

Von der Leyen changes contentious portfolio names after backlash

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News

The U-turn comes after several days of negotiations with Parliament's political groups.



Ursula von der Leyen | *Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has agreed to change some of the controversial titles of dossiers allocated in her new executive.

The portfolio of Margaritis Schinas will be changed to 'Promoting our European Way of Life'; Nicolas Schmit will be in charge not only of jobs, but 'Jobs and Social Rights', and Virginijus Sinkevičius' portfolio will now mention fisheries, with a new title of 'Environment, Oceans and Fisheries'.

It was also agreed that Paolo Gentiloni, as commissioner for economy, will be responsible for

coordinating any necessary name changes.

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It was the title given to Schinas' portfolio that sparked the biggest criticism.

The original label - "protection" of the European way of life - was considered too accommodating of the extreme right when associated with migration, the other competency of Greek-born Schinas, who is the Commission's former spokesman.

Groups on the left of the political spectrum, the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals, had called on the incoming Commission president to drop or modify the title of this portfolio in particular.

The decision to do so, announced on Thursday, has been welcomed by several MEPs including Socialist leader Iratxe García, who said, "I have been in touch with Ursula von der Leyen over the past few days, because my political group was still awaiting an answer to the demands we made in a letter on 19 September."

"We all agree that the European way of life is an achievement we must preserve, but it doesn't have to be defended, rather promoted" **Iratxe García, S&D leader**

"This morning I received very positive answers on core issues for us."

"We all agree that the European way of life is an achievement we must preserve, but it doesn't have to be defended, rather promoted. The social pillar is at the core of the European social model and it could not be left out, so now Nicolas Schmit's portfolio is complete."

She added, "Ensuring a just transition to a sustainable economic model is crucial for us, and we want to make sure that new indicators will be added to the European Semester so that not only macro-economic growth is taken into consideration, but also people's well-being and respect for the environment."

"Having a commissioner from our political family coordinating this transformation reinforces our conviction that the new Commission will have the vision and the determination to accomplish it."

Critics said the title initially given to Schinas' role played into the hands of far-right extremists because the job includes management of migration and asylum policy and might be viewed as suggesting that refugees pose a threat to the way Europeans live.

MEPs used Schinas' recent hearing to complain bitterly about the title.

But at his parliamentary hearing Schinas gave a spirited defence of the title and now describes himself as Commissioner-designate for migration, security, social rights, education, culture and youth.

About the author

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[Public order, justice and rights](#) [9]



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