

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

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Europe in the World**

Questions from the Committee on Foreign Affairs

**1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**1.1. What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for?**

I have devoted a significant part of my life, my work, and my political activities to European issues, which have always taken a central place in my interests and commitment. A key testimony of it being my honour to serve as the President of the European Parliament (2004-2007) as well as the Chair of its Development Committee (2007-2009), or more recently my commitment to a joint European approach as Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation.

But my strong interest and commitment to European Integration – both personally and professionally – dates back much longer, starting already when I was awarded my first scholarship at the age of 17 for an essay on Spain's prospects of accession, while still under the Franco regime, to what was then called the 'European Common Market'.

During my 40 years of public service, I have been involved in EU politics as Member of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers. As a Secretary of State for the Treasury, I participated in the negotiations surrounding Spain's accession to the European Communities. I represented my country for ten years (1986-1996) in three configurations of the Council of the European Union (Economic and Financial Affairs, Environment, and Transport and Telecommunications).

I chaired the Spanish Parliament's Joint Committee for the European Union. In that capacity, I was a member of the Convention that drew up the draft European Constitution that went on to become the basis for the Treaty of Lisbon.

As President of the European Parliament, I strongly promoted a European parliamentary diplomacy. In particular, I supported the development of multilateral parliamentary assemblies with the creation of EuroLat and EuroMed, which I had the honour to Chair under my European Parliament presidency.

My Chairmanship of the European Parliament's Development Committee (DEVE) allowed me to gain a better understanding of Africa and the challenges and opportunities this sister continent offers. For instance, I led a fact-finding mission of the European Parliament in Darfur on the conditions of the refugee camps (2008). I also participated in several meetings of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

As DEVE Chair, I visited several of the European Commission's field operations for international cooperation and humanitarian assistance, from the centres providing psychological assistance to the victims of guerrilla forces in Colombia, to the supply of water to villages in Nigeria. In those field visits, I saw the life-changing impact that both our development cooperation and humanitarian aid have on the ground helping people in need.

Moreover, as DEVE Chair I travelled to the frontline of conflict. For instance, in 2009 I participated in an Observer Mission to Gaza after the Operation Cast Lead bombings together with the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel.

Finally, since June 2018 I have been contributing to the work of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) as Minister of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation of the Government of Spain.

Complementing the above EU-related experience, I have had further significant international exposure, both in my personal and professional life, that allowed me to gain a better understanding of the world we live in, preparing me to assume the office of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP). Highlights include time spent in the United States, Israel, China, El Salvador, Nepal, Sudan, Gaza, Georgia, Armenia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Senegal, Niger, Lebanon or Jordan.

If I am confirmed as Vice-President of the Commission by the European Parliament, I am determined to use all my knowledge, experience and capacity to fulfil my mandate. I believe I hold the right qualifications and professional experiences to contribute to the European general interest. On the basis of the relevant Treaty provisions, I intend to assist the President of the Commission and my fellow Colleagues in their efforts to deliver the President-elect's Political Guidelines and promote the European Union's priorities.

## **1.2. What motivates you?**

First, clearly the European project. It has not only been an integral part of my professional career, but has also always been something I was passionately committed to. The first times I

ever crossed my country's border – something that was not as easy back then as it is now – was for my student summer jobs: working on a farm in Denmark, in the construction sector in Germany, in the hospitality business in London, or harvesting grapes in France. I can still remember the emotions I felt as a young Spaniard upon discovering Europe, a continent which for my generation was an existential reference that we wanted to be part of.

Secondly, I am dedicated to bringing things forward, developing ownership for what I am entrusted with. Whatever function I assumed in my career, I always wanted to make a difference and where possible contribute to the European integration project. When I was a member of the European Convention (2001-2003) in representation of the Spanish Parliament, I participated actively in its working group on EU foreign policy. I still remember our intense debate on the advisability of creating a position initially denominated 'EU Minister for Foreign Affairs', and of conferring upon this single figure the role of High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy — at that time Javier Solana — as well as that of the European Commission's Commissioner for External Relations — who was then Chris Patten. Similarly, there was much discussion regarding what this figure's precise functions should be. Through this new position, we sought to give unity and coherence to the European Union's voice and action in the world, both from the perspective of constructing a common foreign and security policy, and that of the external dimension of EU policies. It was a highly controversial and much-debated decision, and at that time we were all aware – myself in particular – of the difficulties and demands involved in performing this complex double-hatted role.

Thirdly, when assuming myself the concrete role as HR/VP, I truly would like to contribute to making the EU a stronger foreign policy actor. We all know that in virtually all policy areas, we have to act jointly as Europeans in order to make a difference on the world stage - across Institutions and Member States. This will not be an easy task, but I commit myself to do my utmost to achieve EU unity in external relations.

If I am confirmed by the European Parliament at a time when the EU is more present than ever in all global affairs and in all regions of the world, I would be regularly appearing before the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), to request its support to exercise these dual functions of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and of Vice-President of the European Commission.

I have witnessed first-hand the necessity of a stronger Europe, one that defends European values and interests the world over in the face of threats that affect all Europeans. A Europe that exercises international solidarity and upholds peace and security in the world. I am determined to pursue these goals in my capacity of HR/VP.

### **1.3. How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission?**

As announced by President-elect von der Leyen, our aim is to be a “geopolitical Commission”.

Today’s geopolitical conflicts do not take place mostly in trenches in the battlefield, but mainly in the cyberspace and other fields ranging from trade, economic and monetary policy to access for raw materials. The weapons used are no longer bayonets but rather cyber and hybrid attacks, sanctions, commercial tariffs, currency devaluations and forced technology transfers. This is why it has become vital to use all the instruments in the EU’s toolbox, in particular the leverage provided by some of our internal policies, if we want to become a player in world politics and not just a payer. To that end, I intend to fully play my role as Commission Vice-President in charge of coordinating the external action of the European Union, in line with Article 18(4) TEU. I will support the President in coordinating the external dimension of all Commissioners' work and ensure we link better the internal and external aspects of our policies. In line with my Mission Letter, I also intend to work together with my relevant colleagues in the College of Commissioners to ensure that our external financial instruments are used strategically, contribute to our wider political aims and enhance Europe’s leadership and influence in the world.

At times when external and internal policies are increasingly intertwined, it is important to promote the interests and security of our citizens when we shape and conduct foreign policy, but also to look outside the EU when we define domestic policy.

Against this backdrop, the cooperation with the European Parliament, representing directly European citizens, with its political and budgetary support as well as its role as a co-legislator, will be fundamental to have a coherent and effective EU foreign policy.

### **1.4. How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio?**

Since day one, the President-elect has been clear on gender equality being a key priority – and she has delivered in proposing a team that is gender balanced for the first time in the history of the College. It is a commitment of the entire team, including myself.

Our key objective is the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment. I will ensure that the EU remains a leader in international efforts to achieve gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and their empowerment.

Gender mainstreaming is enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and is an effective means to achieving our objectives. I will work with the Commissioner for Equality in the international dimension of the new European Gender Strategy announced in the President-elect’s Political Guidelines. I am committed to further stepping up our action, building on our now well-established three-pronged approach, which combines EU political and policy dialogues with partner countries; mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and actions; and implementing ad hoc measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy

gender inequalities. These three elements go hand in hand. This approach has been and should be applied to all areas of EU external action including foreign and security policy, defence, development, trade, finance, humanitarian aid, migration, justice and education, as well as in preventing and countering radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. In my coordinating role, as stipulated in my Mission Letter, I will be well placed to make sure that gender aspects are adequately reflected, also paying due attention to linking the external and internal aspects of our work. Across all our EU policies, we have a clear connecting thread, requiring the systematic integration of a gender perspective into the planning, conduct and evaluation of all our partnerships, agreements, policies, strategies and activities. This should be based on a thorough, proper and informed gender analysis.

As for my field of responsibility, one example of effective EU gender mainstreaming can be found in the systematic integration of the gender perspective in the entire process of analysis, planning, conduct and evaluation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, as they are developed in accordance with all relevant international standards and legal instruments. Another example is the integration of a gender perspective in the new generation of EU trade agreements. These show that no policy is gender-neutral.

All EU staff, including those in senior management, bear their own responsibility in the proper integration of gender mainstreaming. A gender-responsive leadership is a pre-requisite for effective mainstreaming of gender perspectives, leading ultimately to better achievement of our policy objectives. Gender mainstreaming is a shared responsibility; I plan to lead by example.

**1.5. What guarantee of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

I commit to comply without fail, as soon as I am confirmed as Vice-President, with the letter and spirit of the EU Treaties on independence, transparency, impartiality and availability, as defined in Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). I also commit to comply without fail, with the obligation of professional secrecy as defined in Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

If I am confirmed as Vice-President, I will fully respect the letter and spirit of the Treaty, in particular the obligation to act in the European interest. I will also honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflicts of interest. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I will update it rapidly should any change be required.

I believe that my mandate as Member and as President of the European Parliament is a testimony of my full respect of the letter and spirit of the EU Treaties and the obligation to act in the European interest.

Furthermore, I am strongly committed to avoid any position or situation that could put in question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission, as well as my credibility, the credibility of the Commission or of the EU as a whole. I commit to inform President-elect von der Leyen of any eventual future situation, which could involve a conflict of interests in the performance of my official duties.

## **2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

### **2.1. How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners?**

My fundamental task will be to ensure the work of the Commission and the EU's external action respond to geopolitical challenges that confront the EU, in accordance with my Mission letter. Building on the strength of our soft power, the EU needs to use all available instruments in a more coherent and strategic manner if it wants to be influential in a world increasingly characterised by great power competition.

To that end, I intend to play fully my role as Commission Vice-President and coordinate the European Union's external action to maximise our international leverage to protect our interests and promote our values. For this to succeed, it will be crucial for the Commission services and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to work even closer together, to ensure full complementarity of our internal and external action and to fully exploit the potential of the Commissioners Group for a Stronger Europe in the World, as set out in my Mission letter. Moreover, I will ensure that all of our work linked to defence and our efforts towards a genuine European Defence Union is coherent and consistent, working closely in particular with the Executive Vice-President for a Europe fit for the Digital Age as well as the Commissioner for Internal Market.

Secondly, I see myself as an honest broker at the Foreign Affairs Council. Coordinating the Commission's external action will not be enough to be an effective foreign policy actor. We also need to ensure the coherence of our actions. The EU has proved that it can be an influential player when it acts united.

My aim is to go beyond finding the minimum common denominator when Member States are divided. I intend to play a proactive consensus building role between Member States, promoting what I believe is in the EU's interest in the short, medium and long term. In this regard, I will work with all my colleagues when the College puts forward proposals on the EU's External Action across all policy-areas - external and internal, and make use of my right of initiative as High Representative to put forward proposals in the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

## **2.2. In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

The European Commission is accountable to the European Parliament, which, as the only directly elected institution, enjoys the highest democratic legitimacy. The European Parliament has played a crucial role in the process of European integration, both through the formal powers it gained through Treaty revisions as well as through its informal influence and political leadership.

Effective interinstitutional cooperation is essential for the EU's institutional system to work, and for the efficiency and legitimacy of EU decision-making system. It relies on certain guiding principles that I am fully committed to follow. These include openness, mutual trust, efficiency, and regular exchange of information. President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines and Mission Letters fully reflect these principles, and stress the intention to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. If confirmed as Vice-President, I will work towards this objective and in doing so I will fully respect the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. I will manage my interactions with the European Parliament in an open, transparent and constructive way, to build that relationship of mutual trust.

I commit to the full implementation of the applicable Treaty provisions, in particular Article 36 TEU, and of the Declaration on political accountability. Having been myself President of the European Parliament, I attach particular importance to establishing a close and fruitful relationship in a spirit of trust and cooperation.

## **2.3. What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives?**

I believe that the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can play a complementary role to traditional foreign policy actors, enhancing the impact and legitimacy of the EU's external action. It is for this reason that during my term as European Parliament President I stepped up European parliamentary diplomacy. It is important to continue these efforts, while ensuring the coherence and complementarity of the EU's external action by coordinating our activities closely.

I will cooperate closely with the European Parliament so that it can fully exercise its scrutiny and agenda-setting roles.

First, in accordance with Article 36 TEU, I will keep the Parliament regularly informed of the main aspects of my work and consult the Parliament on the fundamental choices of our CFSP. I intend to do this in several ways: by attending exchanges of views in AFET, by continuing

the meetings of the Special Committee (introduced by the 2002 Interinstitutional Agreement on access to sensitive information in the field of security and defence policy) and by participating in plenary debates, in particular the debates to wind up the adoption of the European Parliament's annual reports on the implementation of CFSP and CSDP as well as the one on Human Rights and Democracy in the World.

Secondly, I commit to fully implement the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission (2010). The President-elect committed that her Commission would follow-up to European Parliament resolutions adopted by a majority of its members with a legislative act, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. In this regard, I will in my areas of responsibility work hand in hand with Parliament at every stage of resolutions based on Article 225 TFEU and will make sure that the Commission responds to parliamentary resolutions or requests made on the basis of Article 225 TFEU, within 3 months after their adoption. For non-legislative resolutions in the field of CFSP, I commit myself to be present for the plenary debates regularly in order to comprehensively address the questions and issues raised and to ensure that my obligations under Article 36 TEU are fully implemented.

Finally, as previously stated, I commit to working closely with the European Parliament on the basis of the Framework Agreement and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making, as applicable.

#### **2.4. In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

The exchange of views and cooperation with the European Parliament is of high importance to me. I commit to fully implement the provisions of the Framework Agreement and of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making hence ensuring equal treatment in my relations with the European Parliament and the Council, where both institutions' competences are equal. Additionally, in line with the Declaration on political accountability, I commit myself and the services under my authority to intensifying the practice of holding exchanges of views prior to the adoption of mandates and strategies in the area of CFSP. The format for such exchanges of views should reflect the sensitivity and confidentiality of the topics discussed. Some debates could take place in Plenary or AFET, other be subject to discussions in Joint Consultation Meetings with the Bureaux of AFET, the Committee on Budgets (BUDG) and the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) or the Special Committee. I also commit myself to jointly explore ways of ensuring a meaningful in-depth dialogue on documents for the strategic planning phases of the financial instruments under my remit. The same will apply to all consultative documents submitted to Member States during the preparatory phase.

In the specific field of international negotiations, as provided in article 218 (10) TFEU and the relevant case-law from the EU Court of Justice, I undertake to ensure that the European Parliament is informed fully and immediately at all stages of the procedure both on CFSP and

of non-CFSP agreements under my responsibility to ensure that the Parliament is in a position to exercise democratic scrutiny of the Union's external action, from the beginning of the process up to the conclusion of an international agreement by the EU.

To achieve this, I will instruct the services to continue with the existing practice of consistently and proactively offer to brief the European Parliament and inform Members in the appropriate and agreed format. This will apply at the beginning of negotiations (including prior to the start of negotiations), during the conduct of negotiations (after each negotiating round or when significant developments occur) and upon the finalisation of negotiations (whenever negotiations are completed, an agreement is initialled, provisional application is proposed or there is the intention to suspend or modify an agreement).

**3. How do you intend to improve inter-institutional dialogue and cooperation? In particular, will you promote and ensure progress in those areas where the Council is reluctant to reach an agreement, such as:**

**i) Cooperation and information sharing on international agreements (inter-institutional agreement on “Better Law-Making”, paragraph 40), and**

If I am confirmed as Vice-President of the Commission, I will seek to achieve full compliance with the principles of transparency, accountability and democratic legitimacy. In line with Political guidelines presented by the President-elect to ensure a high degree of transparency, I will ensure that the European Parliament is informed at all stages of the procedure within my remit both on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and non-CFSP agreements so that the Parliament is in a position to exercise democratic scrutiny of the Union's external action. The better the Parliament is informed about an agreement, the more its views are taken into account, the more elements it will have when it comes to its consent vote.

I commit to fully implement the relevant provisions of the Framework Agreement and of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. I understand that the current practice of ensuring a systematic, transparent and continuous flow of information is working to the Parliament's overall satisfaction. However, I also agree that even good practices can be further improved. While there is a broad common understanding on procedures and principles between the Commission, the High Representative and the Parliament, it would be of added value to also include the Council in a joint arrangement. During the quadripartite negotiations between the Commission, the High Representative, the Parliament and the Council to implement para 40 of the IIA Better Law-making progress was made. Regrettably, an agreement acceptable to all participants could not be reached by the end of the legislature. The achievements of this process could be a good starting point. I will encourage all parties to resume inter-institutional negotiations and I commit to be fully engaged to reach an agreement with the Council that is based on mutual trust and recognition of the respective responsibilities in the process of negotiating and concluding international agreements.

**ii) Negotiations on a revision of the 2002 Inter-Institutional Agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on access to sensitive information in the field of CFSP/CSDP, including on sanctions, the mandates for CSDP missions, their reports, country strategies sent by EUSRs to PSC?**

The Parliament has to have access to the documents it needs to exercise its scrutiny role, be they classified or not. However, it is in the interest of the EU that classified information is

handled, not only in accordance with the applicable physical protection rules, but, more generally, under a sound legal and policy framework.

While classified non-CFSP information is covered by the Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament and the Council which entered into force in 2014, the instrument in force for classified information in CFSP/CSDP matters – the 2002 Interinstitutional Agreement – dates back to Pre-Lisbon, and is no longer in line with the current institutional setup and needs to be replaced. Following Council's recent endorsement to restart the negotiations with the Parliament on a successor arrangement to replace the 2002 Interinstitutional Agreement, I believe that negotiations should start immediately and I am fully committed to reaching an agreement as swiftly as possible in the new mandate. While the negotiations take place, I commit to be actively involved in the meetings of the special committee.

**4. How will you further improve cooperation between the EC/EEAS and Parliament - notably the Committee on Foreign Affairs - building on the commitments and practices of the previous HRVPs, notably as regards:**

**i) An updated Declaration on Political Accountability - or possibly its upgrade to an IIA between the European Parliament and the Commission on political accountability and cooperation in external policies. The Declaration on Political Accountability has been in force for 9 years, during which relations between Parliament and the HRVP have evolved significantly. Therefore, it would be logical to bring up the legal base for political accountability to the necessary level and start the negotiations of an IIA in the field of external policies, which would make relations between Parliament, Commission and the EEAS more coherent, coordinated and transparent),**

I consider accountability of our actions to the European Parliament of the utmost importance. Its legal basis is enshrined in the Treaties themselves.

The Declaration by the High Representative on Political Accountability of 2010 implements the Treaty provisions on the cooperation with the European Parliament in the field of CFSP and CSDP, above all Article 36 TEU. I attach great importance to its content and the underlying spirit of the Declaration, which is as relevant today as it, was back in 2010. I agree that the relationship between the Parliament and the HR/VP has evolved into a positive and special partnership with the Declaration at its basis.

From the many conversations I had with AFET-Members, HR/VP Mogherini and other stakeholders, I understand that the Declaration has been implemented to the satisfaction of all sides. However, I agree that one should always look for areas where we can do more and better. In this respect, I believe that the Declaration's flexibility is an advantage for developing and intensifying our cooperation where needed. One example is the exchange of classified information in the field of CFSP/CSDP on which, as mentioned, I am committed to progress in negotiations on an arrangement to replace the 2002 Interinstitutional Agreement. Another area we could look at is how to find ways of more systematically consulting the European Parliament prior to the adoption of new communications, strategies and mandates. While this is already being done on a regular basis, I am ready to examine how we can be more systematic and coherent in this respect.

In the light of the above, I commit to continue working on the Declaration's full and comprehensive application, building on the positive achievements of the past years and with the guiding principles of transparency, accountability and democratic legitimacy.

**ii) A better synchronisation of Commission/EEAS and Parliament's activities, for example through the systematic advance sharing of planned timelines for the release of official strategic documents (strategies, communications), ministerial meetings and summits, proposals to open negotiations on international agreements, human rights dialogues, etc.,**

As set out in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission, even before taking office, the President-elect submits to the European Parliament his/her Political Guidelines. These guidelines frame the work planned within the next mandate. President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines focus on six clear headline ambitions, among which a Stronger Europe in the World, that identify a number of key initiatives to be delivered within the mandate. The Guidelines, along with the work done by the other institutions, will also form the basis for the first ever-Multiannual Programme, which should be agreed by the three institutions.

In addition, the Commission publishes an Annual Work Programme that announces important initiatives, including important strategies and communications, for a given year. Both before and after the Commission work programme is adopted, the Commission engages in a dialogue with the European Parliament and the Council respectively.

I recognise the need to maintain, and where necessary improve, practices for information exchange, and sharing of documents including forward looking ones with AFET. This is important to make interinstitutional cooperation as effective as possible. While the fast changing nature of foreign policy will sometimes make forward planning more difficult, I commit myself, when there is a need to react swiftly to unforeseen events and therefore, the decision to produce a specific communication or even to open a specific negotiation may be taken at short notice, to ensure that AFET is duly informed and that there is a dialogue to the fullest extent possible.

As regards information to the Parliament and the Council on planning international agreements as part of the annual programming exercise, in addition to my commitment to full compliance with Article 218(10) TFEU and the relevant case-law from the EU Court of Justice, I am prepared to look into enhancing early information on planning. I also commit myself and the services under my authority to continue the practice of informing, as early as possible, on the planning of ministerial meetings, human rights dialogues, and other important meetings.

**iii) Cooperation and information sharing, including in writing, with the Committee on Foreign Affairs as regards the negotiation of international agreements, notably through an immediate implementation of those parts of the text already pre-agreed upon in the framework of negotiations on Paragraph 40 of the inter-institutional agreement on "Better Law-Making" for those parts falling within VP/HR prerogatives; Commitment not to proceed with the provisional application of international agreements before Parliament has given its consent**

As stated in the answer to question 3, I commit to keeping the Parliament fully informed from the beginning of the negotiating process, after each negotiation round and up to the conclusion of all international agreements on all steps that fall within my prerogatives. These parts - "pre-agreed" in the framework of negotiations on paragraph 40 of the inter-institutional agreement on "Better Law-Making" - are fully compatible with the Framework Agreement and in line with current practice. .

In parallel, and insofar as this concerns broad framework agreements falling under my responsibility (such as Association Agreements or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements), I commit to instruct my services to take the following measures to ensure that the Parliament is kept fully informed, at all stages of the negotiations by:

- sharing with the Parliament all draft negotiating directives that are proposed to Council;
- regular briefings to the European Parliament before major events and at key stages on international negotiations;
- making available, either orally or in written form, to the European Parliament, information on substantive proposals to be shared with its negotiating partners during the negotiations, insofar as they are shared with Council;
- sharing with the European Parliament, the text of international agreements at the end of the negotiations, as initialed by the Chief Negotiators;

These measures should be subject to the appropriate modalities for ensuring the confidentiality of such information, notably where it is sensitive and/or classified.

As regards provisional application, the power as to whether and when to provisionally apply an agreement lies with the Council. This being said, I am ready, when proposing decisions to sign and provisionally apply politically important framework agreements that fall under my responsibility (such as Association Agreements or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements), to invite the Council to delay provisional application until the European Parliament has given its consent to the agreement. This should be without prejudice to well-justified cases of overriding practical or political urgency. In such cases, I would continue to insist on the importance of provisional application of the agreement immediately after its signature. As mentioned, it will be the Council's prerogative to decide. I would therefore consider it very important that the Council also engages into renewed practical arrangements in order to have a common understanding that is comprehensive and covers all steps and stages of the process. I therefore reiterate my encouragement to resume negotiations and my commitment to be fully engaged in working towards reaching an agreement between all institutional actors, building on the progress made so far.

**iv) The consultation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on EU foreign policy priorities and positions, notably ahead of meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council and of the publication of new or updated EU communications, strategies and mandates,**

Today's close relationship between the Parliament and the HR/VP is a positive development of the past decade. Hardly could we imagine during the 6<sup>th</sup> legislature, when I was a Member of this House, how deep and regular the dialogue between the Parliament and the HR/VP would be today. This is not a self-serving purpose but crucial to advance the EU's foreign policy objectives while ensuring accountability, allowing for political feedback and guidance and increasing the democratic legitimacy of our policies.

I commit to maintaining and, further intensifying as required the rich and continuous flow of information with the Parliament in full implementation of the 2010 Declaration by the High Representative on Political Accountability. If confirmed as Vice-President of the Commission, I will instruct services to be available for consultations, exchanges of view and briefings as well as to proactively seek the Parliament's view prior to the adoption of new communications, strategies and mandates. I commit to looking into ways of how to do this in a more systematic and coherent way, using the appropriate format among the existing

channels for dialogue – exchanges of views in AFET, Joint Consultation Meetings, the IIA 2002 Special Committee or where needed *ad hoc* meetings, depending on the sensitivity, confidentiality and urgency of the topics to be discussed.

I undertake to continue the current practice for that either I or my representative will be available to briefing AFET ahead of and on the results of the meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council. In case it is not possible to do so in the format of an AFET in camera meeting, the Chair of AFET will receive the information in writing, as per established practice.

**v) The assessment of how Parliament's views have been taken into account following the adoption of resolutions or the consultations referred to above,**

I firmly believe that a regular, comprehensive and substantive exchange of information and views is the best and only way to ensure that the views and positions of the European Parliament are properly taken into account in all phases of foreign policy conduct. I am committed to continue practices in this regard, in particular the regular exchanges between the relevant bodies of the European Parliament and myself and the services under my authority and to ensure their best and most efficient use.

**vi) The continuation of the transmission of political reporting from the EEAS to specific Parliament office holders and relevant staff members with improved modalities: in a swifter manner, covering a broader spectrum (flash notes, inclusion of delegations not yet covered, human rights country strategies) and avoiding both censorship and over-classification,**

The sharing of reports reflects my conviction that providing a broader base of common knowledge of external relations' developments will directly benefit our cooperation and dialogue on foreign policy issues. It is in this spirit that the practical arrangements between the EEAS and the European Parliament on the "sharing of specific political reports from certain EU Delegations with designated MEPs" were agreed upon in 2016.

I confirm my commitment to continue to fully implement the practical arrangements agreed between the EEAS and the European Parliament, and I will instruct the services under my authority accordingly. I am also open to explore ways of facilitating the exercise if and where useful. I will instruct the services under my authority to assess the current practice in order to advise me on what improvements can be made to increase the efficiency and quality of our information sharing, while fully ensuring security and confidentiality. It is in our mutual interest that information shared is of high quality and that it is shared in a swift manner and in full respect of the appropriate security and confidentiality rules, which is an indispensable prerequisite for the sharing of potentially sensitive information.

Also, as a former member of the European Parliament, I am fully aware of how important information is for you to be able to make informed decisions. I would therefore propose to make more use of the practice to request targeted briefings for Members of Parliament ahead of a visit abroad or in view of other foreign policy related events.

**vii) Regular exchanges of views (i) in Plenary, (ii) with Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and (iii) regular attendance of Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on CFSP/CSDP,**

I firmly believe that consulting the EP on the main aspects and basic choices of CFSP/CSDP, in line with Article 36 TEU, is of great mutual benefit for several reasons: it provides an opportunity for discussion, feedback and guidance, it ensures accountability of what we do and it increases the democratic legitimacy of our action and its visibility and communication to the citizens.

For this reason, I commit myself to a regular dialogue with you. The twice yearly Plenary debates to wind up the adoption of the European Parliament's annual reports on the implementation of CFSP and CSDP in accordance with Article 36 TEU, the yearly debate on Human Rights and democracy in the world as well as the frequent topical foreign policy debates held in Plenary without doubt constitute a cornerstone of our dialogue. However, in our mutual interest, I would like to focus on those existing channels for dialogue that allow us to have timely, frank and substantial debates, where we listen and respond to each other's concerns, such as exchanges of views in AFET, in the IIA 2002 ESDP Special Committee or in the Joint Consultation Meetings. Where useful, we could also call for ad hoc meetings in the appropriate format, inviting also Members from other Committees dealing with external relations.

I also intend to regularly attend, as much as possible, the Inter-Parliamentary Conferences (IPC) on CFSP/CSDP. In that respect, the practice of organising the IPC "back to back" with Gymnich-meetings has proven helpful. I also commit to engage with the rotating presidency of the Council to make sure the AFET Chair is invited to Gymnich meetings.

**viii) The cooperation, coordination and efficiency of democracy support activities between the EEAS, the Commission and Parliament - be it through inter-institutional mechanisms, access to information, follow-up and implementation of EP recommendations - especially as the European Parliament has a proven track record in the implementation of democracy support activities (particularly in the four key pillars of election observation, capacity-building for parliaments, mediation and dialogue, human rights actions);**

Supporting democracy across the world is a high priority for the EU today. On 14 October, the Foreign Affairs Council is planning to adopt new conclusions on democracy that reflect this priority. My sense, both from steering Parliament's work as its President and having helped to shape the Council's work as a Foreign Minister, is that this is an area where cooperation between institutions works well, perhaps because there is a large consensus on what needs to be done. It is not by accident that EU electoral observation has over the years become a model of good co-operation: it was already working well when I was co-Chair of the then called Election Coordination Group in my capacity as DEVE Chair. I will maintain this excellent model of cooperation.

Where I believe that we can cooperate better is in the work across the whole electoral cycle including the follow-up to observation but also in pre-electoral situations where the risks of electoral tensions and violence may be high. Here all the European actors are active: the EEAS is highly engaged in mediation and dialogue work, the Commission has a well-developed and important democracy support programme and the Parliament does much to foster inter-parliamentary dialogue through regular delegations as well as specific parliamentary exchanges and mediation operations in situations of potential or actual conflict. As mediation is a tool of first response in EU external action, building institutional capacity in mediation and dialogue will remain a top priority, ensuring that our delivery is up to par with the policy emphasis placed on mediation and dialogue in our external action. The European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2019 on building EU capacity on conflict prevention and

mediation (2018/2159(INI) provides a good basis for continuous strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation in the field of conflict prevention and mediation, and we are already delivering on its recommendations. In short, an EU high-level advisory board on mediation will be set up to enhance EU strategic capacity to engage through a pool of experienced senior mediation advisors, to make political and technical expertise available at short notice. A process of updating the 2009 concept on strengthening EU and mediation capacities has also been launched. I am committed to ensure that we can effectively respond to emerging mediation and dialogue needs. In this context, I appreciate the ongoing cooperation we have with the European Parliament, which has proved its mediation and dialogue capacity.

The integrated approach to external conflicts and crises constitutes a key feature in the Union's external action, and more coherent and holistic engagement of the EU in external conflicts and crises will continue to be vital not only for coherent approach between the European Commission, the High Representative and the European Parliament, but to ensure that our overall engagement has the intended impact. Conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation should play an increasing role in the framework of the EU's overall engagement in third countries. We each have our strengths, but more could be done is ensuring that our work in this area is more systematically co-ordinated in order to maximise our collective impact. So, for example, if we are pushing for electoral reform in our political dialogue with a country and working with Member States to maximise the impact of these messages, the Commission may in parallel be supporting the strengthening of electoral institutions and the Parliament may be planning to raise the issues in a forthcoming delegation visit. In these circumstances it is vital that we co-ordinate more so that these activities happen in a joined up way. The political messages need to be coherent and the cooperation support we provide also must support the objective of those political messages. It already happens in many cases, but we will need to work together to make it more systematic.

Last, but not least, I also want to strengthen the special partnership with the European Parliament on human rights. This priority cuts across all the strands of my work. Our partnership is already strong. Together we advance human rights across the world through concrete political action. For example, every year we engage together in the important Sakharov Prize. We also actively follow up on the human rights urgencies debated by the Parliament. Looking ahead, the new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy – which will run from 2020 to 2024 - is under preparation. Partnering with the Parliament, but also civil society and the private sector, is key to achieve results on the ground.

**ix) The fulfilment of the requests of the European Parliament in relation to EU Special Representatives, notably by presenting a strategic reflection document thereon, ensuring greater transparency on their work, introducing extensive cooling off periods and ensuring that their appointment is only confirmed after a positive evaluation by Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (Parliament's Recommendation on the scope and mandate for EUSRs, of 13 March 2019<sup>1</sup> ).**

I have taken good note of the EP Foreign Affairs Committee's recommendations as regards role, mandate, and cooperation with EU Special Representatives and its wish to engage with me, during the first six months of my mandate, on these questions. I stand ready to reflect and discuss with you how the recommendations can help us in the appointment and development

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<sup>1</sup> Texts Adopted, P8-TA-PROV(2019)0172

of the mandate of the EU Special Representatives, in full respect of the Council's role and prerogatives in the appointment and tasking of the EU Special Representatives.

The EU Special Representatives have proven their value repeatedly. They help the EU in providing strong engagement, particularly in diplomatic processes that require close follow-up. I intend to continue availing myself of this important tool in the pursuit of EU foreign policy objectives.

**5. How do you intend to improve the capacity of leverage and policy impact of the EU in its external action? In particular:**

**i) How do you intend to ensure, in line with Art 18.4 TEU and Art 9 of the Council Decision establishing the EEAS, the coordination, consistency and effectiveness of EU external action, including for the programming of EU external financing instruments?**

The Treaty confers upon the HR/VP, in his capacity as Vice-President, responsibility for external relations within the Commission and the coordination of other aspects of the Union's external action. This is essential to ensure the effectiveness of our international engagement. It is a Treaty requirement, but also a political imperative in today's world, that the EU external action is deployed and implemented in a comprehensive and coherent manner while promoting EU interests and values in our partnerships with third countries.

To this effect the coordination, consistency and effectiveness of EU external action will be a special focus of the new "Geopolitical Commission", as stressed by President-elect von der Leyen in her mission letters to the members of the College. This will notably translate into weekly updates on foreign policy (which I will provide) and systematic discussions on the Union's external action in the College, as well as in regular meetings of the Commissioners' Group for "A Stronger Europe in the World", which I will chair. I believe these will help the EU to make better use of our tools and instruments in order to promote our values and interests and enhance the impact of our external action in traditional areas such as trade, development, humanitarian affairs or neighbourhood and enlargement. This will also include ensuring we better link up with external aspects of our internal policies, ranging from industrial policy (in particular, but not only, in its defence industry aspects) to digital and Home affairs. I intend to engage actively within the College to ensure that we work jointly in identifying interests and goals, as well as the means and strategies to promote and pursue them in a holistic perspective. This is the key mandate given to me by President-elect von der Leyen. I also understand that this what the Council expects from me.

Consistency and effectiveness in the programming responds to this same logic and the proposed new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument will help us advance in this direction. This new streamlined instrument will be more coherent, responsive, and flexible. Fundamentally, it could be a game-changer to instil a more strategic approach to the EU's funding, and how it can be better leveraged in support of our policies, interests and values.

**ii) Looking at the future generation of external financing instruments (2021-2027), how do you intend to ensure improvements in the following areas:**

**- Genuine role of the European Parliament in the strategic steering of the instruments (NDICI, IPA III), including the use of delegated acts for the adoption of programming documents and other strategic decisions and Parliament's attendance of the Commission expert groups drafting delegated acts.**

**- Considering the future single external financing instrument NDICI (2021-2027), how do you intend to ensure its strategic use in order to contribute to the Union's wider foreign policy goals, in particular the effective coordination of actions and the coherence of the Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Development and Human Rights policies?**

**- Preservation of a strong support for the neighbourhood, including in case the current European Neighbourhood Instrument should be replaced by a single instrument for the external action of the EU (NDICI).**

**- Governance, including a proposal to establish a horizontal steering group potentially led by the VP/HR in order to ensure the overall political coordination of all external financing instruments.**

I firmly believe that consulting the EP on the main aspects and basic choices of the EU external action, in full respect of Article 36 TEU, is of great importance. It aims at ensuring accountability, political feedback and guidance, democratic legitimacy, visibility and better communication to the citizens. Reflecting this spirit, the inclusion of the European Development Fund in the budget of the EU was not only proposed to improve the coherence of our external action – it would also significantly increase the European Parliament's legislative, budgetary and scrutiny powers, a legitimate and longstanding request of your institution.

In the upcoming trilogues on the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), we will clearly have to further define the role of, inter alia, the European Parliament and the Council in the governance of the financing instruments, which should happen in full respect of the institutional prerogatives of each EU institution and should be organised in an effective way. Discussions so far have shown that all institutions agree on the main features a new instrument should deliver: more efficiency, consistency, coherence, and an ability to react to unforeseen circumstances. To guarantee this and at the same time ensure the appropriate involvement of the European Parliament, I will ensure, in cooperation with the Commissioners for International Partnerships and for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, that Commission services and EEAS continue to associate the co-legislators closely with the preparation of EU cooperation programmes.

I agree with the EP on the need for horizontal steer and coordination of EU external financing. In fact, the Commissioners' Group for "A Stronger Europe in the World" that I will chair can be one of the instruments to ensure such coordination. Indeed, as mandated in my Mission letter, I will have the responsibility to work together with all my relevant colleagues in the College to ensure that our external financing instruments are used strategically and contribute to enhancing Europe leadership and influence in the world. I will do so in conjunction with the wider work on ensuring the coordination and coherence of the Union's external action. For instance, international trade agreements are a powerful instrument in our relations with external partners, as they promote EU standards and priorities. Our development and human rights policies also allow us to extend our influence globally. By the same token, I will work closely with all relevant Commissioners, such as the Commissioner for International Partnerships, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, the Commissioner for Crisis Management, the Commissioner for Trade and the Commissioner for Internal Market, among others. Still in the spirit of internal-external coherence, I will also strive to engage actively in other Commissioner's Groups chaired by my fellow Vice-Presidents, e.g. on "A European Green Deal" or "A Europe Fit for the Digital Age".

As to the neighbourhood, the need to maintain a privileged relationship with all neighbouring countries in terms of security, resilience, prosperity and stability, is a clear priority. The 2015 Review of our cooperation framework with neighbourhood partners has been instrumental in

addressing EU's and partners' joint interests and common challenges. Therefore, I will continue to attach priority to the principles of joint ownership and differentiation to ensure that this framework remains relevant to each of our partners, at the same time securing EU's interests.

For the period 2021-27, in its proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, the Commission foresees a total earmarked allocation of 22 billion euros for the Neighbourhood East and South countries, which represents an increase of 24% compared to the current MFF and is a guaranteed floor that could only be increased. There could be no stronger safeguard and endorsement of our Neighbourhood policy, which has never benefited from so many resources, and which moreover could gain access to additional resources from the proposed "emerging challenges and priorities cushion". Core specificities of the special partnership with our Neighbours would also be preserved in that context, such as the strong focus on performance, while removing current artificial barriers among existing EU external financing instruments.

**iii) How do you intend to coordinate the work of all Commissioners for External Relations to better streamline the efforts of various Commission and EEAS structures in order to pursue a coherent EU foreign policy?**

I intend to play fully my role as Commission Vice-President and coordinate the European Union's external action to maximise our international leverage, protect our interests and promote our values. My work as Vice-President of the Commission will inform the exercise of my responsibilities as High Representative and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, and vice-versa, for example by making full use of the possibility to present joint communications with the Commission. I will of course ensure that the work done under these various responsibilities is fully consistent.

I will be fully involved in the work of the College, which will systematically discuss and decide on external action matters. To support this, all services and Cabinets will prepare the external aspects of College meetings on a weekly basis, mirroring the process already in place for interinstitutional relations, through a new collegial preparatory body, the Group for External Coordination ("EXCO"), which will be co-chaired by my Deputy Head of Cabinet and the President's Diplomatic Adviser.

I will also make the most out of the Commissioners' Group for "A Stronger Europe in the World" as a tool to that end. We need to have more strategic discussions amongst all the members of the Commission with external responsibilities, not only those responsible for external EU policies but also for internal policies with a strong external dimension, such as migration, digital, energy or climate. Moreover, I will steer our work linked to defence and ensure our efforts towards a genuine European Defence Union are coherent and consistent, working closely in particular with the Executive Vice-President for a Europe fit for the Digital Age as well as the Commissioner for Internal Market.

Close cooperation at services level between the Commission services and the EEAS will be absolutely key for an efficient formulation and execution of the EU's external action. Together with the President-elect, I will work to ensure that the Commission services and the EEAS work seamlessly together towards the fulfilment of the priorities of the new Commission and in line with decisions of the Council and guidance from the European Council. I will also have the privilege of leading the network of EU Delegations across the world, where EEAS and Commission officials work together under a single EU Ambassador.

**As regards connectivity: How should the necessary foreign policy measures be coordinated and how to make sure that there are sufficient financial means available for the strategy?**

The EU has identified the geo-economic importance of connectivity, among other policy areas, to advance EU interests, contribute to growth and boost employment at home. It is important for our external action across the board reinforcing the importance of sustainability and internationally agreed norms, including on climate, social, fiscal and economic sustainability. It also has security-related implications. In order to deliver this strategy, the EU needs strong coordination of the policies, actors and actions as part of the overall coordination of its external action. As addressing connectivity (digital, transport, energy and human dimensions) requires scale, a whole of EU approach is needed - including EU institutions, Member States and EU private sector.

We need to decide together what the EU's key strategic interests are, focus on them, mobilise and create the necessary environment for attracting private investment and use a new generation of instruments that can deliver more efficiently and rapidly in support of EU economic operators abroad.

The ongoing MFF negotiations will be a key to determine the European ambition when it comes to our foreign policy and will guide the further programming exercise.

**iv) To what extent do you intend to use the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty, allowing for qualified-majority voting decisions on CFSP in the Council (Art. 31.2 TEU)?**

Given the complex challenges today, EU foreign policy, and CFSP in particular, must be effective to advance the EU's strategic interests and its values. To be a global leader, the Union needs to be able to take decisions in a faster and more efficient way overcoming constraints in our decision-making that may hamper our foreign policy. EU external action can be undermined when there is a lack of unity within the EU and therefore Member States should abide by the principle of sincere cooperation enshrined in the Treaty. We need to be flexible and to act quickly and decisively. I will seek to use all means to achieve this goal, in particular those offered by the Lisbon Treaty in line with the Political Guidelines and the mission letters presented by President-elect von der Leyen.

**There is a need to look beyond the constraints imposed on EU foreign policy by the unanimity rule. What proposals do you envisage to allow certain decisions to be taken by qualified majority voting, particularly in matters relating to foreign and security policy, starting with the decisions related to human rights and civilian missions? What actions would you envision to convince countries to accept a change in the Treaties?**

In line with my mission letter, when putting forward proposals, I will seek to use the clauses in the Treaties that allow certain decisions on common foreign and security policy to be adopted by qualified majority voting. In this context, I intend to engage in an open discussion with the Council to ensure that we build the necessary confidence to explore making use of these clauses, including in the areas mentioned by the European Parliament. "Constructive abstention" is another pragmatic possibility offered by the Treaty to overcome constraints of unanimity voting.

In this context, I also want to mention the ongoing work in Council on reviewing modalities and working methods to ensure the effectiveness of CFSP and EU foreign policy more broadly. From increased information sharing, to effective communication and implementation

of EU common positions, we can strengthen the decision-making process in the Council, seeking above all to ensure the unity of the EU and therefore enhance its credibility and its influence.

Using and applying the possibilities provided for by the Treaty of Lisbon, together with improving the ways we implement foreign policy, will help ensuring Member States' ownership and unity, and the consistency and effectiveness of the EU's external action.

**v) During your mandate, will you start a review of the EEAS as an institution, including a revision of the Council Decision establishing it also in view of significantly strengthening the European character and esprit de corps of its diplomatic personnel, including a commitment to ensure gender parity in the appointments of high-level officials within the EEAS and EU Delegations, including the target of 50% women as heads of EU Delegation by 2024?**

The EEAS has undergone a substantive review process, as stipulated by the Council Decision of 2010, in 2013; and once again, on a smaller scale, in 2015. These reviews have guided a process of adjustment of structures, working methods and organisation, with the goal of making the EEAS better equipped, more efficient and able to fulfil the role given to it by the Treaty. This process is in fact a continuous one, and I see it as my responsibility to ensure that the EEAS is able to play its role in a fast-changing foreign policy context. While the formal review process has been concluded, we will continue to strive to improve the structures and working methods.

On the specific challenge of achieving gender parity, I share the views of the President-elect and will seek to ensure equal opportunities and diversity in EEAS. This is not only a question of credibility and equality of opportunity – but also better working methods: all research shows that organisations that foster diversity make better decisions and work more sustainably and productively. It is in everyone's interest that our organisation has a variety of staff taking account of all diversities.

In the EEAS, the overall numerical gender balance is close to equal but the qualitative gender composition remains imbalanced. The recommendations of an EEAS task force on equal opportunities are being implemented to accelerate progress towards sustainable gender balance at all levels and in all functions and job categories in the EEAS, including through the informal WEEAS-network which provides specific mentoring for women in management. We will also continue to encourage the participation of more women candidate from Member States diplomatic services.

**vi) The EU and the Member States have been under constant attack of disinformation and fake news coming from various sources influencing public opinion and in some cases threatening democratic processes in the EU. Where do you see the major threats and challenges for the EU in fighting disinformation? How do you plan to approach these issues? How do you see your role in strengthening EU cybersecurity?**

Disinformation – and the manipulation of our information spaces – is a threat to our democracies and to a free and informed global public debate. Hard evidence shows that foreign state actors – often in close cooperation with domestic actors - are increasingly deploying disinformation strategies to influence societal debates, create divisions and interfere in democratic decision-making, including in elections. Disinformation campaigns are often

part of hybrid challenges, involving cyber-attacks, targeting not only EU Member States but also our partners in the neighbourhood.

Countering disinformation and making our societies more resilient to foreign interference and manipulation is a common priority for EU institutions and Member States. This can be achieved only in a whole-of-society approach: in a coordinated effort of governments, civil society, researchers and fact-checkers, private sector (including online platforms) and media. At the same time, we need to fully safeguard the principle of freedom of expression. We need to find the right balance.

This is exactly the spirit of the comprehensive Action Plan against Disinformation adopted in 2018 and that provides guidance for our work in this area. There are a number of priority actions in this regard: We need to get better at detecting, analysing and exposing disinformation, no matter its origin and tactics employed. We need to enhance pooling and sharing of analyses and best practices via the Rapid Alert System, which connects all Member States and EU institutions within a single network managed by the EEAS. We should coordinate better our communications in response to disinformation incidents. We need to develop clear rules for digital platforms and industry in this field. This is what the Code of Practice already started implementing and where we need to reflect further. In any case, we need better transparency rules and better cooperation when it comes to access to data and the use of algorithms. All this is currently being evaluated. We also need to get better at raising awareness and empowering our citizens. This should be done by supporting quality journalism and independent media, building media literacy programmes, cross-border cooperation between media professionals, and media self-regulatory bodies.

The cyber diplomacy toolbox enables the EU and its Member States to leverage the full continuum of policies and instruments, including restrictive measures, to keep cyberspace open, stable and secure.

I intend to work very closely on these issues with the European Parliament and the Commission, in particular the Executive Vice-President for a Europe fit for the Digital Age, the Vice-President for Values and Transparency and the Commissioner for Internal Market. Last, but not least, our future efforts will also have to build on close cooperation with international partners, in particular with the Group of Seven (G7) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

**This issue has been a topic of report and recommendation by the European Parliament, both asking for concrete steps in several different spheres, including turning the Stratcom Task Force into a fully-fledged unit within the EEAS.**

The EEAS has been at the forefront of efforts to tackle disinformation with its activities to expose disinformation campaigns in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood as mandated by the European Council in 2015. Since the adoption of the Action Plan against Disinformation, the EEAS has significantly stepped up its role and activities and expanded the scope of this work. With the support of the European Parliament, we were able to strengthen the three existing Task Forces (East Stratcom Task Force; Western Balkans Task Force; Task Force South) both in terms of staffing and available budget. We have also created a team dealing with related issues, including data analysis capacity, staff working on outreach and awareness raising and on the relations with civil society and industry.

We have now a professional team with considerable expertise that is working very well in the current context. Obviously, I am ready to look at all organisational issues that may arise linked to the changes of its work. I attach a lot of importance to our work on countering disinformation.

**6. Your mission letter states that the EU “needs to be more strategic, more assertive and more united in its approach to external relations”. The 2016 EU Global Strategy sets out common principles and priorities for EU external action. Strategic autonomy is earmarked as crucial for the security of the Union and its ability to promote peace and security worldwide. What concrete measures do you intend to take in order to achieve (or develop) the EU strategic autonomy in the area of security and defense and, in this context, do you plan to define a strategic document to identify our common objectives?**

In the area of security and defence, the aim is to enable the EU and its Member States to take more responsibility for their own security, with partners wherever possible and alone when necessary, in the pursuit of EU values and interests. This drives the EU's Level of Ambition in security and defence, as derived by the Council from the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in November 2016, which sets out three strategic priorities to guide our work: responding more effectively to external conflicts and crises, building the capacities of partners and better protecting the Union and its citizens.

The different actions that have been launched over the last few years in this framework need to be fully implemented in a coherent and delivery-oriented manner. I will attach particular importance to ensuring that the work carried out within the EEAS and the European Defence Agency is conducted in close coordination and synergy with the Commission services, in particular with the future Directorate General for Defence Industry and Space. Let me underline that the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) will enhance the Union's ability to tackle security threats more effectively. It will allow a deepened cooperation from investment and capability development to the joint operational use of those capabilities, in complementarity with NATO, thereby reinforcing the transatlantic alliance and contributing to burden-sharing, as well as strengthening the competitiveness of the EU's defence industrial and technological base.

From the outset, this encompasses a very strong partnership dimension as the EU remains fully committed to working closely with its partners, and in particular with NATO, with which cooperation is developing at an unprecedented pace, based on the Joint Declarations. The shared objective of both organisations is to ensure the security of our citizens and to strengthen the Trans-Atlantic bond. Article 5 of North Atlantic Treaty is the cornerstone for collective defence for NATO Allies as explicitly recognised in the EU Treaty. The two organisations play complementary roles in providing security in Europe, the EU's broad toolbox complements NATO's core tasks. A stronger EU defence dimension makes NATO stronger. I will remain committed to further strengthen EU-NATO cooperation.

In addition, I will make sure that a special effort is made to deliver on crosscutting initiatives to strengthen and improve the EU's integrated approach on external conflicts and crises, the civilian and military dimensions of the Common Security and Defence Policy, enhancing military mobility across the EU, resilience and countering hybrid threats, cyber and maritime security, situational awareness, etc. I also intend to focus on the adoption of the European Peace Facility proposal, which aims at providing the EU with an off-budget fund to finance all Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) operational actions having military or defence implications. This proposal really provides for a step-change in EU efforts on operational military/defence activities and it counts with the Commission support in line with Article 30.1 TEU.

There is scope to further strengthen a coherent strategic approach to connect the different actions, including by identifying synergies and linkages between them, while further

operationalising the EU's Level of Ambition to which they aim to contribute. I am convinced that this would also help to foster a common strategic culture by promoting a shared understanding of common security challenges and the EU's response to them, including through our CSDP missions and operations as part of a stronger integrated approach to external conflicts and crises. Working closely with the Member States, this work will help charter our way towards a European Defence Union, as called for by the Parliament and set out in the political guidelines by the President-elect and will allow the EU to be more assertive on the international stage as called for by the European Council in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

**7. Article 21 of TEU foresees the obligation for the EU to ensure the consistency of the EU's human rights policy with all other external policies. Which concrete measures do you intend to take to ensure that human rights remain a strategic objective in all policies and are not overshadowed by, inter alia, economic, migration and security priorities of EU external action? In institutional terms, how do you intend to coordinate effectively the action of all Commissioners for external policies to achieve this strategic goal?**

It is today more important than ever for the European Union to play a central role in promoting and protecting human rights in the world. Human rights are not a subset of our external policies; they are an integral part of all our policies, whether it is migration, security or trade, among others. For example, all our agreements with third countries contain provisions on the respect for human rights as an essential element for the bilateral relationship. Violations of such clauses can lead to the suspension of the agreements with the country concerned. Moreover, our bilateral trade agreements include provisions on respect of economic and social rights. Countries that benefit from EU trade preferences have to comply with human rights and labour rights conventions. Our CSDP missions are required to uphold the highest standard on human rights and receive a dedicated human rights training before deployment. The EU is committed to a human rights based migration policy where the highest standards of international human rights law are upheld and where human dignity of migrants is ensured. This is why I will build on our current work with countries of origin, transit and destination, international and regional organisations and civil society to improve protection of migrants and their perspectives for a better future. In our dialogues with partners across the world, I will raise the need to defend the best interest of children, foster gender-sensitive approaches to migration, to fight discrimination and xenophobia against migrants and ensure their access to basic services.

The EU has been vocal on country situations where human rights are being violated and abuses persist, and I will not shy away from the responsibility I have towards those who are suffering, those who ask to be protected and to be treated with dignity. The universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the respect of human dignity, are among the key founding principles of the European Union. We have a duty to uphold and promote these rights and fundamental freedoms both towards our citizens and towards the citizens of the world to enhance our efforts.

If confirmed as Vice-President of the Commission, I would have a mandate to ensure that the EU external action is strategic and coherent. I would also have a mandate to protect and promote human rights, which I will do bilaterally and in multilateral fora with the support of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights. I will ensure that human rights are regularly discussed in the Commissioners' Group for "A Stronger Europe in the World" as a cross cutting issue and remain an integral component of our overall approach to partner countries. In doing this, I will ensure a better link between our internal and external aspects of our

policies. I also intend to strengthen the special partnership with the European Parliament on human rights. In implementing the Action plan on Human Rights and democracy and the EU Human Rights Guidelines, I will also ask my service to continue to effectively integrate human rights in all policies towards partner countries, as well as in bilateral dialogues on political, economic or security matters.