

## European Commission hits back at “European Way of Life” criticism

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News

EU executive makes robust defence of its heavily criticised portfolio.



**Photo credit: Press Association**

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The name of the dossier, given to Greek Commissioner-elect Margaritis Schinas, has provoked fury among MEPs and others, including Dutch liberal member Sophie in 't Veld, who said, “The implication that Europeans need to be protected from external cultures is grotesque and this narrative should be rejected.”

But ,on Thursday, the EU executive angrily hit back at the criticism, with a spokesman telling this website, “Actually, the central mission that Vice-President Schinas will be tasked to ensure is to coordinate the work on inclusion and building a genuine Union of equality and diversity.”

“His mission letter explicitly states that “The European way of life is built around solidarity, peace of mind and security.”

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The spokesman added, “The portfolio covers the areas of migration, security union, employment and education and culture. The mission letter explains that the European way of life is defined as “built on the principles of dignity and equality for all.”

This was pointed out, said the spokesman, by Commission President-elect Ursula Von der Leyen at her press conference on Tuesday in responding to a question on the issue.

Von der Leyen sent a six page “mission letter” to Schinas – and all commissioners-elect, spelling out his new role.

The letter, seen by this website, fully explains the portfolio, stating, “I would like to entrust you (Schinas) with the role of Vice-President for Protecting our European Way of Life.

“Protecting our European way of life requires making sure workers are equipped to thrive in our evolving labour market. A declining workforce and a digital and basic skills gap brings into sharp focus the need to equip people with the tools and knowledge they need. It also highlights the need for well-managed legal migration, a strong focus on integration and ensuring our communities are cohesive and close-knit. This is both an opportunity and a necessity for Europe”, states the letter, dated September 10.

It goes on, “The European way of life is built around solidarity, peace of mind and security. We must address and allay legitimate fears and concerns about the impact of irregular migration on our economy and society. This will require us to work together to find common solutions which are grounded in our values and our responsibilities. We must also work more closely together on security, notably on new and emerging threats that cut across borders and policies.”

“The portfolio covers the areas of migration, security union, employment and education and culture. The mission letter explains that the European way of life is defined as “built on the principles of dignity and equality for all” **European Commission spokesman**

Schinas, a former Commission spokesman under Jean-Claude Juncker, is not using the controversial title in his Twitter biography, instead describing himself as commissioner-designate for migration, security, social rights, education, youth and culture.

Other titles have been questioned, including the job title of “An Economy that Works for People”,

given to Latvian Commissioner-elect Valdis Dombrovskis, and “a stronger Europe in the world”; “Europe fit for a digital age” and “democracy and demography.”

Despite the attempt to reassure critics of the new dossier given to Schinas, some MEPs are planning to raise their objections when the Greek goes before them in his nomination hearing in parliament later this month.

They include UK Socialist MEP Claude Moraes, who has been particularly vocal in his criticism of the selected name.

On Thursday, Moraes told this website, “I think it’s clear that the Parliament will raise this strongly up to and including the hearings. It has clear traction across political groups and member states.”

He added, “As well as being seen as completely inappropriate as a title, it also has real structural problems. How independent will the Home Affairs Commissioner be if the migration vice president holds such an extraordinary title?”

Further reservations of the new team announced this week by von der Leyen came from ECR group co-chair Ryszard Legutko.

On Thursday, the Polish MEP told this website, “We certainly had strong reservations following the Von der Leyen’s speech in the European Parliament in July. It had a distinctly federalist tone that repeated a many of the same old ideas and policies that we have all heard before. However, Tuesday’s announcement on the individual commissioners’ portfolios was short on specific policies and we only have names for jobs.

“We won’t pass judgement until we know more about each commissioners’ agenda but we are clear: the entry of the new commission needs to mark a significant change from the last. That means doing less but better, being non-political and showing genuine respect for all member states and their citizens.”

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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