

**ANSWERS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE
NEVEN MIMICA
(CONSUMER POLICY)**

1. *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? What motivates you? What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European 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?*

For almost three decades, I have been active in politics, public policy making and government, carrying out various diplomatic, state administration and political functions. Building mutually beneficial relationships with neighbouring countries through foreign, trade and economic policies has been a key driver of my professional and political efforts from the outset. For more than a decade, I accompanied, promoted and actively participated in the entire process of Croatia's integration into the EU. During this process, I had the honour to hold various functions helping to prepare Croatia for EU membership, in particular as chief negotiator for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU and its Member States, as Minister for European Integration, as chairman of the European Integration Committee of the Croatian Parliament, as member of the National Committee for monitoring the accession negotiations with the EU, and as Deputy Prime Minister for Home, Foreign and European Affairs. This gave me the opportunity to meet with many key European personalities from the European Parliament and other institutions. I passionately supported the accession process as I am convinced that it offered Croatia - after gaining its independence and going through a devastating war - the unique perspective to enjoy peace, social and political stability and to develop its economic potential as a Member State of the Union. Today, I can say that the process of accession to the EU has been as important as the accession itself. It has been a process of reforms, a process of changing everything and everybody for the better – modernizing the economic, social, institutional and legislative set-up and renewing people's mind-set which has been the most delicate and demanding process. Based on my European integration experience, I am convinced that the true beauty of enlargement is reform that brings policies and people in Europe closer together.

In my career, the role and well-being of consumers have been part of my political interest and professional responsibilities, be it as regards their benefits from open and competitive trade relations, inter-actions with third countries or as part of Croatia's alignment with EU policy and legislation in this field. As Deputy Minister for Economic Affairs, as chief negotiator for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and as Minister for European Integration I became very aware of the importance of an effective consumer policy for the proper functioning of the market economy. Therefore I supervised the drafting procedure and final

adoption of the first Consumer Protection Act in Croatia in 2003. Later I strongly supported in the Croatian Parliament the adoption of the new 2007 Consumer Protection Act and its subsequent amendments, fully aligning Croatia's legislation with the relevant EU directives. Building on this experience I had the opportunity, as chairman of the European Integration Committee of the Croatian Parliament, to overview and assist the transposition of other consumer related EU *acquis* into Croatian legislation, e.g. through the General Product Safety Act or the Civil Obligations Act.

I am deeply convinced that integrity and independence from any undue influence is crucial for the public's confidence in the Commission's work, its quality and the respect it enjoys. I have always paid utmost attention to avoiding any links to economic activities that could cause conflicts of interest, and I believe I have succeeded in this, as can be seen from my Declaration of Interests that I have prepared according to the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. Should my nomination be confirmed, I am committed to abide by the highest standards of professionalism and integrity, as reflected in the Code, and to update my Declaration of Interests if changes occur and at least every year. I solemnly undertake to comply with the obligations and ethical standards set out in the Treaty (Article 17.3 TEU, 245 TFEU) and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. In particular, I shall neither seek nor take instructions from any government or any other body and will refrain from any action incompatible with my duties such as to engage in any other occupation.

2. *How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?*

I strongly believe that close cooperation within the College of Commissioners is essential in order to ensure coherence, quality and effectiveness of the different policies. I commit to strictly abide by the principle of collegiality, if my nomination is confirmed. In preparing Croatia's accession, I have always pursued a cross-policy approach in my functions as chief negotiator for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, Minister for European Integration and chairman of the European Integration Committee, which was imperative to ensure a successful and well-coordinated process.

As Commissioner in charge of consumer policy, cooperating with external partners and in particular with other Commissioners will be one of my key priorities. Consumer policy can only be successful if it is an integral part of all relevant policies. My ambition will be to seek very close and regular cooperation with my fellow Commissioners so that they continuously integrate the consumer perspective in their own activities. Consumer behaviour and interests have a significant potential to reinforce sectoral policies and vice versa, and they have strong links to the Union's on-going efforts to further improve the coordination of its budgetary and economic policies.

I will assume full political responsibility for the activities of my services in the field of consumer policy, in order to allow the Parliament to exercise its democratic oversight effectively. At the same time, cooperating with partners also means for me seeking close cooperation with the Parliament which has a decisive role on consumer legislation and on non-legislative initiatives. In the process of preparing Croatia's accession and in particular in the EU-Croatia Joint Parliamentary Committee I had the honour to meet with many Members of Parliament, whose critical advice and support was essential on the way to EU accession. As Commissioner for consumer policy, if confirmed, I am firmly committed to pursue such constructive political dialogue with the Parliament and its committees, based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, regular reporting and exchange of information.

3. *What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives, also in the light of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?*

I am firmly committed to ensure transparency of my work and that of my services towards the Parliament in order to ensure good inter-institutional co-operation, strengthen legitimacy and accountability of my work, and contribute to efficiency and good governance. I pledge to fully implement the provisions of the Framework Agreement regarding openness to improve transparency and enhance the flow of information. I would support and contribute to the Commission's broader efforts to further enhance the transparency for the general public and their consultation as part of the policy-making process. The broader reflection on the current legislative framework with regard to Member States' cooperation in the area of enforcing consumer legislation, which is to be launched later this year, is an excellent opportunity for such in-depth consultation.

Close and constructive inter-institutional co-operation is indispensable for the efficiency, legitimacy and the good governance of the EU decision-making process, which needs to be built on openness, transparency, mutual trust, efficiency, constant dialogue, regular reporting and exchange of information. If confirmed, I will seek good relations with the Parliament and the relevant committees. I commit to attend relevant meetings at the Parliament's invitation and believe that an on-going regular dialogue as set out in the Framework Agreement would be particularly important in the cross-cutting area of consumer policy. I am determined to ensure regular and direct flow of information with the relevant parliamentary committees. I will always be available for bilateral meetings and direct communication with committee members, and I commit to provide prompt and clear information.

I pledge to carefully consider the Parliament's positions and to ensure rapid and comprehensive follow-up as foreseen in the provisions of the Framework Agreement. I will also seek equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council within the limits of the treaties and the Framework Agreement.

4. *What are the main priorities you intend to pursue as part of your proposed portfolio, taking into account, where relevant, commitments made so far by the European Commission and the financial, economic and social crisis and concerns related to sustainable growth?*

My priorities will be guided by consumers' interests and the wider political and economic context. With consumer expenditure representing 56% of EU GDP, this would mean for me working continuously to integrate the consumer perspective into the EU's ongoing efforts to strengthen economic recovery, as regards e.g. the Single Market. Confident consumers will help to boost demand. At the same time, consumers are not just buyers. I would pay particular attention to those consumers who are negatively affected by the current economic context, and strive to demonstrate that European consumer policy matters on the ground as it can help citizens to get better value for money or even cut down costs.

I am also conscious of the importance of fulfilling the objectives of the European Consumer Agenda. It has set a comprehensive and valid vision of EU consumer policy for the years to come, and my ambition would be to seek close cooperation with others in order to ensure its rapid and effective delivery.

One key priority would be to complete the legislative procedures currently pending and to ensure that recently adopted legislation such as on alternative and online-dispute resolution is transposed and applied efficiently so that the envisaged consumer benefits materialize. I would emphasise notably the medical devices legislation, a matter of patient safety, which should be given absolute priority by the co-legislators, to facilitate a possible rapid agreement. The pending proposals on product safety will better protect European consumers and contribute to consumption and growth through a higher level of trust in the market. They should equally be adopted by early next year. I am also strongly committed to seek the advancement of the recent proposal relating to bank accounts.

Another key priority would be to establish close and constructive cooperation with main partners, including the Parliament, Member States and stakeholders, as already explained in the answer to the second question. Consumer policy is a cross-cutting policy and as such can only succeed if it is shared and supported in different horizontal and sectoral policies. I would aim to focus this cooperation in particular to providing consumers with better targeted information and to ensuring more effective enforcement of the far-reaching consumer *acquis* already adopted in the EU. In that context I believe it to be important to consider the particular needs of those consumers that do not have sufficient information of and confidence in their rights.

A third and final key priority would be to continuously and concretely communicate about how the EU can help consumers in their day-to-day life, in particular in Member States with a relatively weak consumer culture. This is particularly relevant at this time of the mandate when citizens will seek knowledge and information on EU affairs in view of the upcoming elections.

5. *Given the short time available until the end of the Commission's term, what specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives do you intend to put forward, and according to what timetable? What specific commitments can you make regarding in particular the Committee's priorities which fall within your portfolio? How would you personally ensure the good quality of legislative proposals?*

Early in 2014 I would intend to present a report on the implementation of the European Consumer Agenda. This report will provide a great opportunity to take stock of how far actions with promising benefits for consumers have been delivered, and whether there is any need to recalibrate the approach or individual actions.

In order to achieve better targeted information, I will exploit the lessons learned from the consumer credit campaign initiated this year in order to see how to further raise awareness in all Member States. I would also like to reinforce consumer issues in the schools' curriculum by promoting the new online "Consumer Classroom" tool.

I strongly believe that we can achieve a more effective enforcement of consumer legislation even without any new legal proposals. I would be determined to use the tools under existing legislation to their best, such as finalising the guidelines on the safety assessment of cosmetic products, establishing an Online Dispute Resolution platform, or fixing guidelines for the implementation of the Alternative Dispute Resolution. In addition, I would strive for better cooperation and joint work among national enforcement bodies. The existing Consumer Protection Cooperation network allows us to learn from each other, exchange best practices and coordinate enforcement actions even beyond purely cross-border issues. I would aim at using this framework to its full extent. Similarly, the annual coordinated enforcement actions for online business, the so-called sweeps, are success stories on which I would try to build even more in the future. Where possible, I will also strive to remove from the market product

claims which are likely to mislead consumers, eg in the cosmetics sector, where a new Commission Regulation foreseen for adoption in the near future will pave the way for better enforcement.

In 2014, I would present a report on the functioning of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation. This report offers the opportunity to reflect on whether the current Regulation provides for sufficient legal tools for most effective use of enforcement capacities, or whether changes to this framework are needed. I will be attentive to ensure that such a reflection is complemented by a full dialogue with all stakeholders and institutional partners.

As regards the quality of legislative proposals, I am personally committed to be as inclusive as I can be when it comes to reflecting on what can be the best possible approach to solve a problem. I intend to apply this approach in my policy-making, notably through broad consultation, and comprehensive dialogues with all actors. I am aware of the current constraints on our economy and would work to advance both the cause of consumers and the competitiveness of our industry, which in my view are mutually reinforcing, while not compromising on safety. Furthermore, I would be attentive to ensuring that the Smart Regulation approach be duly followed and that a proper evaluation of the existing situation, followed by a comprehensive impact assessment, be undertaken before any new initiative is proposed.