

# Dubravka Šuica

## Vice-President: Democracy and Demography

Hearing due to be held on Thursday 3 October at 18.30 hours.

European Parliament committee responsible: Constitutional Affairs (AFCO).

A Member of the European Parliament since 2013, Dubravka Šuica was active in local politics as Councillor of the Dubrovnik City Council and Mayor of Dubrovnik between 2001 and 2009. Between 1998 and 2009, she was twice elected Councillor of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County Assembly, and from 2005 to 2009, was a member of the Board of the Union of the Association of Towns and the Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Croatia. Between 2004 and 2014, she was

Vice-President of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, as well as Chair of its Croatian delegation. From 2008 to 2011, she held the post of Head of the Croatian Parliament delegation to the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

Šuica is a member of the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), a member of the European People's Party. Since 2012, she has held the posts of party Vice-President, and chair of its Committee on Foreign Affairs and European Integration. Between 2000 and 2011, she was a Member of the Croatian Parliament, where she was vice-chair of the European Integration Committee and a member of the Interparliamentary Cooperation Committee.

Born in 1957 in Dubrovnik, Šuica graduated in 1981 from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb and became a teacher of English and German languages and literature. She also holds a degree from the University of Buffalo in the United States.



*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

A higher turnout in the May 2019 European elections demonstrated European citizens' renewed desire for a greater say in the evolution of the European Union. European Commission President-elect von der Leyen appears to agree, and has created the first Commission [portfolio](#) dedicated to democracy and demography, linking it to a Conference of the [Future of Europe](#), to start in 2020 and run for two years.

A recent loss of faith in democracy can be detected as resulting from deeper changes in our society, including a lack of effective action on adverse economic circumstances affecting certain social and regional groups. [Statistics](#) illustrate a connection between these negative tendencies and demographic developments: population decline can be observed across parts of eastern and southern Europe and some central regions of France and Germany. Recent trends in immigration stemming from non-EU countries may even start to alter the demographic balance in a few EU regions. Important demographic contrasts can be observed between the core and periphery, both at EU and Member State levels, such as population increase in certain urban areas (especially capital cities) and coastal areas. Conversely, peripheral, rural, mountainous and sparsely populated areas are affected by depopulation. Insufficient and inadequate social measures, especially concerning working parents, young people, children and the elderly also contribute to changing EU demography. Despite significant recent developments, such as a new [Directive on Work-Life Balance](#), the [Youth Guarantee](#), and pensions systems developments, much remains to be done.

## Priorities and challenges

The new Commission will have to deal with a number of [democratic and demographic](#) challenges, the most important being: ensuring citizen participation in decision-making; tackling poverty and social inequality; reducing 'brain drain'; and ensuring equality between genders, age groups, national and cultural identities and regions.

A new push for democracy in Europe is one of the six headline ambitions of the [political guidelines for the next European Commission](#). Citizens should play a leading and active part in setting the priorities of the EU. One democratic aim is to achieve more transparency throughout the legislative process. President-elect von der Leyen is planning that the Commission propose a new European democracy action plan, to address the threat of external intervention in European elections, and make legislative proposals to ensure greater transparency regarding paid political advertising, as well as clearer rules on the financing of European political parties.

Full implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) at EU and Member State level is a priority not only in the Commission's political guidelines, but also under the 2019-2024 [European Council Strategic Agenda](#). An important part of the pillar is further improvement in work-life balance: parents and people with caring responsibilities should have the right to take suitable leave, to flexible working arrangements and access to care services. Significant progress has been made in this area (such as the Work-Life Balance Directive), but the new Commission will have to coordinate work on better reconciliation of work and family life and on ensuring full implementation of the directive.

At European level, there is a broad and clear consensus that action is needed to address child poverty and social exclusion, which endangers 25 million children under the age of 18 in the EU. To promote children's and young people's wellbeing, and support young people throughout their childhood and into their adult life, the new Commission will need to tackle protection of children's basic rights, such as adequate healthcare and education.

Pension systems, and in particular public pension schemes, have ensured that older people in the European Union are largely protected against the risk of poverty. However, such systems come under pressure as [life expectancy rises](#) and the number of births declines in the EU. For this and other reasons, Member States are encouraging the establishment of private pension savings, to

soften the burden of ageing populations on social security schemes and to complement public pension benefits. The recently adopted [Pan-European Pension Product](#) (PEPP) could provide a further step in this direction.

## Main projects

The Conference on the [Future of Europe](#), which President-elect von der Leyen envisages running for two years from 2020, should bring citizens of all ages from across the EU together with representatives of civil society and European institutions. The idea is to offer a platform where citizens' major concerns can be freely expressed, in order to take them into account in the work of the institutions. The Vice-President-designate for Democracy and Demography should work together with the Parliament and the Council to agree on the concept, structure, timing and scope of the conference, and to facilitate citizens' participation.

The Commission also seeks to help affected social and regional groups of citizens to respond in the best possible way to the challenges of demographic transition. Based on the work of [Eurostat](#), Vice-President-designate Šuica should prepare, through an extensive mapping exercise, an analysis of the impacts of demographic change on these different groups and identify actions to be taken. In this context, she is tasked with coordinating the elaboration of a long-term vision for rural areas, by addressing issues such as demographic change, connectivity, the risk of poverty and limited access to services.

Also in the context of demography, Vice-President-designate Šuica is expected to present a green paper on ageing, analysing long-term impacts of an ageing society on care and pensions, and the ability of social protection systems to deal with the needs of the ageing population.

Another priority of the new Commission is to focus on children's needs and rights. Through the establishment and the coordination of the new [Child Guarantee](#), the Commission will seek to ensure that children can access the services needed to grow up healthy and safe. This work will be complemented by a comprehensive strategy on the rights of the child.

## European Parliament

The European Parliament contributed substantially to the discussion on the Future of Europe, holding [Future of Europe debates](#) from early 2018 to April 2019. Heads of State or Government were invited to address Parliament's plenary sessions, with full freedom to express their views and to debate their position on the future development of the EU with Members of the European Parliament. In the [political guidelines for the next European Commission](#), Ursula von der Leyen points out that the Commission intends to give a stronger democratic role to the European Parliament, as representative of the voice of European citizens, in initiating legislation. Von der Leyen indicates that the Commission is committed to responding with legislative proposals to the Parliament's resolutions calling for legislative acts (under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

In a 2013 [resolution](#), the European Parliament welcomed the introduction of a Pan-European pension product (PEPP), proposed by the Commission to develop both funded, complementary occupational pensions and individual schemes. In 2018, the Parliament also decided to respond to the Commission's recommendation on the tax treatment of PEPPs, with a [resolution](#) based on an own-initiative report, calling on the Council to put forward proposals to incentivise PEPP savers, such as: giving the same tax relief to the PEPP as is given to national products; specific PEPP tax relief harmonised at EU level in a multilateral tax agreement between Member States; and granting a specific (fixed amount or percentage) subsidy to PEPP savers.

A 2016 Parliament [resolution](#) on work-life balance pointed out that social welfare rights are not always granted throughout the entire duration of parental leave, and called for the extension of the minimum duration of parental leave. Another [resolution](#) adopted the same year highlights that

matching citizens' expectations in terms of fair working conditions lies at the heart of a 'competitive and inclusive economy' that benefits from both women's and men's talents.

In 2015, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on 'Reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty', calling for the introduction of a European Child Guarantee that would use EU structural funds to fight growing rates of poverty among children in Europe, and promote their social inclusion and general wellbeing. In 2018, the Parliament went a [step further](#), calling on the Commission and all Member States to establish a special fund dedicated to the Child Guarantee.

## FURTHER READING

Bassot E., [Unlocking the potential of the EU Treaties: An article-by-article analysis of the scope for action](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

Eatock D., [Demographic outlook for the European Union 2019](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

Szczepański M., [Pan-European personal pension product \(PEPP\)](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

Milotay N., [A new directive on work-life balance](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

Drachenberg R. and Kotanidis S., [The Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament, 2018-19 – A synthesis of the speeches by EU Heads of State or Government](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

Zamfir I., [EU policies – Delivering for citizens: EU support for democracy and peace in the world](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

[What Europe does for me website](#), European Parliament.

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