

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Stéphane SÉJOURNÉ****Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy****1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

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? How will you contribute to implementing the political guidelines of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? How will you implement youth mainstreaming?

What guarantees of independence are you able to give 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 come from a generation for whom Europe is both a given and a daily fight.

A given, because I started my political life canvassing for the 2004 French referendum campaign for the EU Constitution. The first elections I stood for as a candidate were the 2019 European Elections. As Member and group leader in the European Parliament and as Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, I contributed to some of the greatest achievements of the EU in the last years: the Green Deal, our common vaccine purchase, the recovery plan Next Generation EU, the regulation of digital markets, and of course the assistance to Ukraine.

A daily fight, because I have been exposed to the doubts about the European project, especially in the aftermath of Brexit, the hard push to overturn the EU's very foundations, to undermine our unity, the crisis of confidence in our EU institutions. Europe is thus a daily miracle, but a fragile miracle built on the renewed approval of our fellow citizens. As a European public official, and even more so as Commissioner, it is a duty to make any decision with this in mind. Serving the European general interest means building and implementing policies that can both improve the daily lives of citizens and tackle the tremendous challenges our continent is facing.

In view of the difficult decade ahead of us, the European general interest urges us to act forcefully, starting with one top priority: a clear clean industrial strategy with a stronger single market to help avoid Europe's forecast decline as well as its dreadful social and political consequences. Our communities and hard-working citizens want qualified, decent and well-paid jobs. Our businesses want opportunities to invest, create and produce more and better, on the same level playing field as their external competitors, and without having to deal with unnecessary burden. These are obvious, legitimate aspirations which the European Union must cater for.

I have a long-held belief: reclaiming economic and industrial leadership is a guarantee of individual prosperity and strong community ties. It is also a necessity to accelerate our transition to climate neutrality. As adviser to the French Minister for Economy and Industry, I was amongst the architects of one of the biggest economic reforms in recent French history. As MEP and group leader, I pushed endlessly for a new approach for our industry, going beyond the futile opposition between decarbonisation and growth, instead reconciling both priorities. As rapporteur responsible for intellectual property rights for artificial intelligence, I advocated the creation of a unique European model based on ethics and innovation. As Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, I put high on the agenda economic partnerships with democratic nations in East Africa or Latin America that had been previously overlooked.

This mindset can also serve a top priority of this Commission: achieving gender equality in our economy and, consequently, mainstreaming the gender perspective in industrial policy. In this new Commission, my first duty, if confirmed by you, would be to make sure that all companies implement the "Women on Boards" Directive. As

a Member of College, I also look forward to supporting the work of EVP-Designate Minzatu, on a STEM Education Strategic Plan, which should also bring more women and girls into STEM education and careers. Gender equality is an objective where political will is key and in that regard, I have a proven track record of appointments of women in the French Foreign Office and the first ever majority-women ministerial cabinet in the history of French diplomacy. If I am confirmed, I commit to continue to champion this approach at the very heart of the Commission. As a 39-year-old Executive Vice-President-designate, you can also count on me to create opportunities for the young generation in everything I would do. To give young Europeans chances to shape decisions in the European Union, I will be pleased to organise the annual Youth Dialogues, starting with the first one during my first 100 days in the office.

All my life, I have worked tirelessly for the general interest. As a European parliamentary leader, I never walked away from my responsibilities. For such a role, both consistency and independence are paramount. In Parliament, I never hesitated to defend a distinctive line from that of my party and my home country when I knew it was for the European general interest. This was particularly true for the EU Directive on violence against women. You can also rest assured that I have always complied, still comply and will continue to comply with the highest ethical standards, in full respect of the EU Treaties as well the Code of Conduct.

My career started with Europe. My first commitment to voters was to serve our Union. My governmental duties included promoting European unity. If you accept my nomination to the European Commission, I will be true not only to my oath to defend European unity and its founding principles, but also to my heartfelt life commitments.

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

Can you commit to duly informing Parliament about your actions and those of your departments? In what respect do you consider yourself accountable to Parliament?

What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of your engagement with and presence in Parliament, both in committee and in plenary, transparency, cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with timely information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

I served in the European Parliament and the respect that I have for this House and its Members has never faltered. I commit to maintain this special relationship with the European Parliament, the beating heart of European democracy, based on mutual trust.

We take our legitimacy from your vote. Although our names are proposed by the Council and the Commission President, we cannot take office without the consent of the European Parliament. This is crucial to ensure the political orientations underpinning our policies meet the aspirations of a majority of citizens as expressed in the European elections.

If you confirm my appointment, I take the following commitments as a working method between my services, my cabinet and I, and the European Parliament:

- I pledge to ensure proper follow-up to your reports and resolutions about issues related to my portfolio. I remain, like the President of the Commission, an advocate for giving the Parliament a stronger role in initiating and shaping legislation. I truly believe that this is a prerequisite for a sound, efficient and trustful European decision-making process.

- I pledge to be actively and regularly present in committee meetings, plenary sessions, trilogue negotiations, and also to come to your groups if you ask me to. In all these settings, I believe that the Commission must be represented at political level as much as possible.

- I pledge to build and maintain a direct communication channel with the Members of the relevant committees, at all stages of the decision-making process. My services and my team will also be easily available throughout the mandate, in a two-way flow of information.

- I pledge to invite Rapporteurs, shadows or leading members in specific fields to working sessions to address legitimate concerns and to take ideas that come directly from their parliamentary work and their constituency.

- I pledge to share information and relevant documents with the Parliament on an equal footing with the Council. It is not only a matter of respect for both co-legislators, it is an obligation under our framework agreement.

All of these commitments are a question of democratic accountability. We owe respect and accountability to this House, and to the citizen you represent. Only together can we move Europe forward.

In line with the political guidelines presented by the President, which were supported by the majority of this House, I look forward to setting out the coherence of the portfolio that the President has entrusted me with and the relevance of our priorities at the hearing. I also look forward to listening to your expectations, your ideas and your concerns.

My mission letter offers a unique opportunity to finally have a fully integrated industrial strategy, from micro- to macro-economics, from the internal market to the external dimension, from upstream to downstream sectors, from public to private investments. If confirmed, I would make all these competitiveness instruments at the service of people's prosperity, of course in full collegiality with Commissioners and full cooperation with you.

If confirmed, I commit to report regularly to this House on the state of progress of my mission. From the start, I believe it is very important to set clear goals and objective indicators on which you will be able to judge my results and our collective efforts.

Questions from the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

Capital Markets Union (CMU)

3. What are the key obstacles and which priorities would you set for the development of the Capital Markets Union/Savings and Investments Market in order to boost private and public financing to invest in high-growth projects and have capital markets investing in innovation? How will you ensure that efforts to enhance the competitiveness of the EU financial sector will not undermine financial stability or lead to excessive risk-taking? How do you view the role of securitisation in this agenda?

The incoming Commission aims to be an investment Commission and President-elect Von der Leyen in her political guidelines announced developing a "Savings and Investments Union", which will be instrumental in filling the investment gaps. Boosting private and public financing to modernise our economy and industry requires well-functioning and developed financial markets, where necessary combined and coordinated with targeted public risk absorption measures.

Firstly, citizens finance must be at the heart of the Savings and Investments Union. Citizens save a lot but keep their wealth predominantly in bank deposits and housing, where it does not contribute as much as it could to productive investment. Their participation in capital markets is often undermined by a host of interrelated factors: high fees and cost of advice, low competition in the distribution of financial products due to market fragmentation, low levels of financial literacy and trust in financial intermediaries.

If I am confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will work with the Commissioner for Financial Services and Savings and Investments Union and other Members of the College to find ways to incentivise citizens to put more of their savings 'to work'. We need to develop new savings and investment products at European level to channel investments to the real economy. It would be good for European businesses, providing them with the capital needed to compete, innovate, and embrace the green, digital and social transitions. It would be good for European citizens too, providing them with an opportunity to contribute to the financing of the European economy, as long as they are appropriately protected and enjoy a decent return on their investment.

Secondly, European innovative firms do not have access to enough risk capital in order to grow and expand within the EU. This is one of the main obstacles to EU's competitiveness. Improving the availability of risk capital is therefore an important objective. If I am confirmed, together with the Commissioner for Financial Services and Savings and Investments Union and other Members of the College, we will be looking into ways of attracting more institutional investors; better leveraging public financing instruments, raising awareness, and facilitating the exchange of best practices, reviewing the tax and legal frameworks to remove existing barriers and build on successful national schemes. Particular focus should be put on the remaining barriers to the scaling up of investment funds, able to support the financing needs of innovative firms.

Thirdly, EU capital markets cannot compete internationally and cannot benefit from Single Market scale as they are too fragmented. EU investors have more limited options to invest and - where they invest - the costs are higher, and the yield is lower than elsewhere. At the same time, without scaled markets the EU cannot keep up with the financing needs for the green and digital transitions. It is important to identify and work further on removing barriers that act as obstacles to integration and deepening liquidity of European markets, but also to make sure European financial institutions can operate in a global level playing field, where internationally agreed standards are applied consistently in Europe and in other jurisdictions. Deeper financial markets would also reinforce the international role of the Euro. If confirmed, I will support efforts to tackle the outstanding challenges that hinder the full potential of the European Capital Markets in line with the Capital Markets Union Action Plan.

Finally, differences in supervision of financial market operators can increase the cost of doing business across Member States. Many of these differences can also be detrimental to investors who may not encounter the same level of protection across Member States. An improved supervisory system at EU level can be a key driver to achieve the full potential of our capital markets, by reducing inefficiencies, realising economies of scale, and creating trust in the functioning of the markets. It would be instrumental in reducing regulatory burden. There are various ways to improve supervision. Additional consultation and engagement with all stakeholders are necessary on how to enhance supervisory arrangements within the EU, also considering the specificities of the different sectors and countries.

I believe that, when soundly structured, well-regulated and supervised, securitisation can play a positive role for the economy as a tool for attracting new investors, and as a risk management tool transferring credit risk from banks to a broad set of EU and third country institutional investors, who would benefit from greater diversification of exposures. This can enable banks to provide more financing to the real economy. The 2019 Securitisation Framework and its subsequent amendments improved transparency and standardisation in the securitisation market, however the market in the EU remains underdeveloped. The European Central Bank Board of governors in March 2024 and the European Council in April 2024 highlighted the importance of reviving the EU securitisation market. A well-functioning securitisation regime should be an element of our agenda. If I am confirmed, my position on whether and how the existing regime should be updated will be informed by further exchanges with you and by the outcome of an ongoing targeted consultation, including technical advice from the European Supervisory Authorities. In that regard, guaranteeing the financial stability will always remain our prerequisite.

Europe needs well-functioning and internationally leading banks, insurers, investment companies and other intermediaries to finance innovation, invest in the green, digital, and social transitions and restore the EU's competitiveness. At the same time, we should not lose sight of the importance of preserving a sound and solid prudential framework. The 2007/2008 financial crisis was caused by too lax standards, too light supervision, and too little international cooperation. Since then, the regulatory and supervisory reforms have strengthened the European financial system, which can now rely on well-capitalized financial institutions and which has shown its resilience during the events of the past years. We should build on this strong foundation to now ensure the competitiveness of the European financial industry in the long term.

As stated in the political guidelines of President-Elect von der Leyen, it is also necessary to leverage and de-risk private capital. Risk-absorbing tools such as loans, guarantees or equity interventions should make it easier for private capital to support the competitiveness of EU businesses. For more details, I would refer the Honourable Members to my answers to question number 5.

Competitiveness Coordination Tool

4. What should be the main pillars of the newly proposed Competitiveness Coordination Framework? How does this interact with the European Competitiveness Fund?

The political guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen refer to a new European Competitiveness Fund as part of our proposal for a new and reinforced budget in the next multiannual financial framework. As underlined in my Mission Letter, the Competitiveness Coordination Tool will be developed in conjunction with this Competitiveness Fund, with the view to better targeting and coordinating investment policies, thereby creating a multiplying effect. This reflects the Draghi report's call for more effective coordination of competitiveness policies to improve the alignment between EU and Member States' reform and investment priorities.

The purpose of the competitiveness coordination tool must be to reinforce the coherence between the EU's competitiveness objectives and the national policies in the Member States. We need to align them on a common set of strategic priorities so they become mutually reinforcing. This would provide more certainty, predictability, and scale in the Single Market, reduce fragmentation and help mobilising the massive investments needed for the EU competitiveness agenda.

In terms of method, if confirmed, I will work with the Commissioner for Economy and Productivity to ensure policy coordination and to ensure that the European Semester continues to focus on the competitiveness of our Union, aligning both our economic and industrial policies.

On the European Competitiveness Fund, please see my answer to question 16.

Investment

5. How do you envisage the future of the InvestEU programme? How do you envisage your cooperation with the EIB? What is your plan to unlock private investments to support the European economy? What are other tools you would be inclined to mobilise to address the significant funding gap?

The scale of investments needed for Europe's competitiveness and security is vast. The Draghi report estimates that around EUR 800 billion annually are needed in additional investment to meet our green and digital transition objectives and defence spending needs. Against this background, the political guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen emphasise the need to maximise public investment and leverage and de-risk private capital. Risk-absorbing tools such as loans, guarantees or equity interventions should make it easier for private capital to support the competitiveness of EU industry.

The InvestEU programme is the "largest risk-sharing instrument currently in place" and it has been successful. Three years after its launch, InvestEU has mobilised over EUR 200 billion of investments, of which roughly 2/3 is expected to come from private resources. This funding contributes to key policy priorities such as innovation and infrastructure to accelerate the green and digital transition as well as support to SMEs and social sectors.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure continued and full implementation of the InvestEU programme throughout the remainder of the programming period, in collaboration with the European Investment Bank and other implementing partners. This will also require using existing flexibility. This is especially important for financial products in high demand, in particular to support sustainable and digital SMEs, social sectors, and clean, digital and bio- technologies.

The strength of InvestEU also derives from its open architecture, which has created an EU-wide ecosystem of public financing institutions, joining forces to achieve EU policy objectives. As the main partner, the EIB is joined by other multilateral banks such as the EBRD, the Nordic Investment Bank, the Council of Europe Bank, as well as Member States' development banks.

Moreover, if confirmed, I would build on the positive experience of InvestEU and scale it to create even more synergies between public and private financing. The EIB Group, which comprises both the EIB and EIF, are longstanding partners of the Commission and have contributed to implement our programmes both inside and outside the EU. Together with the Commissioner for Economy and Productivity, we will ensure that the latter continues to play a strategic role in supporting investment across the EU, thereby contributing to economic growth, innovation, competitiveness, decarbonisation, digitalisation, just transition and cohesion. We could also encourage the EIB to play an even stronger role, by taking more risks on the operations it finances, and support the Commissioner for Economy and Productivity to seek to enhance the role of the EIF to step up financing for high-potential and fast-growing companies. Both the EIB and the EIF are well placed to help create a favourable investment environment and catalyse public and private funding.

We need to also recognise the importance of a conducive regulatory framework. If confirmed, I will work together with the Commissioner for Economy and Productivity, Implementation and Simplification, to ensure less reporting burden for our financial partners and businesses.

The design of the future multiannual financial framework and its instruments is ahead of us. Our reflection will need to start with “what we want to finance” to then see “how” we can best deliver on our objectives and maximise results on the ground, building also on the lessons learnt with InvestEU. Simplified mechanisms to combine different financing tools and advisory support for the preparation and deployment of projects can help speed up and improve the quality of projects. This will allow to make our funding more impactful.

If I am confirmed as Executive Vice President, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration to make sure these elements are considered in the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework proposal to make sure it has a very strong competitiveness pillar.

Questions from the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

6. How will the Clean Industrial Deal build on and complement the Green Deal? What key measures do you intend to put forward in the context of the Clean Industrial Deal, the Circular Economy Act and the Chemicals Industry Package, also in the context of the Draghi report on the EU Competitiveness? How will you ensure consistency and synergies among the initiatives? How will they contribute to the environmental goals, including the zero pollution ambition? How do you intend to accelerate the industrial decarbonisation while investing, ensuring the EU's global competitiveness and preserving high-quality jobs, and reducing unnecessary administrative burden? What measures will you take to ensure that EU legislation regarding the clean transition is tailored to SMEs? What measures will you put forward in the Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act to support European lead markets for the development, production and diffusion of clean tech in industry, and which financial resources will you mobilise to reach this goal? What specific strategies do you plan to implement to accelerate permitting procedures for critical projects to allow for timely progress on climate objectives, while safeguarding high-level environmental protection? What measures will you put forward to strike a balance between reducing dependencies on critical raw materials and boosting European competitiveness, circularity and ensuring the respect of high environmental standards? How will you ensure that the new Circular Economy Act will contain sufficient concrete incentives to sufficiently boost market demand for secondary materials and for the establishment of a single market for waste?

The European Green Deal set the EU on the course to becoming a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy. The Green Deal Industrial Plan put forward actions to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry to accelerate the transition. The Clean Industrial Deal will continue this path to both decarbonise and industrialise the European economy at the same time, with more resilience and more strategic autonomy.

Together with the Executive Vice-President for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition and other Members of the College, we will work towards a set of initiatives aiming to improve permits and access to infrastructures, access to energy and raw materials, access to public and private funding, access to skills and technologies. We will accelerate the decarbonisation of the industry by simplifying administrative processes, by developing lead markets of sustainable and resilient products, by mobilising private funding for the transition, and by harnessing partnerships, by strengthening our Single Market and by ensuring a level playing field.

The Clean Industrial Deal will build on what has been achieved under the last mandate and ensure that implementation is both effective and efficient, without creating additional burden. It will go further on strengthening the business case for decarbonisation and support industry in its efforts to innovate and scale up. To do so, it should address all dimensions of that business case, including but not limited to: internal and external markets, public and private funding, social and industrial policies, financial and legislative instruments. None of them can be seen in isolation. To unleash the transformation in a fair and effective way, there needs to be consistency and the industrial policy must be fully integrated. In addition to horizontal measures, several sectors you mention should be addressed.

First, the Circular Economy Act will be a key part of the Clean Industrial Deal and I will work closely together with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy to deliver on it. The objective is to move away from a linear to a lifecycle approach for products and materials. It will increase the supply and the demand of secondary materials and establish a single market for waste, for example by harmonising end-of-waste criteria. The price of secondary raw materials is often higher than virgin materials, the former often suffering from asymmetric information across the value chain and a limited internal market for recuperation and recycling. The Circular Economy Act will therefore seek to create incentives for the use of secondary materials by addressing that market failure.

We see potential in three building blocks: the practical implementation of the comprehensive legislation adopted in the last mandate; the leveraging of the Single Market, for example to allow producers of secondary raw materials to sell their products across the EU; the strengthening of the economics of the circular transition, promoting circular products and business models. We have been successful in decoupling economic growth from emissions, and we can match this by decoupling growth from the use of resources. By doing so, we will increase our competitiveness and economic performance, while reducing our environmental footprint, our primary resource dependency and our impact on biodiversity and pollution.

Second, the Critical Raw Materials Act will remain central. Boosting European competitiveness requires secure and sustainable access to raw materials. This includes increasing European extraction and refining of raw materials, on a continent where we have many assets with high environmental standards and the most innovative companies and technologies. It also means boosting the recycling of primary raw materials, so that we can decrease our import needs while reducing our environmental footprint. The Circular Economy Act will propose supply and demand side measures for secondary raw materials, such as more effective approaches to extended producer responsibility, end of waste criteria, recycled content and public procurement criteria related to sustainability.

Third, as a key element of the Clean Industrial Deal, I will work with the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth on the Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act to support European lead markets for the development, production and diffusion of clean tech in industry and will speed up planning, tendering and permitting processes, in particular for energy-intensive sectors. Helping EU industry to decarbonise, in a technology neutral approach, will also ensure their long-term competitiveness and preserve high-quality jobs.

Predictability and speed are essential to facilitate investments into industrial projects. To that end, the Decarbonisation Accelerator Act will facilitate permitting measures building on the model of the Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA) and the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA). These allow strategic projects to benefit from streamlined permitting and a 'priority status' at national level without weakening environmental, social and governance standards. To develop this new framework, I intend to work closely with Member States and support national and local administrations with relevant tools. The Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act should also channel investment where it is most needed.

Of course, SMEs play a pivotal role in the economy and sustainable transition. I will continue the implementation of the SME Relief Package, including the SME filter to help identify proposals particularly relevant to SMEs in the early stages of policymaking and initiative-specific mitigating measures. We will also apply a new SME check, as further described in my answer to question 11.

There are many other initiatives that will be included in the Clean Industrial Deal, like the Action Plan for Affordable Energy Prices. Most importantly, the Clean Industrial Deal should create the right conditions, not only for helping European companies to become more competitive on the global stage, but also and for making sure that citizens benefit more from the transition at the local level.

If confirmed, I will engage on these initiatives with you. Stakeholders and national authorities will also be duly consulted. And I can assure you that I will continue to follow the guiding principle of a fair and just transition, geographically and socially, throughout the mandate.

7. How will you ensure that the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is implemented effectively, fully and in a timely manner, while avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy and double protection? What measures will you propose to close potential loopholes upstream and downstream and for the expansion of the scope of CBAM in accordance with the Regulation, while avoiding carbon leakage along the value chain and taking into account the situation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is a very important instrument for the climate. If I am confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will work with the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth to ensure its full and timely implementation, while paying particular attention to minimising the risks of circumvention and administrative burden, in particular for SMEs.

The CBAM will start having financial consequences as from 1 January 2026. During the ongoing transitional phase that started in October 2023, the Commission has provided support and guidance material to importers and exporters as well as national competent authorities.

By listening to stakeholders, including businesses and national administrations, including within the implementation Dialogues, but also third-country partners and members of the Climate Club launched at the G7, we can ensure that the implementing measures will be as effective and efficient as possible.

The Commission will also draw lessons from the current transitional period to make adjustments, in particular in terms of simplification. We will for this purpose present a review report to the European Parliament and the Council by the end of 2025.

The report will cover all the considerations laid down in the review clause of the Regulation and will include an assessment of possible extensions of the CBAM's scope including to indirect emissions, of the CBAM's governance, and of the international impact of the regulation on developing countries and especially Least Developed Countries.

The regulation provides for the possibility to extend the scope of the CBAM to cover other goods at risk of carbon leakage under the EU ETS, notably organic chemicals, and polymers, emissions from the transport of goods and transportation services, as well as other input materials, so-called precursors. As required by the CBAM Regulation, we will consider possibilities for including products further down the value chain of the current CBAM goods. This may be necessary to avoid that carbon leakage is pushed further down the value chain, and to make full use of the CBAM's potential for climate protection. However, any possible extension of the CBAM needs to be based on clear criteria and proportional to the objectives of the mechanism. Furthermore, together with the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, I will continuously assess how to address potential circumvention of CBAM, in which customs play a crucial role.

As requested by the co-legislators, the Commission will also assess the carbon leakage risk for goods subject to CBAM, produced in the EU and exported to third countries, in particular to those which do not apply the EU ETS or a similar carbon pricing mechanism.

When it comes to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), CBAM does not exempt LDCs, as this would encourage delocalisation of more polluting industries to such countries instead of encouraging decarbonisation. Commission studies show that exports from LDCs to the EU in the sectors covered by the CBAM are limited. Yet, for some LDCs, exports to the EU can provide important foreign exchange earnings and represent a significant share of their Gross National Income. Together with other Commissioners, I will ensure that the Commission continues to work closely with these countries and support them to adjust and prepare during the transitional period of the CBAM.

8. What are your priorities for the upcoming Chemicals Industry Package? How will you achieve the transition to safe and circular green, less water- and energy-intensive chemicals while providing long-term predictability for investors towards sustainable innovations? When will you present a proposal for a revision of REACH that ensures simplification while guaranteeing enhanced protection of health and the environment and a competitive industry? What is your plan on PFAS to minimise human and environmental exposure to them while ensuring a clear and feasible framework for industry by taking into account essential uses?

The Chemicals Industry Package set out in the Political Guidelines will be of key importance to ensuring the protection of human health and the environment and for a competitive EU industry. Building on years of experience in the implementation of REACH and chemicals legislation, it is clear that the EU needs to accelerate, reduce red tape, and provide clarity and certainty for both businesses and consumers. The Package will strive to create a more efficient regulatory framework that acts faster to remove harmful substances from the marketplace while providing greater long-term investment certainty for Europe's world-leading chemical companies.

The EU can be proud of having the most advanced chemical regulatory framework in the world, however certain aspects need to be reviewed. In view of the risk posed by certain chemicals and the economic challenges faced by the chemical industry, a renewed and holistic approach is needed to boost the green transition and reach sustainable competitiveness. This is why, if confirmed, I will work together with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and Competitive Circular Economy to set four priorities for the upcoming Chemicals Industry Package::

(1) Innovative, sustainable, and secure supply chains: the EU must stand firm in supporting a strong and resilient chemical industry, which is key to creating growth and prosperity in the EU. There is a need to create an enabling framework for investments that drive the transition towards new green and digital solutions, including clean energy sources and sustainable carbon feedstock but also safe, circular, and sustainable chemicals. This will require clear signals and long-term predictability for investors and can be achieved by promoting a more collaborative approach

between public authorities and industry. The substitution of harmful chemicals should be further supported through innovation and knowledge transfer in industry's transition to safer alternatives. Given that chemicals are at the heart of many supply chains that are key for the transition, we must avoid creating new dependencies.

(2) Simplified and streamlined legislation: REACH has contributed significantly to increasing the knowledge on chemicals through registration and evaluation, and to addressing the risk posed by certain chemicals through authorisations and restrictions. However, REACH has also proven too burdensome for industry, in particular for SMEs. A legislative proposal to revise REACH in 2025, prepared together with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and Competitive Circular Economy would align REACH with the priorities of simplification, burden reduction and competitiveness, and allow for essential supplementary consultations with the Parliament and all relevant stakeholders.

The REACH revision should aim to modernise the regulatory framework to increase sustainable competitiveness and security in the EU without compromising on the protection of human health and the environment. To simplify, the dual system of authorisations and restrictions will be reviewed to reduce substantially the need for individual authorisations. By basing our approach mainly on broader restrictions, we would be able to take decisions faster and more transparently, without jeopardising the high level of protection of our health and environment.

In addition, SMEs will be supported through digitalisation. Strengthened enforcement will level the playing field, including for online sales, with a view to maintaining the competitive position of compliant EU companies, and will ensure that imported products meet all relevant standards. Improvements in information requirements such as on endocrine disruptors will close information gaps and improve risk control. Non-animal test methods will be promoted and animal testing minimised. Furthermore, the implementation of the recently adopted amendments to the Directive on Industrial Emissions will facilitate a much more efficient and circular use of water in the chemical industry as well as to reduce harmful discharges in water.

Finally, to complement the REACH revision and previous initiatives proposed by the Commission, such as 'one substance - one assessment', a legislative proposal for a basic regulation for the European Chemicals Agency will strengthen the governance of the Agency, speed up its procedures and increase its financial sustainability, which is urgent.

(3) Policy coherence: the European chemicals industry is faced with an increasing number of regulatory requirements, which are justified on their own but may create inconsistencies and duplications between different pieces of legislation. We need better coordination at both EU and national levels and a more holistic approach to ensure that the cumulative burden does not hamper the EU's competitiveness and innovation potential. Therefore, together with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and Competitive Circular Economy, I would strongly encourage and facilitate early discussions among EU and national authorities on common priorities and the most appropriate policy measures for chemicals to ensure alignment between REACH and other pieces of legislation. Such coordination would also benefit the health and the environment.

(4) Clarity on PFAS: As indicated in my mission letter, if confirmed, I commit to provide timely clarity on the REACH restriction process of PFAS, together with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and Competitive Circular Economy. These chemicals require special attention considering the large number of cases of contamination of soil and water, including drinking water. That is why the Commission has already taken significant steps to control the risks from PFAS through restrictions of consumer uses and other measures under REACH as well as tighter limits for PFAS in drinking water and controls on surface and ground water. I will seek to advance as rapidly as possible the final decision on the current initiative of several Member States to restrict PFAS to protect the health of our citizens and the environment, while already sharing certain basic orientations in the interests of clarity and predictability. I will seek to ban the use of PFAS in consumer uses, like cosmetics, food contact materials and outdoor clothing.

Where adequate alternatives in terms of performance and safety are not available, I would support the continued use of PFAS in industrial applications, in particular critical ones, under strictly controlled conditions until acceptable substitutes are found, accompanied by strict emission and disposal rules to limit their release into the environment, and clear incentives to innovate and develop sustainable substitutes. The criticality of certain industrial sectors for our society was recognised in the Commission Communication on the Essential Use of April 2024 and PFAS are widely used in many industrial applications that are critical, e.g. in the defence, semiconductor, clean tech or medical sectors.

Questions from the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

9. What is your vision for your portfolio over and above your mission letter and what would you like your legacy to be? What legislative proposals and other initiatives will you suggest to the College of Commissioners for adoption in the next five years and in particular in the first 100 days? How will you ensure that these proposals, as well as the implementation of existing legislation, would strengthen European competitiveness? Do you intend to base those legislative proposals on dedicated impact assessments? What are your plans in particular for the Clean Industrial Deal, the European Prosperity Plan, the Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act, the European Competitiveness Fund and the Circular Economy Act? What financial resources do you think should be allocated to these initiatives? How will you finance in particular the European Competitiveness Fund without prejudice to existing commitments to other EU policies? What should be, in your view, the economic logic and the industrial funding needs to be addressed by the European Competitiveness Fund? How do you see the relationship of these initiatives with the Net Zero Industry Act (NZIA), the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), STEP, as well as the 2040 emission-reduction target? How do you intend to address the social dimension of these initiatives? How will you also address in the same context energy cost and efficiency, use of renewables and other sources of energy? What is your vision for the Competitiveness Coordination Tool and how should it work to enable you to fulfil the tasks set out in your mission letter?

Europe has a strong manufacturing base and a strong position in global markets. The automotive, chemical, and pharmaceutical sectors are areas of excellence but are facing significant global competition. The EU risks falling behind in digital and clean innovation as well as in the competitiveness of energy-intensive sectors. Because energy prices are significantly higher in Europe than in other economies. Because Europe is good at innovating but less good at scaling up and bringing innovative products to the market. Because the current geopolitical context has exacerbated the risks linked to strategic dependencies. These are all reasons to put renewed focus at the top of the European agenda on our industrial strategy.

Competitiveness as a means and prosperity as the goal, this is my mission. Our ambition is that at the end of this mandate we have put in place the right conditions for European companies to grow and to benefit from a new dynamism that can underpin the prosperity of current and future generations. I firmly believe that decarbonisation can be turned into a source of growth and jobs. I also believe that the EU must act together to succeed, and not as 27 separate Member States. To achieve this objective, I will put special emphasis on ensuring consistency across all our policies, while taking tailored-made initiatives in strategic sectors.

With that in mind, the Clean Industrial Deal, that I will, if confirmed, present together with the Executive Vice-President for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition and the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth in the first 100 days of the mandate, will set the direction of travel. It will be a key part of the wider European Prosperity Plan set out in the Political Guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen. As set out in more detail in my answer to question 6, the Clean Industrial Deal will set out actions for the next years to decarbonise industry, including among others by cutting red tape, ensuring access to affordable energy and raw materials, creating demand and lead markets, mobilising further private investments and addressing unfair trade practices. As such, it will be a key enabler on Europe's way to climate neutrality, through a more competitive industry.

Better regulation and diligent implementation will be paramount for an efficient and simplified regulatory framework as well as a supportive business environment in the Single Market. I am committed to evidence-based policymaking that contributes to the EU's competitiveness. I will screen the legislation under my responsibility in order to eliminate any overlaps, reduce burden and facilitate the best use of digital tools.

Also, we need to focus on our industrial policy priorities so that we de-risk and mobilise private investment for our common goals. As set out in more detail in my reply to questions 4 and 16, this will be fostered in particular through the European Competitiveness Fund, in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Currently, investment in Europe is too fragmented, and the EU has a large investment gap, including for scaling up. The next Multiannual Financial Framework is an opportunity to make our spending more focused, simpler, and more impactful, with a strong competitiveness pillar. It should facilitate the access of European businesses to different options of funding. If confirmed, the development of the European Competitiveness Fund will be one of my main priorities, on which I will work closely with the Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration, other members of the College, as well as the Parliament and the Council.

As set out in my reply to question 10, the implementation of the Net-Zero Industry Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act will be essential in our effort to increase Europe's resilience and competitiveness. These instruments address important aspects of industrial competitiveness, including streamlining of permitting, access to a secure supply of raw materials and access to markets. Well aware about the important work that has been done in the previous mandate by this House, I will work to ensure their speedy implementation and ensure the Clean Industrial Deal builds on them and other related initiatives, including STEP.

Regarding the European Climate Law, the Commission, under the leadership of Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth will propose an amendment to include a net 90% emission-reduction target for 2040.

As outlined in my reply to question 4, the Competitiveness Coordination Tool will foster the alignment of investment priorities across Member States and the European level. It should build on work done with existing tools such as the Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report and the European Semester. The results of this alignment should in turn drive the choices of multi-country projects like the IPCEIs, which are of the highest importance in our industrial strategy.

All in all, the true beneficiaries of these efforts will be the Europeans. Innovative and competitive businesses provide stable and high-quality jobs, both directly and indirectly, in all regions. Economic and industrial growth allows Member States to finance their social models. The green and clean transition improves their health and their well-being. These are key conditions to the prosperity of our society and our continent.

Accordingly, the Clean Industrial Deal will have a strong skills and social dimension, leaving no one and no place behind. We need both a just and fair transition. I will support the work of the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness towards developing a Union of Skills, reinforcing upskilling and vocational training tailored to industry as well as mutual recognition of qualifications. I will attach high importance to social dialogue. Not only it creates more ownership and acceptance of the transition, decisions taken with employees and their representatives are also more sustainable.

Regarding energy costs and efficiency, the Clean Industrial Deal will also aim to address this challenge, namely through the Affordable Energy Plan prepared by the Commissioner for Energy and Housing. I will work to make sure that it brings down both prices and CO2 emissions.

Last but not least, there is no doubt that we will not secure Europe's long-term competitiveness if we do not shift away from imported fossil fuels towards a clean, competitive, and circular economy. And this should happen urgently.

10. What actions do you envisage for the effective implementation of the CRMA and the NZIA in order to strengthen European competitiveness? What should be the next steps to complete this legislation within and beyond the broader scope of European strategic autonomy? How do you intend in particular to strengthen the value chains related to the NZIA and promote resource efficiency in the context of the CRMA? How will you contribute to the creation of lead markets for clean tech? What other actions will you propose to unlock long-term investments and strengthen the competitiveness, resilience and autonomy of the EU industry, including defence production, while maintaining the European social model? What sectorial and horizontal measures do you envisage to support European industry? What will be your criteria to define Europe's specific vulnerabilities in certain sectors and to guide your actions to protect European industry from external unfair competition? What concrete measures do you think should be included in the steel and metals action plan? What sectors and technologies do you think should be included in the new IPCEIs, and how this would support the EU industrial strategy and SMEs? How do you intend to revise public procurement rules in order to ensure security of supply and support the use of European products in certain strategic sectors and technologies to the benefit of all Member States? Which criteria will you use to identify those strategic sectors and technologies? How will you contribute to the action plan for the automotive sector? Do you have any specific plans for PFAS?

The Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA) and Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) address important aspects of industrial competitiveness, including streamlining of permitting, access to a secure supply of raw materials, the reskilling and upskilling of the European workforce and access to markets. If confirmed, we will ensure they deliver: the agreed permitting timelines, the first batch of CRMA strategic projects selected in early 2025 and support for public and private investors to get them off the ground. I will also work to ensure the speedy adoption of the implementing legislation necessary for the Member States to start applying ambitious non-price criteria in public procurement and renewable energy auctions – an important first step in creating lead markets for clean tech.

We will oversee the set-up a Critical Raw Materials Platform, equipping it with the means and resources to support joint purchasing and manage strategic stockpiles. To promote circularity, the full implementation of the recyclability and recycled content measures included in the CRMA, the batteries and the ecodesign legislations, will increase availability and uptake of secondary raw materials. But to complete the picture we must also create a true single market for waste and secondary raw materials, and, as described in my reply to question 6, I will work with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and Competitive Circular Economy to ensure that the Circular Economy Act does that.

To strengthen competitiveness, resilience and open strategic autonomy more broadly, we need to put in place the right conditions for our companies to invest, decarbonise and become more competitive. To that end, I will help put forward a Clean Industrial Deal within the first hundred days of the mandate, as described under question 6.

Moreover, in line with my mission letter, we will develop a horizontal strategy to deepen the Single Market and remove barriers to help companies scale up, as further described in my reply to question 12, and propose a European Competitiveness Fund to ensure that we invest in strategic technologies and sectors, as described in my reply to question 16.

Importantly, defining Europe's specific vulnerabilities is key to inform policy intervention. As outlined in my reply to question 15, I will put the emphasis on the monitoring of supply chain risks and anticipating disruptions, notably by focusing on existing and potential strategic dependencies, in particular on one country. To safeguard our supply chain resilience, we will prioritise risk assessments across critical ecosystems such as energy intensive industries, health, digital and electronics (like chips, quantum, supercomputers and AI), renewable energy, electric vehicles, aerospace and defence. I will build on our approach to critical raw materials to find the appropriate solutions.

Securing an international level playing field and effectively protecting European industry from external unfair competition will require deploying the full trade and competition policy toolbox, such as the systematic enforcement of trade defence instruments, and their reinforcement if needed in a WTO compliant manner. A number of clean tech products which contribute to the EU's Green Deal objectives are already covered by trade defence measures, including steel wind towers and e-bicycles, as well as battery electric vehicles, more recently. Our trade policy must be aligned with our industrial policy.

In terms of sectorial measures, I will develop a dedicated steel and metals action plan setting out bold measures to tackle the most urgent needs and ensure the sector's long-term viability, building on the outcome of the Clean Transition Dialogues and the Metals Transition Pathway. The action plan should tackle the negative effects of global overcapacity and high energy prices. It should also ensure that trade policy further contributes to the industry's long-term competitiveness and decarbonisation.

In parallel, together with the Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism we will work on a robust action plan for the automotive industry, which is going through major transformations on the road to electric and autonomous vehicles. They are faced with many problems, including high production costs, over-capacities in third countries, and weakening demand. We have to do much more to address these challenges, to ensure continued support to the battery and overall supply chain, to put in place a coherent framework for the automotive industry, including for its digitalisation. This also means updating the type approval framework for motor vehicles to allow the deployment of autonomous vehicles and to better harness the economic potential of vehicle data.

IPCEIs have proven a catalyst for investment, mobilising over EUR 100 billion in strategic sectors such as micro-electronics, batteries, hydrogen, cloud, and health. My priority will be to work with Member States to identify the right technologies for future IPCEIs. Since October 2023, the Commission has set up the Joint European Forum where intensive discussions are taking place. Several promising technologies have emerged as candidates, such as advanced materials for clean tech, Artificial Intelligence, or nuclear energy technologies. I would, together with the Executive Vice-President for the Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, strive to accelerate this work to have new IPCEI proposals and will reflect on how to best use the EU budget to support IPCEIs as part of the future European Competitiveness Fund. I will also work with the Executive Vice-President for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition Proposals and Member States to enable new IPCEIs to be announced and approved quickly.

Public procurement will be another important lever to create lead markets in clean and strategic technologies. As set out in more detail under question 14, I intend to prepare a revision of the Public Procurement Directive that will prioritise resilience in certain strategic sectors and technologies.

Regarding PFAS, to provide clarity on the REACH restriction of PFAS, please see my reply to question 8.

Finally, in working to improve industrial competitiveness and prosperity, I will not lose sight of broader societal and planetary objectives. If done right, competitiveness measures can be key enablers for the climate transition and the creation of quality jobs.

11. How do you plan to address regulatory issues affecting companies, especially SMEs, including when operating cross border? How do you plan to ensure that SMEs will benefit from the strategic autonomy roadmap? What legal consequences will have the introduction of a new category of small midcaps on existing and future EU legislation? What will be the criteria for defining small midcaps? Will it be a separate binding legal definition or will existing legal categories (e.g. EU SME Definition) be extended to include this new category? What are your concrete plans to make speed, coherence and simplification key political priorities in order to reduce administrative burden and simplify implementation, reporting and permitting? How will you concretely implement the 'new SME and competitiveness check'?

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are the muscle of EU's economy. Helping them grow and become more productive is necessary for the EU's long-term competitiveness.

SME are particularly affected by regulatory burden, given their usually limited resources for administrative tasks. If confirmed, I will work to create a dedicated SME passport to reduce administrative burden and costs by certifying in a simple manner a company's SME status, thereby freeing up time and resources for their business. It would also allow for an easier processing and handling for public authorities.

Together with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law we would work on the development of a so-called 28th regime, to help innovative companies grow and benefit from simpler, harmonised set of rules throughout the Union. In line with the political guidelines, a Single Market dimension will be added to the Rule of Law Report, looking at issues affecting companies, especially SMEs operating across borders.

If confirmed, together with the Commissioner for Startups, Research, and Innovation, we will launch a European Innovation Act and an EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy to streamline our regulatory framework and facilitate access to venture capital for startups and scaleups.

SMEs are also essential to achieving open strategic autonomy, as they play a key role in building resilient and diversified supply chains. If confirmed, I will make sure that SMEs can benefit through dedicated support and efforts to secure the availability of critical inputs, which are essential for their resilience.

Speed, coherence and simplification of EU laws as well as an easy access to EU financing instruments are crucial to regain Europe's competitive edge and will be a central priority for my portfolio. Therefore, if confirmed, I will put an emphasis on reducing burden, such as reporting obligations and administrative costs. If confirmed, I will also work in a collegial manner with other Members of the College, and in particular with the Commissioner for Implementation and Simplification, to stress-test the Single Market acquis and to make proposals to eliminate any overlaps and contradictions and to be fully digitally compatible, while maintaining high standards.

As written in my mission letter, I will lead the work to introduce a definition of a new category of small midcaps, based on the number of employees as well as the financial revenues, which could in turn allow the Commission and the co-legislators to adopt dedicated rules for such small midcaps when and where it could be necessary and justified .

Furthermore, I intend to make full use of standardisation and digitalisation so that information is digital by default and submitted only once, which will create a regulatory environment that simplifies and streamlines, ranging from reporting to permit-granting. Facilitating compliance is essential and we can achieve this by shifting from document-based to data-driven information flows. In this regard, I will endeavour to further leverage smart digital tools for e-Invoicing, the Digital Product Passport, and the Single Digital Gateway.

Our policies must promote competitiveness and consider the needs of SMEs. Finally, the new SME and competitiveness check, on which, if confirmed, I will work with the Commissioner for Implementation and

Simplification, will help us design future legislation in a way to boost competitiveness of EU companies, including of SMEs, and avoid unnecessary burdens, while maintaining high standards.

First, the new competitiveness check, which will accompany all impact assessments, will be based on a set of key indicators, including cost/price competitiveness, international competitiveness, capacity to innovate and impacts on the competitiveness of SMEs. It will include a deeper analysis of the impacts of a proposal, taking into account the health of the sectors most affected by international competition and relevant for the proposal. To the extent that sectoral competitiveness issues are identified, the check will also reflect the required mitigation measures.

Second, we will further strengthen the SME dimension of our analysis with a new SME check. With this new check, the Commission will consider the needs of SMEs along the policy cycle, in particular at the first stages of the policy-making process. The Commission will also carry out a dedicated analysis of impacts on SMEs in all their evaluations and fitness checks. This retrospective assessment will allow us to draw valuable lessons to simplify and cut burden reduction for future SME-relevant policies.

For me, it is crucial to systematically consider the SME dimension at every step of the decision-making process. The cumulative as well as the indirect impacts of a proposal, through trickle-down effects in the value chain as well as its influence on market dynamics, are currently not sufficiently considered. If confirmed, I will stand ready to collaborate with the Parliament, the Council and other interested parties to ensure that policies reaching SMEs do support them and do not place a disproportionate burden on them.

Questions from the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection

12. In her political guidelines for this new term and in her mission letter to you, the President of the Commission underlines that the Single Market is a key pillar of the EU and that a new momentum is needed to deepen it, especially in the services sector where many barriers still persist, to ensure EU prosperity. In the fields of free movement of services and goods, which actions, including legislative measures, are you planning to undertake and how would the new Single Market Strategy contribute to bring about this new momentum, further integrate the Single Market, reduce unjustified barriers, administrative burdens and reporting obligations, while empowering and protecting consumers, promote entrepreneurship, and make the EU globally competitive in the coming decades? How do you foresee to increase product safety and fair competition in the Single Market in relation to products originating from third countries, addressing also third-country e-commerce platforms flooding the EU with products that often do not comply with EU standards while avoiding customs?

The Single Market is an under-exploited treasure. And the recent report presented by Enrico Letta is clear: creating a truly integrated Single Market is critical for European competitiveness. If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will do my utmost to deepen the Single Market with the view to boosting Europe's productivity, supporting our prosperity and social market economy, achieving the fair green and digital transitions, ensuring a level playing field that leaves no one behind.

Therefore, I will develop, by June 2025, a Single Market Strategy to create a new momentum for a modernised Single Market for goods and services, based on the facts and the needs from businesses, workers and citizens. I will strive to remove existing regulatory and administrative barriers and to prevent new ones, while ensuring a well-functioning Single Market and promoting an upward convergence. Furthermore, my priority will be to simplify the legislative framework, facilitate compliance and ensure correct implementation across all Member States. My work will be guided by four main priorities:

First, prevention: I will consider the need for a Single Market Barrier Prevention Act, as elaborated further in my reply question 13, with the intention to strengthen the notification system.

Second, collaboration: I will enhance the powerful work with Member States of the Single Market Enforcement Task Force and the SOLVIT network to address very concrete barriers citizens and businesses encounter. While our joint efforts with Member States have already led to concrete results, more efforts and political engagement are needed to remove remaining obstacles detrimental to the competitiveness of our enterprises.

Third, digitalisation: I will promote digital by default, paying particular attention to interoperability and the once-only principle. Compliance with necessary reporting obligations will be simplified as we progress in the shift from document-based to data-driven information flows and an increased use of smart digital tools.

Fourth, enforcement: Corrective measures to address Single Market barriers and ensure the correct implementation of EU rules should be applied where needed. In that regard, I believe we should reflect on how to trigger enforcement action more rapidly where companies and citizens risk suffering significant economic consequences because of Member States' non-compliance with the EU rules.

Implementation of our common rules is a joint responsibility. Thus, working closely with Member States and also the European Parliament will be of highest priority for me.

It will also be the case in the fields of services, which are paramount to our economic competitiveness and prosperity. They account for around 70% of EU GDP and jobs and are key to EU manufacturing industries. Yet, the Single Market for services continues to perform below potential. In many sectors, we have 27 markets instead of 1. It means fewer opportunities for companies, and less chance to scale up. This is why, if confirmed, I will make it a priority to tackle administrative barriers for EU service providers, with particular attention to cross-border regions.

In this regard, I also want to look at regulated professions. Today, access to and exercise of many professions are subject to regulatory requirements to safeguard consumers and public interest objectives. Of the over 5500 regulated professions in the EU, many are only regulated in a few Member States, suggesting that there may be less burdensome means of safeguarding public interests. Where professions are regulated, my objective is to make the cross-border recognition of qualifications faster and simpler, also by supporting digitalisation and automation of processes, while safeguarding workers' rights. This will enhance the mobility of qualified professionals within the Single Market and enable people to swiftly take up work or provide services for which they are qualified. To achieve this, I will join forces with Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness to work on the Skills Portability Initiative.

In the Single Market, it is essential that European citizens are only offered authentic and safe products. Yet, too many products that do not meet our standards enter our market freely. I am particularly aware that concerns and fraud have increased with the rise of e-commerce and direct sales to EU consumers via third country online marketplaces, which are more difficult and costly to control for compliance. Tackling these challenges requires efforts from several Members of the Commission. Therefore, I will work with the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, on effectively and promptly tackling challenges related to product safety and e-commerce.

Many different tools will have to be used together to address these challenges. Customs and tax authorities, together with market surveillance authorities, will play an important role. The enforcement of the Digital Services Act, vis-a-vis online marketplaces who are not following our rules, is and will remain a priority. Furthermore, the recently adopted General Product Safety Regulation and the Market Surveillance Regulation also provide new product safety specific obligations for online marketplaces, such as takedown orders. Together with Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, and the Rule of Law, I will support national enforcers in ensuring that only safe products are offered for EU consumers both online and offline.

While doing all of this, we must ensure an environment where smaller European e-commerce platforms are able to thrive and compete on a fair basis with non-EU e-commerce platforms. Therefore, we must create an enabling environment without fragmentation or duplication of rules.

13. With regard to the mission letter of the Commission's President, what do you envisage on possible content and timing of the specific measures indicated thereto, in particular in relation to the Single Market Barriers Prevention Act, the European Competitiveness Fund, the SME passport, the Single Digital Gateway, the Circular Economy Act, and the evaluation of the EU Standardisation Regulation? How will you develop in concrete the new Single Market Strategy? How do you plan to engage with the IMCO Committee and its Working Groups, in the framework of its scrutiny activities, in order to keep the Committee updated in a transparent, regular and timely manner about the implementation of current legislation, the upcoming initiatives, including those mentioned in the mission letter, and the results of the enforcement actions in the Single Market for services and goods by the Commission and the Member States?

If I am confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will strive to ensure the completion of a robust, simple, and modern Single Market framework, empowering consumers and companies alike. As part of the Single Market Strategy, the Commission will present concrete actions to promote cross-border provision of services and cross-border movement of goods. I will focus my efforts on both removing the existing barriers and preventing the creation of new ones. Unlocking the potential of the Single Market and leveraging on its scale is a shared

responsibility of the European, national, and regional administrations. I will engage in a constructive dialogue with the European Parliament and the Council. Working closely with all the stakeholders, including social partners and industry representatives, I will aim at delivering this Strategy by June next year.

While reinforcing our transparency tools, I intend to strengthen the preventive assessments of new national regulations that could have an impact on the Single Market, including considering the need for a Single Market Barrier Prevention Act. Mobilising the full potential of preventive action is possible by better implementing the existing transparency instruments. Closing the gaps in the existing notification mechanisms, strengthening stakeholder participation, and imposing more stringent proportionality assessments for new regulatory initiatives will be key in that regard. Where prevention fails, I will not hesitate to launch infringement proceedings.

As explained in my reply to question 11, one of my first priorities will be to create a dedicated SME passport to reduce administrative burden and freeing up time and resources for businesses and to allow for an easier processing and handling for public authorities, e.g. in relation to the application for funding, regulatory compliance, or exemptions from legal requirements such as reporting obligations.

As outlined in my reply to question 6, together with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience, and a Competitive Circular Economy, I will work on proposing the Circular Economy Act to establish a well-functioning single market for waste and secondary materials.

The evaluation of the Standardisation Regulation is planned to be finalised in early 2025. Based on the evidence gathered, I will carefully assess if regulatory revisions are needed and whether the current system is able to meet the urgent EU policy and industrial needs. We need to deliver on technical standards, not least for the legislative needs accompanying the green and digital transformation in a shifting geopolitical landscape. The impact of the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice over the last eight years will be also part of this reflection, as well as overall simplification needs, which might require a new approach to how we work with our stakeholders on standards, while safeguarding the important economic and technical insights that our participatory process brings. Standardisation has been an important strength of Europe in the past, and my intention is to maintain and develop our position as a global standards-setter.

As for the Single Digital Gateway, it is one of the EU's most ambitious eGovernment initiatives. It offers access to reliable information, digital administrative procedures, and assistance services. It reduces administrative burden by facilitating the digitising and digitalisation of public administration for Europe's citizens and businesses, providing a comprehensive online access point when looking to work, study, or operate in another EU country. If confirmed, I would further reinforce it and will prioritise the full roll-out of the Once-Only Technical System by supporting the onboarding of more than 80 000 public administrations in the Member States and by ensuring the availability of all administrative procedures in its scope.

I pledge – and it will be my pleasure – to build and maintain a direct communication channel with you and your relevant working groups, in full respect of the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission and at all stages of the decision-making process. As outlined in my reply to question 2, all my team will also be easily available throughout the mandate, in a two-way flow of information. I will invite Rapporteurs, shadows, or leading members in specific fields to working sessions to address concerns and to take ideas that come directly from their parliamentary work and their constituency.

14. How do you plan to realise your assigned mission of revising the Public Procurement Directives in order to use the potential of public procurement for the benefit of EU single market, and EU citizens and businesses, among them of SMEs to enhance competitiveness, including EU digital competitiveness, and to ensure fair competition, security of supply for certain vital technologies, products and services? What technologies and sectors do you find strategic thus requiring an intervention through public procurement and what solutions should be applied, bearing in mind the need to maintain a level playing field and equality of opportunity for EU companies across the Single Market? When do you consider the revision of the public procurement framework will take place, and are you planning to revise it through EU regulations instead of EU directives?

Public procurement has a crucial role to play in creating lead markets, i.e. demand for innovative, sustainable and resilient products. The current *acquis* consists of no less than six Directives and provisions across dozens of pieces of sectoral legislation. If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will undertake the revision of the current EU public procurement directives as indicated in my mission letter and announced by President-elect von der Leyen in her political guidelines.

The revision of the legislative framework will seek to further unlock the enormous potential of public procurement to shape the European economy, create lead markets, and to lever growth and resilience for European companies, thereby creating quality jobs. I intend to propose a modernisation of the rules to address three main areas: 1) the strategic role of public procurement through qualitative requirements, notably in terms of sustainability, social, resilience and cybersecurity; 2) the EU added value of public procurement for our citizens through the security of supply for strategic technologies, products and services, including in case of emergency and 3) the simplification of the current mechanisms, in particular with EU startups and innovators in mind, but also the local authorities.

The revision of the Public Procurement Directives is also an opportunity to rethink public procurement with digital technologies in mind. Not only on how we use these technologies to simplify and speed up the processes, but also on how we can speed up the uptake of innovative products and technologies. I would like to take the opportunity to draw attention to the Public Procurement Data Space that, since September this year, empowers public buyers and businesses to improve decision-making by leveraging advanced data analytics and digital tools.

In order to be able to conduct such a revision in a way that conforms with the principles of Better Regulation as well as subsidiarity and proportionality, two main steps will have to be fulfilled. First, the evaluation of the current framework. If confirmed, I commit to conduct a thorough evaluation of the current Public Procurement Directives, in line with the requests of the Council and the European Court of Auditors. A thorough public consultation will enable us to identify conflicting aspects, benefits and challenges of the current framework that will feed our reflection on possible areas for improvement and simplification. Second, an impact assessment will consider any burden, financial or administrative falling upon citizens, enterprises or public buyers.

In this preliminary phase, I would also like as a priority to hear your views, and to consult the local authorities, who are the first users of public procurement, so as to feed into our proposal.

In order to identify and prioritise the strategic technologies and sectors, in accordance with the statement by the President-elect that the future of our prosperity must be made in Europe, we will take into account a number of factors: the sectors and technologies identified in existing sectoral legislation for example the Net-Zero Industry Act and the Eco-design for Sustainable Products Regulation as well as in upcoming initiatives such as the Clean Industrial Deal and the Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act, but also criteria such as resilience of supply chains, physical and cyber security of critical infrastructure, technology security and leakage, economic dependencies or coercion, rate of participation of third countries' economic operators in a given sector. This is an important part of the reflection on the revision of the public procurement framework, and we will give it particular attention.

The new rules will be designed to ensure EU added value for our citizens, security of supply for certain strategic technologies, products and services and the right conditions for EU companies to invest in decarbonisation and create quality jobs. It is of particular importance that public buyers ensure that third country bidders conform to our environmental, climate and social standards regardless of the applicable legal regime in their country. It remains equally important to push for a reciprocal access for our companies to the public procurement markets in third countries.

We will assess the impact of different possible tools to address these challenges, and continue implementing the recently adopted ones, as well as collaborating with public buyers and stakeholders in view to find further practical and easy to apply solutions. For this endeavour, it is necessary to provide the appropriate time. But I can assure you that this work will be given high priority so that we can advance as fast as possible without compromising on quality.

As part of the policy options identified in the impact assessment, we will consider whether a regulatory intervention in the form of one or several Directives, a Regulation or other targeted measures are the best way to address the combined objectives.

Finally, beyond legislative effort, if confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will further promote the use of guidance, support for capacity building and tailored training sessions to both public buyers and social economy entities in EU Member States.

Question from the Committee on International Trade

15. In a climate of heightened global uncertainty and an increased need to consolidate the Union's economic security agenda and to strengthen our competitiveness, how will you ensure that economic security, trade, investment and industrial policies are all part of a cohesive approach that fosters the Union's open strategic autonomy and resilience? How will you design and implement the economic security agenda and over what time frame? Building on the earlier exchanges between Parliament and the Commission on the Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1441, will you give an assurance that when the first report on the implementation of the Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR) is presented by 13 July 2026, a legislative proposal to amend the FSR will also be presented? Given the significantly higher than expected case load related to notified bids in public procurement procedures, will you ensure a substantial increase in the number of staff responsible for the implementation of the FSR within the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs?

I strongly believe in the need for a cohesive approach which makes use of our economic security, trade, investment, and industrial policies to pursue the EU's strategic interests. We need to give our companies the space and conducive environment they need to innovate and scale up, protect the Single Market from unfair competition, ensure fair access to raw materials, open third country markets to create new opportunities, as well as secure the inputs we need from diverse sources and at competitive costs. The competitiveness of our European industry indeed requires a holistic approach with a secure supply-chain, fair competition conditions and economic opportunities worldwide.

A lot of initiatives have been taken in the previous mandate to protect and support our businesses and infrastructures in the immediate aftermath of external shocks, to create the structural conditions for their competitiveness and the resilience of our supply chains, and to align our policy with our values and our climate objectives. These questions underpinned our industrial strategy, trade strategy and the economic security strategy, which are intertwined and must be implemented in a coherent manner. I support more assertiveness in protecting the Single Market from unfair trade practices, distorting non-market policies, and technology leakage.

Coherence and coordination between these work strands will first and foremost be ensured at College level, in particular with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, in view of the clear objectives we have set – competitiveness, security and sustainability. If I am confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will work with my counterparts to ensure that both internal and external aspects are fully considered and taken into account when further developing our industrial, trade and economic security policies. They are the two sides of the same coin. We need to make sure that we continue to benefit from international open and rules-based trade, while limiting the risks that excessive dependencies will be weaponised. We have powerful tools at our disposal in this respect, which we should use, such as the foreign subsidy instrument.

Our economic security policy, two years after the adoption of the Strategy, needs to be further implemented and developed across the board, to ensure that all relevant policies, industrial, digital, research and innovation, and others, are mobilized in a coherent and mutually reinforcing way. The Strategy, centred around “promote, protect and partner“ now needs to be efficiently implemented based on risk assessments.

If confirmed, we will work with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security in deepening our understanding of the risks we face through coordinated risk assessments, preparing targeted and proportionate risk mitigation measures, deploying economic security tools we have to address the risks we face, and successfully completing ongoing processes to strengthen our tools, e.g. concerning FDI screening and outbound investments. We will assess whether new tools are necessary. We will also help advance the initiatives started in the previous mandate such as deepening the emphasis on the monitoring of supply chain risks and anticipate disruptions and focusing on existing and potential strategic dependencies. An appropriate calendar and scope should be established with Member States for conducting further risk assessments for critical technologies. Finally, I will work with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security to continue partnering with like-minded countries, notably the G7, to strengthen our supply chain resilience by developing economic security standards. In addition to Free Trade Agreements, we will develop Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships with a strong business dimension for investment opportunities to secure and diversify the supply of critical raw materials, green energy, and clean tech.

As regards the Foreign Subsidies Regulation, it has already shown its effectiveness and we will make full use of it. In parallel, if confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I would conduct a thorough assessment of the implementation of the Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR). When reviewing the practice of implementing and enforcing the Regulation, we will consider, amongst other issues, the appropriateness of the level of the notification

thresholds. The report on this assessment will be presented to the Parliament and the Council. Based on this assessment, if needed to ensure a level playing field for all companies on the internal market, the Commission will consider a possible legislative proposal to that end.

If confirmed, I will work together with the Executive Vice-President for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition to realise our ambitions for a level playing field for all companies operating in the Single Market.

Question from the Committee on Budgets

16. In her political guidelines, the President-elect calls for the establishment of an EU Competitiveness Fund that will invest in strategic technologies (from AI to space, clean tech and biotech) and in Important Projects of Common Interest (IPCEIs) and will also leverage and de-risk private investment in our common goals.

The scope of such a fund will encompass a wide variety of existing policy priorities.

Can you tell us about the rationale underpinning this approach and elaborate on your vision for implementing it and how it will drive the twin transitions, in particular detailing the policies and existing programmes that would fit in such a fund, the degree of harmonisation these programmes will be subjected to, the balance between repayable and non-repayable support the fund will provide and the safeguards put in place to ensure that Parliament is involved on equal footing with Council in the decision making process, programme implementation and the monitoring of the implementation of the fund?

Europe has always been a continent known for its innovative power and for its thriving industry able to excel in global markets. But this strength is being tested. Today, European companies operate in a turbulent world, with more unfair competition, higher energy prices, skills and labour shortages and difficulties in accessing the capital they need. We are facing a pivotal moment for the European industry and research communities. Our technological leadership, our capacity to respond to industrial challenges, to accelerate the transition and to actively capture new opportunities are at stake.

Against this background, if confirmed as Executive Vice-President, my aim is to create the enabling conditions for needed investments into boosting the innovation potential, and successfully achieving the twin transition. As outlined in the political guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen and in line with our ambition to become an investment Commission, the European Competitiveness Fund will be our investment capacity for strategic technologies, working in synergy with other tools and policies.

Europe's competitiveness – and its position in the race to a clean, digital and bio economy – will depend on starting a new age of invention and ingenuity. This requires putting research and innovation, science and technology, at the centre of our economy. To achieve this objective, our tools need to be fit for purpose.

Today, EU spending, including for competitiveness, is spread over too many programmes – many of which fund the same things but with different requirements and difficulties to combine funding effectively.

I firmly believe there is a need to better focus EU spending on our priorities. If I am confirmed, developing the future European Competitiveness Fund will be one of my main priorities, working closely with other Members of the College, notably the Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration and the Executive Vice-President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition. The design of the future European Competitiveness Fund is ahead of us. These key principles will guide us:

1. **Strategic focus.** The European Competitiveness Fund will invest in European public goods. Strategic technologies will be key – from artificial intelligence to space, clean tech to biotech – to ensure that they are developed and manufactured in Europe. The future of the clean and cutting-edge tech industry must be made in Europe. The Competitiveness Fund should support research, innovation, start-ups, scale-ups, as well as Important Projects of Common European Interest. Our research and innovation policy must be aligned with our industrial policy. And we need to invest strategically to maximise our impact.
2. **Flexibility.** The European Competitiveness Fund will invest where EU action is most needed and with the most impactful and flexible toolbox. Moreover, the fund should ensure that we use the power of our budget to leverage and de-risk private investment in our common goals.

3. Simplicity and speed. Benefitting from EU funds should be easy and fast for potential applicants. Rules and procedures for access to EU funds need massive simplification. We need fewer programmes. Access to information, faster processes, and continuous improvements building on stakeholders' feedback are key to better support our industrial and research community at operational level.

We need to translate European innovation into markets and facilitate scaling up in Europe. The Competitiveness Fund will be our tool to make this happen. It should accompany European businesses along the whole investment journey: from idea to commercialisation, from research to production, from lab to fab. So that our companies have the necessary support to grow and thrive in the Single Market and globally.

The Fund will also be part of our funding for the geopolitics of today, by strengthening our value chains and tackling our dependencies.

The Commission will develop a new Competitiveness Coordination Tool which will operate in conjunction with this new Fund. This tool should translate EU-wide competitiveness objectives into coordinated national policies, ensuring public and private financing for each strategic priority.

As former Member, I know that the European Parliament is a powerful advocate for an ambitious EU budget at the service of our policy priorities. I will therefore engage with the Parliament for developing and delivering the European Competitiveness Fund, in a spirit of openness, transparency, mutual trust, and constant dialogue, with regular exchange of information. You can count on my commitment to ensure involvement of the Parliament on equal footing with the Council, as co-legislators and budgetary authority.

Question from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

17. As Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, you will be in charge of the revision of the Public Procurement Directive. This Directive can play a pivotal role in the promotion of high labour standards. Social partners at EU level are very clear on the necessity to bring more protection to European workers through this Directive.

How will you ensure that the social aspects of the EU public procurement legislation are strengthened, notably with regard to social award criteria in public contracts, in view of: limiting subcontracting chains and regulating the role of labour intermediaries; ensuring the respect of workers' rights and the application of collective agreements; enhancing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and workers with support needs; ensuring that not-for-profit/social economy providers of social services are not excluded from public contracts?

As a European, I am proud of our high labour standards and committed to strengthening them. These standards are key to promote sound competition and avoid a race to the bottom in the quality of the jobs we create. I strongly believe that EU public procurement has an important role to play in the promotion of these standards.

Already today, the 2014 Public Procurement Directives mandate that social and labour law obligations must be complied with in the performance of public contracts, including those based on collective agreements. The Directives also offer procedural tools for public buyers to ensure this throughout the whole procurement process. Moreover, the rules enable public buyers to create opportunities for non-profit organisations and social economy enterprises, and for employers to integrate disadvantaged workers or persons with disabilities in their staff.

But more can be done. The revision of the Public Procurement Directives, as explained in the reply to Question 14, is a valuable opportunity for an in-depth evaluation of the legislative framework, allowing us to identify further possible steps toward promoting the use of social clauses, enhancing social responsibility and sustainability in procurement. Local authorities, who are the main users of public procurement and at the same time the best experts on local employment, as well as social partners, have an important role to play in this process. If confirmed as Executive Vice-President, I will ensure they are properly involved in the process in order to feed their input into the revision.

In addition, if confirmed, I would further promote the use of guidance, support for capacity building and tailored training sessions to both public buyers and social economy entities in the Member States. I support ongoing Commission efforts to look into its own use of social clauses.

Moreover, I have the strong belief that other objectives such as simplification and resilience will also have a positive social impact: resilience will support European jobs and simplification will enhance access for SMEs and social economy enterprises, hence again with an impact on local jobs. In fact, the complexity of our rules often hinders the participation of small entities in public procurement. Through simplification and capacity building, I want these entities to be able to tap into the potential that public procurement can offer them.

If confirmed, during the preparation of the revision I will work closely with the Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness, to reflect on how the rules may be improved, promoting social dialogue and high labour standards, enhancing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and contributing to the social economy and a more inclusive society.

A close coordination will be needed as I believe the revision of the Public Procurement Directives can only produce the desired effects if it is accompanied by the relevant actions in the upcoming Quality Jobs Roadmap and the new Pact for European Social Dialogue.

Question from the Committee on Legal Affairs

18. Intellectual property without copyright

In your mission letter, one of your areas of action is to ensure that “our intellectual property policy continues to reward innovation and creativity and step up enforcement of the current rules”.

The 2020 Commission IP Action Plan aimed at enabling the European creative and innovative industry to remain a global leader and at speeding up Europe's green and digital transitions. This IP Action Plan led in particular to the strengthening of the protection of IP with the adoption of the Regulation on the protection of geographical indications (GI) for craft and industrial products and with the revision of the 20 years old Design legislation that make it fit for the digital age. The Patent package - where the European Parliament adopted its first reading position and that will be negotiated during this term - aims to propose new rules to help companies, especially SMEs, to make the most of their inventions and creations and supports the EU's competitiveness and technological sovereignty notably in ensuring that key-patented products can be made available in times of crisis. Among the patent package files, one seems to encounter particular difficulties in the Council (the SEPs file), despite recent trends indicating that the EU is losing market shares compared to Asian and US economic players. The IP Action Plan also led to the adoption of the EU Toolbox against counterfeiting which “aims to foster collaboration between rights holders, service providers, and law enforcement, while encouraging best practices and the use of modern tools and technologies”. IP is a key driver for economic growth as intangible assets play an increasing role in the global innovation race. Nevertheless, as underlined by the Draghi Report, it seems that EU companies, especially SMEs, feel discouraged to protect their IP assets due notably to the complex, costly and lengthy procedures required when filing IPR applications. This situation would prevent companies from competing globally and leveraging the Single Market. Besides, the evolution of AI technologies or the unethical use of some technologies, such as the use of dark patterns, may pose new challenges to the IP framework that still remain unaddressed and that may have potential effects on innovation, creativity and on the EU's competitiveness, thinking in particular about Generative AI and its relationships with patents, but also trademarks, trade secrets as well as with the question of IP enforcement. In addition, currently the Commission carries out a periodic review of the EU legislation on trademarks. As regards trade secrets, in particular for SMEs, additional efforts are needed to promote awareness and fight against theft of trade secrets in the context of global technological innovation.

Bearing these challenges in mind, what measures would you take to ensure that all the current IP rules are properly enforced and will you put forward new initiatives, for example in the area of trade secrets or trademarks, to ensure that the EU framework is still fit-for-purpose to reward innovation and creativity in the digital age and to support the EU's long-term growth and competitiveness, while stepping up efforts to facilitate negotiations on proposals carried over from the previous term?

Intangibles represent a significant portion of corporate assets and are one of the strongest incentives to invest in a company. For example, startups employing patents and trademarks are 10 times more likely to obtain venture capital funding. Therefore, Intellectual Property (IP) is an essential element of competitiveness.

Yet, the EU patent rulebook remains fragmented. If confirmed, my first focus will be to address that fragmentation by promoting a wider adoption of the Unitary Patent System, beyond the current 18 Member States, to reduce costs, increase legal certainty and benefit from the uniform jurisdiction of the Unified Patent Court, counting on the European Patent Office to continue with its task of issuing unitary patents.

Along this line, I will strive to deliver on the Patent Package, building on the European Parliament's support for all its three pillars, two of which would bestow new responsibilities on the EU Intellectual Property Office. I plan to work closely with Member States to finalise these reforms, which address the most pressing challenges to the EU patent acquis and aim to build on and reinforce the unitary patent system.

The proposals for Regulations on Supplementary Protection Certificates aim to reduce administrative burden and guarantee coherence for the pharmaceutical and agrochemical industries, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises and solidifying the Unitary Patent System. The proposal for a Regulation on Compulsory Licensing, which is reaching the trilogue stage, will address the Union's need for effective IP tools to react to crises that impact value chains across the Single Market. A reliable and transparent framework for Standard-Essential Patents (SEP) licensing will ensure that the EU is a more attractive investment destination for licensors and licensees. In that respect, I will actively contribute to the work of the co-legislators, remedying licensing frictions in the markets critical to the Union's competitiveness, particularly given the dawn of the Internet of Things and the change in the global balance of SEP ownership. Finally, the EU Biotech Directive, established more than two decades ago, laid down the core principles for patenting biotechnological inventions. As new developments unfold in the biotech market, we need to ensure that IP protection optimally contributes to fostering the EU biotech sector and is considered one of the elements when preparing the future EU Biotech Act.

Secondly, if confirmed, I will be committed to further modernising the IP framework to adapt it to emerging market realities, such as artificial intelligence (AI), and the potential challenges they may pose, all while prioritizing the prosperity of our citizens and the EU's industrial goals. Both our trademark and design law acquis have recently been modernised with a view of making them fit for the digital age, while reducing administrative burden, and the new rules on geographical indications for craft and industrial products have tapped into the underexploited value created by our craftsmen and -women. By valorising traditional know-how, we will put IP to use to acknowledge their life's work and to protect good-paying jobs, including in less industrialized regions. While AI can pose challenges to core concepts of IP law, such as inventorship, patentability, authorship, and economic rent distribution, I believe we should strike a balance between promoting and facilitating innovation, while ensuring the protection of rightsholders. Looking ahead, we will need to ensure that the EU IP system enables uptake and roll-out of AI and AI-based solutions, while making sure appropriate safeguards exist to prevent their abuse. This is particularly true for patents and trade secrets protection in the age of industrial big data.

Thirdly, IP law can only spur investment and fuel competitiveness if it is effectively implemented. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that creators and inventors within the EU receive fair returns on their creations and innovation, and that SME intangibles are protected and their access to finance facilitated. We need to reduce the burden of SMEs to apply and enforce their IP rights, since IP can significantly leverage their ability to gain liquidity and bring their innovations to the market. SMEs are more likely to fail because of IP violations than larger companies, thus I will explore the possibility of offering a robust and tailor-made SME IP support mechanism, such as from the SME Fund. In 2019, counterfeit products accounted for nearly 6% of all EU imports (EUR 119 billion in value), leading to a loss of 670 000 jobs and EUR 15 billion in lost tax revenue. This is why enforcement is a core element for the Commission. To that end, I will seek to implement the Commission's Anti-Counterfeiting Recommendation, which includes measures and tools to combat counterfeiting and enhance the enforcement of IP rights. One of these tools is the recently published Cyber-Theft Prevention Toolkit to better prepare SMEs for the challenges posed by online theft of trade secrets and to mitigate the negative consequences of cyber-attacks.

Finally, protecting and leveraging intangible assets requires a cohesive international IP strategy. If confirmed, I intend to proactively defend the Union's interests in international IP fora, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization.