


The importance of the Vice-Presidency for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition in the new European Commission

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Theme

This paper looks at the content and the potential implicit in the tasks assigned to the Spanish Commissioner, Teresa Ribera, who between 2024 and 2029 is set to hold the Competition portfolio and the first Vice-presidency of the EU executive.

Summary

On 17 September the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, unveiled her proposed line-up for the College of Commissioners for the 2024-29 term. The candidate nominated by Spain, Teresa Ribera, has received the important dual responsibility of overseeing climate action –with the rank of Vice-president– and running competition policy. Ribera, after more than six years working as Spain’s Minister for Ecological Transition, will now have to tackle the tricky EU job of combining ambitious decarbonisation targets with a renewed industrial commitment, the need to reduce energy prices and the defence of a single market that is distorted neither by state aid nor by companies’ dominant market positions. If the new Commission has as its three overriding priorities security, competitiveness and the climate crisis, her responsibility has a resounding impact on the latter two and an indirect impact on the former.

The most concrete component of the post, which is set out in the ‘mission letter’ she received from the President, will depend on organisational skills such as the deft discharging of her Vice-presidency (which has been presented as the first of the six Vice-presidencies), the effective connection between the green transition policies ([climate and energy](#)) and those of technology, industry and trade –something that will be helped by her simultaneously holding the Competition portfolio–, access to administrative services, and the authority that she wields over regulatory and financial instruments. Moreover, more political considerations –being able to establish herself as a leader of the social-democrat grouping, keeping a cooperative relationship with von der Leyen and the Commissioners whose responsibilities overlap with hers, and maintaining good Madrid-Brussels relations during the years ahead– may help to ensure that she fulfils her full potential and, in so doing, strengthens Spain’s influence in the EU.

Analysis¹

On 18 July the European Parliament re-elected Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission for the 2024-29 cycle, with a majority made up essentially of MEPs from the European People's Party (EPP), the Socialists and Democrats group (S&D), almost all of the liberal group (Renew) and a large proportion of the Greens. Between the end of July and the first half of September the process got under way for appointing the remaining commissioners who now, after the corresponding confirmation hearings to be held in October by the specialised parliamentary committees, must be submitted for the approval of the European Parliaments sitting in plenary session in November 2024.

In accordance with Article 17 of the Treaty of the European Union, the President is responsible for deciding the internal organisation of the Commission.² However, the choice of the Commissioners –one per member state since the 2004 enlargement, although the treaty allows them to be theoretically fewer– is made by common agreement with the respective national governments. Thus, on 25 July von der Leyen sent a [letter](#) to the capitals requesting that they nominate a man and a woman who would subsequently be interviewed in August and, depending on this process, she would decide which of the two would be appointed and which specific responsibilities would be assigned.

Only one of the member states, Bulgaria, honoured the request and sent both a woman and a man.³ The candidates were announced over the course of August. The male majority was such that the ratio stood at 21-4; this is without reckoning with the German President and the Estonian Vice-president/High Representative, who had already been appointed. The prospect of having such an imbalanced College caused von der Leyen to apply pressure to certain capitals, with the threat of assigning very lowly portfolios to their Commissioners, so that in some cases –such as Romania, Slovenia and to an extent Belgium– chose to change their initial suggestion and nominate a woman, and in the end equality was almost achieved, with 11 women (40% of the 27).

Apart from the importance of the role played by the gender issue, the process also demonstrates how each actor –the President-elect and the national governments– addresses this process from a perspective of defending their interests and strengthening their power. The simple fact that it was von der Leyen who decided the definitive name of the individual, having interviewed both nominees, bestowed upon her a personal political lever regarding the future make-up of the Commission that the member states were unwilling to accept. It is also significant that France, Italy, the Netherlands and

¹ The authors wish to express their thanks for the contributions made to a first draft of this text by four commentators who prefer to remain anonymous. Their suggestions have enabled the content to be enriched, although its three authors are alone responsible for its production.

² This does not include the appointment of the Vice-president and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which falls to the European Council. On 28 June 2024 the leaders agreed to appoint the then Estonian Prime Minister, Kaja Kallas.

³ Curiously, Bulgaria is the member state with the greatest accumulated credit with regards to gender and the one that had most political-moral authority to ignore the request for two names made by the President, because all the people it has proposed as Commissioners since its accession have been women.

Poland –who all proposed men– were not subjected to the same pressure from the President on this account than smaller member states, particularly if they came from political groupings other than the President's. It is nothing new that the dynamics of power struggles are often concealed by other, more acceptable, motives.⁴

The case of France –with the dramatic last-minute resignation of Thierry Breton– also shows that the President-elect was just as concerned about avoiding Commissioners who make a point of asserting their independence of opinion as she was about gender equality. The matter was resolved with an agreement between von der Leyen and President Macron whereby in the end another male Commissioner was appointed (the Minister Stéphane Séjourné), who receives a major executive Vice-presidency with responsibility for Industry and the Single Market. Meanwhile it emerged that Paris –considerably weaker than five years ago owing to its fragile internal situation– was willing to swap its candidate for a less experienced replacement if this meant not losing out in the new hierarchy.

This French example, which illustrates what virtually all governments have done in terms of trying to maximise their heft in the Commission by negotiating with von der Leyen and her head of cabinet –another German, Bjoern Seibert– shows the gulf between the theory in the treaties and the actual practice. The Commissioners do not represent their home countries and supposedly defend the general European interest. But, as innumerable analysts have observed, the [member states believe that the appointment of a Commissioner from their country comprises the main channel of influence over such a powerful institution](#). In addition, the increasingly pronounced centralisation of power within the Commission is at odds with the collective nature of the institution described in the treaties, hence the member states justify this attitude in part to counteract the more hierarchical style of internal governance that has been imposed in recent years.

It was already known that the new College of Commissioners was going to tilt towards conservative positions –with 15 Commissioners from the EPP and another two from the Eurosceptic right, compared with only five from Renew and another five from the centre left– but now it has also been confirmed that the balance of power inclines in favour of the larger states. The four largest members (Germany, France, Italy and Spain) have either the Presidency or three executive Vice-presidencies. In Italy's case, the post assigned to Raffaele Fitto –Reforms and Cohesion Policy– has been somewhat downgraded, but it remains a significant honour bearing in mind that Prime Minister Meloni's party went so far as to vote against von der Leyen's investiture. The Commissioners of the following member states also receive powerful portfolios as a reflection of their economic and demographic heft: Poland gets Budgets, the Netherlands gets Climate and Romania another of the Vice-presidencies.⁵ Despite these biases

⁴ Indeed, of the eight Vice-presidencies that existed in the 2019-24 Commission –the appointment of which depended completely on the President– five were held by men and three by women. It is true however that for the 2024-29 period, with six Vice-presidencies, there are four women as opposed to only two men.

⁵ There are two cases of small states (Slovakia and Latvia) where the length of time served by their Commissioners has been rewarded by the important portfolios of Trade (Maroš Šefčovič) and Economy (Valdis Dombrovskis), although now stripped of the rank of Vice-president. In can also be said that, in [\(cont.\)](#)

favouring size and the right, the President has achieved a reasonable north-south-east geographical balance and has rewarded the small political groupings such that the liberals and social democrats both end up with two of the Vice-presidencies.

The responsibilities assigned to each of the Commissioners and the Vice-presidents give rise to more questions, because there could be overlaps and, as a consequence, rivalries for jurisdiction over content. The President, who may have sought this horizontal competition partly in order to maintain her famous vertical authority, has argued for the boundaries between portfolios being blurred because of the need to avoid ‘watertight compartments’. In any event, there is a notable intention that each portfolio should have at least one Directorate-General at its disposal; something that will be achieved if the current DG NEAR (Neighbourhood and Enlargement) is split into two and both the Slovenian Enlargement Commissioner and the Croat in charge of the Mediterranean have an administrative support structure.⁶ Meanwhile, the aforementioned departure of the powerful Breton has resulted in the assignment of three Directorates formerly controlled by him alone to three distinct Commissioners.⁷ Therefore the rule seems to be that each Vice-president or Commissioner is assigned a single Directorate-General with substantive content.

From the point of view of priorities, whereas there were three in the 2019-24 legislative term (the Green Deal, Digital Agenda and Economy), to which the same number of executive Vice-presidents were assigned –and at the helm of each a politician from each of the three large groupings accounting for the political and legislative majority– now the distribution is less clear cut. The number of executive Vice-presidencies rises to five (in addition to the one to be held by the High Representative) but, as the Italian case shows, without there being the same clear connection that formerly existed between the three overriding priorities, the three executive Vice-presidencies and the three political groupings underpinning the majority. The three overriding priorities of the new Commission between now and 2029 seem likely to be: (a) security, linked to the war in Russia and strategic autonomy, above all with regard to China; (b) competitiveness, in the context of the much-quoted [Draghi report](#); and (c) somewhat nuanced, but still significant, attention to climate action.

1. The responsibility assigned to Spain’s nominated Commissioner

Even before the election in June, when Teresa Ribera headed the PSOE roster for the European Parliament without concealing her intention of aiming for a job as commissioner, the Spanish government had clearly expressed its commitment to a

general, the states that have been most proactive against Russia (the Baltics, Poland and Finland) have been well treated with important portfolios and control over issues of particular importance to them.

⁶ Another option is that DG NEAR is not split up and reports to two different Commissioners, just as happened in the 2019-24 legislative term with the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) connected simultaneously to Didier Reynders (Justice) and Helena Dalli (Equality).

⁷ The Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) would remain under the French Vice-president, but those of Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) and of Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT) would now transfer to two Commissioners with these specific attributes.

'green' portfolio with responsibility for the EU's climate and energy policies, as well as its wish that it should have the rank of vice-president of the Commission. From the perspective of the stated goal, the negotiation has been an overwhelming success, since the Spanish candidate has been assigned this clean transition role, moreover linked to the objective of industrial competitiveness and with direct responsibility for the traditionally powerful competition policy, which prior to September did not seem to form part of the role lined up for Ribera.

The Spanish candidate boasted undoubted strengths throughout this process. Particularly notable was her track record in green transition matters –which went beyond her six years as Minister and Vice-president of the Spanish government– her being a woman at a time when a premium had been placed on female candidates, and the circumstance of hailing from a large member state, key to the political support for the new Commission.⁸ Moreover she was and is destined to be the most important Commissioner from the social democrat grouping in this five-year cycle and can also count on the additional support of the Greens, who had mostly voted for von der Leyen in July as a quid pro quo for not reducing the EU's climate ambition. There are also certain well-known weaknesses, however. From the purely political point of view the waning strength of the centre left in the new Commission and the hostility with which the People's Party has greeted her appointment need to be borne in mind.⁹ And focusing on the content of the portfolio, it is important to highlight the preference of the EPP (and the farming industry) for curbing the ambitions of the decarbonisation calendar and the fact that her very high profile in such controversial topics as nuclear energy, the Nature Restoration Law and the Iberian exception has been received poorly in various capitals.¹⁰

There has even been talk of a reactive term of office, focusing more on avoiding the dismantling of everything achieved in 2019-24 than on continuing to make headway. To guard against this risk, which is real, the goal of the Spanish negotiations regarding the portfolio was to adapt the purely climate-focused agenda to the revamped priorities of the EU agenda, such that the Vice-presidency would not lose importance. This tweak to the agenda had already started to take shape before the elections. In her [most recent State of the Union speech](#), the President indicated that the EU was entering a new phase of the Green Deal, placing the emphasis on industrial competitiveness. Such stances have been confirmed in the political guidelines put forward for the 2024-29 cycle. Von der Leyen affirms that the [European Green Deal will continue occupying a central place](#);

⁸ Despite the fact that the PP has announced its rejection of Ribera, the number of Spanish MEPs who voted in favour of re-electing von der Leyen in July (PP, PSOE and PNV) came to a total of 43 –out of the 401 who supported her– which places them only behind those of Germany –around 60– but ahead of the approximately 35 Italians and the barely 30 French and Polish MEPs who also voted for her. In all the other cases, the number of MEPs from the same country who voted for von der Leyen was under 25.

⁹ Aside from the polarised dynamics of domestic politics exported to Brussels, which always prejudice the member state but now form part of the habitual panorama, this tension between Ribera and the PP may be more serious over the medium term, if the party now in opposition comes to power half-way through the EU legislative term. In order to ensure that Spain's relations with the Commission do not suffer in this, by no means unlikely, possibility, it would be advisable for both parties to lower the temperature of the confrontation in regard to this particular appointment.

¹⁰ For example, opposition has come from the Czech Republic: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/czech-meps-criticise-spains-commissioner-pick-anticipate-tough-hearings-2/>.

however, while in 2019 the Green Deal seemed to come first as a priority in its own right, in the new guidelines the Green Deal is framed as part of other goals related to industrial policy –specifically, the so-called Clean Industrial Deal–, economic competitiveness and resilience, and economic and food security.

However, while the language used in the political guidelines could be interpreted as a downgrading of the importance of the green agenda, references to the fact that the agenda is entering a new phase (linked to goals related to other policies and responsibilities) also offers an opportunity to design a more expansive and horizontal policy focus, giving the Spanish Commissioner greater centrality in the next Commission. Thus it has proved; not only because the post comes accompanied by the highly powerful competition policy but also because, despite the growing opposition and theoretical loss of relative influence attached to this area, nobody dares deny its political importance or cast doubt on the Vice-presidential status it has enjoyed since 2014.¹¹

There is widespread acknowledgement among observers of EU politics that the post assigned to the Spanish Commissioner on 17 September is the one that a priori has most potential. In the 'mission letter' the President sent to Ribera, the targets for decarbonising the economy set out in the Green Deal are linked to those of strengthening competitiveness. To this end she is urged to work with the Vice-president for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy (the Frenchman Séjourné) and the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth (the Dutchman Hoekstra) in line with the Industrial Plan of the Green Deal. Moreover, as the Draghi report points out, high energy prices are one of the main obstacles to the EU's competitiveness, and so she is asked to work with the Commissioner for Energy and Housing (the Dane Jørgensen) to reduce dependency on fossil fuels. This portfolio also has a social component: she will work with the Commissioner for Energy and Housing to invest in clean energy infrastructure to combat energy poverty as part of the wider housing crisis; she will also work with the Commissioner for Climate to ensure that taxation measures support a just transition and to ensure investment by means of the Social Climate Fund and the Just Transition Fund.

In any event, weaving through all of this is her main dossier, namely competition policy. The principal goal will be to modernise it in order to contribute to the aforementioned objectives of strengthening strategic autonomy, the competitiveness of European companies, sustainability, social justice and security. To this end, there await a series of specific tasks such as: developing a new framework of state aid as part of the Clean Industrial Deal to help deploy investment in green energy and technologies and to review state aid to ensure support measures for housing, while not reducing control over them and bolstering competition laws; working with member states in the submission of proposals for the Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs); reviewing guidelines for overseeing mergers; and ensuring the implementation of regulations such as the Foreign Subsidies Regulation and the Digital Markets Act.

¹¹ In the Juncker Commission (2014-19), Maros Sefcovic was Vice-pPresident for the Energy Union. In the von der Leyen Commission I (2019-24), Frans Timmermans (2019–23) and Maros Sefcovic (2023-24) were Vice-presidents for the European Green Deal.

As the executive Vice-president for the green transition Ribera will therefore be unlike Frans Timmermans between 2019 and 2023, because the Dutchman was an executive Vice-president and simultaneously the Commissioner for Climate, whereas now the executive portfolio awarded to the Spaniard is Competition, with Climate getting its own Commissioner. The connection that now exists between the green agenda, competitiveness and competition is highly interesting. It will, however, be difficult to avoid conflicts of jurisdiction with the French Vice-president –however little experience he may currently have– in terms of promoting clean technologies and net-zero industry, and the same goes for the conservative commissioners in charge of Climate (the aforementioned Hoesktra), the Environment (the Swede Jessika Roswall) and Agriculture (the Luxembourgier Hansen).

In itself, the Competition portfolio comprises one of the Commission's most important executive responsibilities; it involves overseeing the smooth running of the single market in terms of: (a) authorising, or otherwise, the mergers and acquisitions of companies that may pose a threat of market domination; (b) fining them in the event that they abuse it either individually or as a cartel; and (c) policing any state aid that may distort the level playing field. This power will lend her additional influence over industrial policy and significant indirect regulatory power even though, paradoxically, she enjoys little scope for initiating legislation.

Past Presidents of the Commission have avoided giving the Competition portfolio to politicians from member states with a high degree of state intervention in the economy. In three quarters of a century of European integration it has never been in the hands of a French politician and only in the first of the Colleges (the Hallstein Commission, 1958-67) was it held by a German. There is thus a certain tradition that neither of the two largest member states should hold it, but this does not detract from the importance of the post; rather it confirms it.¹² It is also worth highlighting the fact that it has not been discharged by anyone from any of the 16 countries that have joined the EU since 1986. The typical Competition Commissioner is someone from the Benelux countries (half of the dozen people who have held the office have been from Belgium, the Netherlands or Luxembourg) but it has also been held by an Irishman (Peter Sutherland), a Briton (Leon Brittan), an Italian (Mario Monti), a Spaniard (Joaquín Almunia) and a Dane (Margrethe Vestager, still in office). Ribera will be the fourth Social Democrat to have held the job (the EPP have held it only twice, the liberals also twice, the conservatives once and the remaining four were independents).

The Competition portfolio is interesting in the context of the harmonisation of state aid for industry –an area in which Spain stands to lose– and is one of the most important for US companies, potentially affected by anti-monopoly policy, and Chinese companies, as recipients of subsidies. It also has influence over the extended Single Market (Norway and Switzerland) and the UK in the wake of Brexit. In her 10 years in charge Vestager has been adamant in opposing wishes to create 'European champions' in certain sectors,

¹² Consider the negative effect for Spain if a merger process should promote European champions that are in reality Franco-German entities or if state aid, which Spain was in no fiscal position to grant, unlike France and above all Germany, were to be inadequately invigilated.

but this is now being called into question because it is a matter of providing the EU with enough scale to compete with the US and China and promoting European industry in the context of strategic autonomy. Both Paris and Berlin, and the European Socialist Party, want more industrial subsidies, so Ribera will also have to juggle these contradictions and the pressures opposed to watering down the defence of competition exerted by small countries, SMEs and consumer organisations. Nor will it be easy to carry out the reforms to competition policy her President is asking for because –as will be set out below– the Directorate-General for Competition (DG COMP) has a deep-rooted organisational power that is resistant to change.

2. Organisational elements to be borne in mind

Once the content of the Competition portfolio and its link to a Clean Transition Vice-presidency are known it is important to ensure that it is furnished with the necessary instruments in the form of sufficient powers and resources to achieve its goals. Here it is important to pay attention to three aspects: the content of the Vice-presidency; access to services; and responsibility regarding regulatory and funding instruments.

2.1. *Content of the executive Vice-presidency*

The assignment of an executive Vice-presidency to Ribera reflects the various factors already mentioned (social democratic allegiance, major member state and her own personal prestige) but above all the cross-cutting nature and continued objective importance of the green agenda. It must also be pointed out, however, that there is a reduction in the clout of the executive Vice-presidencies in the new Commission –there are five rather than three– and that, in principle, everyone is equal in the College of Commissioners, so a Vice-president has the same status as a Commissioner. The power of the Vice-presidencies thus derives from whether they have access to certain administrative services, from the structures of collaboration and supervision that emerge between Commissioners and from the working methods that are devised within the College.

In the first place, it is therefore necessary to sign up to the broad outline of the President's political programme. Relations with her and her team are key: acknowledging the President's authority and supporting her on a range of issues yields dividends for the Commissioners (and the member states behind them) in terms of autonomy and access. It is clear that the Spanish government has negotiated this process with von der Leyen skilfully and the post received by Ribera is powerful, but now it is down to her to keep the political and personal trust going.¹³

¹³ Although the president acknowledges in public the considerable power she is giving her first vice-president, she does not on that account cease to be loyal to herself, trying to avoid other commissioners wielding too much power. In the case of Ribera, this involves stripping her of an international role. The 'mission letter' gives her no foreign role either in climate matters –where the COP negotiations are handed to Hoekstra– or in green technologies or overcapacity; economic security being the preserve of Séjourné and Sefcovic. The only exception which does come under Competition is the regulation of foreign subsidies. The President thus seems to want to control the geopolitical agenda of relations with the US and China using ideologically more closely aligned commissioners or countries with a perspective more akin to her own regarding 'de-risking' with China.

It is also fundamental to forge alliances beyond the President and establish appropriate working methods that ensure proper coordination with other Vice-presidents –especially the French Commissioner in charge of industrial strategy– and with the Commissioners she is due to oversee: Climate, Energy and the Environment. Here it is important to bear in mind that the role of the Vice-presidents is not codified in any structural way, and consequently has evolved under various mandates. During the von der Leyen Commission I, the executive and non-executive Vice-presidents had the function of coordinating the portfolios that fell within their area of responsibility and to validate the initiatives that fell within their scope. Moreover, the figure of executive Vice-president, introduced by von der Leyen in 2019, was differentiated from that of Vice-president because it had direct access to services. It remains to be seen how it manifests itself in the von der Leyen Commission II, but it is true that Ribera will not directly control the Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), although she will do so with Competition.

In this Commission the green Vice-president is therefore not arranged so much within a climate cluster –unlike the previous Commission– but rather within a cluster linked to competitiveness. As pointed out, the key in any case will lie with the services and structures. Vice-president Ribera will have three Commissioners below her who are the ones that will most directly control the administrative services, which will oblige the Vice-presidency to ensure there is effective coordination with them.

2.2. Access to services (and which services)

At the start of each mandate, the Commission's services are reorganised, a prerogative that falls to President von der Leyen.¹⁴ As mentioned, a Vice-president's scope for action is determined to a large extent by access to the services that draw up and manage initiatives; these accumulate significant power owing to their technical capability and the control they exert over administrative processes. Moreover, during the von der Leyen Commission I the difference between the executive Vice-presidents and the other Vice-presidents was precisely that of having directly reporting services.

So important is access to services that major member states, such as France and Italy, have previously prioritised control of various dossiers and services over the post of Commissioner. For example, in 2019, the French Commissioner, Thierry Breton – responsible for the Single Market– managed to impose his judgement on the initial opinion of the person who was his executive Vice-president, Margrethe Vestager –in charge of the Europe Fit for the Digital Age group– partly thanks to controlling its three Directorates-General: Communication Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT); Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW); and Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS). As mentioned, these three Directorates-General will be distributed because they generate considerable power. The advantage of having direct

¹⁴ For example, at the start of the Juncker Commission, the Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union was created, with administrators hailing from the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) and the Directorate-General for the Internal Market (DG MARKT), the predecessor of DG GROW.

access to them is that of receiving information sooner, being able to set the agenda by moving first and having more resources to carry out personal initiatives.

In the structure assigned to Ribera, she will have direct control over the Directorate-General for Competition (DG COMP), which has the most authority and resources of all in the EU administration. This considerable power will work to the benefit of the Vice-president, although set against this there is always the danger of the vast technical knowledge it has accumulated in a highly specialised domain creating corporatist dynamics and acting autonomously in the face of policy directives issued by the Commissioner in office. The main challenge is to ensure that the Directorate-General evolves towards an effective connection with the green transitions, because no green industrial plan can be drawn up without level playing field instruments, both internal (control of state aid) and external (TDI and FSR) in the face of China's over-supply.

Beyond DG COMP, with its strengths and weaknesses, Teresa Ribera will need to be skilful to access other very important services linked to the goal of the transition and the content of her Vice-presidency:

- As mentioned, DG CLIMA, which is responsible for instruments such as the [Innovation Fund](#), funding innovative low-emission technologies, and the income from the emissions trading system (ETS), will be assigned to the Dutch Commissioner.
- The Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER), which is in charge of energy policy, as well as the funding of interconnections –a matter of particular importance for Spain– will be assigned to the Danish Commissioner.
- Notable within the Directorate-General for Internal Market and Industry (DG GROW), which will be the responsibility of the French Commissioner and Vice-president, is the Directorate of Ecosystems, Mobility and Energy-intensive Industries, which is in charge of the [Net-Zero Industry Act](#) and part of the Green Deal Industrial Plan to encourage the manufacture of clean technologies in the EU.
- And lastly, in the Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) there is a Directorate for the Circular Economy, which will come under the control of the Swedish Commissioner.
- Also relevant are certain units of the Directorate-General for Trade (DG TRADE), which will be assigned to the Slovakian Commissioner.

In light of this fragmented panorama it is important that the Vice-presidency should have access –even if indirect– to this wide range of services, something that will require the systemisation of working methods, such as weekly orientation meetings. In other words, since controlling and even directly accessing all these services is impossible, formulas need to be sought to maximise indirect access, above all bearing in mind that a large number of the initiatives stemming from these directorates-general will have implications for the green agenda.

2.3. Responsibility for regulatory and funding instruments

Lastly, in order to carry out the political objectives it will be essential to wield effective responsibility for the funding (a third of the current budget is devoted to climate and energy objectives) and regulatory instruments.

It should be borne in mind that the budget is unlikely to increase in the next Commission. Unless Next Generation EU is renewed, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)¹⁵ will also have to bear its interest payments. In addition to maximising the effect of the funds it will be important to have good relations with the European Investment Bank (EIB), which will gain in importance amid reduced availability of public funds.¹⁶

In this regard, the funding instruments pertaining to a green Vice-presidency (although it does not directly manage them) are:

- Innovation Fund: around €40 billion for 2020-30.¹⁷
- **Social Climate Fund**: €86 billion for 2026-32 with the goal of ensuring that the most vulnerable groups are able to adapt to decarbonisation.¹⁸
- **Just Transition Fund**: within the framework of cohesion policy, to support the regions most affected by the green transition and with funding of €17.5 billion for 2021-27.
- **Connecting Europe Facility**: for the construction of sustainable trans-European networks in the areas of transport, energy and digital services, with a budget of more than €5 billion for 2021-27.
- **InvestEU**: an EU guarantee of €26.2 billion for 2021-27 with the goal of stimulating investment. The EIB is the main partner.

In terms of the regulatory instruments that may play a significant role in the years ahead, three stand out (although these do not come under the Vice-presidency's direct control either):

- The regulation of the energy market, under the responsibility of DG ENER.
- The successor programme to the Net-Zero Industry Act and the European Critical Raw Materials Act to ensure industry has sustainable access to such materials, within the framework of the Green Deal Industrial Plan, currently the responsibility of DG GROW.
- The reform of the emissions trading system (ETS), under the responsibility of DG CLIMA.

Conclusions

The future European Commissioner proposed by Spain, Teresa Ribera, has been

¹⁵ The current MFF applies to the 2021-27 period. Negotiations for the 2028-34 period are due to commence in 2025.

¹⁶ Since Nadia Calviño took charge of the EIB it has been emphasised that the bank proposes to finance the green and defence industries. Two Spaniards are thus set to leave a considerable imprint on European industrial policy between now and 2029.

¹⁷ Subject to the way ETS prices develop.

¹⁸ Funded by a new emissions trading system (ETS2).

charged with the important twofold task of supervising climate policy –with the rank of Vice-president– and steering competition policy. This constitutes a major responsibility and a major success for Spain. However, it will only be possible to get the most out of the post if: (a) the political capital is well managed, with good relations with the social democratic group in the European parliament, but also with governments, especially that of Madrid; (b) personal abilities are deployed, such as technical capability and a capacity to develop a relation of trust with the President and other Commissioners; and (c) intimate knowledge is acquired of the organisational latticework that is the Commission, and access is secured to its administrative services and its financial and regulatory resources.

It is crucial to have the structures and tools that secure tangible power and prevent others from monopolising key services and instruments. Hence an appropriate means of coordination needs to be established in the College to ensure that the Vice-presidency has in practice –and not only in theory– the power of approval, and if necessary veto, over questions relating to the climate agenda, decarbonisation and industrial competitiveness put forward by other Commissioners or Vice-presidents.

The green agenda will continue to occupy its objectively high-priority status in 2024-29, and in the case of Teresa Ribera will be accompanied by the important advocacy of Competition. It is crucial that, building on these foundations, the Vice-president is able to manage the reorganisation of priorities that the President of the Commission –and most of the capitals– have already laid out, where the industrial and competitiveness component, as well as economic security, have gained significant importance. In any event, the departure point represented by the redesigned Commission and the mission that the Spanish Commissioner has been given is ideal: a powerful and coherent portfolio and a credible political and personal authority to carry it out. Discharged successfully it will also reap an increase in Spanish influence in the EU.

Conclusions

The future European Commissioner proposed by Spain, Teresa Ribera, has been charged with the important twofold task of supervising climate policy –with the rank of Vice-president– and steering competition policy. This constitutes a major responsibility and a major success for Spain. However, it will only be possible to get the most out of the post if: (a) the political capital is well managed, with good relations with the social democratic group in the European parliament, but also with governments, especially that of Madrid; (b) personal abilities are deployed, such as technical capability and a capacity to develop a relation of trust with the President and other Commissioners; and (c) intimate knowledge is acquired of the organisational latticework that is the Commission, and access is secured to its administrative services and its financial and regulatory resources.

It is crucial to have the structures and tools that secure tangible power and prevent others from monopolising key services and instruments. Hence an appropriate means of coordination needs to be established in the College to ensure that the Vice-presidency has in practice –and not only in theory– the power of approval, and if necessary veto,

over questions relating to the climate agenda, decarbonisation and industrial competitiveness put forward by other Commissioners or Vice-presidents.

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