

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HEARINGS**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER
DESIGNATE****Ms. Meglena Shtilianova KUNEVA****(Consumer Protection)****Part A –General questions****I. Personal and professional**

1. *What aspects of your personal qualifications and professional experience do you feel were of particular relevance with regard to your nomination and your prospective role as Commissioner?*

I have been working in European affairs for many years. As a senior legal advisor to the Bulgarian government, I had the opportunity to take part in the whole process of the harmonization of the Bulgarian legal system with the European *acquis* from the very beginning. In my political career, which started in 2001 when I joined the National Movement Simeon II, a pro-European and pro-reform party, my specialized area was also European affairs. Since 2001 I have had the privilege to represent Bulgaria as the Chief Negotiator in the context of accession negotiations with the EU, and since 2002 as the Minister for European Affairs. This gave me the opportunity to contribute to the fundamental and politically exciting process of enlargement of the European Union, to be in contact with prominent European figures from all institutions and, in particular, to participate in the European Convention. I was also a member of the last two Bulgarian governments, which had the challenging task of fully preparing the country for European Union membership.

After the conclusion of accession negotiations, I supported the launch of a comprehensive campaign – including seminars for the administration and general public – in the area of consumer protection. The aim of this campaign was to inform the public of the work of the European Institutions as well as to clarify the rights and responsibilities that would come with Bulgarian EU membership. A specific additional campaign on consumer protection issues was also carried out in cooperation with producers in some of the municipal cities of Bulgaria and was directly related to the adoption of the harmonized Law on Consumer Protection. Day-to-day communication with citizens was an indispensable part of those efforts. This taught me how important

and constructive public opinion can be for policy- making at both national and European levels.

From the whole process I learned that to be effective one needed not only to be patient, persistent and hardworking, but also to have a vision, and to understand the real value of many European policies for European citizens. Both as an individual as well as a Commissioner, should my nomination be confirmed, I want to make a difference and contribute to ensuring that the work of the European Commission brings direct benefits to the life of EU citizens. Therefore, it would be a challenge and a privilege for me to lead the European policy in the area of Consumer Protection, not only because it is one of the core policies of the European Union with a strong tradition and effective instruments, but also because it focuses on protecting the interests of citizens. My background is in law and since 1989 I have worked in various positions dealing with the defense and protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens, mainly in the area of the environment. Furthermore, I come from a country, which learned the hard way how important it is to respect the rights and freedoms of its people.

II. Independence

2. *How would you describe your obligation to be independent in carrying out your duties and how do you concretely envisage putting this principle into practice?*

The independence of a Commissioner stems from the Treaty establishing the European Community. Whilst carrying out my duties I will fully respect the Treaties and will abide by all their fundamental principles. Bearing in mind the tasks given to the Commission by the Treaties and its role as a neutral mediator, I will attach particular importance to the Commission's tradition of independence. Should my nomination be confirmed, in my future work as the Commissioner responsible for Consumer Protection I would see my task as the defense of the legitimate interests of half a billion consumers within the Internal Market. This will oblige me to act with integrity and in the general interest of the Community, taking into account the wide spectrum of European policies. Given the very nature of my position and this portfolio in particular, I will be careful not to allow any external influences to exercise undue pressure on the decision-making process.

The main guiding principle for my work will be a strictly professional approach. In my duties I will be completely independent and will avoid any possible conflict of interests. I will not accept instructions from national governments, political groups, businesses or professional bodies. From my experience gained from being Bulgaria's Chief Negotiator and Minister of European Affairs, I understand that the best way to make a substantial contribution to European integration is to be a responsible and active member of a strong, effective and independent Commission.

3. *Could you provide the European Parliament with details of your recent and present business, financial and political interests and positions, and of any other commitment that might clash with your prospective duties?*

Prior to my election as a Member of the Bulgarian Parliament and my consequent appointment as a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chief Negotiator in 2001, and Minister for European Affairs in 2002, I was a Senior Legal Adviser to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, dealing mainly with environmental legislation and access to information. During that time I was also a legal consultant to EU projects related to environmental issues. Over the last 10 years I have held various social and professional posts, including membership of the Access to Information Programme Foundation and of the Advisory Board and Steering Committee of the TIME Eco-projects Foundation. Currently I am a Member of the Board of Trustees of the Berlin Conference for European Cultural Policy and a Member of the Atlantic Club, Bulgaria.

Regarding my political activities, I am currently a Member of the Political Council of the Bulgarian political party National Movement Simeon II. However, my membership in the Political Council will automatically cease when I end my mandate as a Minister. I have no financial interest or asset, which might create a conflict of interests in the performance of my future duties.

III. Future of the European Union

4. *Which are, in your view, the consequences of the fact that the Constitutional Treaty could not, as initially hoped, enter into force on 1 November 2006? How could the European Commission contribute to achieve the necessary constitutional settlement for the European Union before the year 2009?*

In my opinion, Europe needs to reform in order to deliver effectively for its citizens, be competitive in the world, and act as a key player on the international scene. The constitutional settlement is a way to achieve these goals. Without this reform and without becoming more effective, transparent and democratic, the European Union cannot properly address the important issues it faces today. As a participant in the European Convention, I realize how difficult it was to achieve the current compromise: it still offers the right balance.

A broad debate with the citizens is an essential condition for any further development. As a member of the European Commission I would do my best to explain to the Member States' governments as well as to EU citizens how important reform and the constitutional settlement is for Europe.

I am convinced that in our future efforts to reach an ambitious and lasting settlement, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, as well as national Governments and Parliaments need to work closely together and find the best solution for our citizens. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with the rest of the

Commission to make an active and decisive contribution to reaching a lasting institutional settlement.

5. *The Lisbon Strategy is a ten-year strategy to make the European Union the world's most dynamic, competitive and sustainable economy by 2010. The Lisbon strategy comprises the three pillars of sustainable development: the economy, social affairs and the environment. The date of 2010 will coincide with the term of your mandate. What would you do, as Commissioner, to accelerate progress towards the Lisbon goals and what in your view should be the main priorities?*

I consider the Lisbon Strategy to be a vital instrument enabling Europe to compete and face the challenges of a global world. In my opinion, the role of the European Commission lies in steering the instruments to achieve the ambitious objectives already set at both EU and national level as well as in finding the most effective ways to help the Member States to implement them. The National Reform Programmes show that the Commission and the Member States have to work hand-in-hand to allow national institutions to become more effective in achieving the goals of the Lisbon strategy. I also think that economic reform needs to concentrate not only on boosting employment, but above all on the issues of competition and Internal Market, but also on energy and environmental issues. Since all of these areas are directly and closely connected with consumer protection and because consumer awareness is a key factor in achieving competitiveness for the economies of all Member States, as the Commissioner responsible, I would do my best to address these issues and to help the national institutions and bodies deal with them effectively.

At the same time it would be my role to make sure that in the process of achieving the goals of economic reform, the rights and legitimate interests of European citizens as consumers are fully taken into account and to ensure that the Internal Market brings real benefits to European consumers. Furthermore, I would focus on creating a legal environment supporting consumer confidence in the Internal Market by making consumer protection legislation simpler and more effective, especially in cases that involve cross-border transactions. To achieve all these goals, I would closely cooperate with both European and national Institutions as well as with the enforcement authorities and all economic actors concerned.

6. *How do you intend to improve the public image of the Commission?*

I am aware that many European citizens see the Union through the activities, actions and policies of the EU Institutions, including the European Commission. Therefore I would do my best to make sure that the Commission's public image is that of an active, responsible, effective and transparent body, which acts in the best interests of European citizens. Consumer Policy is an area of shared Commission competence, and one, which directly concerns all European citizens. If confirmed Commissioner for Consumer Protection, I would be responsible for responding to citizens' expectations that the EU's work will improve the quality of their lives.

I believe that the best way to respond to these expectations and concerns is to find the most effective way to achieve the defined objectives, whilst observing the highest standards of public service conduct. At the same time I will fully commit myself to the principles of openness and transparency in accordance with the European Transparency Initiative and the commitments to Better Regulation. The direct legitimacy of the European Parliament gives it a particular role in citizen-centred policies like Consumer Protection. I will actively seek to involve Members of the European Parliament, as well as consumer representatives, in the decision and policy-making process.

IV. Democratic accountability to the European Parliament

7. *How do you envisage your accountability to the European Parliament?*

As the Bulgarian Minister for European Affairs, the Chief Negotiator, and a representative in the European Convention, I had the privilege and opportunity to maintain close contacts and to report to the Bulgarian Parliament. Following this experience there should be no doubt about my willingness to listen carefully to the European Parliament's concerns and to take them duly into account in the execution of my future responsibilities.

My experience as a lawyer and politician has strengthened my belief that responsibility to representatives directly elected by the people is the core principle of democracy. I have successfully stood twice in elections for the Bulgarian Parliament, so I know the respect owed to the authority of the Members of the European Parliament. I also consider that the established principle of accountability of the College to the European Parliament is of key political importance. The European Parliament has a direct democratic legitimacy, representing the citizens of the Union's Member States; it brings the European Union closer to its people and plays an essential role in driving the integration processes forward. It has to be able to effectively exercise its democratic oversight in the interest of the citizens. I will regard this as an integral element of my duties as Commissioner, as Consumer Protection policy directly influences the daily lives of every European citizen.

The Treaties in general and the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission in particular, provide the basis for a close day-to-day cooperation between the two institutions. I will aim to ensure constructive political dialogue, regular, transparent and timely flow of information and close cooperation as regards legislative procedures and planning. I will also aim to ensure that Members of the European Parliament will have direct access to me as well as to my staff whenever the need arises.

I intend to take political responsibility for actions in my field of competence, while respecting Commission collegiality.

- a. ***From a strictly political standpoint, do you consider that, in case a hearing should lead to a negative conclusion, the concerned Commissioner designate should withdraw his/her candidacy?***

Hearings are now established as an important aspect of the appointment procedure. I consider them to be an essential part of Commissioners' accountability to Parliament. They also constitute an opportunity to establish mutual confidence and support needed between Parliament and the Commissioners. Without them, it would be difficult for me to see how I could effectively discharge my duties.

I believe that it is the prerogative of the President of the Commission to evaluate any negative result from the hearings and to draw the appropriate conclusions. For my part, I fully accept the practice that the President of the Commission can ask a Member of the Commission to step down if the European Parliament expresses a lack of confidence.

- b. ***To what extent do you consider that you are responsible for the answers provided by your services to the Parliament as a result of requests emanating from its Committee on Petitions or other responsible committees? If called upon to justify or explain previous acts of the Commission, or previous omissions, to what extent do you consider yourself as being accountable to Parliament***

I will seek to ensure the institutional continuity and coherence within the field of my portfolio. It is my intention when taking up the office of Commissioner to make sure that there is no break in the responsibility of the Commission with regard to Parliament in the area of Consumer Protection. The Commission is a collegial body and Commissioners are answerable to the College for their activities and those of their departments. On a day-to-day basis I will work to ensure transparency and proper flow of information between me and my services in order to implement the guidelines set by the College. If I were to decide that previous acts need to be modified or changes made in the Consumer Protection policy - subject to a College decision - I would inform Parliament in a timely and comprehensive way.

- c. ***What do you understand by the concept of political responsibility before the Parliament for the activities of your Directorate(s)-General? What steps do you intend to take to ensure your Directorate(s)-General are well-managed?***

I will follow the provision of the Framework Agreement on relations between Parliament and the Commission that each Member of the Commission takes political responsibility for actions in the field of which he or she is in charge, without prejudice to the principle of Commission collegiality. I will strive to ensure that the services responsible for Consumer Protection are managed in an efficient and transparent way and, above all, in the interests of European citizens. I intend to promote and encourage relations between my Cabinet and my Directorate-General that are based on transparency, trust and loyalty. I will pay close attention to the detailed reporting flows that the internal procedures guarantee as the basis for my dialogue with the senior managers reporting to me.

8. *How important would you consider implementing the interinstitutional co-operation (Commission-Parliament), in particular with the relevant parliamentary committees in your area of competence? In this new context, what does transparency mean for you, in the interinstitutional legislative procedure between the European Parliament, Council and Commission, as well as in the interinstitutional relations in general?*

In my opinion, effective interinstitutional cooperation is central to the proper functioning of the EU Institutions and constitutes a prerequisite to ensure efficiency, legitimacy and good governance in the EU decision-making process. Such cooperation should be based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, efficiency, continual dialogue, regular reporting and exchange of information. I undertake to fully implement the provisions laid down in the Framework Agreement, as well as the commitments under the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking. I will also be committed to implementing the new comitology rules, thus ensuring that Parliament can fully exercise its control rights.

The development of the Consumer Protection policy requires joint efforts and good working relations between the competent Member of the Commission and the respective Committees as well as individual MEPs. If my nomination is confirmed, I intend to do my best to maintain and improve further these relations in terms of dialogue, presence and exchange of information, as well as follow-up of views expressed by the Committees. The agreements mentioned above set out important standards for Commissioners to respect. The hearings can be an important first step in establishing a good dialogue with the Committees covering my prospective area of responsibility, so that we can start building a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

I attach great importance to transparency. It enables European citizens to better participate in policy development, strengthens legitimacy and accountability, and in general contributes to good governance. Transparency helps to ensure high quality of EU legislation and the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It is also essential for an effective interinstitutional cooperation. Awareness of citizens, stakeholders and other European Institutions in respect of the Commission's work helps the legislative process to be efficient and relevant to the concerns of European citizens. I welcome the progress made to promote greater transparency, openness and accessibility in the working of the EU Institutions with regard to the public and between the Institutions themselves. It is important to implement in full the principles and rules concerning public access to documents, information on expert groups and on the handling of confidential information, Better Lawmaking and the Commission's 'European Transparency Initiative'. If confirmed, I would commit myself to fully implement these principles and to do my utmost, wherever possible, to improve the flow of information and transparency in all the concerned areas.

V. Gender mainstreaming

9. *What concrete measures do you consider necessary in order to ensure that the concept of gender mainstreaming is implemented in your*

specific policy area? Do you have a policy strategy, and what financial and human resources do you think are necessary to implement gender mainstreaming in your portfolio?

In my political and professional career, I have always attached great importance to the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality. I consider them to be cornerstones of the democratic principles on which the European Union is based. I think that gender mainstreaming is essential so that gender equality becomes a full part of common policies. Therefore it consists not only in simply employing more women but also in reshaping policies and activities in a way that makes sure that the principle of gender equality is fully and duly implemented at all levels. If confirmed as Commissioner for Consumer Protection it would be my obligation and responsibility to protect the rights and interests of all the citizens in an effective and non-discriminatory way. I am convinced that only a society that respects the rights of all its citizens in an equal and non-discriminatory way can be economically effective and competitive – as well as true to social justice.

I wish to assure Parliament that, whatever policy action I shall be recommending in my prospective areas of competence, it will be undertaken taking into full account the implications to gender equality. I would also like to point out that as far as Consumer Policy is concerned, EU actions offer an excellent opportunity for women, since they undertake as consumers the greater share of transactions on the market. As far as gender mainstreaming in my services is concerned, 33% of the management positions are occupied by women. I myself intend to strive for gender parity in my Cabinet. I will try to integrate a gender perspective into all phases of policy work, including analysis, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of consumer policy.