

Teresa Ribera Rodríguez

Executive Vice-President: Clean, Just and Competitive Transition

Confirmation hearing due to be held on Tuesday 12 November, at 18.30.

European Parliament committees responsible: Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)

Teresa Ribera Rodríguez has held senior posts in the Spanish government since 2018, most recently serving as third vice-president of the government and minister for ecological transition and demographic challenge (2021-2024), fourth vice-president of the government and minister for ecological transition and demographic challenge (2020-2021) and minister for ecological transition (2018-2020).

Since 2000, Ribera Rodríguez has been involved in the international climate negotiations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. From 2013 to 2014, she was advisor on energy and climate programme at the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, and in 2019, she was responsible for organising the UNFCCC COP25 in Madrid.

Member of the Spanish parliament, representing the Socialist party, since 2019, Ribera was state secretary for climate change and biodiversity in a previous government from 2008 to 2011.

Born in 1969 in Madrid, Ribera Rodríguez holds a law degree from Madrid's Complutense University and a diploma in constitutional law and political science from the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies.



Teresa Ribera Rodríguez, Spain.

IN THIS BRIEFING

- Fundamentals of the portfolio
- Priority issues for the vice-president
- Main projects
- Parliament's priorities
- Executive responsibilities
- Priorities and challenges
- European Parliament
- Recent developments

This is one of a set of briefings designed to give an overview of issues of interest relating to the portfolios of the Commissioners-designate. All these briefings can be found at: https://epthinktank.eu/commissioner_hearings_2024.



Fundamentals of the portfolio

Ribera Rodríguez's role, as set out in the [political guidelines](#) of the European Commission President-elect and the relevant [mission letter](#), will be to oversee the European Union's clean and competitive transition in a socially fair way. The transition will involve measures to fight climate change, including accelerating decarbonisation, making the EU economy more circular, boosting the EU's flagging competitiveness, stepping up innovation, and ensuring that taxation supports social justness, in particular through the [Social Climate Fund](#) and the [Just Transition Fund](#).

Together with the Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Policy, Ribera Rodríguez is tasked with working on the [clean industrial deal](#) to unlock investment, create lead markets for clean technology and put conditions in place for companies to grow and compete.

While strengthening the implementation of the existing legal framework to reach the EU's 2030 [targets](#), the Vice-President is to prepare a longer-term architecture to enable the EU to reach its 2050 target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions. The [European Climate Law](#) requires the Commission to propose [emissions reduction targets for 2040](#). Earlier this year, the Commission published a [communication](#) and an [impact assessment](#) on the issue; a 90 % reduction target is one of a number of options.

Ribera Rodríguez's role will include overseeing [competition policy](#), which requires non-discrimination and equal treatment for companies, and developing a new State aid framework to speed up the roll-out of renewable energy and deployment of industrial decarbonisation and increase clean tech manufacturing capacities. She will have to review the [Horizontal Merger Control Guidelines](#), simplify State aid rules and focus on the challenges facing small and medium-sized companies, notably to avert the risk of 'killer acquisitions'.

The vice-president's guidance will be required in efforts to lower energy prices and overcome dependencies on fossil fuels, as well as in addressing [energy poverty](#) to combat the [housing crisis](#).

The position involves supporting the implementation of the future [European competitiveness fund](#) and collaborating with Member States on [important projects of common European interest](#). She will also be responsible for enforcing the [Foreign Subsidies Regulation](#) and the [Digital Markets Act](#).

Priority issues for the vice-president

The overarching priority of the Executive Vice-President is to steer the Commission's work on the EU's clean, just and competitive transition by implementing and drafting new initiatives on competition policy and guiding other commissioners in their efforts to tackle climate change, strengthen European industry and ensure that the changes support social fairness.

Important consideration will be given to revamping competition policy to help EU companies rise more effectively to the challenge of growing global competition. The tasks are in line with the recent [report](#) by Mario Draghi, former Italian prime minister and ex-President of the ECB, which states that without a policy shift, EU firms will struggle on the global market.

In its [Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029](#), the European Council has called for investment, both public and private, to boost EU sovereignty and make the EU a technological and industrial powerhouse.

Work will continue on the Commission's [2040 climate targets](#), which provide an interim goal in the pursuit of climate neutrality by 2050 as well as offering Member States predictability for the deployment of the best available, most cost effective and scalable technologies. One policy option explored in the Commission's [impact assessment](#) is to reduce the EU's net greenhouse gas emissions by 90 % compared with 1990 levels. The EU's other [binding targets](#) are to cut net greenhouse gas emissions by 55 % by 2030, compared with 1990, and to zero by 2050.

To alleviate the impact of the transitions on vulnerable groups, the approved Social Climate Fund is to provide a maximum of €65 billion from 2026 to 2032 to support building renovation, and access to affordable energy-efficient housing, electrification, and zero- and low-emission vehicles.

The fund will help to address the EU's energy poverty problem. The Social Climate Fund Regulation defines energy poverty as 'a household's lack of access to essential energy services that provide basic levels and decent standards of living and health, including adequate heating, hot water, cooling, lighting, and energy to power appliances, in the relevant national context, existing social policy and other relevant policies, caused by a combination of factors, including but not limited to non-affordability, insufficient disposable income, high energy expenditure and poor energy efficiency of homes'. According to [Eurostat](#) figures, in 2022 over 41 million people in the EU, 9.3 % of the population, were unable to keep their homes adequately warm. The Social Climate Fund is intended to help to mitigate the impact of extending the [emissions trading system](#) to fuels for road transport and buildings.

The [Just Transition Mechanism](#), which is to mobilise €55 billion between 2021 and 2027, is another, shorter-term tool to alleviate the impact of the clean and competitive transitions by means of investment in those EU regions that are dependent on fossil fuels, including coal mining regions. The issue of fairness is also addressed by the [InvestEU](#) and [public loan facility](#) schemes.

The competitive transition will demand significant financial investment, estimated by the Draghi report at €750–800 billion per year in additional spending, to secure the necessary leap forward in EU [competitiveness](#). The EU is facing a trade-off situation. Increasing reliance on China may be the cheapest route to meeting EU decarbonisation targets, but it is seen as a threat to its clean tech and automotive industries from China's state-sponsored competition regime. According to Draghi, the EU has a static industrial structure dominated by the same companies and technologies as decades ago.

A new State aid framework will be needed to facilitate industrial growth, simplify State aid rules, and take care of small and medium-sized enterprises. Other primary issues include the future European Competitiveness Fund, a review of merger rules and further development of important projects of common European interest (IPCEIs), which bring together knowledge, financial resources and economic actors throughout the EU.

Main projects

In her mission letter, von der Leyen asks Ribera Rodríguez to coordinate EU efforts to ascertain that its green and industrial transitions boost [competitiveness](#) in a socially fair way as part of the [European Green Deal](#). Improving innovation, especially in the digital sector, will be pivotal if EU companies are to improve their international presence, at a time when the Union's [economic growth rates](#) have been lower than those of the United States in most years since 2005. Rapid enforcement of the [Digital Markets Act](#) is also among the vice-president's tasks.

The mission letter states that the EU needs a new State aid framework to speed up the roll-out of renewable energy and ensure sufficient clean tech capacity, while maintaining strong control over State aid, to address market failures and inefficiencies in public spending. In her political guidelines, the Commission President-elect spoke of the need for a new approach to competition policy that would be supportive of companies hoping to scale up on global markets. Enforcing the [Foreign Subsidy Regulation](#) is also important, as is mapping the most problematic practices that could lead to competition distortion.

The new State aid framework will form part of the clean industrial deal. In her [address](#) to the European Parliament in July 2024, von der Leyen stated the deal would seek to channel investment in infrastructure and industry, in particular for energy-intensive sectors. It is one of the initiatives that is to be proposed during the first 100 days of the new Commission's term.

Ribera Rodríguez will also have to focus on the challenges facing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in particular to address the risk of killer acquisitions from foreign companies seeking to eliminate them as a possible source of future competition.

Ribera Rodríguez's work on strengthening the IPCEI programme involving cross-border projects should focus on strategic sectors and technologies, and seek to secure maximum possible involvement of SMEs. The EU has [approved](#) State aid for IPCEIs worth more than €91 billion since 2018. There are currently 10 such projects under way, involving 22 Member States, in the areas of the [battery](#), [hydrogen](#), [health](#) and [microelectronics](#) value chains, [cloud edge computing](#) and the [Fehmarn Belt fixed rail-road link](#).

The mission letter also asks Ribera Rodríguez to review the [horizontal merger control guidelines](#) to improve the EU's resilience, efficiency, innovation and investment intensity in strategic areas. The term 'horizontal merger' means the joining-up of companies operating in the same industry and at the same stage of the production or distribution process. The Draghi report, which the European Commission requested to help it steer future policies, states that the EU needs bigger and more efficient companies, especially in strategic sectors, such as defence, energy, banking and digital.

Ribera Rodríguez will be required to implement a future European competitiveness fund and make sure that it is coherent with State aid policy. In her [political guidelines](#), the President-elect promised to propose the fund as part of the EU's 'new and reinforced budget in the next multiannual financial framework'. The mission letter states that Ribera Rodríguez should help in the work on a simpler, more focused and responsive long-term budget.

The vice-president will also have responsibility for steering work on EU investment and financing for a just and social transition, notably through the Social Climate Fund and the Just Transition Fund. In line with this task, Ribera Rodríguez's responsibility for revising the State aid rules will have to take into account the need to improve [energy efficiency](#) and [social housing](#). This should serve to address energy poverty, to ensure that vulnerable consumers have access to essential energy services and products.

Working with Commissioners

Stéphane Séjourné (Vice-President): Prosperity and Industrial Policy

Wopke Hoekstra: Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth

Dan Jørgensen: Energy and Housing

Jessika Roswall: Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy

Valdis Dombrovskis: Economy and Productivity

Piotr Serafin: Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration

Parliament's priorities

In a January 2024 [resolution](#) on competition policy, the European Parliament stressed the need to ensure that competition policy preserves the level playing field on the EU's internal market. It highlighted the threats to the market posed by allowing rich Member States to subsidise their companies more than poorer countries. Parliament also called on the EU to remain vigilant regarding the conduct of the big tech players, mainly from the US, that dominate the EU market in most areas.

In a February 2023 [resolution](#) on an EU strategy to boost industrial competitiveness, trade and quality jobs, Parliament called for the establishment of a [European sovereignty fund](#) to be [put in place](#) to invest in the areas now supported mainly by national State aid. It argued that the green transition needed to contribute to the deepening of the single market, help secure EU leadership in clean energy technologies, improve Europe's existing industrial base and produce high quality jobs. Parliament urged the Commission to take a stronger stance on tackling the unfair global competition caused by unjustified State aid. MEPs expressed concern for instance about the subsidy-laden US

[Inflation Reduction Act](#), which they said discriminated against EU companies. In the same resolution, Parliament advocated flexibility in State aid rules in order to accelerate green and industrial transformations.

On the IPCEIs, in the same resolution, Members expressed concern at the lengthy processing times for their approval by the Commission. They also called for faster and more transparent permitting for strategic European projects. MEPs also called for measures to support re-industrialisation and prevent the de-industrialisation of vulnerable regions, for instance by means of strategic inter-regional investment projects and development plans.

Members have also stressed the importance of developing the circular economy. In their February 2021 [resolution](#) on the new circular economy action plan, they endorsed the ambition of establishing a well-functioning EU market for high-quality, non-toxic secondary raw materials. They called on the Commission to look into measures to make secondary raw materials more competitive.

In its legislative work on the revision of the Energy Efficiency Directive, Parliament [advocated](#) more stringent energy consumption targets. Its 2021 [resolution](#) on a European strategy for energy system integration meanwhile noted the need to enhance the EU's power grid infrastructure. In a 2020 [resolution](#) on energy storage, Members argued that the EU should also focus on the under-used potential of the market. It also stated that the EU urgently [needed](#) to accelerate deployment of renewables so that they are not held back by red tape, or under-development of grid and storage infrastructure.

In April 2022, shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Parliament [supported](#) a ban on imports of Russian gas.

In its September 2022 [resolution](#) on the Eighth Cohesion Report, Parliament addressed energy poverty, in the context of rising energy prices and the need for cheaper social housing and accelerated housing renovation.

In its October 2022 [resolution](#) on the EU's response to rising energy prices in Europe, Parliament stressed the need to keep energy affordable. This chimed with its December 2020 [resolution](#) on a 'strong social Europe for just transitions', which called for a strong agenda for a social Europe to focus on protecting everyone, especially the most vulnerable, and on making economic growth inclusive and socially just. In that resolution, Members called for green and socially just transitions to enable the EU to decarbonise its economy, make it more competitive to create jobs and make it more relevant on global markets.

Executive responsibilities

The vice-president has executive powers in the area of [competition](#), ensuring the correct application of EU competition rules. This mainly involves monitoring and, where necessary, investigating anticompetitive agreements, cartels, price fixing, abuses by companies of dominant market positions, mergers and acquisitions and government support.

To do this, the Commission has a wide range of inspection and enforcement powers, for example to investigate businesses, hold hearings and grant exemptions. Governments have a duty to notify the European Commission in advance of any planned State aid for business.

The objective of merger control is to examine whether proposed mergers will have harmful effects on competition. If it is considered that a merger will not harm competition, it is approved unconditionally. Conversely, if a merger would harm competition, suitable commitments can be proposed by the merging firms to remove the harm.

State aid is prohibited by the Treaty unless justified by the need for general economic development. The European Commission is in charge of ensuring that State aid complies with EU rules and exemptions are applied equally across the European Union.

In 2023, the [Foreign Subsidies Regulation](#) started to apply. The new rules enable the Commissioner to address distortions caused by foreign subsidies and allows the EU to ensure a level playing field for all companies operating in the single market, while remaining open to trade and investment.

Since 2004, some of the Commission's enforcement functions have been undertaken by Member States within the 'modernisation' process ([Regulation 1/2003](#)). This allows national competition authorities (NCAs) to apply and enforce competition in smaller cases. Those authorities function as part of the [European Competition Network](#). The [EU Merger Working Group](#) was set up in 2010 to foster increased consistency and cooperation among EU merger jurisdictions. It consists of representatives of the European Commission and of EU and European Economic Area NCAs.

Priorities and challenges

Expectations/public opinion

Responding to a 2022 [Eurobarometer survey](#), 83 % of participants agreed that competition gives consumers more choice, and 82 % considered that it encourages innovation and economic growth.

In the [2023 Eurobarometer on climate change](#) 93 % of participants viewed climate change as a serious problem. In the same survey, 85 % of participants agreed that the EU should boost the manufacturing of clean energy and 79 % thought that EU measures should seek to reduce energy consumption. Still on the subject of energy, 86 % of survey participants supported gas storage as a way to avoid the risk of shortages.

Arguably the greatest challenge for Ribera Rodríguez will be to balance [climate objectives](#) with [social fairness](#) and industrial competitiveness. Achieving the EU climate goal will require massive investment, while high spending will also be needed if the EU is to maintain citizens' living standards and equip industry to boost its competitiveness and innovation. Many of the EU's priorities and challenges are highlighted in the EPRS paper: [Increasing European added value in an age of global challenges: Mapping the cost of non-Europe](#).

The Draghi report estimates that €750–800 billion in additional investment will be required annually to achieve the twin digital and green transitions. EU companies spent approximately €270 billion less on research and development than their US counterparts in 2021, largely because they are less dynamic and rely on technologies often developed decades ago.

In the area of competition, priorities will involve striking the right balance between allowing EU companies to scale up to boost their ability to compete globally and ensuring a level playing-field in the EU's single market at a time when it is supposed to undergo deepening, decarbonisation and digitalisation as well to see its strategic sovereignty increased.

Part of the discussion over the future of State aid is whether the EU should take a more global perspective when assessing its State aid rules. According to a joint [statement](#) made in April 2024, France, Germany and Italy are convinced that a new approach in competition policy is needed for big enterprises to compete globally. The outgoing EU Competition Commissioner, Margarethe Vestager, voiced [concern](#), however, that any significant departure from strict EU competition rules could fragment the single market.

In 2022, France and Germany [granted](#) their companies €73.7 billion and €45 billion respectively in State aid, accounting for more than a half of the EU's €228 billion combined national State aid spending. Part of the discussion over EU State aid is linked to concern that other countries offer incentives for European companies to relocate. China meanwhile looks set to continue its protectionist economic policy, providing arguments for advocates of increased public support for EU companies. Chinese subsidies on [electric vehicles](#) are a case in point.

Another key issue will be to include innovation in the Commission's toolbox for assessing mergers and State aid, in particular to ward off killer acquisitions.

European Parliament

Treaty basis and European Parliament competence

Articles 101-109 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) form the basis for the EU's [competition policy](#).

EU [environment policy](#) is based on Articles 191 to 193 TFEU. Article 191 lists climate action as one of the objectives of EU environment policy. Article 11 TFEU also requires environmental protection to be taken account in other EU policies.

Article 194 TFEU is the legal basis for EU [energy policy](#). Legislation under this article usually follows the ordinary legislative procedure, which gives an equal role to the Council and the Parliament. An exception is made for measures 'primarily of a fiscal nature' where the Council decides.

[Social and employment policies](#) are underpinned by Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), and Articles 9, 10, 19, 45-48 and 145-161 TFEU.

While the European Parliament has legislative power on many social issues and in the areas of climate and environment, decisions on [competition policy](#) enforcement are firmly within the European Commission's remit. In competition policy, Parliament's [role](#) is limited to scrutiny of the executive. This responsibility falls primarily to the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON). The ECON committee prepares motions for resolutions on the Commission's [annual reports](#) on competition policy, offering policy input and steering Parliament's response to EU competition policy challenges. The Competition Commissioner is a regular invitee at ECON committee meetings.

Recent developments

During the previous parliamentary term, EU competition, climate, energy and single market policies have all changed significantly to adapt to the Commission's flagship project: [the European Green Deal](#). Competition and other policies were also deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war on Ukraine, the resulting spike in energy prices, and rapid advancements in digital technologies.

The European Commission launched the European [Green Deal](#) in December 2019 to fight climate change while transforming the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. In the key area of the green and industrial transition, it provided a comprehensive roadmap designed to make the EU economy climate-friendly, competitive and sustainable. The Green Deal's main components included achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, promoting the circular economy, supporting biodiversity and ecosystem restoration, and mobilising industry in the areas of clean energy and transportation.

In 2021, Parliament adopted the [European Climate Law](#), which enshrines the 50 % net emissions reduction target for 2030 and an EU-wide climate neutrality target for 2050. MEPs also [approved](#) key laws from the 'fit for 55' legislative package. These included the [emissions trading system](#) (ETS) reform – to help achieve the net emissions reduction target of 55 % below 1990 levels by 2030 – and the EU carbon border adjustment mechanism ([CBAM](#)), which obliges EU importers to purchase 'CBAM certificates' to pay the difference between the carbon price paid in the country of production and the price of carbon allowances in the ETS.

Parliament played its part as co-legislator in the revision of the [Renewable Energy Directive](#), which sets a new renewables target of 42.5 % at EU level by 2030, while aiming for 45 %. The revised [Energy Efficiency Directive](#), meanwhile, raised the [EU's energy efficiency target](#), making it binding for EU countries to secure an additional 11.7 % reduction in energy consumption by 2030. The approved Social Climate Fund law supports vulnerable citizens and firms affected by the extension of the ETS to the buildings and road transport.

The revised [Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#) requires Member States to reduce their average primary energy use in residential buildings by 16 % by 2030, and by 20 to 22 % by 2035, and

aims to fully decarbonise EU building stock by 2050. It sets an obligation for all new residential buildings to be zero-emission as of 2030, and new public buildings as of 2028.

In the field of competition, the Commission responded to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 with a communication on a temporary framework for [State aid measures](#), which temporarily allowed for State aid to be bigger in scope, larger in amount, and faster to implement. Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Commission published a [temporary crisis framework](#) for State aid, extending the previous measures to newly affected areas and companies, such as energy producers.

In 2023, a [temporary crisis and transition framework](#) took effect, introducing the possibility to grant more State aid to sectors that are key to the transition to a net-zero economy. The Commission allowed State aid to be granted to enterprises developing green technologies. The aid can match the amount that a company might receive for the purpose outside the EU.

EU Member States [reported](#) a combined total of €228 billion in State aid expenditure in 2022, compared with €329 billion in 2021. In one of the biggest national State aid support schemes, the Commission approved a €27.5 billion [German plan](#) in 2022 to compensate energy-intensive companies for higher electricity prices.

In the previous parliamentary term, the Commission focused on digital markets and took measures to ensure that US big tech firms, which dominate on the European market, comply with EU competition and digital rules. In March 2024, it opened [non-compliance investigations](#) against Alphabet, Apple and Meta under the Digital Markets Act. Earlier in March 2024, it [fined](#) Apple €1.8 billion for abuse of a dominant position, alleging that it favoured its own music-streaming service over those of rivals.

FURTHER READING

Bassot E., [The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission: An end-of-term assessment](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2024.

European Parliament, [Teresa Ribera Rodríguez hearing documents and CV](#), 2024.

European Parliament, [Increasing European added value in an age of global challenges: Mapping the cost of non-Europe](#), 2023.

European Commission, [Scoreboard State Aid data - New dissemination tool for statistics \(2000-2022\)](#).

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