

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**  
**Jutta URPIILAINEN**  
**Commissioner-designate for International Partnerships**

**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? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio?**

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

I believe I hold the appropriate qualifications and professional experiences to contribute to the European general interest. I intend to assist my fellow Members of the College in their efforts to uphold the European Union's priorities.

My personal European journey began when I, as a young activist, campaigned in favour of Finland's membership in the EU. At the age of 19, I was able to cast my vote for the Finnish EU membership in the referendum of 1994. As a student, I had the chance to participate in the Erasmus programme in Vienna. During my studies, I also actively promoted the participation of Finland in the euro. I have always held a strong European identity and a belief in the purpose of European integration - together we are stronger. I have always wanted to make a contribution to the future of Europe.

This conviction also led me to co-found the Finnish branch for Youth of the European Movement. It is an organisation that provides young Finns with information on Europe and with a platform for European debate. In my view, it is crucial to understand the history of European integration. Personally, I hold dear the experiences as a participant to the International Seminar on the Future of Europe in the Ventotene island in Italy in the 1990's. It was on this infamous island that hosted the prison for, among others, Altiero Spinelli, that I started to study his idea for a federal Europe.

It was this spirit and idea of Europe, as something more than just a collection of States that has inspired my whole carrier and life as a European. As a parliamentarian, a chair of the Social Democratic party of Finland, and as the Minister of Finance, I have always sought to strengthen and act on my commitment to Europe.

From Ventotene and co-founding the European Movement organisation in Finland, I have come a long European way to this point. Our continent - and its shared aspirations for a prosperous future for all - has remained one of the most important focus points for me personally. These ideas and convictions have led me to act both in civil society and in politics. When I look back, all these experiences support me in my possible task as a Commissioner for International Partnerships.

This challenge, building global development with partnerships, reminds me of my years in the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations, in the Boards of World Vision Finland and the Crisis Management Initiative, in the Finnish Development Committee and the in World Bank/International Monetary Fund Development Committee as well as of my years chairing the Finnish UN Association, Finnish Unesco Commission and Finnish National Committee on Sustainable Development, as Deputy Prime Minister. The latest link in this chain is my work as the Foreign Minister's Special Representative on Mediation, in which I have focused on Africa and on engagement with women and young people. It is my firm commitment to put my experience at the service of a more strategic and effective European model of development which promotes the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable development Goals.

Due to my work on many fronts of international cooperation and development, I believe that the great challenges of our generation can only be addressed through cooperation. Whether it is climate change, inequality, poverty, new security threats or the erosion of democracy, only partnering and working together can provide us with the results we need. In a way, this also reflects the strategic approach of the President-elect, as in her College challenges will be dealt with in teams, bringing all the relevant knowledge and tools around the same table.

Promoting the cause of young girls and women has always been a special priority for me. As the first woman in Finland to hold the position of Minister of Finance, I had the honour to act as a pioneer in promoting gender equality and women's leadership in economy and in politics. Gender and equality have been core issues in my various development-related functions as well as in the task of Special Representative on Mediation. I will ensure that gender equality and women empowerment continues to be a top priority in our international cooperation and development policies.

Having received the Mission Letter and having discussed with the President-elect, I look forward to draw on my experience in the Finnish Government as Finance Minister, especially when it comes to using the full potential of the European Investment Plan to unlock private and capital investment under both the current and future Multiannual Financial Framework. The relations with partner countries - be they African, Asian, Caribbean, Pacific or Latin American - need to focus on job creation and investments. Economic opportunities are achieved by investing in education, sustainable and digital solutions, which are among the priorities of this Commission. The Sustainable Development Goals offer a truly common agenda with our partners. This partnership will be strengthened by drafting a comprehensive strategy for Africa and by finalising a new agreement with the countries from the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP countries). On the latter, my focus will be to ensure the swift conclusion of the negotiations for an ambitious Post-Cotonou Agreement that will shape our cooperation with ACP countries for the years to come.

With this European conviction and experience in civil society and in politics, I am keen to act as a Member of the Commission to contribute to building the future of Europe. I am committed to strengthening our international partnerships and to promoting the sustainable

development agenda in our external relations in close cooperation with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President and with fellow Commissioners responsible for other policies. With my civil society and parliamentary background, I am motivated to implement this mission in partnership with the European Parliament and in close cooperation with civil society as key interlocutors in designing and implementing European policy, programmes and projects.

Accountability and strong ethics have always been the basis of everything I do. I have always paid the utmost attention to avoid any links to economic activities that could cause conflicts of interest. I commit to fully comply, as soon as I am appointed, with the Treaty obligations on independence, transparency, impartiality and availability, as defined in Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union and in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

If confirmed in my appointment, I will fully respect the letter and spirit of the Treaty, in particular the obligation to act in the European interest and without taking any instructions. I will also honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflicts of interest. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I will update it rapidly should any change be required.

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

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

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

If confirmed in my appointment, I will take full political responsibility for the activities in my area of competence, as set out in the Mission letter. I believe that the von der Leyen Commission will be a strong team committed to the values that ensure a common direction. I highly value the principle of collegiality and will collaborate fully with other Members of the College.

I am committed to promoting the overall priorities of the President-elect such as growth and jobs, the Green Deal, digital agenda, a stronger Europe in the world and managing migration. I strongly believe that close cooperation within the College of Commissioners is essential to ensure the coherence, quality and effectiveness of the different policies. In cooperation lies our true strength. As Deputy Prime Minister in Finland, I worked in a leading position in a coalition government. Building consensus between different parties and interests was the essence of my work. I am a team player.

I have had the honour to represent my election district for 16 years in the Finnish Parliament. I believe in representative democracy and thus in the strong role of the European Parliament. I will work with the Parliament and relevant committees at all stages of the policy-making

process and am committed to engaging in regular political dialogue. Interinstitutional cooperation is of paramount importance to ensure the smooth functioning of the EU's institutional system and the efficiency and legitimacy of our decision-making system. Through openness, mutual trust, efficiency and regular dialogue we can work together in advancing our shared goals.

The President-elect's Political Guidelines and Mission Letters reflect these principles aiming to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. I find this extremely valuable and commit to ensuring regular flow of information, providing swiftly and accurately answers to the questions from Members of the European Parliament to the Commission that come under my responsibility, directly communicating with the committee members and being available for both bilateral meetings and the European Parliament's plenary or committee meetings, when needed.

I commit to implementing the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. President-elect von der Leyen supports a right of initiative for the European Parliament. I fully support this objective in full respect of the principles of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making. I know myself to be, and I am extremely honoured to be, accountable to the directly elected Members of the European Parliament. I will ensure that the parliamentary committees are involved in all major developments under my responsibility on an equal footing with the Council.

#### Questions from the Committee on Development

### **3. Implementation and roadmap of Sustainable Development Goals**

**The European Parliament and the European Council have requested that the Commission put forward an effective and integrated European SDG implementation strategy, with detailed timelines up to 2030, objectives and concrete actions, as well as monitoring and review mechanisms.**

**What are the views of the Commissioner-designate on such a strategy - when could it be adopted, what potential would it have to enhance Policy Coherence for Development, and could the Commissioner-designate outline for which SDGs the contribution of EU development cooperation may be of particular relevance and added value?**

I strongly believe that the European Union must continue to play a leading role in the global implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the eradication of poverty worldwide. The Union's engagement to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflects our values and is a strong signal of our support for multilateralism.

President-elect von der Leyen has expressed her unwavering commitment to the SDGs. First, and towards Member States, she has committed to refocus the European Semester into an instrument that integrates the SDGs. In addition, each Commissioner has been tasked to ensure the delivery of the SDGs within their policy area, and the College as a whole will be responsible for their overall implementation.

All 17 SDGs are connected. To ensure efficient use of resources and additionality, we need to continue exploiting the interlinkages between SDGs fully; for example, by bringing the social and economic aspects of sustainable development and our climate and environmental agendas closer together. It will be of the highest importance for me to cooperate and coordinate with my fellow Commissioners to ensure policy coherence using the SDGs as the compass for what we do at home and abroad, inside and outside the EU.

I consider it my specific responsibility to contribute to the 2030 Agenda implementation in close cooperation with the EU's partner countries. If confirmed, I intend to do this mainly in the following ways:

I intend to build on the work done by my predecessor to promote the achievement by Member States of the 0.7% target for Official Development Assistance (ODA).

I will seize the opportunities that the external aspects of the policy priorities of the incoming Commission represent, such as the Green Deal, to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs through partnerships with countries across the globe. These partnerships should support the integration of the SDGs at national level. The 2030 Agenda will also be key to enhance coordination at country level with EU Member States.

I will work to ensure that the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument is fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda. This represents a major opportunity to support partner countries in their achievement of the SDGs. Our Joint Results Frameworks with Member States at country level will be based on the national SDG frameworks. Finally yet importantly, I will want to ensure that we cooperate closely with other partners, including civil society, international organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and others to accelerate the implementation of our shared agenda and to improve monitoring and review worldwide. I will be working closely with the European Parliament and with the Council in order to achieve this.

#### **4. Official Development Assistance (ODA) at 0.7%**

**In May 2015, the Council reaffirmed the EU's commitment to increase its collective Official Development Assistance to 0.7% of EU Gross National Income. However, in 2018, only four Member States provided 0.7% or more of their GNI in ODA, while the ODA to GNI ratio slightly decreased in twelve member states. It is important, not only for the recipients of EU development aid, but also for the credibility of our institutions and the trust that our citizens place in us, that our Union lives up to the commitments we set, including all those concerning financing for development.**

**As Commissioner, what steps, possibly including the re-introduction of the Commission's preparation of annual Accountability Reports, would you take to ensure that the EU and its Member States honour their financing for development commitments?**

I will spare no effort on this critical issue. The eradication of poverty is a prerequisite to global sustainable development. It is at the heart of the EU's development and cooperation policy. The EU must continue to be the global leader in development cooperation.

In 2018, the European Union's collective Official Development Assistance (ODA) represented 0.47% of EU Gross National Income (GNI), far from the target to collectively provide 0.7% of GNI as ODA by 2030. The decrease in ODA from EU Member States in the last two years is a matter of concern, and I intend to work hard to reverse this trend.

Member States have the prime responsibility to meet ODA targets. Four Member States meet the 0.7% ODA/GNI target already and I commend them for this, but we need to do better collectively. The European Commission will keep monitoring the performance of the EU collectively and of Member States individually. I indeed plan to request Member States to specify how they intend to proceed by 2030 to be in line with this objective. SDG 17 ('Partnerships for the Goals') includes our commitment to reach the 0.7% of GNI as well as our commitment towards Least Developed Countries (LDCs), enshrined in target 17.2 of SDG 17.

Regarding the Accountability Reports, I will certainly want to follow up closely on Member States' commitments on Financing for Development. We will also have to factor in the concrete outcomes from the United Nations SDG Summit and High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development that took place in New York on 24-25 September 2019.

The plea to commit more ODA also means we have to be very concrete about the results it can achieve. Over the next five years, my main objective will be to ensure that the European model of development evolves in line with new global realities, as set out in my mission letter. It should be strategic and effective, should create value for money and should contribute to our wider political priorities. I will also be keen to discuss the modernisation of our development cooperation with Member States and with the European Parliament.

## **5. Economic Partnership Agreements / EU-Africa strategy / Trade**

**The EU's relationship with Africa is built on the Cotonou Agreement and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) on the one hand, and on international cooperation for development on the other. Trade and investment are key to wealth creation in developing countries.**

**As Commissioner-designate for International Partnerships, you were given a mandate by the President-elect of the Commission to develop a new comprehensive strategy for Africa, building on the EU-Africa Sustainable Alliance.**

**What do you envisage the various pillars of the new strategy to be, and how will the new strategy integrate trade, EPAs, and sustainable investment? How do you foresee cooperation and division of work with the Trade Commissioner?**

**What is your view on the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and what are the prospects for a continent-to-continent trade partnership, as called for by Juncker in the New Alliance?**

Europe has a longstanding partnership with Africa, as its largest trading partner, investor and donor. However, Africa and Europe can and must go much further together. Our linked destinies deserve our joint commitment to foster sustainable development in a true partnership of equals.

Bearing in mind the growing economic importance of the African continent and the world's attention to its changing dynamics, the EU should step up its engagement, building on the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs. The Alliance reflects the needed change of mind-set, as it fosters stronger interconnections between Africa and Europe and a strategic dialogue with the private sector. Crowding-in sustainable private investment, enhancing the investment climate, boosting intra-African and intercontinental trade, as well as enhancing job creation, and advancing skills for employability are key axes of our agenda.

I will work with the High Representative /Vice-President and the Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood, and in consultation with other Commissioners, including the Commissioner for Trade, towards a new comprehensive strategy for Africa. I believe the Alliance needs to grow and to step up to the next gear: through stronger political and economic partnerships, through more EU Member States' buy-in and participation, more means and a stronger coordinated use of instruments, more coordination with businesses in both the EU and Africa, more people-to-people contacts across the two continents, and more fine-tuning to local circumstances. In addition, the EU should champion high-quality development in Africa, by fully integrating climate, environmental, biodiversity and social priorities. Opportunities will arise by supporting ongoing African initiatives to leapfrog in terms of technologies, in particular digital.

More particularly on trade-related issues, I believe the approach promoted so far is the right way forward. Trade and investment need to be addressed in an integrated manner. They are two sides of the same coin when it comes to sustainable growth and decent job creation. Advancing the economic integration process at regional and continental level in Africa and boosting trade relations with the EU are therefore essential components of a coherent economic strategy in line with the EU's priorities. Together with the Commissioner for Trade, I will therefore ensure that trade and investment continue to be priorities in our economic agenda with Africa.

The EU provides Aid for Trade to enhance capacity building of key actors, to ensure that African countries fully benefit from opportunities created by trade agreements, so that trade contributes to growth and job creation. We support partner countries in preparing and implementing intra-regional and bilateral trade agreements and in particular the European Partnership Agreements and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

As the strongest supporter from the start, the EU will continue to accompany and support the African integration process. Strengthened EU support to the African Continental Free Trade Area will translate into major political credit. I believe that we need to make better use of EU experience, not only in the area of trade but with all relevant expertise in economic integration processes.

## **6. Gender in development**

**How does the Commissioner-designate envisage future work to promote further gender equality and women's empowerment in development policies, especially in relation to access to education, and fighting discrimination and violence against women and girls, and how will it translate in practice in the Gender Action Plan III, which is in preparation?**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will continue to be a top priority and will be mainstreamed in all our actions. Educating girls will unlock global development by strengthening equality, boosting skills and fostering inclusive growth.

Promoting women's empowerment requires leadership. And it starts from within the European institutions. President-elect von der Leyen is setting the example by ensuring gender parity within her team and I am proud to be part of this journey. You do not need to be a woman to promote gender equality, but you need a gender responsive leadership to place women and girls at the centre.

Education is a pre-condition to ensure the empowerment of women and girls. Despite progress in recent years, disparities still exist. I want in particular to step up our efforts in those Sub-Saharan African countries, which have the worse gender gaps, and build together education systems promoting gender equality in and through education. We also need to make sure women and girls have access to technical and vocational training and that the labour market is inclusive and encourages female participation.

Unfortunately, violence against women and girls is still one of the most widespread and devastating human rights' violations across the world. We need all international partners to work together to end this shame. Endeavours such as the Spotlight Initiative, putting together the weight of the UN and of the EU, civil society and governments, are quintessential to ensure we have impact on the ground. I will increase our effort to bring others on board including the private sector to help us fight the surge of violence against women and girls.

Much has been achieved in recent years. The current EU Gender Action Plan<sup>1</sup> has contributed to advance the gender equality agenda worldwide. It has triggered an institutional culture shift within the EU and Member States' staff, including in EU Delegations. It has also set the ambitious objective that at least 85% of all new development actions adopted by 2020 shall target gender equality. We are not there yet, and I want to continue coordinating efforts with Member States to meeting this target.

The Commission has launched an independent evaluation of the EU Gender Action Plan, which will allow taking stock of achievements to date and draw lessons for the future. It is likely that after 2020, we will still need to have a plan of concrete actions translating our political commitments. I would like to use this opportunity to thank the European Parliament for the support in this respect and ask for it in the future in view of a possible Gender Action Plan III.

One thing is clear: gender equality is not only a goal in itself (SDG 5) but also an essential crosscutting objective, if we are to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

Let me underline my staunch political and personal commitment to ensure that the EU leads international efforts to champion gender equality across the globe. I see our collective work ahead as a pre-condition for a sustainable future for all and I intend to work closely with the Commissioner for Equality and other fellow Commissioners, to ensure coherence in our external and internal policies.

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<sup>1</sup> EU Gender Action Plan II Equality and Women's empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020, SWD (2015) 182 final, 21.09.2015



## **7. Climate change and deforestation**

**Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to impacts of climate change and the mitigation and adaptation action needed includes halting global deforestation. This is necessary also to protect the rights and livelihoods of forest-living and other vulnerable people and to decrease the alarming rate of global biodiversity loss.**

**Parliament has called for substantially increased support for climate action in developing countries, in particular for adaptation, and for an Action Plan on Deforestation, with regulatory measures including mandatory due diligence in forest-risk commodity supply chains and ambitious forest-specific provisions in all EU trade and investment agreements.**

**What is your approach to climate action in developing countries? What new EU measures to address deforestation and biodiversity loss in such countries would you propose and what legislative initiatives, if any, would those proposals include?**

The EU is already a frontrunner in climate and environmental actions. We must not lower our level of ambition, but aim higher to advance the global sustainable development ecologically, socially and economically.

Since 2014, interventions related to environment and climate change within the remit of international cooperation and development, have amounted to more than EUR 9 billion. This corresponds to 23% of our funds, i.e. in excess of the given target of 20%. We have been mainstreaming climate change and environment at all levels and in all our actions with partner countries.

Our actions have focussed on boosting renewable energy, supporting sustainable agriculture and food systems, safeguarding biodiversity, promoting an integrated urban management and a circular and green economy.

We need a strong external dimension to complement the European Green Deal and support the transition to low-emission and circular economies in partner countries. This will require tailor-made geographic approaches, adapted to specific contexts.

Supporting partner countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change and reduce biodiversity loss will be among my priorities and the focus of our investment. More specifically:

- On climate, we will support the update and full implementation of partner countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on climate change and support countries' adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts. We will accompany partners to move towards a green and circular economy.

- On forests, I will step up our efforts. Building on the experience of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreements, I will work on partnerships to promote forest protection, restoration, and afforestation. In doing so, I will closely cooperate with the Commissioner for Environment and Oceans.

- On biodiversity, I will support the EU's leadership in the preparation of the 2020 meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in China and scale-up the work with our partner countries on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources.