

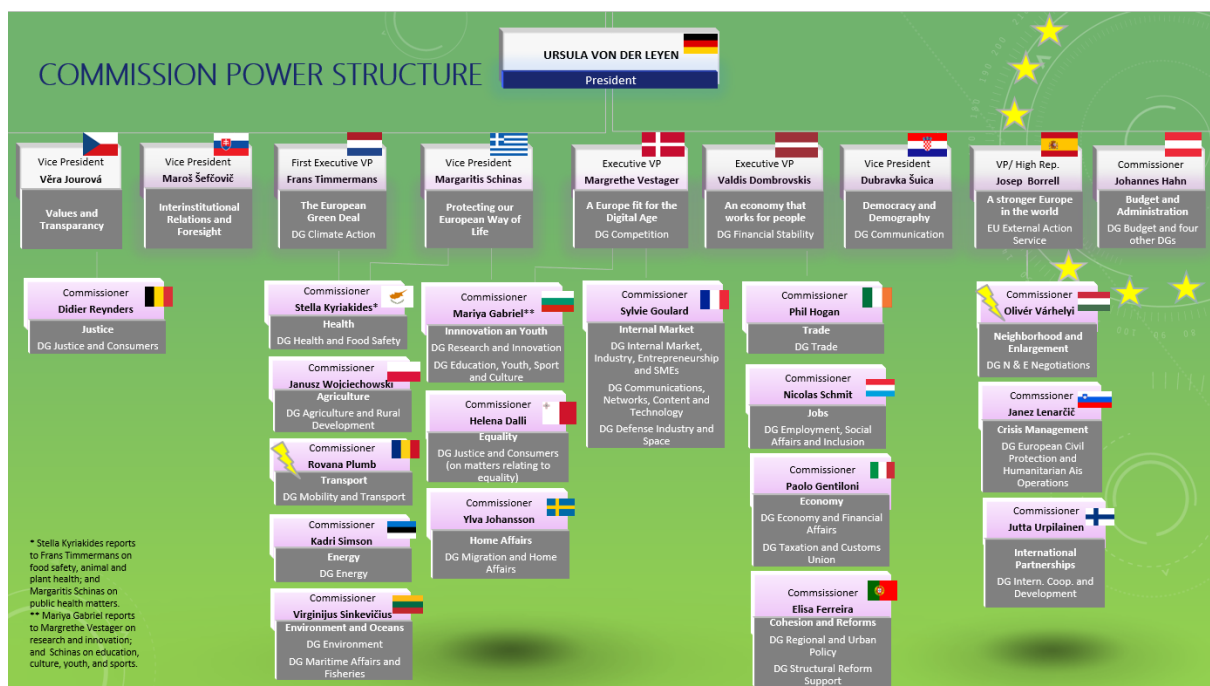
How to navigate the new EU?

This entry guide for environmentalists will give a brief overview of the 2019 post-electoral power structure in the European Union. The paper will provide insights on the new European Commission and Parliament, as well present expectations for the Finnish Presidency of the European Council. The guide will also briefly outline predictions of the effects of these institutional shifts on EU climate-policy.

Climate action seems to be taking center-stage in terms of priorities for the next Commission in a promising way. Turning this rhetoric into tangible results, however, will prove challenging, especially when it comes to convincing certain reluctant European governments of the pressing need to act.

The European Commission

The European Parliament confirmed Ursula von der Leyen (EPP) as the first woman president of the European Commission for the next five years. Early on in September 2019, the President-elect presented her pick of commissioner candidates and the new structure of the next European Commission.



Power Structure of the New European Commission, own illustration

Climate action is getting a promotion in the next Commission, with the portfolio assigned to one of three executive vice presidents, Frans Timmermans (S&D). The Dutch Timmermans coordinates five commissioners and is the commissioner for climate protection in charge of implementing a Green Deal for Europe. This positioning of the Green Deal reinforces the impression that climate and environmental protection rates significantly higher on the agenda of the new Commission than it did for the Juncker Commission. Under the mandate of the previous commission, climate protection represented only one of several goals of the Energy Union - this time, the Energy Department should work towards the Green Deal.

However, von der Leyen also decided to promote her Latvian EPP colleague Valdis Dombrovskis as executive vice president delighting her own party with the move. The Social Democrats are less pleased about Dombrovskis' rise. They complain that the Latvian, and not Timmermans, will coordinate the work on the [European Sustainable Investment Plan](#), which should unlock €1 trillion of climate-related investment over the next decade.

What happens next?

Now that the candidates are finalised and their mission letters are drawn, the action will move on to the European Parliament, where MEPs will choose whether or not to confirm von der Leyen's choices. Starting at the end of September, the Commission candidates [will be grilled by parliamentary committees](#) and at the end of October, the European Parliament has to give its consent of approval for the entire Commission. The hearings can be followed live [here](#).

However, the European Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee found conflicts of interests with the commissioner designates from Romania and Hungary last week and blocked their nomination procedure. This unprecedented move means that Rovana Plumb, nominated for the transport portfolio, and László Trócsányi, nominated to be commissioner for relations with the EU's neighbors, cannot proceed on to the next phase of the hearings at the European Parliament.

According to new [EU rules](#), if the committee concludes a nominee could not carry out the duties of a commissioner, the European Parliament president David Sassoli should ask the Commission president how she plans to proceed. Von der Leyen could try to address the committee's concerns and ask MEPs to reconsider the nomination. She could also withdraw the nominees and ask their governments to put forward new candidates.

After this setback, [Hungary has nominated its ambassador to the EU](#), Olivér Várhelyi, as its new candidate for the European Commission.

Overview on climate relevant commissioners

In order to get to know the climate relevant Commissioner candidates, their mission letters provide an excellent insight. Below are the key points from their letters that describe their working areas:

Frans Timmermans

Vice-President in charge of the Green Deal and Climate Commissioner. Responsible for the Directorate-General for Climate Action (CLIMA). Key points from his [Mission Letter](#):

- Raising the 2030 EU climate target to 50% initially and possibly to 55% in 2021
- Conducting negotiations with other major issuers to increase climate ambition
- Proposing European Climate Law in the first 100 days, which enshrines the 2050 climate-neutrality target into action
- Monitoring the implementation of the existing EU energy and climate laws (ETS, Effort Sharing, LULUCF)
- Coordinating the work of the following Commissioners: Energy (Kadri Simon, ALDE, EE), Environment and Oceans (Virginijus Sinkevičius, Greens, LT), Agriculture (Janusz Wojciechowski, EKR/PiS, PL), Transport (Rovana Plumb, S&D, RO), Health (Stella Kyriakides, EVP, CY) and Cohesion and Reforms (Elisa Ferreira, S&D, PT)

The extension of emissions trading to the transport and buildings sectors is notably missing from this list of responsibilities. This is a good sign, as it likely means the Commission's in-house experts have analyzed the measure and found it to be ineffective. However, the list is also missing any mandate to revise EU climate legislation if 2050 climate-neutrality or more ambitious 2030 targets are agreed by the EU.

Kadri Simson

Commissioner for Energy. Responsible for the Directorate-General for Energy (ENER). Former member of the Estonian Parliament and Minister of Economic Affairs; belongs to the ALDE Group. According to [EU Observer](#) coverage, she is enthusiastic, always well prepared, and not technocratic.

Key points from her [Mission Letter](#):

- Implementation of regulation on energy efficiency and renewable energies, cooperation with Member States on NECPs
- Assessing whether a revision of the existing energy and climate legislation is necessary in light of the Green Deal
- Mainstreaming the efficiency first principle, with a mandate to raise building renovation rates
- Contributing to the design of the new Carbon Border Tax
- Revising the Energy Taxation Directive
- Developing a Gas Strategy, with a view to diversifying supply sources and fully exploiting affordable LNG potential

Virginijus Sinkevičius

Commissioner for the Environment and Oceans. Responsible for the Directorate-General for the Environment (ENV) and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE). At 28 years, he would become the youngest Commissioner in history if confirmed by the European Parliament. Based on his record as the Lithuanian Minister of Economic Affairs, [climate protection](#) and [gender equality](#) do not seem to be priorities for him. He has voted against 2050 net zero EU emissions in the EU's long-term climate strategy, for instance. This could lead to friction between him and Ursula von der Leyen, according to [Politico](#). He is a member of the Confederation of Peasants and Greens of Lithuania, which are part of the political group of the Greens/EFA. The party does not belong to the European Green Party, however, and according to Co-Chairman of the European Green Party [Ska Keller](#) it is not green enough.

Key points from his [Mission Letter](#):

- Developing a new Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (including Natura 2000, deforestation, soil degradation, protected species and habitats, and sustainable oceans)
- Achieving an ambitious agreement at COP 15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 2020 in Kunming, China
- Creating a new Circular Economy Action Plan that ensures sustainable resource use. Part of this is the leading efforts towards plastic-free oceans

- Full implementation of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy

Janusz Wojciechowski

Commissioner for Agriculture. Responsible for the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI). Was a longtime member of the EU Parliament (2004-2016, EPP) and sat on the Agriculture Committee. Recently, he has been a member of the European Court of Auditors. Although the Court of Auditors has published a number of helpful reports (such as strong criticism of the system of direct payments to farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy), it is unclear to what extent Wojciechowski shares the Court's opinions. The European Anti-Fraud Office is currently investigating the commissioner-designate because of possibly fraudulent expense reports.

Key points from his [Mission Letter](#):

- Bringing negotiations on the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 to a swift conclusion – the final agreement must contain ambitious environmental and climate targets and ensure a fair income for farmers
- After the conclusion of the negotiations, the focus will be on the implementation of the new Common Agricultural Policy, which requires close cooperation with the Member States in drawing up national Strategic Plans.
- Ensuring that agriculture and food production contribute to climate, environmental and biodiversity goals, notably through the reduction of pesticides, fertilizers and chemicals in Europe and beyond
- Developing a long-term vision for rural areas

Elisa Ferreira

Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms. Responsible for the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (REGIO) and the newly created Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. Was Minister of Environment and Minister of Planning in Portugal and sat in the European Parliament (S&D) from 2004-2016.

Key points from her [Mission Letter](#):

- Designing a Just Transition Fund, in close cooperation with Timmermans and Budget Commissioner Hahn, to assist populations in particularly affected areas, such as industrial, coal and energy-intensive regions
- Focus on sustainable development in cities and urban areas (climate change, digitization and the circular economy), particularly in light of the upcoming review of the Urban Agenda for the EU

Rovana Plumb

Commissioner for Transport. Responsible for the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (MOVE). Currently MEP and Vice-President of the S&D Group, formerly Minister for Environment and Climate Protection, Minister of Transport and other functions in Romania. Romanian NGOs have had bad experiences with her as Minister of the Environment, as she is reportedly difficult for NGOs to talk to, with some climate-denying rhetoric. In addition, there

were [allegations of corruption](#) against her in 2017, which is why she resigned as Minister for EU Funds though she has avoided investigation as MPs voted to keep her immunity. Fortunately, her responsibilities are very narrow and emissions reductions in the transport sector lie within the purview of Timmermans, with Plump merely fulfilling a supporting role.

Key points from her [Mission Letter](#):

- Ensuring that transport is “sustainable, safe, affordable and accessible”
- Developing a strategy for sustainable and smart mobility with a focus on sustainable fuels for road, ship and air traffic
- Extending the ETS to the shipping sector and reducing free allowances for airlines
- International negotiations on global emissions reductions within International Civil Aviation Authority and the International Maritime Organization
- Contributing to the zero-pollution ambition, focusing on mitigating the impact of transport on the climate and the environment, including particularly the reduction of emissions as well as air, water and noise pollution
- Contributing in the review of the Energy Taxation Directive
- Focusing on a fair and functioning internal transport market (development of missing infrastructure links and the Trans-European Transport Network)

Stella Kyriakides

Commissioner for Health, responsible for DG Health and Food Security (SANTE). Vice-President of the Democratic Rally Party which is currently in power in Cyprus. The party is a member of the EPP in the European Parliament.

Key points from her [Mission Letter](#):

- Designing a new “Farm-to-Fork” strategy for sustainable food
- Reducing pesticide use and protecting citizens from exposure to endocrine disruptors, as part of the “Farm-to-Fork” strategy and the zero-pollution ambition
- Improving consumer information, especially on the health and sustainability of food products
- Animal health and welfare: Enforcing existing laws, reviewing the current strategy and promoting European standards worldwide

Johannes Hahn

Commissioner for Budget and Administration, reporting directly to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Responsible for the Directorate-General for the Budget (BUDG), the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and a variety of administrative Offices and Directorate-Generals. A longstanding member of the Commission, he has served as Commissioner for Regional Policy (2010-2014) as well as Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (since November 2014). He is a member of the Austrian People’s Party, which is a member of the EPP group in the European Parliament.

Key points from his [Mission Letter](#):

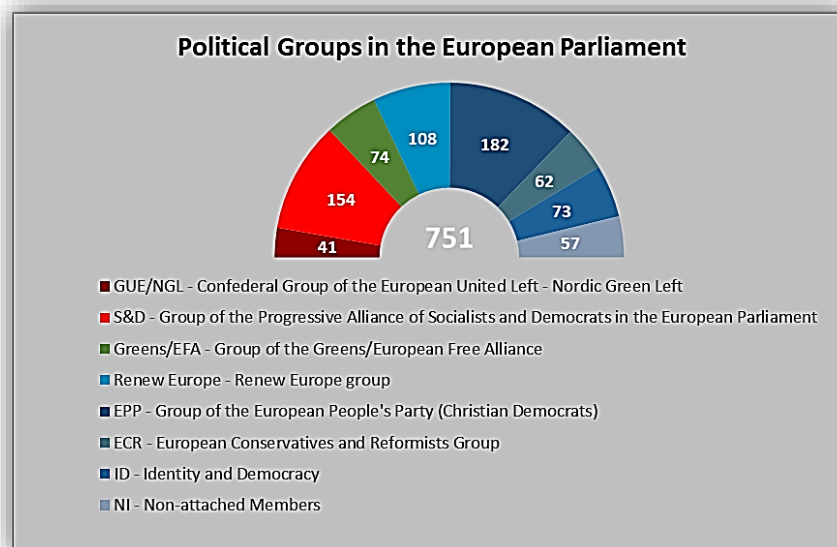
- Support the Commission President in concluding negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, with a view to delivering an ambitious and flexible budget in line with the Commission's strategic priorities. Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring the rule of law as an integral part of the next long-term budget.
- Ensuring overall coherence between individual sectoral programmes within the next long-term budget
- Ensuring that the Commission has the right infrastructure and security culture to protect against physical and cybersecurity threats

What is worrying?

Climate may come to play an important role in the new Commission. However, one thing is extremely worrying from an environmentalist standpoint: the introduction of a "One in, one out" approach for new legislation, as proposed by President-elect von der Leyen in the mission letters. This means that for every new measure in a certain area, another measure in the same area is to be abolished. This would be a continuation of the de-regulation agenda, which was already prominently represented in the Juncker Commission. However, this proposition is inherently incompatible with the increased climate ambition set out by the Commission President-elect and risks undermining the potential benefits of new initiatives under the European Green Deal. The [Green 10](#), a coalition of ten of the largest environmental organisations and networks active on the European level, have [called on the European Parliament](#) to strongly oppose the "One in, one out" mechanism for new initiatives.

European Parliament

What changes in the political power structure can we expect from the European Elections 2019? Does it foretell the advent of an era of stronger climate policy in the European Parliament?



Results European Elections 2019, own illustration

Overall, the pro-European parties continue to hold the majority in the EU Parliament. This is of great importance, as the European Union plays a decisive role in shaping policy in the

member states. Around 80 percent of all environmental legislation have their origin in Brussels, for example. In addition, the European Parliament is the only EU institution directly representing European citizens.

The European People's Party (EPP) and Social Democrats and Socialists (S&D) still remain the largest groups in the European Parliament, but both have lost a considerable number of seats, and no longer hold an absolute majority. Since the informal "Grand Coalition" will no longer hold a majority on its own, EPP and S&D will therefore need to focus on better cooperation and alliances with other political groups in order to pass legislation and appoint the powerful commissioners and other top posts.

One of the groups that we can expect EPP and S&D to work more intensively with is Renew Europe. This centrist liberal group will be made up of former European Parliament group Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE) and French President Emmanuel Macron's En Marche party and it is expected to take a 'kingmaker' role. The other grouping now well-positioned to force more drastic action – particularly with regards to climate policy – is the Greens. This group did better than expected, thanks to strong electoral showings in Germany and France. However, this 'green wave' is mainly limited to Western and Northern Europe, as the Greens won almost no seats in Central and Eastern Europe.

Ahead of the elections, a large part of the discussion centered on the rise of far-right populist parties. While those parties came first in a few countries, overall the number of seats these groups will control heading into the next session is lower than anticipated. Experts predict that the gains of populist and Eurosceptic forces will not paralyse the European Parliament, but instead reinforce the need for cooperation between the mainstream parties.

The Brexit proceedings have also cast their shadow on [the composition of the European Parliament](#). Should the United Kingdom decide to leave the EU on 31 October, the 73 seats it currently occupies will be redistributed along the following lines:

- 27 seats will be distributed to countries which are currently underrepresented: France and Spain receive five additional seats, Italy and the Netherlands three, two will go to Ireland and one each to Austria, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Croatia, Estonia and Slovakia.
- The remaining 46 seats will be reserved for future member countries. With 96 seats, Germany will retain most seats after the Brexit reshuffle.

Short overview on climate relevant Committees

The European Parliament has a total of 20 specialised committees and two subcommittees. Each committee has one chairperson and up to four vice-chairpersons, who are in office for two and a half years. Here is a short overview on the climate relevant Committees ITRE and ENVI:

The Romanian Adina-Ioana Vălean is the new Chair of the [Committee on Industry, Research and Energy \(ITRE\)](#). She previously chaired the ENVI Committee. Her Vice-Chairs are the Polish ECR MEP Zdzisław Krasnodębski, the Danish Morten Petersen (Renew Europe), the Italian Patrizia Toia (S&D) and the Spanish S&D MEP Professor Lina Galvez Muñoz. The other members of the ENVI Committee can be found [here](#).







The [Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety \(ENVI\)](#) is chaired by Pascal Canfin of the French Renew Europe Group. He was a member of the EU Parliament from 2009 to 2012. He then served as Minister for Development in the French Foreign Ministry before becoming Managing Director of WWF France in 2016. His Vice-Chairs are the Dutch Bas Eickhout (Greens/EFA), the British Seb Dance (S&D), the Romanian Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (EPP) and the Dutch Anja Hazekamp (GUE/NGL). The other ENVI Committee members can be found [here](#).

At the advent of the new legislature, the Environment Committee of the European Parliament tasked its Scientific Service to [determine](#) the foreseeable challenges and tasks that lay ahead in climate policy. In light of the work carried out in the previous legislative period, the Scientific Service prioritized the completion of this work on the framework for sustainable investment in its evaluations. The Service also concentrated its findings on the abolishing of subsidies for fossil fuels.

Central decisions would have to be taken on the EU's climate targets and their implementation. Should the greenhouse gas reduction target for 2030 be raised to 50 or even 55 percent as von der Leyen has promised, a series of legislative adjustments would be necessary in order to actually achieve this goal – in particular with regards to emissions trading and effort sharing. The political guidelines established by von der Leyen's mission statement will also indicate a clearer direction for tasks and questions to take in the upcoming session.

Presidency of the European Council

The presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every six months. Three successive presidencies who work together closely are known as [presidency trios](#). This system was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. It ensures more consistency in comparison to a usual single six-month presidency. Each trio presidency includes a new member state. This allows new member states to hold the presidency sooner and helps old member states to pass their experience on to the new members. The current trio (2019–20) is made up of Romania (January–June 2019), Finland (July–December 2019) and Croatia (January–June 2020).

2019	January – June	T9	 Romania
	July – December		 Finland
2020	January – June	T10	 Croatia
	July – December		 Germany
2021	January – June	T10	 Portugal
	July – December		 Slovenia

The trio presidency (T9 and T10), own illustration

The Finnish Presidency will be the first of the trio to work with the new European Commission and European Parliament and will hopefully help lead a response

to the climate emergency. It is a good sign that the Finnish government announced their intention to achieve [carbon neutrality by 2035](#) on national level and will launch a “whole of government” approach towards realising this objective. Environmentalists hope for [spill-over effects](#) from Finland moving forward, which combined with its leadership on European level, will lead to other countries following suit and a higher overall climate ambition in the EU. For a strong, climate-oriented Finnish presidency, it is also helpful that it is the third time which the member state has assumed the role of the presidency. The upcoming 25th anniversary of EU membership for Finland should also provide an impetus and secure public attention.

One of the most important unresolved issues left on the table will be a climate plan for 2050. The Finnish Presidency must set the course for a climate-neutral EU by at least 2050, and must

convince the dissenting faction consisting of Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary to do so as well. As the presidency team that kicks off the new cycle of governance in the European Commission and European Parliament, Finland has an especially important role in helping promote the Commission's proposal of a Green Deal and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, the Finnish Presidency needs to be engaged in the completion of the negotiations on the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework advocating for the new EU budget to be truly Paris Agreement-compatible. Environmentalists call for the exclusion of all fossil fuels and the earmark 40% of the entire EU budget to climate action.

For further information or questions, please contact:

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