

Margaritis Schinas

Vice-President: Protecting our European way of life

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

European Parliament committees responsible: Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs (LIBE) and Culture & Education (CULT).



Margaritis Schinas has most recently served as Chief Spokesperson of the European Commission since 2014, and Deputy Director-General of the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication since 2015. Born in 1962, he obtained a law degree from the University of Thessaloniki, which he then complemented with degrees in European studies from the College of Europe in Bruges and in public administration and policy from the London School of Economics (LSE).

Schinas began his career in the European Commission in 1990, and has held a

number of senior positions, including in the cabinets of different Commissioners, as well as the post of Deputy Head of the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA - the predecessor to the European Political Strategy Centre, EPSC). During this period, he represented the Commission on the Board of the European Union Institute for Security Studies.

From 2007 to 2009, Margaritis Schinas served as a Member of the European Parliament, representing New Democracy, affiliated to the European People's Party at European level. As a Member, he was active in the Committee on Budgets, as well as the Delegation to the European Union-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. He was the rapporteur for two opinions, one on publication and translation obligations of certain types of companies, and the other on the deployment and commercial operating phases of the European programme of satellite radionavigation.

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

Background

In Ursula von der Leyen's [mission letter](#) to Margaritis Schinas, the European Commission President-elect specifies that the 'European way of life' entails solidarity, peace of mind and security. It also requires ensuring that workers are able to adapt to the evolving labour market, by equipping them with the necessary skills, including digital. She points to the need for well-managed legal migration, for smooth integration of migrants and refugees, and for common solutions on migration and security, based on European values and responsibilities. The Vice-President for 'Protecting our European way of life' will therefore be in charge of coordinating a wide range of policies, ranging from education, culture and sport to integration, migration and security, even if some of these do not have an entirely obvious link to the title of the portfolio.

Education, culture and sport can play an important role in building a resilient, competitive and inclusive society. EU education policy is focused, inter alia, on measures to encourage [youth](#) mobility, acquisition of digital skills, and vocational training that allows adaptation to evolving labour markets and industrial change. [Sport](#) can also be used as a tool for engaging with varied social groups and communities. Moreover, education offers opportunities for better [integration](#) of migrants and refugees, as well as helping to [prevent radicalisation](#).

Migration from third countries to the EU was highly topical during the 2014-2019 parliamentary term. Following the 2015 peak in the [number of migrants](#) arriving in EU countries, the Commission proposed a [European Agenda on Migration](#), aiming to address the immediate challenges created by the increasing migration flows, and equip the EU with better tools to manage migration in the long term. Despite the Commission's efforts to reduce the incentives for irregular migration, secure the EU's external borders, redefine EU asylum policy and provide the EU with a new legal migration policy, many of the proposals presented by the Commission during the last term are still to be adopted by the co-legislators.

Security was also high on the agenda during the 2014-2019 term, not least due to the wave of terrorist attacks that hit Europe. In 2016, the concept of a Security Union emerged, following the [review](#) of the 2015 [European Agenda on Security](#) focusing on three main priorities to be addressed: terrorism and radicalisation, organised crime and cybercrime. There is also a growing understanding that the traditional divide between internal security and external defence hampers effective response to global threats. There is, therefore, a need for coordinated action and an integrated approach to protect the [collective security](#) of the Union.

Priorities and challenges

Public opinion

According to the [Delivering on Europe](#) survey conducted in 2018, the first areas where EU citizens would like the EU to intervene more are the [fight against terrorism](#) and [unemployment](#) (77 % and 76 % respectively). Also, more than 70 % of respondents across Europe are in favour of more EU intervention on [migration](#) (72 %) and [protection of external borders](#) (71 %). Finally, coming just after security and defence policy (68 %), Europeans called for more EU action on the [equal treatment of women and men](#) (65 %, which is an increase of 10 percentage points compared to 2016). Another [survey](#) showed that more than half of young EU citizens (53 %) identify education and skills as the top priority for the EU.

In line with citizens' expectations, education policies have not only maintained their relevance, but have gained more importance with increased funding proposed for programmes such as [Erasmus+](#) and the [European Solidarity Corps](#) in 2021-2027. In her [political guidelines](#) for 2019-2024, Commission President-elect von der Leyen supported the European Parliament's proposal to triple the Erasmus+ budget, and also committed to achieving a [European education area](#) by 2025, emphasising the need to improve access to quality education and learning mobility. She also announced an update of the [digital education action plan](#) to improve digital literacy and skills.

Current trends suggest [migratory flows](#) to Europe will continue, which means migration management will remain high on the EU agenda. Von der Leyen's [political guidelines](#) announce a 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum', including relaunch of the [Dublin reform](#), and stress that a fresh start and a new way of burden-sharing are required. She proposes to focus on two elements: firstly, reinforcement of the [European Border and Coast Guard Agency](#) to a standing corps of 10 000 border guards by 2024, earlier than the current target of 2027; and secondly, the need for a modernised and truly common [EU asylum system](#). The Commission President-elect also emphasises the need for a more sustainable approach to [search and rescue](#), moving from ad hoc solutions to a permanent system, as well as updating the [return policy](#) rules.

Internal security will continue to be a top priority, with [terrorism](#), radicalisation and cybercrime remaining important challenges, as well as tackling [money laundering](#) and terrorist financing more efficiently. Cybercrime is a persistent [threat](#), with the number and level of sophistication of cyber-attacks increasing over recent years. The EU needs to enhance its resilience and response to attacks by state and non-state actors, to protect itself from malicious interference. The EU will also have to increase security-related funding in its budget, and invest more in security research. Pooling of resources, cooperation and information-sharing are essential aspects, according to the European Council [strategic agenda](#) 2019-2024. Finally, an important challenge for the ninth legislature will be to follow up and evaluate [implementation](#) of the security measures adopted during the last term.

Main projects

Ursula von der Leyen has [assigned](#) a wide range of tasks to the Vice-President for 'Protecting our European way of life', in three main areas: skills, education and integration, finding common ground on migration and security union. The Vice-President will therefore coordinate and ensure coherence between these policies, chairing a group of Commissioners with related responsibilities, and working under the guidance of the Commission President, supported by the Commission Secretariat-General.

On education, labour mobility and integration policy, the Vice-President will aim to provide young people with new skills and opportunities, making full use of programmes such as the European Solidarity Corps and [DiscoverEU](#). Other tasks include work on the education agenda, on life-long learning and cross-border learning, and on achieving the European education area. Culture and sport policy can be expected to contribute to bring communities closer together, including better integration of migrants and refugees. The Vice-President will also coordinate efforts towards establishing a Union of equality and diversity, including fighting discrimination, combating gender-based violence, developing a new European gender strategy and contributing to empowering women and girls.

Vice-President-designate Schinas will also be tasked with creating pathways to [legal migration](#), to attract the skills and talents that the European economy and labour market need and lack, and cooperating with the Commissioner for Jobs to develop a better match between jobseekers and vacancies. The main goal of the overall approach to migration is to find common ground and relaunch a policy based on shared responsibility and solidarity. Work should start on a 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum', addressing [issues](#) such as external border control, asylum and return policy, the Schengen Area, and cooperation with third countries of origin and transit. Moreover, cooperation with the High Representative/Vice-President for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) should ensure coherence between the external and internal dimensions of migration.

Close cooperation with the HR/VP is also necessary to bridge the gap between internal and [external security](#) policies and to create a 'culture of cooperation between the two dimensions'. Coordinated responses will also be needed to prevent, detect and respond to [hybrid threats](#). The main task of the Vice-President will therefore consist of ensuring the coherence of all security related policies, while continuing to work towards a 'genuine European Security Union'.

European Parliament

The European Parliament has consistently stressed the importance of adequate funding for education, culture, youth and sport. Parliament [proposes](#) to triple the Erasmus+ budget for 2021-2027. In its [resolution](#) on the New Skills Agenda for Europe, Parliament voiced the need to promote lifelong learning, develop digital skills and media literacy at all levels of education, and to foster intercultural dialogue to facilitate the [integration](#) of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers into the labour market and society. It also [called](#) for an 'ambitious and targeted' revision of the Blue Card Directive to enhance rules on entry and residence of qualified third-country nationals.

The European Parliament has adopted several own-initiative resolutions addressing migration. In its [resolution](#) on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration, Parliament developed a set of recommendations, including a substantial reform of the Dublin Regulation and a centralised EU asylum system. Parliament also highlighted the need for a comprehensive labour migration policy, and for better integration of migrants, in order to meet the Union's goals for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and to fill gaps identified in the EU labour market. Regarding external border policy and Schengen, Parliament emphasised the need for effective border management, with high common standards applied by all Member States and an effective exchange of information between them. In 2017, the Parliament also adopted a [resolution](#) on the role of EU external action in addressing refugee and migrant movements.

During the eighth legislative term, the European Parliament adopted several resolutions addressing the [European Agenda on Security](#), as well as specific issues such as [anti-terrorism measures](#), [prevention of radicalisation](#) and [cybercrime](#). In particular, Parliament [insisted](#) on the need for an in-depth evaluation of EU counter-terrorism policy. In 2017, Parliament set up a [Special Committee on Terrorism](#) (TERR) to assess the terrorist threat in Europe, examine counter-terrorism measures and their impact on fundamental rights, and identify possible [gaps](#). In its [resolution](#) on the TERR Committee findings, the Parliament recommended consolidating the EU institutional framework, stepping up efforts to prevent and counter radicalisation, enhancing cooperation and information exchange, better protection of external borders, providing adequate resources for EU bodies in charge of counter-terrorism, and enhancing the response to the needs of victims of terrorism.

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.

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

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