

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Raffaele FITTO****Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms****1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? How will you contribute to implementing the political guidelines of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? How will you implement youth mainstreaming?

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

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

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

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

Questions from the Committee on Regional Development**3. Future of cohesion policy - key lessons learned - simplification**

What is your vision for the future of cohesion policy post-2027 and which are, in your view, the key lessons that the European Commission and Member States should have learned from the previous programming periods in this respect? Do you consider the objectives of overcoming regional disparities and economic and social cohesion valid and how will you ensure that the principle of 'do no harm to cohesion' is reflected in the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)? Will you continue to uphold the cohesion policy as an investment and solidarity mechanism for all regions, and how will you ensure the development of less developed regions and provide adequate response to challenges faced by urban areas? How will you protect the core purpose of cohesion policy and secure a robust budgetary envelope under the MFF proposal? How, at the same time, will you increase its flexibility to manage emerging needs, enhance its transparency, accelerate the implementation processes and ensure its simplification? In particular, should cohesion policy funds be reformed on a performance-based model similar to the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)? In this context, how will you guarantee the continuity of cohesion Policy, preserving its initial objectives, and ensure that future management and funding of the policy respects the shared management model, the place-based approach, the multilevel governance and the partnership principles, and preserves the role of local and regional authorities? Will you explore creating an effective mechanism under the next financial programming period for direct access to cohesion funds by regional and local authorities, cities and municipalities in each Member State, based on their specific development needs?

4. Link to reforms, rule of law, European Semester, conditionality

The Ninth Cohesion Report highlights the need to explore ways to further strengthen the link between investments and reforms to maximize the impact of cohesion policy. However, there are concerns that the objectives of

cohesion policy, as outlined in Articles 174 and 175 TFEU, may be compromised by the potential introduction of conditionalities. Consequently, do you support the introduction of a stronger link between cohesion policy funding and key national reforms? If so, what types of reforms should be linked to the access of funds? Are you considering linking the access to funds to the European Semester or macroeconomic conditionality in particular? Will you ensure that Member States or regions with limited administrative capacity are not disproportionately penalised? Do you intend to reinforce the link between cohesion policy and compliance with the rule of law, by enforcing stricter application of the horizontal enabling conditions, particularly the implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights? Lastly, how will you ensure that national governments' reluctance to pursue certain reforms does not impede regions' access to funds?

5. Eastern regions, enlargement, ECBM

In the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, EU border regions, especially those Eastern and Northern regions on its external borders with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, face the dual challenge of strengthening security while revitalising their economic and social development. Do you plan any initiatives or special support measures to help these border regions address their severe economic downturn? What types of assistance and policy initiatives will you prioritise? In addition to the pressure on the cohesion policy budget from those Eastern and Northern regions, the planned enlargement towards Ukraine, Moldova, the Western Balkans and possibly Georgia will further affect the cohesion policy budget. How will you ensure that the cohesion policy budget is sufficient to meet the growing needs? Moreover, it is important to note that persistent administrative and legal cross-border obstacles exacerbate the economic downturn not only in regions affected by the Russian war, but across all EU regions. These obstacles fragment the Single Market, resulting in the loss of billions of euros and millions of jobs at EU level. In this urgent context—on the one hand, addressing the needs of border regions impacted by the war, and on the other, preparing for enlargement—will you prioritise the conclusion of inter-institutional negotiations on the long-stalled Regulation on a Mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context?

6. Islands, depopulation, right to stay, outermost regions (Art. 349 TFEU), housing, territories with geographical and natural particularities (Art. 174 TFEU)

In accordance with Article 174 TFEU, the Union pays special attention to addressing the challenges of disadvantaged regions, particularly those suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps. In the spirit of the effective 'right to stay', what concrete measures will you take to tackle depopulation, especially in rural areas and small towns, while ensuring equal access to essential public services? How will you improve the regional connectivity and housing conditions to enable people living in islands, outermost regions, peripheral and cross-border regions to remain in these areas? What specific measures will you advocate to reduce bureaucracy and improve the access to EU funding and the internal market for SMEs of these regions? Do you believe it is time for the Commission to develop a European strategy for islands (Islands Pact) and a POSEI (programme of options specifically relating to remoteness and insularity) transport programme?

7. Natural disasters, emergencies

Europe has been experiencing an increase in the number and severity of weather-related disasters, such as extreme temperatures, storms, inland and coastal flooding, droughts and wildfires. How would you address both the immediate and long-term impacts of such disasters more effectively? In particular, how would you improve the budget allocation, the eligibility and the management of the current EU Solidarity Fund? What other specific measures, also in terms of prevention, would you suggest to tackle natural disasters within the future Multiannual Financial Framework post-2027, while preserving the main purpose of cohesion policy? With regard to water management, in terms of both floods and droughts, what actions would you propose to mitigate their impact on the most vulnerable regions? Moreover, would you propose updating the EU strategies to reduce the vulnerability of coastal and mountain regions to climate change?

Question from the Committee on Budgets

8. What do you intend to put in place in practice to fulfil the mission you have been entrusted with “to align cohesion policy to wider EU priorities, be more focused, simpler and more impactful and help mobilise reforms and investment”? How will cohesion policy fit into the President-elect's demand for a policy-based approach to the next EU long term budget? In particular if the implementation is to be based on “a plan for each country linking key reforms with investments”, how will you ensure that there is sufficient flexibility while maintaining a clear audit trail, clear European added-value with discernible cross-border dimension to spending involving regional

and local authorities, real value for money and that the Parliament plays a role on equal footing with the Council in the implementation and the monitoring of the funds?

Question from the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

Implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility

9. Given the absorption rates of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), do you consider that the RRF has been sufficiently quick and targeted to stimulate the economy following the Covid-19 crisis? How will you as the responsible Commissioner ensure that the RRF funds are used most effectively? Will you proceed with a claw-back of funds transferred to Member States in cases where investments are unlikely to be finished by 2026? Do you see the RRF as a precedent to address crisis and significant funding gaps?

Question from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

10. Your mission letter insists “for all citizens to have an effective right to stay [...] by supporting what a community needs” notably by “tackl[ing] regional disparities”. Among other policies, this touches upon employment and social policies, including social inclusion. What concrete proposals and measures do you foresee to address this challenge and to improve access to quality social and employment services, and how do you see the Recovery and Resilience Facility plans contributing to this objective, and more generally, to the effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights?

In particular, given the EU’s commitment to promoting deinstitutionalisation and ensuring that persons with disabilities, children, and other groups in a vulnerable situation live with equal rights, how do you plan to ensure that future EU funding and cohesion policy does effectively support community-based services and affordable housing solutions? How do you intend to work on this with Commissioner-designate Jørgensen?

Question from the Committee on Transport and Tourism

11. According to the corresponding mission letter, President von der Leyen tasked the future Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms to “guide the work on sustainable mobility and tourism to connect different parts of Europe and underpin a thriving Single Market”. In this regard, you are meant to support the work of the future Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism. How do you intend to pursue this cooperation and what would be your strategy and priorities both for transport and tourism? As Executive Vice-President responsible for cohesion policy and regional development, you will also have an impact on the completion of the TEN-T network for which TRAN is responsible. How would you ensure that the implementation of the TEN-T network is adequately financed and underpinned by the EU cohesion policy? Also as responsible for the development of outermost regions, islands, rural areas and cities, what role do you see for transport, as a tool for social cohesion and connectivity, and how do you intend to approach tourism in these areas to promote a resilient, sustainable and competitive tourism sector?

Question from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

12. As Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, how would you pursue the cross-Directorate-General objective of addressing the causes and challenges of maintaining and improving life quality in rural areas? How would you reduce the urban-rural gap, promote the development of infrastructures, support the digital transition, facilitate access to services and generally make rural areas more attractive for farmers as well as businesses? How do you view the Rural Pact and its further development? In terms of funding, how do you intend to ensure that EU funds and policies are complementary in supporting rural areas and that information is accessible to local stakeholders?

Question from the Committee on Fisheries

13. How would you make the fisheries sector more resilient, sustainable and competitive in the global market, contribute to generational renewal and bringing benefit to coastal communities and Outermost regions, while assuring the cohesion of these territories and within the objectives of the European Green Deal?