

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HEARINGS**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER
DESIGNATE****Mr Leonard ORBAN****(Multilingualism)****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 believe that my professional experience and the positions I held in administration and government represent a solid foundation for taking up the responsibilities of a member of the European Commission. My experience in EU affairs began in 1993 as Parliamentary counsellor on European and International Affairs within the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament, where I was responsible for the European Integration Committee, as well as for relations with the European Parliament. In 1995, with the entering into force of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Romania, I also dealt with the secretariat of the Joint Parliamentary Committee European Union – Romania.

This experience provided a basis for the next challenge. In May 2001 I was appointed Deputy Chief Negotiator and later Chief Negotiator directly responsible for coordinating Romania's preparation for accession to the European Union, as well as for drafting the Treaty of Accession to the EU. After the signature of the Treaty of Accession, when Romania received the status of observer in the Council and in the Commission's committees I had responsibility also for coordinating Romania's policies and positions in EU affairs.

My in-depth experience in the field exposed me to the entire spectrum of EU matters as well as to a close communication with a wide range of actors and stakeholders, and to a permanent dialogue with the European Institutions, which are in my opinion solid assets for facing the challenges of my prospective role as Commissioner.

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 good functioning of the European Union is intrinsically dependent on the good functioning of its institutions according to their specific attributions. In the case of the Commission the capacity to perform the tasks set out in the Treaties and its role as an "honest broker" for the European Union is reliant on the impartiality of its members.

The independence of Commissioners as set out in the Treaties provides them with the framework to perform their mission and duty to pursue and protect the general interest of the Community, for the benefit of all Member States. This is the central feature of how the Commission works and how it is able to discharge its duties and it is particularly important that its independence is maintained.

I entirely subscribe to this fundamental principle and I will respect to the letter the relevant provisions of the Treaty. I shall neither take instructions from any government or from any other body, nor engage in any other occupation, and I will avoid any possible conflict of interest. In doing so, I will duly take into consideration all interests at stake, and I will aim to find the right balance in deriving and promoting the general interest of the Community in each particular area.

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?*

I do not have any financial or political interests which might entail a conflict of interest in performing my duties as European Commissioner. I have always been solely dedicated to my work, be it in the parliamentary or in governmental administrations, and I have not held any other position, nor have any other commitments that might be incompatible with the duties of a member of the Commission.

I strongly support the principles of the Code of Conduct for Commissioners and I truly believe in the need to ensure full transparency and the credibility of those having a political mandate.

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?*

I share the vision of a strong, cohesive European Union capable of fulfilling its destiny as a major actor on the global scene. A strong Union needs an appropriate legal basis and strong institutions.

I am very proud that I had the privilege to be one of the signatories to the Accession Treaty, by which my country also ratified the Constitutional Treaty.

I fully share President Barroso's views on how the Union is held back without the measures proposed in the Constitution. The problems which the Constitution sought to address have not gone away and there are many areas in which, without the Constitution, the Union cannot deliver the policies its citizens expect.

The Commission has been active in maintaining momentum in the Constitutional debate. The "Plan D" adopted in October 2005 launched a series of actions aimed at stimulating a wide public debate at national and European level. The Plan D actions have made a real contribution to building reflections on the way forward. At the same time, the Commission's May 2006 paper "A Citizens' Agenda: delivering results for Europe" set out the right way forward – a twin track strategy to deliver both concrete policy results and progress towards a swift institutional settlement.

The European Parliament's proposal to set out the costs of no Constitution is welcomed, and I understand that the Commission is making a contribution on this subject very soon. The Commission and the European Parliament have a key role to play in building a consensus on what an institutional settlement should look like and in helping the German Presidency to re-launch the process in the first half of next year.

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?*

A strong European Union able to fulfil the goals of lasting peace, stability and prosperity for its citizens and to spread European values worldwide depends on its capacity to be a driving competitive economic force at global level. The overarching priority should therefore be to step up the pace of change, particularly in the areas of further developing a healthy business environment, better regulation and innovation, conducive to the creation of more and better jobs in a consolidated and responsive labour market.

The reports recently presented by Member States on the implementation of their National Reform Programmes confirm the positive overall trend but also the need to do more in some areas. More progress is needed, for instance, in fiscal sustainability, in competition and Internal Market issues and in energy and the environment. The Commission assists the Member States to share, to develop, and to build on their best practices, a strategy that is starting to bear fruit.

Reinforcing the communication effort on economic reform also needs to be a priority. Wide public support for the vision of a confident European Union, seeing globalisation as an opportunity not a threat is of utmost importance. Both the

Commission and the European Parliament have a vital role to play in this respect, in cooperation with the other institutions, with Member States and with stakeholder groups.

I will fully share the common responsibility of the Commission to carry the Lisbon Strategy forward. My prospective portfolio has a role to play in this respect. Language skills are part of the knowledge economy. They foster competitiveness and mobility, support better education, create better jobs, generate innovation and business in information, media and elsewhere, while multilingualism is essential for the Internal Market.

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

Citizens' expectations of the EU have grown over the last 50 years as it has multiplied their numbers and their need for better and broader knowledge and information about their Union. Citizens are asking more of Europe, not less and they need to see that Europe has the means and the will to meet these expectations in order to face the big challenges of today – global economic competition, climate change, migration and demographic changes.

Even if the Commission is only one of the actors responsible for making the EU work, it is natural that the Commission's image is bound up with the wider issue of perceptions of the EU. Should my nomination be confirmed, the right way to add my contribution to a good image for the Commission is to perform my tasks professionally and with the highest standards of public service conduct, and to make my contribution to a College delivering effective results of high quality.

My objective is to identify the best ways and means of meeting the needs and expectations of the citizens within the limits of my duties and according to the role and function of the services under my prospective responsibility.

EU citizens want a better understanding of, and say in, what the EU does and how it does it. "Going local" is a key principle of the Commission's communication strategy and as such intimately linked to multilingualism. The Commission has been taking an increasingly active part in the development of a true communications policy, but its success depends fundamentally on a partnership with all key players in European politics, including the European Parliament.

Commissioners are the public faces of the Commission. With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria the Commission gains two more voices able to communicate with the citizens. I intend to involve myself energetically in close coordination with my Commissioner colleagues in communicating personally to the citizens not only on the issues related to my prospective in my portfolio, but also on the other main priorities of the Commission and the Union.

Language is the very essence of communication and multilingualism is at the core of more dialogue and transparency. If appointed member of the Commission, from my position I will be able to continue to improve the capacities and abilities of the Commission to provide the linguistic means for better communication with the public. I will concentrate my efforts on the achievement of the Commission objective to better assist the Member States in preparing their citizens to enjoy the benefits of enhanced communication in the rich multicultural and multilingual environment of our Community.

IV. Democratic accountability to the European Parliament

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

It is of fundamental political importance to the democracy, effectiveness and legitimacy of the European Union that the College is accountable to the European Parliament.

The European Parliament is the only directly elected European Institution, and thus enjoys a particular democratic legitimacy in representing the peoples of the Member States. The European Parliament plays a central role in pushing the process of European integration forward, offering vision to the European project and bringing Europe closer to its citizens.

The day-to-day cooperation between the Parliament and the Commission is the basis for constructive political dialogue between the two institutions. This cooperation includes: regular dialogue between Commissioners and the European Parliament; direct access and communication links to the Commissioner; Commissioners availability vis-à-vis MEPs; respect for the principle of transparency with regard to the activities of the Commission; provision of prompt and clear information; and a willingness to listen carefully to Parliament's concerns and to consider them as an important factor in the execution of the Commission's responsibilities. The Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission of May 2005 provides the basis for this relationship by improving the constructive dialogue and the flows of information, reinforcing the political responsibility of the Commission, and by strengthening cooperation as regards legislative procedures and planning.

Therefore my close cooperation with the Parliament is essential and I will maintain both directly and through my services, a regular constructive dialogue with the Parliament, in particular with the Culture and Education Committee, but also with the Constitutional Affairs Committee, in full respect of the principle of transparency. I will carefully take into account the Parliament's views and I believe that a good and timely communication with the Parliament is an important factor in the execution of my responsibilities.

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 have become a key element in the procedures established by Parliament as part of the appointment procedure and an essential part of Commissioners' accountability towards Parliament, and thus of the Commission's democratic legitimacy. The hearings also provide a first opportunity to establish mutual trust between the Commissioners-designate and Parliament.

As to the outcome of hearings, it is the responsibility of the President of the Commission to evaluate a possible negative conclusion and to draw conclusions.

I fully accept the principle defined in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission that the President of the Commission

can request a Member of the Commission to resign if 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***

The Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission clearly states that “each Member of the Commission shall take political responsibility for action in the field of which he or she is in charge, without prejudice to the principle of Commission collegiality”.

If appointed, I would therefore intend to ensure on taking up office that I am in a position to guarantee that there is no gap in the accountability of the Commission to Parliament in relation to my areas of responsibility. I would of course inform Parliament if I were to decide, subject to a College decision, that previous choices or assessments needed to be revised.

- 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?***

According to the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, each Commissioner is answerable to the College for his or her activities and those of his or her department. The Director-General is answerable to the Commissioner and the College for the proper implementation of the guidelines set by the College and the Commissioner and, in particular, for the management of the Directorate-General or Service in line with the distribution of powers as defined by the Staff Regulations, the Financial Regulation, the Rules of Procedure and the rules laid down as part of the administrative and financial reform of the Commission.

To ensure that the Directorates General under my responsibility are managed properly I will fully respect the legal framework and I would guide myself on the principles of efficiency, quality, better services and accountability.

I will assess together with the senior management and with the internal audit services what are the needs and challenges the Directorates General are currently facing and decide over the appropriate actions if and where needed.

It nevertheless should be stressed that relations between Commissioners and departments are based first and foremost on loyalty, trust and transparency – particularly in respect of external contacts.

- 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?

Interinstitutional cooperation is central to the way the European institutional system works and to the legitimacy, effectiveness and good governance of the EU decision-making process. It should be based on mutual trust, frankness and transparency, as well as on regular dialogue, reporting and exchange of information

The hearings will be an important first occasion to establish a good working relationship with the committees covering my prospective area of responsibility, so that we can build a relationship of confidence and respect.

I undertake to fully respect the principles laid down in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission; the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking - another crucial step, especially as regards better co-ordination between Parliament, Council and Commission during the legislative process; as well as the comitology rules, as amended this year, to make sure that the European Parliament can fully exercise its new control rights.

I believe that good relations between Commissioners and the Parliament committees are essential. We should always be looking for ways to improve these relations in terms of exchange of information and dialogue, presence and availability, as well as follow-up of the views expressed by the committees.

In addition, I consider it an important part of a Commissioner's duties to be available to committee members and to attend committee meetings, both on the committee's invitation but also on my own suggestion. I would like to establish direct communication with MEPs, so that I can be aware of concerns and provide prompt and clear information;

The principle of transparency is of pivotal importance for me, since it enables citizens to participate more closely in policy development and decision-making, strengthens legitimacy and accountability, and contributes to efficiency and good governance. Improving the quality of lawmaking, applying subsidiarity and proportionality, ensuring legal certainty are supported by transparency.

Transparency is also essential for good interinstitutional cooperation. A lot has been done to promote greater openness, transparency and accessibility in the workings of the EU Institutions. I would like to point in particular to the Regulation regarding public access to documents, and the Commission's commitments in the Framework Agreement with Parliament, as well as the European Transparency Initiative launched by the Commission. I would undertake to implement these provisions in full and to do whatever possible to improve transparency and the flow of information.

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?

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Treaties. The EU Institutions and the Member States must incorporate a gender equality perspective in all policy fields and at all stages of policy-making at all levels. The seriousness with which this is taken has been shown in the way in which this principle has been applied in a series of important policy areas: such as research, the Structural Funds, and the Employment Strategy.

The Community policy as regards gender equality is laid down by the *roadmap* adopted by the Commission on 1 March 2006. The method recommended for the implementation of this policy is mainstreaming. I believe that multilingualism may powerfully contribute to “the elimination of the stereotypes related to the kind in teaching, the training and the culture”, which is one of the *Roadmap* objectives. All the concrete measures envisaged to promote linguistic diversity in the Union will contribute to improve mutual understanding amongst European citizens and, I hope, to combat stereotypes, including those which relate to gender.

The Commission's commitment to make gender equality core to planning and policy has been reinforced by the role of the Group of Commissioners on fundamental rights, freedom and equal opportunities. I would expect the College to continue to take a particular interest in promoting gender mainstreaming.