

Hearing of Commissioner-designate Ekaterina Zaharieva



Ekaterina Zaharieva during the confirmation hearing 2024 © European Union, 2024 - Source: EP

On Tuesday, the Industry, Research and Energy Committee questioned Ekaterina Zaharieva, Bulgarian candidate for the Startups, Research and Innovation portfolio.

The committee chair and political group coordinators will meet without delay after the hearing to assess the performance and qualification of the Commissioner-designate.

In her [introductory remarks](#), Commissioner-designate Zaharieva expressed her desire to place Research and Innovation (R&I) at the heart of the EU's competitiveness agenda. There is now momentum for investing more into R&I in a more strategic manner to allow Europe to achieve its digital and low-carbon transitions, she said, highlighting that R&I spending in Europe is lower than in the US, China or Japan. She pledged to propose a European Innovation Act, to push

Member States to meet the 3% spending target on R&I, avoid brain drain, defend freedom of research, invest in R&I infrastructure and expand the European Research Council.

Support for Start-ups and, smaller companies

Ms Zaharieva also advocated for a comprehensive strategy to help start-ups and smaller companies grow by facilitating access to capital and cutting red tape.

The Commissioner-designate also argued in favour of a strategy for European life sciences, boosting the use of AI in science, and an Advanced Materials Act.

Ms Zaharieva said that the Commission should also bring forward an action plan to help promote women in R&I and advocated for an ambitious budget for R&I in the next multiannual framework programme. On international relations, she said the EU should defend the principle of reciprocity, level playing fields, and strategic autonomy, pledging to work with Ukrainian researchers and innovators as much as possible.

Cutting red-tape for SME applicants and boosting research funding

During the discussion, several MEPs called on the Commission to push member states to finally meet the 3% of GDP R&I target, ensure the independence of the EU research programme, and to spend more money on research at the EU level. In response, the Commissioner-Designate committed to fight for an independent and reinforced Framework Programme, and advocated increasing the R&I target to 4% by 2030.

Several MEPs called for less red tape for SME applicants for EU research support. Ms Zaharieva said she is in favour of a strong simplification with a two-phase application process in order to minimise red tape. Other MEPs asked for EU R&I policy to have a stronger focus on nuclear research, in the context of the low-carbon transition.

You can watch the video recording of the full hearing [here](#).

Ms Zaharieva made a statement after the hearing, you can watch it [here](#).

Next steps

Based on the committee recommendations, the Conference of Presidents (EP President Metsola and political group chairs) is set to conduct the final evaluation and declare the hearings closed on 21 November. Once the Conference of Presidents declares all hearings closed, the evaluation letters will be published.

The election by MEPs of the full college of Commissioners (by a majority of the votes cast, by roll-call) is currently scheduled to take place during the 25-28 November plenary session in Strasbourg.

Further information

[Committee on Industry, Research and Energy](#)
[EP hearing webpage: Commissioner-designate Ekaterina Zaharieva](#)
[EP research briefing](#)
[Timetable of hearings](#)
[Webstreaming of hearing](#)

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