

# MISSION LETTER

Brussels, 17 September 2024

Ursula von der Leyen  
President of the European Commission

**Ekaterina Zaharieva**

## **Commissioner-designate for Startups, Research and Innovation**

Dear Ekaterina,

The Commission we will serve in together will be called upon to make choices that will shape our Continent and our Union for years and decades to come. In a time of great global instability and great expectations of Europeans, we must live up to that responsibility. **We must deliver and lead from the front**, working closely with the people and regions of Europe and the parliaments, governments and institutions that serve them.

This was the spirit of the Political Guidelines which I presented to the European Parliament in July 2024 – our common plan for European strength and unity. It focuses on ensuring our **security** in every sense in a more dangerous and turbulent world, on supporting people and citizens by strengthening our **prosperity**, our social market economy, green and digital transitions and sustaining our unique quality of life. We will strengthen our **democracy**, rally around our values and ensure that we are stronger at home. We will work with our partners and better assert our interests around the world.

Together, we will respond to the real and legitimate concerns and expectations that Europeans expressed at the last elections. We will be closer to people and businesses where it really matters with practical support and sustained investment. We will strive to **make Europe faster and simpler** in the way that we act – and in the way we interact

with people. And we will work towards European unity at every turn, starting from within our College.

I am convinced that your experience, motivation, and European commitment will be an essential part of this team. This letter sets out my expectations for our collective work, as well as for your own mission.

## New Commission, new approach

The priorities that I have set out in the Political Guidelines are not standalone areas of work. They are all connected and they will all impact each other. The same will be true for the work of the College as a whole and for each of its Members working together in a spirit of **collegiality**. I expect every Member of College to take **full ownership** of what is agreed.

**Every Member of College is equal** and every Member of College will have an equal responsibility to deliver on our priorities. With this in mind, I expect cooperation at all levels and for you to take an active role across all priorities and to facilitate access to your services where other Commissioners' responsibilities require it.

You will work with myself and the Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration for a **simpler, more focused and responsive long-term budget** that reflects European strategic priorities and our ambition to be an **Investment Commission**.

Given the transformative nature of the next long-term budget – and in order to adapt to our modern approach and new spending priorities – **I will review the structure of the College and the missions** of each Member of College.

I would also like you all to play an active role in **supporting candidate countries to prepare for joining our Union** in your respective policy areas. I count on you when it comes to the pre-enlargement policy reviews and for our broader **ambitious reform agenda**.

I expect you to all contribute to achieving our agreed climate objectives, notably those set for 2030 and the climate neutrality goal for 2050.

As we head to 2030, each Member of College will ensure the delivery of the EU targets and objectives defined for that year, as well as of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** within their policy areas. The College as a whole will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Goals.

Beyond what is listed in your individual mission below, I would like all Members of College to draw on recent or upcoming reports. This notably includes the **Draghi Report** on the

future of European competitiveness, the **Niinistö Report** on how to enhance Europe's civilian and defence preparedness and readiness, the report from the **Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture**, as well as the **Letta report** on the future of the Single Market.

### *Working together for Europe, working closer to Europeans*

To ensure trust and confidence of Europeans, I also want the College to lead when it comes to openness, transparency and representation.

First, **this Commission will strengthen its relationship with EU institutions**. I expect all Commissioners to be present in the European Parliament, both in plenary debates, in Committee meetings and in trilogues. Equally, I expect all Commissioners to engage with Member States and participate in the relevant Council formations. This is essential for ensuring accountability and better communicating our work and our planning.

I will ask you to organise a **structured dialogue** with your respective Parliamentary Committee to chart a way forward for any Article 225 Resolutions adopted by the Parliament calling for legislative proposals. This will be part of our work in ensuring **transparency and information flow** with the Parliament and Council, notably before major events and at key stages about international negotiations.

Second, this Commission will be **more present on the ground, more often and in more regions**. I would like you to visit Member States regularly. I encourage you to go local, visit places and meet Europeans from across our Union, including in cities, rural and sparsely populated areas. Our network of Representations will support you in this. You should meet with representatives from regional or local areas, notably relying on our network of EU Local Councillors, and to give **more visibility to EU projects** making a difference to people's lives on the ground. When engaging with our international partners you will also be supported by our network of EU delegations around the world.

I expect you to **actively communicate** on the Commission's actions and decisions and explain the benefits and opportunities stemming from our work. You should also help **tackle disinformation**, notably by providing clear and accurate information at all times.

Third, this Commission will start **a new era of dialogue** with citizens and stakeholders. You should organise a first edition of the **annual Youth Policy Dialogues** within the first 100 days so that young people can be heard and can help shape your work.

This will be part of our work in embedding **citizen participation** in our work. We will build on the Conference on the Future of Europe to instil a true and **lasting culture of participative democracy**. We will choose policy areas and proposals where recommendations from a European Citizens' Panel would have the greatest value and follow up on their proposals.

Fourth, every Member of College must show a **true European commitment** beyond doubt and be fully independent in their action. I expect full adherence to all applicable integrity, impartiality and ethical rules from all, starting with the **Code of Conduct**. You will ensure that the rules on transparency and meetings with interest representatives are fully respected, including for your staff and services. We will **strengthen our transparency system** by extending the requirements of the Transparency Register to all managers.

Fifth, we will ensure that the Commission becomes **more representative** of the people we serve. We have made a lot of progress in terms of gender balance across management but there is clearly more to be done. Reflecting the EU's strength in diversity, your Cabinet should ensure **gender and geographical balance**.

While the Berlaymont will remain your primary headquarters, you will also have an office within your Directorate-General and be expected to be present on a regular basis to **work closely with your staff and services**. We will collectively ensure that the Commission is an inclusive, respectful and safe workplace.

### *Making Europe simpler and faster*

The success of this new Commission will be measured against our ability to meet the targets and objectives we set, notably as part of the **European Green Deal**.

You will be responsible for the delivery of the policy objectives and targets within your portfolio. To achieve this, you should make full use of all instruments for implementation and enforcement, including infringement proceedings.

You will ensure that existing rules are fit-for-purpose and focus on reducing administrative burdens and simplifying legislation. You must contribute to reducing reporting obligations by at least 25% – and for SMEs at least 35%. You should leverage the power of digital tools to deliver better and faster solutions. We must listen to all companies and stakeholders who work on a daily basis to comply with EU legislation. You will organise at least two **Implementation Dialogues** per year with stakeholders to align implementation with realities on the ground. You will prepare an **Annual Progress Report on Enforcement and Implementation** for your respective Parliamentary committees and Council formations.

You will also work to **stress test the EU acquis** and table proposals to eliminate any overlaps and contradictions and be fully digitally compatible, while maintaining high standards.

New legislation must ensure that our rules are simpler, more accessible to citizens and more targeted. You will ensure the principles of **proportionality, subsidiarity and Better Regulation** are respected, including through wide consultations, impact assessments, a review by the independent **Regulatory Scrutiny Board** and a new **SME and competitiveness check**. Proposals must be evidence-based and the Joint Research

Centre, our internal scientific service, can support you in that work.

## Your mission

### **I would like to entrust you with the role of Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation.**

Europe's competitiveness - and its position in the race to a clean and digital economy - will require putting research and innovation, science and technology at the centre of our economy. This will entail more investment and cooperation, the right conditions for researchers to thrive and develop new skills, and a clearer focus on the most important and disruptive innovation needed for our competitiveness, security and sustainability goals.

You will play a critical role in this ambition, driving the EU's scientific and technological progress, from basic research to applied innovation. Research and innovation must become an ever-greater part of our competitive edge in today's global economy.

- You will create the conditions for researchers and innovators to thrive. You will focus on groundbreaking fundamental research and disruptive innovation, especially in strategic fields, and on scientific excellence. To do this end, you will work to expand the **European Innovation Council (EIC)** and the **European Research Council**.
- You will propose a **European Research Area Act** to guarantee a "fifth freedom", namely the free movement of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology. The aim will be to reduce fragmentation of research and anchor innovation and research into the Single Market and unlock more of its potential.
- I would like you to prioritise the foundations that foster knowledge and innovation, notably through a **long-term strategy to boost European Research Infrastructure**, with the aim of creating a pan-European ecosystem of research infrastructures and services.
- I would like you to focus on **supporting the next generation of researchers** and help strengthen and incentivise cooperation between academic, private and public sector entities to create attractive career perspectives. As part of this, you will support the work to strengthen our **University Alliances**.
- Applying and deploying innovation matters for competitiveness. You will work on a **European Innovation Act** to streamline our regulatory framework, facilitate access to venture capital for European innovative startups and scaleups, supporting them testing, such as with 'sandboxes', and introducing new solutions and technologies.
- I would like you to develop an **EU start-up and scale-up strategy** that improves the framework conditions for start-ups and scale-ups.

- As part of your work in expanding the EIC, you help create a network of **Trusted Investors** to bring together deep tech investors across Europe to foster co-investments with the EIC Fund and greater knowledge, expertise and finance to grow deep tech startups.
- You will lead on the preparation of a new multi-disciplinary **Strategy for European Life Sciences**, to unlock high-value technologies in support of green and digital transitions. You will contribute to the **EU Biotech Act** and the updated bioeconomy strategy.
- Reflecting the growing importance and demand for advanced materials to support the competitiveness of European industries and the twin green and digital transition, you will work on an **Advanced Materials Act** to support the research and innovation process through to manufacturing and deployment.
- You will put forward a strategy to increase the uptake of AI by European scientists and help set up a **European AI Research Council** where we can pool all of our resources.
- I would like you to work to strengthen our **research security**. While promoting the development of critical technologies and their deployment in the European Union, you will be mindful of the need to safeguard our Union's **economic security** while partnering with like-minded partners to achieve common objectives. In this context, you will contribute to the work on identifying and harnessing the EU's dual-use and civil-military potential.
- I would like you to lead the work on **reinforcing international research and innovation cooperation** to better address EU dependencies in strategic sectors while promoting our values and principles. You will work to identify partners for cooperation in critical technology areas, notably through Global Gateway projects.
- You will lead the implementation and oversee the allocation of funding from EU research and innovation programmes, such as **Horizon Europe**, and ensure that these resources are used effectively to achieve the highest standards of scientific excellence and impact. You will work intensively to further simplify access to funding, especially for innovative SMEs and small midcaps.
- As part of this task, you will intensify our effort to make sure **EU Missions** achieve their goals by 2030, and that all the instruments of our Framework Programmes, such as Joint Undertakings, are used to their full potential.
- You will contribute to further developing the **New European Bauhaus**, notably focusing on innovation and bio-based materials.

As a rule, you will work under the guidance of the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and the Industrial Strategy. You will also work under the guidance of the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy on matters related to tech sovereignty. The Directorate-General for Innovation and Research, the Joint Research

Centre and a taskforce on startups will support you in your work.

## Way forward

The actions listed in this letter will shape your work. However, we will need to complete and adapt as we go along and I count on your ideas and expertise in this regard. In addition to College meetings and our continuous discussions, I will invite you every six months for a structured reporting meeting to discuss progress and challenges in delivering on your mission.

Reflecting the evolving nature of political priorities, the Commission must remain agile in allocating staff where most needed. I expect you to play a collegial role in this, by working with your services to identify efficiencies and contributing to corporate redeployment efforts across the Commission.

Given the scale of the challenges and the many issues in our in-tray, we must **hit the ground running on day one**. I invite you to take contact with your future services to prepare your hearing and the work ahead.

I look forward to working closely together for Europe.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Ursula von der Leyen  
*President of the European Commission*