



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009–2014

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

7.1.2010

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Hearing with Janez POTOČNIK, Commissioner-designate for Environment

Please find enclosed the written answers sent by Janez POTOČNIK.

The Secretariat

**ANSWERS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER -DESIGNATE**

Janez POTOČNIK

(Environment)

General competence, European commitment and personal independence

- 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? Which 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?**

My record as a Commissioner over the last 5 years is the best evidence of my commitment to the European general interest and to collegiality. That experience has shown me that by working with colleagues, with the Commission services, with the Parliament and the other institutions, it is possible to make a real difference in 5 years. That experience will also allow me to be quickly operational in my new portfolio responsibilities. As Commissioner for Science and Research I gained a valuable general understanding of the institutional processes and responsibilities, but it has also given me a valuable insight into the issues central to the Environment portfolio.

Experience from my earlier professional life also gives me a good foundation for being an effective Environment Commissioner. I have been an economist, a manager, a teacher, a researcher, an accession negotiator and a Europe minister.

My motivations are numerous and profound. I am a Slovenian and my personal experience of the break up of Yugoslavia and the diverse development of the Balkan region since, has obviously been an important influence. For me the European Union has always been about freedom, and freedoms; and the recent history of my country means that I do not take such freedoms for granted. I am proud that I played, as chief negotiator for Slovenia, a part in the success of enlargement and in Slovenia's accession. But whilst the post world-war, and post cold-war rationales for the fundamental freedoms in the European Union remain valid, I see a changing role for the EU in the future. The Union is becoming increasingly important, not only as a single market place, but also in providing common approaches and common solutions to the regional and global challenges we face. In a multi-polar world Europe must be

responsible, Europe must be in the lead, and Europe must be strong. In an ever more connected and interrelated world our individual and collective responsibility has grown. Europe should take that responsibility. The Treaty of Lisbon will help us to fulfil that role.

Of course many of those challenges relate to the fact that we live on a planet which has finite resources and a fragile ecology, but yet must meet the valid aspirations of its almost 7 billion people for a decent material quality of life. I cannot even claim that my motivation for the Environment portfolio is purely moral and disinterested. As I stated in a speech I gave in May this year "Sustainability is no longer an issue of morality only; it is also becoming an issue of self-interest. It is no longer merely about how we will leave our planet to future generations, but also about the effect of our behaviour during our own generation or the next one." And this was far from being the only speech in which I was vocal on the need for a sustainable future, and policies supporting sustainability. You can easily check that personally on my webpage, where you have access to the majority of my contributions during my previous mandate.

I can pledge immediately and unequivocally that I will not engage in any other occupation, gainful or not, in the duration of my mandate. I currently hold no other offices or responsibilities. I have no business or financial holdings. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I undertake to update it in case of changes. I also undertake neither to seek nor take instruction from any government or any other body, and to take all necessary precautions to avoid any potential conflicts of interest in the performance of my duties.

These are obligations for all Commissioners as set out in the Treaties and our code of conduct and I am fully committed to respect them. For me independence is also a matter of personal principle: a moral obligation that is necessary for maintaining the dignity of my office and of the Institution I represent. I believe that this is borne out by my record as a Commissioner for the last 5 years. I have always declined invitations to participate in any organisation, publication or event that might compromise my independence or be perceived to do so. I have worked with industry but not for industry, for example in establishing public-private partnerships (eg. Joint Technology Initiatives). In the research framework programmes I always strongly protected the independence and scientific basis of evaluation of research calls.

Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament and its committees

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?

The College of Commissioners is the political heart of the Commission. It must be political, but not partisan, and I have been personally impressed by the extent to which Commissioners act independently of their own political and national backgrounds. As for myself I have always, and will continue to cooperate with politicians of all political groupings. Transcending partisan divisions for a common good is part of my political culture. I fully subscribe to the political guidelines presented to this House by the President of the

Commission, and indeed I actively supported those orientations during the previous mandate. I also intend to contribute actively and vigorously to deliberations and decisions of the College, and I will not hesitate to be positively critical. However, once decisions have been taken I will share collective responsibility in full conscience of what that implies, and indeed I undertake to make every effort to communicate and explain those decisions to citizens as I believe that Euro-ignorance is the breeding ground of Euro-apathy.

I will take full political responsibility for the activities of the services in my field of competence. I am designated to take responsibility for a portfolio that has impacts and implications in a wide array of policy areas. I therefore believe that it will be important to work effectively with my colleagues and their services long before the formal decision-taking stage and, in particular, with the Commissioner for Climate Action. I am fully aware of how challenging it can be to cut across institutional hierarchies and responsibilities, but I also believe that it is necessary in order to achieve our many shared objectives. I am a team player, still active in playing volleyball, even if I notice that the net is each year getting higher. I believe that getting good results means being willing to share the work, share the responsibilities and share the credit. Trust and transparency will be particularly important in view of the division of responsibilities for environment and climate change, but these are principles by which I have always worked.

I am a democrat coming from a country which has had to fight for democracy. Therefore I am happy that the Treaty of Lisbon reinforces the role and powers of the European Parliament. I intend to invest strongly in developing a constructive political dialogue with the Parliament and its committees based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, regular reporting and exchange of information, in order to allow the Parliament to exercise its democratic oversight effectively. I regard my presence at plenary sessions and committee meetings as central to my responsibilities as a Commissioner and directly linked to the accountability and legitimacy of the Commission as a whole. A constructive and regular relationship with the Parliament is also essential to achieving results, and therefore I intend to work with the Parliament and its committees upstream as well as downstream in the legislative flow.

I believe that my record in my relations with the European Parliament is sound. The Science and Research portfolio did not include a heavy legislative workload and therefore did not bring me frequently to the Parliament. Nevertheless I have proactively volunteered on several occasions to explain my actions to the Parliament's committees, and to listen to their reactions, opinions and suggestions. For example as Commissioner responsible for the largest directly managed budget, I volunteered to regularly inform the Committee on Budgetary Control of progress with the research audit strategy.

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?

An effective partnership of the Parliament and the Commission is essential to making the Community method work in the interests of European people. I have always found that the

better informed the Parliament is, the more useful its criticism is in helping the Commission towards effective solutions. But I also believe that information overload should be avoided; what is required to achieve efficiency and good governance is the right information at the right time. This should of course be combined with a system of access to information in order for the Parliament to properly exercise its role of democratic oversight. I believe that the Framework Agreement provides a good basis for transparency and information flows between our two Institutions and I undertake to respect it to the letter, and in spirit. I am proud to have served in a Commission that has made great efforts to develop transparency through the European Transparency Initiative.

The Treaty of Lisbon reinforces the need for a consensus-building approach between our two Institutions. This cannot be based on Treaty provisions and decision-making rules alone; it is a question also of political will and good faith. I have never doubted the importance of decision making based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, efficiency, constant dialogue, regular reporting and exchange of information. I have already indicated my availability for dialogue with the Parliament's committees. The hearing will be a welcome first contact with members of the Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and I intend it to be the beginning of a regular, open and fruitful relationship. I commit myself to fully abide by the Framework Agreement and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. I also undertake to respond quickly to questions and information requests of individual members, and will welcome direct communication with committee members.

In acting in the European general interest I believe that the Commission should base its initiatives on impact assessments (including wide consultations), scientific evidence and the principles of better regulation (including proportionality and subsidiarity). But the European general interest cannot be achieved in a political vacuum; that is why Commission proposals must be subject to open political debate in a true European public space, and the European Parliament provides the decisive forum for deliberation and the source of democratic legitimacy.

I undertake to fully and promptly inform Parliament and its relevant committees on a regular basis of actions taken in response to Parliamentary resolutions relating to my fields of responsibility. I will also take account of any requests made by the Parliament for legislative proposals to be submitted in accordance with the Framework Agreement. Given the importance of the ordinary legislative procedure in the field of environmental policy I intend to fully cooperate with the joint legislators at all stages of the process, and to actively support their endeavours to reach agreement.

Policy-related questions

4. What are the three main priorities you intend to pursue as part of your proposed portfolio, taking into account, where relevant, the financial, economic and social crisis and concerns related to sustainable development?

Sustainability is about balance and it is about responsibility. As the world becomes more interconnected, more multi-polar, more competitive and as it faces more global challenges, establishing that balance and responsibility becomes more complex. Europe must find a path for balanced progress based on turning our resources-based economy into a knowledge-based

society. Europe must take the responsibility of leading the development of global governance mechanisms to ensure a mutually sustainable future. My three priorities for my mandate would be promoting a green economy, halting the loss of biodiversity and implementing and improving existing environmental legislation.

Developing a low-carbon economy and stimulating a green economy, innovation and jobs will be one of the main priorities of the EU 2020 Strategy. Reinforcing the contribution of environmental policy to this strategy and translating it into reality will be a central challenge. Resource efficiency will be a critical component of any strategy to protect our environment and enhance our competitiveness. It will mean putting in place the right mix of smart regulation, incentives and market-based mechanisms to foster eco-innovation and sustainable consumption and production, finding ways to promote the changes needed which fully respect our levels of environmental ambition. This will include presenting action plans for eco-innovation, environmental technologies and the next phase of Sustainable Consumption and Production to make the EU more resource efficient.

More political commitment is needed to address biodiversity. The threats from biodiversity loss are becoming clearer and the failure to meet interim goals on biodiversity loss cannot continue. The real value of biodiversity and ecosystems and the importance of soil, water, land use and forestry must be fully recognised. The link between biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation is critical. For this reason, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Climate Action. Given that we will meet neither the EU's 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss, nor the global target of significantly reducing it, this policy area will need new impetus. New EU and global targets are needed, but targets are not enough. I will push for an ambitious action plan, and I am aware that my biggest challenge will be to make sure that it can deliver results.

If we are to achieve ambitious environmental objectives, we must act on many policy fronts. I am fully aware of my role and responsibility to ensure that these objectives are properly reflected in other policies. Implementing and reviewing existing environmental legislation (air, water, waste & chemical) will support the move towards more sustainable growth and continue to ensure that negative impacts of our activities on the environment and human health are prevented. Improving the implementation of our legislation is also critical. It will maintain environmental progress, and ensure that the benefits intended from proposals at the time of their adoption actually materialise. This will be an important area of cooperation with the Member States. We must guard against implementation being hampered or marginalised by the pressures stemming from the economic crisis. The financial crisis has demonstrated the consequences of unsustainability in one area. Our exit from that crisis should be done in a way which can increase, and not further reduce the sustainability of our future.

5. What are the specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives you intend to put forward, and according to what timetable? What specific commitments can you make regarding in particular the committees' priorities and requests attached hereto which would fall within your portfolio? How would you personally ensure the good quality of legislative proposals?

I intend to waste no time in tackling the key environmental issues, but that does not mean I will favour hasty fixes that are high on communication impact and low on environmental

impact. I want European environmental policy to be ambitiously effective. I am determined to focus in all that I do on optimal environmental outcomes. But I know that we will never achieve these only through good intentions and moral rectitude. We need a systematic approach and a solid knowledge base, not only as the precondition for credibility of our own proposals, but also in order to ensure that we have a strong evidence base for effectively mainstreaming our objectives via other policy areas. This will be central to our effectiveness in the EU 2020 Strategy.

I will prioritise effective implementation of EU environmental legislation and integration into other policy areas. I will continue the dual approach of partnership with Member States to ensure compliance and, where this fails, I will not hesitate to use legal instruments for enforcement, with the strategic objective of getting the highest possible impact on improved compliance.

I intend to seize upon the opportunity of 2010, the international year of biodiversity, to address the challenge of biodiversity loss. I will draw conclusions from the experience of the 6th Environmental Action Programme and move forward the policies on waste, resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production to foster green growth and eco-innovation and to contribute to a more environmentally, socially and economically resilient EU. I will also ensure that environmental policy fully contributes to the Commission's activities to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to climate change.

Despite some positive results, established biodiversity targets for 2010 will not be met. I will put forward options for a new EU vision and target for biodiversity to enable Europe to provide strategic input to the international debate on biodiversity in 2010 and subsequently present a new EU biodiversity strategy which will integrate biodiversity into linked policy areas. Within the EU I will finalise the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, continue work to protect marine biodiversity and review the different means available to finance nature protection in preparation for the next financial perspectives starting in 2014.

I will review the implementation of the existing water legislation bearing in mind the need to adapt to climate change and will present my findings in 2012. Effective implementation of fresh water policy will also contribute to implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the environmental pillar of the EU's maritime strategy. Together with the Commissioner for industry and entrepreneurship I will work to implement REACH effectively. This will contribute to innovation in the chemical sector, an important element in putting Europe on a path to more sustainable growth on its exit from the economic crisis. In cooperation with the Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, I will also examine if the existing legislative framework adequately covers environmental issues related to nanotechnology or whether specific measures are necessary.

I will endeavour to continue improvements in air quality in Europe and in particular re-examine the proposal for a revision of the National Emission Ceilings Directive in view of ambitious health and environmental objectives to be achieved by 2020 as set by the Commission's Air Thematic Strategy of 2005.

An independent evaluation of the 6th Environment Action Programme will be completed by the end of 2010. Together with the European Environmental Agency's "State and outlook of the European environment" ('SOER'), it will form the basis for moving environmental policy

forward in the context of the EU 2020 and Sustainable Development Strategies. Smarter and simpler regulation is essential for achieving our current objectives and for pushing them further. Better regulation will not be about reducing ambitions, but about enabling effective meeting of these very ambitions.