

# Maroš Šefčovič

## Vice-President: Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight

Hearing due to be held on Monday 30 September at 09.00 hours

European Parliament committees responsible: Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) and Legal Affairs (JURI).

Maroš Šefčovič has served as a European Commissioner since 2009. In the outgoing European Commission, he has been the Vice-President responsible for the Energy Union. Prior to that, from 2009 to 2010, he served briefly as Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, and then from 2010 to 2014, as Commissioner and Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Administration (in the Barroso II Commission).



Born in 1966, Maroš Šefčovič studied at the Bratislava University of Economics and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and has a doctorate in law from the Comenius University of Bratislava. As a Slovak diplomat, he was Ambassador to Israel, and Permanent Representative to the European Union from 2004 to 2009.

A member of the SMER-SD party in Slovakia, in 2018, Maroš Šefčovič declared his intention to seek the nomination of the Party of European Socialists (PES) as lead candidate for the position of the Commission President. He later withdrew his nomination to endorse the outgoing Commission's First Vice-President, Frans Timmermans (PvdA, the Netherlands), as the

party's lead candidate. He is author of the book *Driving the EU forward – Straight talks with Maroš Šefčovič* (2014).

*This is one of a set of Briefings designed to give Members of the European Parliament an overview of major issues of interest in the context of the hearings of the Commissioners-designate. The full set of Briefings can be found at: [https://epthinktank.eu/commissioner\\_hearings\\_2019](https://epthinktank.eu/commissioner_hearings_2019)*

## Background

European legislation ultimately depends on how the EU institutions – in particular the Commission, Council and Parliament – work together. Efforts to improve interinstitutional relations have been stepped up in recent years, and further improvement remains an ongoing commitment. The 2016 [Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making](#), for instance, emphasised the importance of 'sincere and transparent cooperation' between the EU law-making institutions, and their 'joint responsibility' for high-quality EU legislation. In 2014, at the start of his term, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker gave weight to the issue of interinstitutional relations and better regulation by entrusting the area to the newly created post of First Vice-President of the Commission, held by Frans Timmermans, also responsible for the rule of law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The portfolio now assigned to Maroš Šefčovič includes interinstitutional relations, better regulation and strategic foresight, to be put at the very core of better policy-making.

## Priorities and challenges

In her [opening statement](#) to the European Parliament on 16 July 2019, before being elected Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen pledged to further strengthen the special relationship between the Commission and the Parliament. The Commission-Parliament relationship was boosted by the 2014 '[Spitzenkandidaten process](#)' ahead of the 2014 elections in which European political parties nominated lead candidates for the role of Commission President, and which concluded with the election of Jean-Claude Juncker in July 2014. The lead candidate process ground to a halt after the 2019 elections, however, with the European Council nominating Ursula von der Leyen as candidate rather than nominating any of the lead candidates of the European political parties. On 16 July 2019, Parliament [elected](#) von der Leyen as Commission President by 383 votes in favour, 327 against and 22 abstentions. Against this backdrop, in her [political guidelines](#) von der Leyen stressed the need to review the EU election and appointment processes, including a reference to improving the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and the issue of transnational lists – both now to be dealt with under the portfolio allocated to Vice-President-designate [Věra Jurová](#) (Values and Transparency).

In her guidelines, von der Leyen also expressed support for Parliament's right of initiative, committing the Commission to submit a legislative proposal when Parliament asks it to (Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – TFEU), in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and the Better Regulation Guidelines. She also pledged to boost Commissioners' presence at trilogue meetings, and expressed her intention to revive the tradition of 'question time' – a debate in Parliament's plenary sessions that was [not used](#) during the 2014-2019 parliamentary term.

The outgoing Juncker Commission gave new impetus to the EU's Better Regulation agenda, which has been a feature at EU level for almost two decades, and which became a central tool in delivering on the now familiar Juncker slogan of being '[big on big things and smaller on small things](#)'. It is broadly agreed that a 'better law-making culture' is gradually taking hold within and across the EU institutions, although much remains to be done. In April 2019, First Vice-President Timmermans [emphasised](#) the need to consolidate better regulation practices within the 'EU institutional machinery' as, according to him, 'we have not reached the point of no return with better regulation yet'. He also stressed the need for evidence-based decision-making, which is ever more important in a 'post-fact world'.

The European Council's 2019-2024 [Strategic Agenda](#), intended to guide the institutions' work for the coming five years, expressed a continued commitment to 'focus on what really matters' and reiterated the aspiration to be 'big on big and small on small', in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It also stressed the need to engage with citizens, civil society and social partners, as well as with regional and local actors in this process. It once again emphasised

that good governance depends on rigorous implementation of agreed rules – an issue that is at the core of better regulation efforts.

The outgoing Commission also saw the adoption of the [2016 Interinstitutional Agreement \(IIA\) on Better Law-Making](#), which forms a central part of efforts to improve interinstitutional cooperation in law-making. The agreement expressed the three institutions' shared commitment to promote simplicity, clarity and consistency in EU legislation, and better coordination and transparency in the legislative process. It also strengthened provisions on cooperation on programming, some of which will be applied for the first time this year. Regarding multiannual programming, the IIA establishes an obligation for the three institutions, upon the appointment of a new Commission, to 'exchange views on [their] principal policy objectives and priorities for the new term' as well as, 'where possible, on indicative timing'. At the initiative of the Commission and as appropriate, the three institutions will draw up joint conclusions. These are to be signed by the three presidents and will be subject to a mid-term review and adjustment 'as appropriate'. The IIA also envisages better cooperation on annual programming, including joint declarations setting out broad objectives and priorities for the following year. So far this has resulted in two [joint declarations](#) on the EU's legislative priorities (2017 and 2018/2019) signed by the respective institutions. These provisions are widely seen as leading to shared ownership in EU programming and [stronger political agenda-setting](#).

## Main projects

In her [mission letter](#) to Maroš Šefčovič, Commission President-elect von der Leyen entrusts him with leading the Commission's work on 'interinstitutional relations, better policymaking and strategic foresight'. In line with the approach of 'big on big and small on small', it emphasises working together 'where it matters the most and where it can provide the most added value'.

In continuation of recent initiatives, Maroš Šefčovič is expected to support the Commission President in further strengthening the 'special partnership' with the European Parliament, including ensuring that the 2010 Framework Agreement between the two institutions is upheld and the 2016 IIA implemented. He is also charged with leading 'interinstitutional discussions on annual programming'.

Maroš Šefčovič will be in charge of relations with national parliaments, and is expected to work closely with other Commissioners on Parliament resolutions calling on the Commission to submit legislative proposals. Further, he is entrusted with coordinating the Commission's work on better regulation, including ensuring respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. In order to 'alleviate regulatory burden', he is tasked with developing and applying the 'one in, one out' principle, according to which 'every legislative proposal creating new burdens should relieve people and businesses of an equivalent existing burden at EU level in the same policy area'.

The President-elect calls for further strengthening the 'culture of evidence-based policymaking', including making full use of knowledge, information and research within the Commission. In this regard, Maroš Šefčovič is charged with leading the Commission's work on strategic foresight, focusing on 'long-term trends to better design laws and to develop future-oriented policies'. He will coordinate the [European Battery Alliance](#) and, drawing on the work of the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), produce an annual foresight report, with the aim of fine-tuning priorities and linking policies. The guidelines stress that making use of research and knowledge will be crucial with regard to both the digital and climate transitions, and should also feed into the debates of the Future of Europe Conference – work on which will be led by [Dubravka Šuica](#).

President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has charged the Vice-Presidents with a steering and coordinating function. Maroš Šefčovič will work under the President's guidance, and will be supported by the Secretariat-General in his coordination work.

## European Parliament

Parliament has made use of the 'indirect' right of initiative granted it by Article 225 TFEU on [numerous occasions](#), asking the Commission to submit proposals. It has also [called](#) for a full right of initiative, and for action to convert the remaining 'special' legislative procedures (consultation and consent) into the ordinary legislative procedure. Both issues have been embraced by President-elect Ursula von der Leyen, who has expressed support for Parliament's right of initiative and 'full co-decision power'. Parliament has also developed initiatives and created capacities for strategic and scientific foresight, such as the scientific panel for the future of science and technology (STOA), units devoted to scientific and strategic foresight within the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), and through participation in the interinstitutional European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS).

Parliament had long [called](#) for revision of the 2003 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making, a process that concluded with the entry into force of the 2016 agreement. In a 30 May 2018 [resolution](#), Parliament took stock of the initial period of implementation of the IIA and noted outstanding issues of concern. It welcomed progress made in implementing the agreement, noting, in particular, the two joint declarations on the EU's legislative priorities (for 2017 and 2018/2019), improved access for Parliament experts to documents and meetings concerning the preparation of delegated acts, and the operational [joint register](#) of delegated acts. The resolution also highlighted issues where implementation efforts should be stepped up and/or which remained unsatisfactory for Parliament. It called for a better flow of information from Council and for greater efforts to set up a joint database on the state of play of legislative acts to improve traceability, as required by the IIA.

### FURTHER READING

Find articles on the theme of [Global Trends](#) and [Scientific foresight](#) on the EPRS blog; [epthinktank.eu](http://epthinktank.eu).

European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), [ESPAS report 2019: Global trends to 2030 – Challenges and Choices for Europe](#).

Bassot E., [The Juncker Commission's ten priorities: An end of term assessment](#), EPRS, European Parliament, May 2019.

Ferger J. and Aleixo M., [Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making](#), EPRS, March 2016.

Remáč M., [Parliamentary scrutiny of the European Commission: implementation of the Treaty provisions](#), EPRS, July 2019.

Tilindyte L., [Subsidiarity: Mechanisms for monitoring compliance](#), EPRS, July 2018.

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