



COMMITTEE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION
THE CHAIRMAN

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Josep BORRELL FONTELLES
President
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

3 17 4 5 7 28.11.2006

Dear President,

In accordance with Rule 99 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, the Committee on Culture and Education held on Monday 27 November a public hearing with Mr Leonard Orban, Commissioner Designate, who, subject to the positive conclusion of the nomination procedure will be in charge of multilingualism. The Committee on Constitutional Affairs has been associated to the preparatory process and the hearing itself.

Prior to the hearing, the committee submitted a written questionnaire to which the Commissioner Nominee replied in writing in a satisfactory way.

In his introductory statement Mr Orban touched upon the following issues: the contribution of multilingualism to prosperity and economic competitiveness, to the social dimension and to the intercultural dialogue as a cornerstone of European society; multilingualism in relation to third countries and external relations; multilingualism as a space for European political dialogue.

During the debate the Commissioner Designate answered questions relating to, in particular, the following issues (among others):

- the role of the European Schools in multilingualism;
- the links with the Council of Europe at the crossroads of multilingualism and culture;
- the extent of Mr Orban's proposed portfolio and the subsidiarity issue;
- the life-long learning opportunities' availability to speakers of lesser-used languages;
- the problems faced by children from immigrant communities in Member States' schools;
- the "mother tongue plus two" principle;
- cost control of translation and interpretation in the EU without loss of quality;
- the linguistic aspects of equality between men and women;
- the Sami people of northern Finland, the Roma and Hungarian minorities in Romania and the Slovenian minority in Austria;
- language rights and the use of regional languages;
- communication of EU activities in the respective language of the EU citizens.

He made in particular the following commitments with regard to the policy areas he will be responsible of (if confirmed):

- his deep commitment to European integration and his assurance to make a substantial contribution to move the European project forward;
- his commitment to mainstream the integration of the multilingual dimension of the EU in all relevant policies and programmes and his willingness to cooperate with his future fellow Commissioners - and with other institutions - in order to promote multilingualism within other relevant policies;
- his belief to deliver results for citizens, and the need to communicate with them in a language they understand;
- his objective to start working on the motivation to learn languages, to improving language teacher training, to reinforcing prosperity, in particular by building a partnership with business, to making the media and new communication technologies more language friendly, to raising awareness on language related professions, and to reinforcing a space for European political dialogue;
- his commitment to work for the consolidation of the languages of the 2004 enlargement and for the smooth integration of Bulgarian and Romanian;
- his firm intention to ensure the position of excellence of the EU translation and interpretation standards around the world, while at the same time controlling their cost;
- his outspoken commitment to work closely with the European Parliament on all aspects of the portfolio.

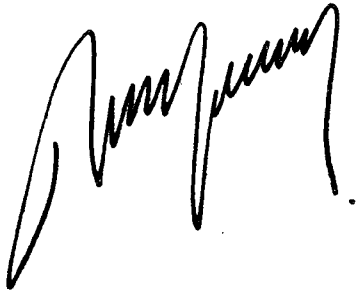
On the basis of the reactions of the Members present at the hearing and the results of the evaluation meeting of the Committee on Culture and Education, which took place this morning, I am able to provide you with the following assessment of the hearing:

- A number of Members highlighted the relative vagueness of the portfolio, which comprises multilingualism, but also aspects related to the intercultural dialogue; the oral and written assurances by Commission President Barroso were not seen as sufficiently clarifying the division of labour between the President himself, Mr Figel and Mr Orban; several Members made an appeal to the Commission President to further clarify, publicly and in writing, the legal basis of Mr Orban's field of activity in order to help the European citizens to find their way in the European administrative labyrinth and to clearly identify the relevant competences and responsibilities within the College;
- With regard to the gender mainstreaming issue, some members considered that the Commissioner Designate should devote high attention to linguistic aspects of the equality between men and women;
- Some members, although recognising that Mr Orban stood before the Parliament without a sufficiently clear mandate which may have incited him to reply with caution, would have appreciated a more voluntary approach with regard to various aspects of his portfolio, in particular in relation to the Member States;
- A large majority of Members expressed the opinion that he showed high political skills, as well as great ability, capacity and ambition to learn and acquire expert knowledge into his portfolio; members, on the whole, while criticising the unclear mandate of the Commissioner Designate, recognized that Mr Orban seems particularly qualified to handle such a difficult portfolio with true professionalism;
- Finally, members seemed happy with the Commissioner Designate's performance and some congratulated him, expressing willingness to start working with him soon.

Upon questions by the Members of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, the Commissioner Designate has shown full awareness of the constitutional dimension of multilingualism, of the improvements in this domain contained in the Constitutional Treaty and of the need to overcome the present constitutional crisis, hopefully on the basis of a road map proposed by the German presidency. He is committed towards a strong political Union and ready to support within the college initiatives contributing to a constitutional settlement. With regard to the implementation of a European dimension in policies on language education, which is already feasible under the Treaties presently in force, it would be desirable that he develops more courage and dynamism after taking up his office."

In general terms, Members of both committees thought the Commissioner designate has given a convincing impression of his personal and professional capacities and his aptitude to assume the high office he has been proposed for.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nikolaos Sifunakis', written in a cursive style.

Nikolaos SIFUNAKIS