-President for Demography and Democracy since 2019. She was also the co-chair of the Conference on the Future of Europe. From 2013 to 2019, Šuica was a Member of the European Parliament, where she focused on issues relating to the environment, public health and food safety, and foreign affairs. In 2019, she was a vice-chair of the European People's Party Group in the European Parliament.

As a member of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Šuica served three terms in the Croatian Parliament, from 2000 until 2011, also holding the position of vice-chair of the EU Integration Committee.

From 2001 to 2009, Šuica served two terms as the first female mayor of Dubrovnik, her hometown. In 2006, she was honoured with the World Mayor Award.

From 2004 to 2009, Šuica was a board member of the Union of the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Croatia. She later served as a councillor on the Dubrovnik-Neretva County Assembly. She also served as the president of the Croatian Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe for a decade. Since 2012, she has chaired the HDZ Committee on Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, and has been the vice-president of EPP Women.

Born in 1957, Šuica graduated in English and German language and literature. She started her career in education, first as a teacher and later as director of Dubrovnik High School.



*Dubravka Šuica, Croatia*

*This is one of a set of briefings designed to give an overview of issues of interest relating to the portfolios of the Commissioners-designate. All these briefings can be found at: [https://ethinktank.eu/commissioner\\_hearings\\_2024](https://ethinktank.eu/commissioner_hearings_2024).*

### IN THIS BRIEFING

- Fundamentals of the portfolio
- Priorities and challenges
- European Parliament
- Recent developments



## Fundamentals of the portfolio

The Mediterranean is of great importance to the EU, both historically and geographically. In 1972, the relationship between the European Economic Community and the Mediterranean began to take shape under the [global Mediterranean policy](#), followed by the [Barcelona process](#) (1995) and the [Union for the Mediterranean](#) (2008). The new [agenda for the Mediterranean](#) (2021) addresses both internal and external factors for development and regional cooperation, and seeks to relaunch the Barcelona process. The new portfolio decouples Mediterranean policy from EU enlargement.

The [mission letter](#) for Šuica outlines the fundamentals of her portfolio: developing a new pact for the Mediterranean and creating new partnerships based on common values and dialogue with partner countries, in cooperation with the High Representative/Vice President of the Commission. Trade and investment, including cooperative standard-setting aiming at an integrated Euro-Mediterranean market, will also be important. The Mediterranean has tremendous trade and industrial [potential](#) for both extraction of energy (natural gas reserves) and production of clean energy (solar electricity, hydrogen). Despite having relatively large reserves of some 125 trillion cubic feet (tcf) in estimated gas reserves, eastern Mediterranean countries' reserves are '[dwarfed](#)', however, by Russia's (1 230 tcf), Iran's (1 170 tcf) and Qatar's (880 tcf).

Šuica will be involved in setting up a trans-Mediterranean energy and clean tech cooperation initiative, including by furthering links through the [Global Gateway strategy](#) for green and smart investment in infrastructure, education and research. As regards external aspects of migration policy, these have become more salient since 2019. Aiming for a more holistic approach to the southern Mediterranean, Šuica will also have to develop an EU Middle East strategy, identifying steps towards a two-state solution and building strategic partnerships in the region; taking forward the [multi-year support programme for the Palestinian Authority](#) and implementing the [Gulf strategy](#). The portfolio also envisages a strategic communication plan to be developed with local communities.

The mission letter also attributes responsibility to Šuica for Demography, which she held during the Commission's previous term. The Commission's 2020 [report](#) on the impact of demographic change and the 2021 [Green paper on ageing](#) launched a broad policy debate, followed by major reports linked to ageing: [The 2021 Ageing report](#) with economic and budgetary projections, the [Pension adequacy report](#), and the [Long-term care report](#). The Commission also launched the [Atlas of Demography](#), an interactive tool for dealing with demographic transition, which maps [national demographic challenges](#) and policy responses in the EU. Building on the Commission's [care strategy](#), 2022 saw the adoption of two related Council recommendations: on [early childhood education and care](#) and on [long-term care](#). In response to the European Council's [invitation](#), the Commission assembled a set of existing EU regulatory, policy and funding tools in its communication [Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action](#). In the European Council's [Strategic Agenda 2024-2029](#), adopted in June 2024, EU leaders pledged to address demographic challenges and their impact on competitiveness, human capital and equality in a comprehensive way. In this area Šuica will work under the guidance of the Executive Vice President for People, Skills and Preparedness.

## Priorities and challenges

### Expectations/public opinion

According to an April 2024 [Eurobarometer](#) survey, the majority of European citizens polled would like to see increased EU involvement in all policy areas relating to foreign affairs, peace and security. The survey reveals respondents' strong attachment to peace and democratic values. Looking to the future, respondents put defence and security, which they see as a condition for reinforcing the EU's global position (37%), as the top priority, and energy issues (30%) as the second priority. While 4 in 10 citizens say the role of the EU in the world has become more important, 35% think it has stayed the same and 22% that it has diminished. Since 2015, integration of migrants became an important factor for public opinion. The [Eurobarometer](#) shows that 70% see integration of immigrants as a two-way process where immigrants and society are both responsible for its success; 47% believe that integration is unsuccessful at national level.

## Fostering a common EU policy

The EU's priorities in the Mediterranean – security, migration, resolution of the Cyprus issue, Türkiye's increasingly [aggressive unilateral actions](#) in the eastern Mediterranean, the external dimension of migration, and the [Israel-Palestine conflict](#) – are wide-ranging. It can prove difficult to forge common EU positions and there is often no [coherent or comprehensive approach](#). A 2023 EPRS [cost of non-Europe report](#) identified a need to broaden the scope of qualified majority voting in common foreign and security policy (CFSP), using the 'passerelle clause' in [Article 31\(3\) TEU](#).

## A new pact for the Mediterranean

While the Mediterranean has always been of strategic importance for the EU, the Commission has been increasingly involved in the region since 2019, with the declared goals of steering migration, combating human trafficking and promoting partnerships with countries of origin and transit. Following the 1995 [pact for the Mediterranean](#) and the 2008 Barcelona process establishing a Union for the Mediterranean, with more than 40 states, economic investment became central to the [new agenda for the Mediterranean](#) in 2021. Nevertheless, some crucial aspects, including trade, regional economic cooperation, demographic challenges and discrimination against minority groups, were omitted from the new agenda. It also has a relatively low budget: €7 billion for the 2021-2027 [Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours](#). A [new pact for the Mediterranean](#) will likely focus on building comprehensive partnerships and deploy an integrated policy approach combining economic and humanitarian aspects, development, as well as peace and security.

## Middle East strategy and the war in Gaza

Following the terrorist attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023, [sanctions](#) were adopted against Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The EU also increased its [humanitarian assistance](#) and activated a [maritime corridor](#) to deliver aid to Gaza. With a broadening war also threatening Lebanon and the wider Middle East region, the EU, along with the international community, is [promoting](#) the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine on the basis of the 1967 lines and is [calling](#) for an immediate end to the unlawful presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

## External dimension of migration policy

Following the 2024 adoption of the new [pact on migration and asylum](#), the Mediterranean requires [tailored migration policies](#) that address different types of migration, including labour force migration, political refugees and irregular migration. Mediterranean countries, in particular transit countries such as [Tunisia](#) and [Türkiye](#), are increasingly playing a 'gatekeeper' role. However, some [authoritarian regimes](#) tend to instrumentalise the migration issue. Human rights concerns are not always easily reconciled with security prerogatives and the urgency of mitigating irregular migratory flows. Finally, migration from and through the Mediterranean highlights the importance of addressing the [integration](#) needs of second- and third-generation immigrants in the EU.

## European Parliament

### Treaty basis and European Parliament competence

According to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), Parliament must be consulted on the main aspects of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Twice a year it must hold a debate on progress in implementing the CFSP, including the common security and defence policy ([Article 36 TEU](#)). International agreements concluded by the EU require Parliament's consultation and consent ([Article 218 TEU](#)). The Treaties also require that Parliament be immediately and fully informed at all stages of international negotiations ([Article 207\(3\) TFEU](#)). Parliament holds veto power not only over association and cooperation agreements with third countries and regions but also over financial protocols and instruments with third countries, trade agreements and ratification of international agreements. Parliament has approved several [financial instruments](#), including the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, crucial for the Mediterranean. Parliament's President is a member of the Presidency of the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean](#).

Parliament supported the Barcelona process and subsequent initiatives in the Mediterranean. In 2022, it endorsed the [renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood](#). For many years, it has [endorsed](#) the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. In January 2024, it [reiterated](#) Israel's right to defend itself but highlighted the risks of regional escalation. In March 2024, MEPs [criticised](#) the Commission for bypassing parliamentary budgetary oversight, when it disbursed €150 million to the Tunisian authorities as a special measure under the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding.

## Recent developments

The EU's policy towards the Mediterranean countries and broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region seeks to encourage political and economic reforms through the [European Neighbourhood policy](#) (ENP, launched in 2004) and through regional cooperation among the countries of the region themselves and with the EU ([Union for the Mediterranean](#)). Following a review in 2015, the ENP now supports economic development for stabilisation, security, and migration and mobility. The May 2017 [Valletta Declaration](#) focused on research into the root causes of migration, a [partnership for research and innovation in the Mediterranean](#) (PRIMA) and research and innovation to create 'blue jobs' and growth in the Mediterranean ([BLUEMED initiative](#)).

Since 2019, irregular migration policy has become increasingly important and challenging. The new [agenda for the Mediterranean](#) was presented in February 2021. The Commission presented its [EU action plan for the eastern Mediterranean](#) in October 2023 and concluded several bilateral agreements, including the July 2023 [EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding](#) and the March 2024 [EU-Egypt Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership](#), which have been criticised for not providing sufficient human rights conditionality. A network of [Euro-Mediterranean association agreements](#) established free trade areas between the EU and most of its southern neighbours (with the exception of Syria and Libya), and essentially cover trade in goods. Negotiations to create deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs) have been launched between the EU and Morocco, and between the EU and Tunisia.

Finally, in 2021, under the new [EU trade policy review](#), the EU announced a new sustainable investment initiative for interested partners in the MENA region.

## FURTHER READING

Bassot E., [The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission: An end-of-term assessment](#), EPRS, European Parliament, April 2024.

European Parliament, [Dubravka Šuica hearing documents and CV](#), 2024.

Lazarou E., Stanicek B., [Mapping threats to peace and democracy worldwide: Normandy Index 2024](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2024.

## DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

© European Union, 2024.

Photo credits: © European Union, 2022; EC – Audiovisual Service, Christophe Licoppe.

[eprs@ep.europa.eu](mailto:eprs@ep.europa.eu) (contact)

[www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu](http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu) (intranet)

[www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank) (internet)

<http://eptthinktank.eu> (blog)