



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Constitutional Affairs

7.1.2010

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Hearing with Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President designate of the Commission for Inter-institutional Relations and Administration

Please find enclosed the written answers sent by Maroš Šefčovič.

The Secretariat

ANSWERS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE
Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ
(Inter-institutional Relations and Administration)

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? 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?**

Since the completion of my studies in international relations and following my entry into the diplomatic service in 1990, I have been actively involved in EU affairs for almost 15 years. My greatest privilege was to be intensively part of the process, when Slovakia – after very challenging years – dynamically embraced the goal of EU integration and passed one milestone after the other. I was able to witness from very close how Slovakia was transformed in a significant and positive manner. When I started my diplomatic career 20 years ago, I would not have dreamed of Slovakia becoming so soon a fully fledged, democratic member of the EU without borders, with its citizens being able to use a single European currency. This very clear proof of the positive transformation power of the EU made me believe even more strongly in the attraction and potential of European integration. My motivation to work as a Member of the College of Commissioners is deeply rooted in my firm conviction that Europe can exploit the benefits of European integration even more than today, render it still stronger and bring it closer to the citizens.

I have acquired detailed knowledge of the EU institutions notably in my five years as Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the EU, and in recent months serving as Commissioner. I have experienced here both the complexity and growing importance of inter-institutional relations. Having participated in the relevant Inter-governmental conferences and in the drafting of the Lisbon Treaty, I am completely aware of the manifold tasks and challenges ahead to bring the Treaty fully into life when implementing it. The Lisbon Treaty has elevated inter-institutional relations to a qualitatively new stage, reinforcing in particular the role of the European Parliament as a co-legislator. I am greatly motivated to contribute to a smooth implementation of the Lisbon Treaty for the benefit of an even closer inter-

institutional cooperation. My many dealings with the European institutions have shown to me at the same time that the institutions' biggest asset is their personnel. Having been myself responsible for a large number of staff over the past years, I am convinced that the challenges lying ahead of us will call for even higher standards on the administration and personnel aspects. Therefore, I would like to ensure that the European Commission's civil service is highly qualified, motivated, well-equipped and transparent.

I am fully aware of and strongly committed to respect the obligations stipulated in Article 17.3 TEU, 245 TFEU and the Code of conduct for Commissioners, laying down the basic guarantees of independence and ethical principles to be respected by the Members of the Commission. In particular, I would not accept any instructions from any government or any other body, I would refrain from any action incompatible with my duties, I would not engage in any other occupation - whether gainful or not - during the term of office, and I would respect the obligation to behave with integrity and discretion as regards the acceptance of certain appointments or benefits after my mandate. My declaration of interests foreseen by the Code of conduct for Commissioners is completed and I am committed to update it regularly in case of any changes.

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?

Collegiality is the guiding principle and the basic pillar for a well functioning Commission. As a Member of the College, I would be first and foremost dedicated to the portfolio assigned to me by the President. My duties would be done in full cooperation with the other Members of the Commission. With respect to the work carried out by my own services, I would be committed to take the political responsibility for their activities in my field of competence and without prejudice to the principle of collegiality. The relations between my Cabinet, the services and myself would be based on loyalty, trust, transparency and mutual flow of information and assistance.

While fully respecting the responsibilities of the other Members, I would like to contribute to the decisions of the Commission with my own experience, expertise and ideas to the widest possible extent, with the aim to achieve the best possible result for the European general interest. As a Commissioner in charge of inter-institutional relations, I would, in particular, like to make sure that we build our policies on the basis of a wide EU consensus developed through partnership with the European Parliament and the other EU institutions. Once adopted, I would fully bear the responsibility with the other Members for the decisions taken. I would be committed to ensure a constructive political dialogue with the European Parliament and its committees based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, regular reporting and exchange of information, so that the European Parliament can exercise its democratic control effectively.

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 deeply convinced about the importance of inter-institutional co-operation between the European Commission and the European Parliament for the good functioning of the EU's institutional system. This co-operation should be based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, efficiency, constant dialogue, regular reporting and exchange of information. I would see this at the same time as part of the Commission's broader efforts to foster transparency for the general public.

The Lisbon Treaty has increased notably the role of the European Parliament in the legislative process, bolstering the importance of building consensus on future initiatives. With co-decision becoming the ordinary legislative procedure, we need to ensure similar treatment in the Commission's dealings with the institutions. As Commissioner in charge of inter-institutional relations I would pay particular attention and meticulous care that these principles are respected and applied by the Commission vis-à-vis the European Parliament. Excellent relations between the Commissioners and the European Parliament, particularly in their contacts with the relevant committees, are primordial for rendering the co-operation between the two institutions successful for the benefit of the general public. Considering an intensive dialogue as instrumental, I would be strongly committed to be at the disposal of the relevant committees upon their invitation or my own suggestion, but also for bilateral meetings and direct communication with committee members. Providing prompt and clear information, as well as following-up the views expressed in these meetings would be an essential element of my relationship with the European Parliament. In this context, I would be strongly dedicated to fully implement the provisions of the Framework Agreement, notably regarding the flow of information, in order to ensure the involvement of the Parliament and to give full effect to the provisions of the new Treaty.

Furthermore, I support the efforts of the Commission towards greater transparency vis-à-vis the general public such as the "European Transparency Initiative" launched by the outgoing Commission and I am happy to note that the European Parliament has endeavored to work together with the Commission to set up a joint register of interest representatives. I consider the Hearing as an important first occasion to build a very good working relationship based on mutual trust and respect with the committee.

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?

The European Union has huge potential to act in the interest of Europe's citizens. But to do this, it needs to be built on the firm foundations of the EU's institutions. The lesson of recent years is that when the EU acts together – whether on climate change and energy, or on the response to the financial, economic and social crisis – it can meet its ambitions. And it can only act together effectively through partnership. So my main priority as Commissioner for inter-institutional relations is to ensure that inter-institutional relations bring about a true

inter-institutional partnership. To make our policies effective, we need a strong leadership from the European institutions together with the involvement of all sectors of society: national, regional and local authorities, business, trade unions and civil society.

The Lisbon Treaty gives particular importance to relations between the Commission and the European Parliament. I would like to take the special partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission to a new level – along the lines set out by President Barroso in his political guidelines – by reinforcing and complementing the existing mechanisms of co-operation. The first opportunity will come with the revision of the Framework Agreement between our Institutions. I look forward to a fruitful dialogue with Parliament and to conclude an agreement which recognises the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the Parliament as the democratic heart of Europe, which keeps the institutional triangle as the motor of the EU's work, and which cements a new phase in inter-institutional co-operation.

The other main priority for me will be the swift and effective implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. I am very glad that after almost a decade of work on revising the Treaty, we now have a strong democratic basis for the EU, and one which opens up new possibilities for an active EU to work effectively. I want to ensure that the potential of this Treaty will be used to the full. I intend to play an active role in the overall coordination of the implementation of the new Treaty. I count on good co-operation with the other institutions to ensure that we all reap the full benefits of the new Treaty. More specifically, I will work for the early adoption of new rules on delegated and implementing acts, the European Citizen's Initiative and ensuring that the mechanisms to allow national parliaments to monitor subsidiarity work well.

The Commission can achieve its policy objectives only when it has the right resources in the right place at the right time. As Commissioner also in charge of administration, I would therefore like to ensure that the Commission attracts, trains and retains highly skilled and motivated staff. I would put my focus on a clear Human Resources strategy and vision, which should enable all policy areas to be based on the fundamental principles of ethics, transparency, equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The strategy should aim at warranting the optimal allocation of our human resources, as well as the sustainability of the legal framework and finances. The implementation of the Lisbon Treaty with regard to organisational and staff matters would be an important short-term challenge, especially as regards the setting up of the European External Action Service.

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?

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon marks an important milestone in the history of European integration. I believe we need now to move to a swift and efficient implementation of the Treaty to deliver on the expectation of our citizens and I look forward to working with the other institutions on this agenda. There are a number of areas where concrete Commission initiatives are necessary in order to implement the Lisbon Treaty. I commit myself to putting forward immediately after my appointment a draft regulation on implementing acts (Article 291 TFEU) to replace the Comitology decision of 1999. Concerning delegated acts, a

Commission Communication to the European Parliament and Council on the application of Article 290 TFEU has already been presented, with the full and very constructive involvement of the European Parliament's services. As regards the Citizens' Initiative, I would like to present a proposal for a Regulation during the spring of 2010, hoping that agreement among the institutions could be found before the first year of the Treaty is concluded. It would be my intention to ensure full transparency concerning initiatives that are in the pipeline, as well as those that are being taken forward. I would be committed to guarantee that the Commission will be attentive to positions expressed by the European Parliament in this regard, and of course the Parliament could support a Citizens' Initiative by making use of the prerogatives foreseen in Article 225 TFEU. Moreover, once the Commission has examined and taken a position on a given Citizens' Initiative, my intention would be to set out its conclusions in a Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. I am also very committed to continuing the work of the inter-institutional working group on agencies with the aim of agreeing on a common approach between the institutions during the first half of 2011.

As regards the priorities of the Committees on Legal Affairs and on Petitions concerning infringements, I will play my part in making sure that the Commission remains vigilant in the application of EU law including through the pursuit of infringements and continues to work closely with the European Parliament in reporting on and discussing developments in the application of Community law. The Commission will also carry on working in close co-operation with Member States to ensure the general management of the law and to work in partnership with them to ensure effective responses to citizens' legal concerns and the correction of infringements.

Having carefully examined the remaining priorities outlined by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, I should first make it very clear that some of these priorities (such as communication, electoral reform, implementation of the Stockholm Programme and the European External Action Service) do not come within the remit of my portfolio. However, I would like to point out that, as a Member of the College of Commissioners, I would be fully committed to communicating the EU's policies in order to raise awareness of the EU and its institutions and to build public understanding and support through information and debate. Furthermore, I would support any Commission initiative, which aims at boosting participation in European elections. As regards the European External Action Service (EEAS), I am convinced that it will only be effective if it works well with the other institutions. Therefore, it is important that the EEAS is set up with full respect and recognition of the inter-institutional balance, closely involving the European Parliament, and that it is properly accountable to the European Parliament. In my capacity as Commissioner in charge of administration, I would contribute to enabling the setting-up and running of the EEAS notably through the proposal of amended Staff Regulations, pursuant to Art 336 TFEU, which involves the European Parliament on the basis of the ordinary legislative procedure. Providing administrative support from the Commission Services to the EEAS could be in my view an important element to render the newly created service effective and cost efficient.

Article 197 TFEU has introduced a further new element, foreseeing that the Union may support the efforts of Member States to improve their administrative capacity to implement Union law. I firmly believe that the Commission should set here an example in the modernisation of public administration in Europe and play a key role in reinforcing relations and sharing best practices with and between national and international public administrations.

In this context, European institutions should be exemplary in their respect for fundamental principles of good administration such as transparency, equal opportunities, ethics and environmental management. I will also build on the framework for the relations with "interest representatives".

With regard to the quality of legislative proposals, I will make sure that they live up to the necessary quality standards respecting the principles of smart regulation, notably by ensuring that a proper consultation of the relevant institutions and stakeholders has taken place and that proposals have been subject to an integrated impact assessment.