

# Mariya Gabriel

## Innovation and Youth

Hearing due to be held on Monday 30 September 2019 at 18.30 hours.

European Parliament committees responsible: Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and Education and Culture (CULT).

Since 2017, Mariya Gabriel has served as European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society.

She was elected a Member of the European Parliament in 2009. As a member of the European People's Party (EPP) Group, she sat on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)



and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) where she served as coordinator for the EPP Group. In 2014, Gabriel was re-elected and became a Vice-President of the EPP Group and Head of the Bulgarian delegation in that group. She also took an active part in the work of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), notably as the rapporteur on reports on a third of the EU's visa-liberalisation agreements. Gabriel twice received the 'MEP of the Year' award: in 2013 in the 'gender equality' category and in 2016 in the 'development' category. She is a member of the ruling centre-right party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB).

Born in 1979, Gabriel studied political science at the Institut d'études politiques (IEP) in Bordeaux (France) and she holds a Master's degree in comparative politics and international relations from the same institution. She was a teaching and research assistant at IEP Bordeaux from 2004 to 2008.

*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

Innovation and youth are closely interlinked. Allowing young people to get good education and feed into the research and innovation talent pool is key to sustaining the EU's competitive edge and its ability to lead in the transition to a climate-neutral economy and new digital age. The various components within the new enlarged and rebranded 'Innovation and youth' portfolio – namely **research, education, culture, youth and sport** – have a central role in building a resilient and inclusive society for the future. They are relevant for virtually all EU citizens, be they students, researchers, teachers, parents, decision-makers or professionals belonging to these respective categories.

Horizon 2020 – the world's most extensive research and innovation programme – supports the EU's position as a global leader in science, attracting the best 'brains' and helping EU **researchers** collaborate and share ideas in tackling societal challenges. As an interface between research and industrial policy, innovation policy aims to create a conducive framework for bringing ideas to market.

Currently there are some 20 million **students** in the EU, which is increasingly attractive globally, both as a study destination and a partner for exchange. The EU's action in the area of education is focused on the mobility of **young people** and **teachers**, the development of tools for the recognition of academic qualifications and other types of learning, the acquisition of digital skills, and the adaptation to labour market needs and industrial change through vocational training.

Europe's **creative and cultural industries** [employ](#) around 8.7 million people and are instrumental in the promotion of Europe's cultural diversity around the world. EU countries account for nearly 40 % of [Unesco's World Heritage sites](#), and eight in ten EU citizens [take pride](#) in Europe's **cultural heritage**. The EU is tasked with a variety of other missions (protection and promotion of its cultural and linguistic diversity, advancement of cultural exchanges, and the support of artists' mobility, etc.)

**Sport** can also have a substantial economic and social impact and can be a valuable tool to engage with various social groups. Over 7 million people work in [sport-related](#) jobs in the EU, and sports-related goods and services contribute nearly €300 billion to the EU economy.

## Recent developments

In April 2019, the European Parliament endorsed the partial agreement with the Council on **Horizon Europe**, the successor of [Horizon 2020](#). The EU's position as a leading knowledge-based economy increasingly relies on its ability to transform world-class science into innovation that ultimately allows the creation of new markets, more skilled jobs and a better quality of life.

In its 30 years of existence, 9 million people have benefitted from the **Erasmus programme**. The 2018 Commission [proposal](#) aspires to provide learning opportunities for 12 million more people in the 2021-2027 period alone. Additionally, the first 17 [European Universities](#) comprising 114 higher education institutions from 24 EU countries joined the **European education area** in June 2019 and became inter-university campuses, allowing students to move seamlessly and obtain a personalised European degree. The new European Commission has committed to roll out the complete scheme by 2025.

The 2018 **European agenda for culture** strives to bring together the economic and social aspects of [culture](#) in a globalised world. The **Creative Europe programme** will continue supporting the cultural and creative sectors in the 2021-2027 period, through cooperation projects connecting artists across Europe. Its **Guarantee Facility** – in operation since 2016 – already triggered a total of €1 billion in loans for micro- and small cultural and creative enterprises. Over 6 million people contributed to the [success](#) of the **European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018** by participating in some 12 000 events. The Year was a watershed in mainstreaming cultural heritage in EU policies and was scaled up through a [Framework for action](#) outlining some 60 initiatives for the years 2019-2020.

With the support of the European Parliament, funding for **sport** is now available for the first time in the form of a specific chapter in Erasmus+. The symbolic amount – €266 million – serves to combat doping, match fixing, violence and discrimination. It also provides a valuable contribution to health-enhancing activities, grassroots sport and equal opportunities.

## Priorities and challenges

### Public opinion

An overwhelming 80 % of EU citizens consider that the [diversity](#) of the EU's **culture** sets it apart and gives it particular value. Asked to identify three [priority topics](#) for the EU, 53 % of young EU citizens placed **education** and **skills** on top. Some 67 % recognise that European programmes and initiatives such as Erasmus+ make them feel more European. Similarly, 83 % acknowledge that learning about the functioning of the **EU and its institutions, EU history** and **European culture**, should be part of compulsory school education. Half of the young people polled consider it central to Europe's future to promote **critical thinking** and the ability to search for trustworthy **information** in order to combat **fake news** and extremism. Some 32 % value education provided in creative and immersive ways through **virtual reality**. EU citizens expect a lot from breakthrough **innovation**. They notably anticipate that [science and technological development](#) will have a positive impact on health and medical care (65 %), education and skills (60 %), transport and transport infrastructure (59 %), energy supply (58 %), protection of the environment (57 %) and the fight against climate change (54 %).

Mirroring EU citizens' expectations, the new budgetary proposals for the 2021-2027 period envisage an increase in resources for **Horizon Europe** (€100 billion), **Erasmus** (€30 billion) and **Creative Europe** (€1.9 billion). This is an indication that research and education policies have not only maintained their relevance, but have gained in importance.

However, a number of challenges need to be addressed. Remaining [implementation gaps](#) in the completion of the **European research area** result in a loss of €3 billion per year. Stakeholders argue that the main [obstacles](#) preventing the current research framework programme from achieving its objectives are the complex application procedures, high administrative burden, lack of flexibility to react to unforeseen circumstances, insufficient synergies between EU programmes and funds, and the difficulty of combining EU action with other public interventions and private finance.

While the EU is close to meeting its **education and training 2020 targets** for early-school leavers and higher education graduates, some regions and segments of the EU population lag behind. Similarly, access to **quality education** remains unequal. Increased attention will be needed on improving access to, and the quality of, early childhood education and digital literacy. An additional matter of concern is that too many pupils leave school lacking basic skills.

For maximum impact and increased synergies, the **European youth strategy** needs to be further aligned with other policy areas. Similarly, young people from all walks of life need to be better represented in the **structured dialogue** with EU decision-makers, irrespective of their circumstances and life experiences. Achieving greater accountability in this process is not an aim *per se*, but would help young people understand how their ideas can translate into policies.

Creators, cultural entrepreneurs and legislators alike have been faced with the **digital transformation** resulting in new business and monetising models, work environment and employment conditions, thus blurring national borders. Tackling this new challenge as well as globalisation in general will require increased focus on preserving the richness and diversity of European culture. Linked to this is the need to foster awareness of Europe's shared cultural heritage, history and values, to help instil a sense of belonging to the EU's integration project. Defence of **multilingualism** has not ranked highly in the past five years and will require some reflection on improving the digital presence of minority and **regional languages** in this context.

Physical inactivity is also a growing concern. A 2018 [survey](#) shows that 46 % of the respondents never exercise or play sport – up 7 percentage points from 2009. Even though the budget promoting **physical activity** under the **Sport chapter of Erasmus+** nearly doubled from €6 million to some €11 million between 2017 and 2019, this effort needs to be sustained to try and reverse the physical inactivity trend.

### New Commission priorities for the 'Innovation and youth' portfolio

Prioritising a '[Europe fit for the digital age](#)', President-elect von der Leyen has [tasked](#) Commissioner-designate Gabriel with providing sufficient funding for '**disruptive research and breakthrough innovations**' via the

**European Innovation Council**, making the **European education area** a reality by 2025, together with the need to improve access to quality education, enable learners to move more easily between education systems across EU countries and encourage lifelong learning. Special attention is drawn to improving **digital skills** both for young people and adults, as well as raising awareness on **disinformation**, and updating the **digital education action plan** and the increased use of massive open online courses. **Creative industries** are singled out as a 'catalyst for innovation' and jobs, whereas digital technologies should be instrumental in the preservation and protection of **cultural heritage**. Finally, the **European Week of Sport** and the **#BeInclusive EU sports awards** are expected to contribute to social inclusion and wellbeing.

## European Parliament

### Treaty basis and European Parliament competence

The EU and Member States have shared competence in the area of **research and innovation** (Articles 179-188 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, TFEU). Policies in the area of **education, vocational training, youth, culture, the audiovisual sector and sport** are essentially decided and implemented by the Member States (Articles 165-167 TFEU). The EU's role is one of support and coordination, with harmonisation of laws and regulations being specifically excluded. The respect of **linguistic diversity** and the **protection of cultural heritage** are enshrined in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

As in previous legislative terms, Parliament has consistently stressed the importance it attaches to adequate funding for education, research, culture, youth and sport. Accordingly, it called for the **Erasmus+ 2021-2027** budget to be tripled – a commitment taken up in the [mission letter](#) – and for an increase in the overall [budget](#) of **Horizon Europe** by additional €20 billion. Parliament also proposed to nearly double **Creative Europe 2021-2027 funding** and expressed concern about the **Guarantee Facility** being moved to the 'Invest EU programme' without quotas for the cultural and creative industries. In addition, Parliament contributed to the vibrant success of the **European Year of Cultural Heritage** and succeeded in securing funding for the **EU Youth Orchestra**. True to form, Parliament acted as a guardian of cultural diversity during the revision of the **audiovisual media services' rules**. It obtained that 30 % of content, including in video-on-demand (VOD) service providers' catalogues, should be European. VOD platforms were also required to contribute to the development of European audiovisual productions, either through direct investment in content or through contributions to national funds. The **European Week of Sport** – originating from a 2011 European Parliament [resolution](#) – is part of the EU's response to physical inactivity and is the largest public-funded sports initiative worldwide. Since its launch in 2014, the [week](#) has drawn over 40 million Europeans to more than 100 000 events in 38 countries, and its popularity continues to grow.

### FURTHER READING

Chircop D., [Lifelong learning in the EU](#), animated infographic, EPRS, European Parliament, October 2018.  
Karakas C., [Research and innovation in the EU: Evolution, achievements, challenges](#), EPRS, European Parliament, November 2018.

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Additional contributions to this Briefing have come from Denise Chircop and Magda Pasikowska-Schnass.

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