

# Commitments made at the hearing of

## **MARGARITIS SCHINAS**

### Vice-President-designate

### Promoting the European Way of Life



The Vice-President-designate, Margaritis Schinas, appeared before the European Parliament on 03 October 2019 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committees on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, on Culture and Education, and on Employment and Social Affairs. During the hearing, he made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to his portfolio, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to him by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, including:

- Skills, education and integration;
- Finding common ground on migration; and
- Security Union.

Please note that the quotes included in this document only make reference to oral commitments made during the [hearing](#). The [verbatim report](#) of the public hearing is available on the [Commissioners-designate hearings website](#). The Vice-President-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which he provided [written answers](#).



## Skills, education and integration

### Union of equality and diversity

"My job will be to ensure we pool expertise across policy areas, with a focus on people and concrete outcomes."

"I think cultural expression and freedom are part of what it means to be European [...]. Together with Mariya Gabriel and our services, I'll be very happy to look at cases or matters [of censorship and artistic repression] that come under our remit, because it would be interesting for us to know what's going on and what we can do to help."

### Culture and sport / European Solidarity Corps and Discover EU

"I agree with the many opinions expressed that, in DiscoverEU and the European Solidarity Corps, people who participate should not only travel. They should bring back some experience, they should be exposed to some sort of skills and they should bring back some knowledge to the wider society and I am willing to work on that."

"There is no doubt that there is an element of youth participation that revolutionises the way we look at climate and the environment [...]. So, through our youth programmes (European Solidarity Corps, DiscoverEU), I will try to do as much as I can to promote the sustainability drive involving our youth."

"We must not forget one of Europe's treasures: our cultural heritage that we must continue to invest in and promote inside and outside our borders".

"I want to exploit fully the synergies between Mariya Gabriel and her work on sport and Stella Kyriakides on healthy lifestyles [...]. Grassroots contributions that we can make in sport [...] is where we should put our money and this is where we should help."

### Education / European Education Area

"We will work to make the European Education Area a reality and incentivise Member States to reform and modernise their education and training systems, including in digital learning. I will ensure we use the Erasmus+, the DiscoverEU and the European Solidarity Corps programmes to empower our youth and offer new mobility opportunities."

"We need to create this European education area by 2025. This is our main priority. To get there, we need to be able to address all levels of education from schools to universities. We need to create a European student card. We need to build on the European university

alliances that we started already. We need to value teachers."

"The Erasmus+ fund [...] is one of the most successful programmes in EU history and we fully support your idea to triple the resources attributed to it [...]. There are some aspects in Erasmus+ that stop some people participating because of lack of resources or for whatever reason [...]. I am going to discuss this with my colleague Mr Schmit [...] to see whether we can find the funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to enable those young people to also take part in Erasmus+."

"To help ensure that no child is left behind, we shall introduce a European Child Guarantee to ensure children at risk of poverty or exclusion have access to most basic rights like healthcare and education."

"I pledge that you will see me a lot on the ground [...] at training centres, at schools, at universities."

### Identification of skills shortages and reskilling

"In terms of skills, I think we have to do two things at the same time. First [...], we need to keep investing in skills for the job market and to fight inequality. [...] But there is something else which is skills-related, and where we have to do more. This is the question of soft skills that relate to inclusion: not skills that necessarily lead you to the job market but skills that can lead you to better inclusion into the society around you. Talking to others, doing sport, visiting museums, engaging in civil society activities. We are determined, with the help of Mariya Gabriel and Nicolas Schmit, to address both these strands of work: by law, because already we have legislation on that; by our instruments; by the ESF, Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and DiscoverEU."

"There are two things to do [...]: first, 'upskilling' is how we make sure that parts of our society that are practically cut out of certain skills can be brought to a level that can benefit from digital technology [...]. This is the work that we can do on the social strand of the portfolio. The other part is bridging the skills gap. This is: what can we do to face up to the fact that we will be needing in the next year 250,000 skilled workers in digital [...]. And that's where legal migration comes in, that's where positive intervention through what Mariya Gabriel described to you – the Digital Education Action Plan – through how we use our educational stream in the European education area to produce these skills that we lack."

"So, to accompany lifelong learning is a priority. We have to do it through a comprehensive set of instruments, the New Skills Agenda, Erasmus+ and the ESF. There we have to very clearly help Member States identify the specific needs for lifelong learning [...]. I continue to pledge that we have to start bottom-up."

We have to go to the Member States, identify needs and then match with policies and instruments from the EU.”

“Traineeships simply cannot be seen as an opportunity to get young people into work but in insecure conditions and distorting the concept of training. So traineeships only make sense if they are for a limited period of time which is precisely set out in terms of what skills and learning is involved. And I think it is very important also to talk about pay. And if these conditions are not met, then traineeships are no longer traineeships. So I think that the Commission will continue working on this with Nicolas Schmit, so that it becomes a universal principle for this kind of work.”

“I’m not happy that many of the issues we discussed, like lifelong learning, like youth unemployment, like skills, like upskilling, are scattered around the Commission. So we need – and that’s, I think, my role, together with the Commissioner for jobs, together with the Commissioner for culture, education, youth and sport, together with the Commissioner for equality, together with the Commissioner for health – to bring all this together”.

### **Improving the integration of migrants and refugees**

“I intend to revisit the 2016 Action Plan on integration of migrants and refugees. [...] I was glad to see that the longer-term integration of migrants and refugees will be incorporated under the new European Social Fund Plus. This will allow us to have more tools and more resources to support inclusion initiatives.”

“There is scope to review our long-term labour resident legislation [...] which clearly needs a review. And there is a review scheduled. [...] I am very willing to consider a legislative amendment of the long-term resident legislation precisely to address any obstacles so that legally residing people can have a chance to benefit from labour mobility across the EU. ”

## **Finding common ground on migration**

### **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**

“Delivering the New Pact on Migration and Asylum [...] is a tall order, but one I believe we can achieve by mobilising our strengths and learning from the past. This new pact must be cross-cutting and marry internal and external policies. When it comes to the reform of our Common European Asylum System, the first thing we will do, together with the Commissioner for Home Affairs, is engage in a dialogue with you and our Member States. [...] We will present you quickly with options that we would like to discuss and find consensus on, but only then will we be putting something formally on the table..”

“I think that we have to start keeping our emphasis on the reform of Dublin and the corresponding procedures but to unblock the situation, bring in all the other elements that combine the full picture: returns, new readmission agreements and arrangements, Schengen, borders[...]. We have to maintain the progress we have achieved in the five legislative texts you have worked very well in the European Parliament. [...] Secondly, we have to concentrate on the two texts that are missing: the Dublin one and the Procedures one. [...] To get around the impasse that exists in the Member States that are blocking this we have to be able to come with the new elements [...]. First of all, returns and readmission arrangements [...]. Then we have to review the Schengen proposal because internal freedom is linked to the way we protect our borders.”

“Our intention with the relevant Commissioner-designate is [...] by the end of this year to unveil a scoping paper [...] which will set out the main issues that have to be addressed [...]. And then [...] we will be able to create this new impetus with the support of whole college of Commissioners and the President-elect at the beginning of the next year.”

“As a stop-gap, [...] until a new truly asylum system comes into force, we need to support Member States in including temporary arrangements on disembarkation. For me, part of this must include pursuing a proper dialogue with the many NGOs doing commendable search and rescue work in the Mediterranean.”

“All proposals and initiatives of the new pact will be done with the aim – a parallel aim – of lifting internal border controls and returning to a fully-functioning Schengen area. ”

“I will lead a renewed drive to set up returns of those with no right to stay: firstly by completing the reform of our EU internal rules on return, and secondly by concluding readmission agreements and arrangements with priority countries of transit and origin. ”

### **Creating pathways to legal migration**

“So moving and doing something meaningful on legal migration is not something that depends on fighting illegal migration. It’s something that we have to organise properly, positively. [...] These pilot projects that allow some of our Member States, with our help, to start engaging in some sort of legal migration skills – this is a good start. We need to do more along these lines. Then, I’m new to this, but I’m very happy to review our Blue Card proposal. Let’s see what went wrong there[...] we have to continue these humanitarian corridors combined with resettlement, because this is another orderly way to bring in people legally.”

“Building on pilot projects on legal migration, which are under way, I will promote modern and targeted legal migration schemes that respond to the needs of the EU

economy, labour market and demographic challenges, and we will ensure that humanitarian corridors are set up along the model of the emergency transit mechanisms to Niger and now also Rwanda.”

### Coherence of the external and internal dimensions of migration

“One of my priorities would be, together with Jutta Urpilainen [...] to start, early on in the mandate, a new wave of readmission agreements with countries of transit and origin.”

“It is very important to talk first [...] with third countries. [...] We have to look for [...] global agreements, win-win solutions. And in these agreements we have to look at the root cause of the problem and address that. We also have to look at the development needs of these countries. We have to look at the opportunities that exist for young people to live at home and have a decent life [...]. That is my ambition and that is what we have talked about with Ylva Johansson.”

“It is true that EU-Turkey Joint Statement was delivering results until recently [...] It is also true that some aspects of the agreement were left hanging in the air [...]. I think that we have to revisit the agreement, to refresh it [...] We are going to discuss this with the Turkish government [...]. Greece will not be left alone to manage migratory flows, we cannot leave Greece on its own [...]. I hope that in the next weeks we will be able to take a fresh look at the EU-Turkey agreement in a positive way.”

## Security Union

### European Security Union

“This is the same Union that sets world standards on data protection and privacy, and [...] my role is also to ensure that whatever we do in security respects fundamental rights. The respect of fundamental rights needs to be designed into policies from the start. This

will also guide my work in implementing the interoperability proposals, which will be particularly important as we move to launch our new information systems.”

### Better link Commission's work on internal and external security

“This work on data retention now is something that will continue within the Commission. We will continue evaluating the situation after the ECJ decisions, but I also understand that there are many other court cases which are pending. I discussed with the services and I understood that they would feel safer if they allow for these pending cases also to conclude before we decide on the next steps.”

### Enhance EU's stability to prevent, detect and respond to hybrid threats

“I will place a relentless emphasis on implementation of what we have collectively agreed. I will promote a coordinated approach to protecting Europeans online, through the adoption of our Terrorist Online Content proposal, by inputting the Digital Services Act to come and by investing in the work of the EU Internet Forum. I will use any possibility I have to build the EU's resilience and response to hybrid threats, which threaten our systems and our very democracies.”

“I think that would be more for me – is to make sure that when the Digital Services Act is produced [...], that this is the moment where clearly we must find the right balance between policy, security and guarantee. [...] I think that we can sufficiently address these concerns by this assurance that our security policy should be driven by fundamental rights [...] And fundamental rights should not be seen [...] as an impact assessment that we have to do at some point at the end. [...] It has to be done when we decide policy from the very start.”

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Manuscript completed: as of October 2019; Date of publication: November 2019

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Print ISBN 978-92-846-5566-3 | doi:10.2861/4852 | QA-02-19-785-EN-C

PDF ISBN 978-92-846-5565-6 | doi:10.2861/79 | QA-02-19-785-EN-N