



PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EVROPSKÝ PARLAMENT
EUROPA-PARLAMENTET EUROPÄISCHES PARLAMENT EUROOPA PARLAMENT
ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΟ ΚΟΙΝΟΒΟΥΛΙΟ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
PARLEMENT EUROPEEN PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EIROPAS PARLAMENTS
EUROPOS PARLAMENTAS EURÓPAI PARLAMENT
IL-PARLAMENT EWROPEW EUROPEES PARLEMENT PARLAMENT EUROPEJSKI
PARLAMENTO EUROPEU EURÓPSKY PARLAMENT
EVROPSKI PARLAMENT EUROOPAN PARLAMENTTI EUROPAPARLAMENTET

Focus

Round-up of Tajani and Barrot hearings

MEPs have voted to endorse the latest reshuffle of the European Commission. They voted 507 in favour with 53 against and 64 abstentions to support the candidacy of former MEP Antonio Tajani for the post of Commissioner for Transport. The House also voted 489 in favour with 52 against and 19 abstentions to support Jacques Barrot's candidacy for the post of Commissioner for Freedom, Justice and Security. Mr Barrot is currently Commission Vice-president and holder of the Transport portfolio.

In hearings held Monday night Jacques Barrot and Antonio Tajani faced questions from MEPs on their priorities should they be approved European Commissioners for Justice, Freedom and Security and Transport respectively. Mr Barrot said his priorities would be fighting discrimination and data protection. He also vowed to fight for visa free travel by EU citizens to the US. The need to tackle drink driving and modernise Europe's air traffic control were two priorities picked out by Mr Tajani.

Both men were questioned by MEPs for up to 3 hours on issues such as the future of the Lisbon treaty after the Irish vote in a referendum and individual policies they intended to pursue in office.

You can read a full report of the exchanges both men had with MEPs in section 4 and 5 of this focus. There are also photos of the hearing available.

Mr Tajani is a former MEP for the EPP-ED group whilst Mr Barrot is currently Commissioner Vice-president with responsibility for transport.

Antonio Tajani

Following his initial nomination to the Commission on 9 May, former MEP Antonio Tajani faced a confirmation hearing before the Transport Committee, and a delegation from the Budget Committee on 16 June. If MEPs subsequently vote in his favour, Antonio Tajani will be confirmed as Transport Commissioner, a post previously held by Jacques Barrot. He will also be a Commission vice president.

Who is Antonio Tajani?

Mr Tajani served as an MEP from 1994 until May this year, prior to this he worked as a leading print and radio journalist. He has also worked as a civil and military air traffic controller. In the Parliament he was a member of the EPP-ED political group and led his party's (Forza Italia) delegation within the group. He was a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Security and Defence Sub-Committee.

Mr Tajani takes over the Italian commissioner post from Franco Frattini, who was recalled to Silvio Berlusconi's Italian government after the recent elections. If confirmed by Parliament he will face a charged June plenary agenda, which includes several transport reports on road safety and the establishment of the European Railway Agency.

Mr Tajani has two children, a daughter, 17 and a son, 15 years old.

Jacques Barrot

Who is Jacques Barrot?

The French politician already knows European corridors and habits. After a short appearance as Commissioner for regional policy from April- November 2004, he has been European Commissioner for Transport and Vice-President of the Commission since November 2004, as part of the Barroso Commission.

A Member of the right-wing UMP party - the party currently in power in France - Mr Barrot has served several times as a French Minister (Labour and Social Affairs minister in the 1990's). He has also held national parliamentary and local mandates.

Born on 3 February 1937 in Yssingeaux, he graduated from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris and is a barrister.

Jacques Barrot is married and has three children.

Photos of the hearings

The hearings took place in Committee room N1.4 in the Louise Weiss building in Strasbourg. Mr Barrot was first up from 1730-2000 with Mr Tajani following him from 2015-2315. After they have finished you will be able to find all the photos from the hearing in this focus.

Photos from Mr Barrot's hearing are now available - please click on the link below (.zip file).

Summary of the hearing of Antonio Tajani (Italy), Commissioner designate for Transport

At a hearing before MEPs on Monday, Antonio Tajani, the Italian Commissioner-designate for transport, faced around three hours of questions on issues ranging from state subsidies for airlines through trans-European rail-freight corridors to port infrastructure and piracy in EU waters. He promised to press Member States to invest more in trans-European infrastructure projects and to ensure air passengers' rights under EU law are fully respected.

The hearing was organised by the Transport Committee, with participation from the Budgets Committee. On Tuesday morning, the MEPs involved will draw up a letter of evaluation, which will be considered by Parliament's political group leaders in the Conference of Presidents in the afternoon, after which it will be made public. The plenary session will vote on Wednesday on whether to support Mr Tajani's appointment.

"Without a strong transport policy, there is no united Europe," incoming Transport Commissioner Antonio Tajani told MEPs. Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty and demonstrations across Europe against oil price rises show we need a Europe "capable of responding to citizens' short-term needs", he said, adding that transport is clearly an area where we need "more Europe", because modern transport infrastructure and affordable services "are a driver for economic and social development, growth, and jobs."

Road safety

In his introduction, Mr Tajani stressed the need to raise awareness of the dangers of drink and drug driving, especially amongst young people.

Replying to a question by Gabriele Albertini (EPP-ED, IT) on traffic congestion in big cities, Mr Tajani said that the Eurovignette proposal can help to reduce urban pollution by directing heavy goods vehicles to alternative routes. "It is not a new tax, but a voluntary measure, the revenue from which is used to fund road safety measures," he added.

Single Sky

An "open sky" initiative, to be unveiled on 25 June, will help end the fragmentation of air traffic control systems, thanks inter alia to tools developed under the SESAR air traffic management research project. These tools, he said, will also boost the Europe's air transport competitiveness, by cutting airlines' fuel consumption and hence their CO₂ emissions.

Replying to a question by Christine de Veyrac (EPP-ED, FR) on the SESAR project, Mr Tajani also stressed the vital need to modernise and rationalise an air traffic control system that currently relies on 27 national control centres.

"The Commission and Parliament must steer innovation, liberalisation and development," otherwise "we risk being defeated by those who don't believe in Europe," he said.

As another useful innovation, Mr Tajani cited a new system for detecting dangerous liquids in travellers' luggage, which should facilitate airport checks.

State aids

State aid rules will be rigorously enforced, irrespective of the country concerned, said Mr Tajani, stressing that "there's no difference between Alitalia and any other company". "As a European Commissioner, I shall ensure that the treaties are respected", he said in reply to a question to by Georg Jarzembowski (EPP-ED DE), about a previous case, involving Olympic Airways and Alitalia. He also pointed that he had already begun investigating whether state aid rules had been infringed.

"Should state aid to ports be restricted?", asked Johannes Blokland (IND-DEM, NL). "We need to consider this very carefully before making proposals," replied Mr Tajani, noting that the EU has 12,000 ports, which are the entry point for 40% of goods circulating within Europe.

Maritime safety

"The lack of progress on the ERIKA III maritime safety package is a scandal", said German Socialist Willi Piecyk. "Many Member States barely implement International Maritime Organisation regulations, particularly Ireland and Italy", he claimed. Mr Tajani admitted that there was resistance in the Council to the flag state and civil liability proposals, and appealed for Parliament's support to overcome it.

Replying to another question by Mr Piecyk, on piracy, Mr Tajani said he agreed with Mr Barrot's disquiet at its growth beyond and within EU waters, and said the Commission was considering various intervention possibilities, but was open to Parliament's suggestions.

TENS

Asked by Salvatore Tatarella (UEN, IT) about Member States' commitment to trans-European network projects by, Mr Tajani undertook to try to accelerate progress on 30 priority projects under the Trans-European Networks (TEN) programme, including funding, and urged Parliament to join the Commission in impressing upon Member States the need to honour their commitments to fund infrastructure projects.

Replying to a question by Anne Jensen (ALDE, DK) about the private sector's failure to invest in Galileo and European Investment Bank guarantees for TENs, Mr Tajani described public/private partnerships as a "very useful tool for implementing TENs."

Cross-border rail freight

Erik Meijer (EUL-NGL, NL), asked Mr Tajani to comment on a "conflict between subsidiarity and sustainability" that hampers the development of cross-border rail freight links. Mr Tajani agreed, citing historic differences between rail national rail gauges, and said he would seek to promote trans-European rail freight corridors.

Lobbying

"How can you guarantee independence from transport industry lobbyists?" asked Luca Romagnoli (N-A, IT). "I'm not pocketable by any lobby", replied Mr Tajani.

The transport job

"Was it a surprise that you got this portfolio?", asked Johannes Blokland, reflecting a general view that Mr Tajani was very well prepared, and wondering aloud whether as a journalist, Mr Tajani had written on transport issues.

"The Commission has a political role to play (...), to stop blockades of our economy we have to come up with answers," replied Mr Tajani, acknowledging that his first article, written in 1978, had been about the Italian highway code, and that he had also written about air accidents.

16/06/2008

Chair, Transport and Tourism Committee : Paolo Costa (ALDE, IT)

The hearing was organised by the Committee on Transport and Tourism, with participation from the Committee on Budgets

Summary of hearing of Jacques Barrot, Vice-president of the European Commission

European Commission Vice-president Jacques Barrot faced a hearing at the European Parliament on Monday. It was held because Mr Barrot, previously responsible for transport, has been allocated the portfolio for justice, freedom and security. The outcome will be considered on Tuesday by the Conference of Presidents, which will then pass the baton to the full Parliament on Wednesday.

According to Mr Barrot, the failure of the referendum in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty merely “postpones” the increase in the Parliament’s powers. Until that happens, the Union must “remain a model” by respecting “the triangle formed by freedom, security and justice”.

The Commissioner then set out his priorities, which include fighting discrimination and the protection of data. He also stressed his commitment to “persuading the United States to allow all citizens of the Union to travel to that country without a visa”.

Mr Barrot also proposed the creation of a rapid response system for child abductions and an initiative to protect minors in divorce cases.

As regards security, Jacques Barrot said he wished to work towards the mutual recognition of decisions taken by courts of Member States and towards the creation of a European system of information on criminal records.

Lastly, on immigration, the Commissioner was in favour of integrating legal immigrants while tightening up measures against illegal immigration and external border controls, following on from action taken by his predecessor.

Political group speakers

Manfred Weber (EPP-ED, DE) quizzed the Commissioner about the future of the Lisbon Treaty following the Irish “no”. Mr Barrot believed that “we must allow our Irish compatriots time to reflect and await the European Council”. He sought to “learn lessons from this new ‘no’ and place more emphasis on a practical Europe, one that appeals to the citizen”. On the possible use of a “passerelle” clause [allowing some policy areas to come under co-decision, following a vote by the European Council], he said “the Commission could take an initiative, although the European Council must agree unanimously. That cannot be ruled out but it is hard to achieve”.

On behalf of the PES group, Claudio Fava (IT) asked “can enhanced cooperation be envisaged in JHA matters following the Irish ‘no’?” “We have thought of that” in connection with harmonising matrimonial law, was Mr Barrot’s reply. This solution “would enable a way out to be found if the delays (caused by the ‘no’ vote) prove too long”, he said, adding “don’t assume the progress made at Lisbon will be forgotten.”

To a question by Kathalijne Buitenweg (Greens/EFA, NL) on the future horizontal directive on discrimination, Mr Barrot said the text would be presented soon and he called for “an alliance between the Commission and Parliament” on this matter. The Council must agree unanimously.

Speaking for her group, Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (GUE/NGL, DE) was vexed that one member of the Commission had claimed “not to have read the Treaty”. She asked “How can the Commission defend the treaties if it doesn’t read them?” While acknowledging that this remark had been unwise, Mr Barrot stressed that a referendum was also an inappropriate way of ratifying a treaty.

Derek Clark (IND/DEM, UK) queried the Commissioner’s past, raising questions of financial wrongdoing: “Is

this not a most untimely and inappropriate appointment?", he asked. Jacques Barrot answered that the Commission's legal service had cleared him of any suspicion.

Fundamental rights

Kinga Gál (EPP-ED, HU) wondered what impact the Irish "no" was going to have on minorities and Michael Cashman (PES, UK) called for more action by the Commission on this front. Replying, Mr Barrot said "even without Lisbon, we can advance": if the EU cannot act for minorities in the collective sense, it can protect individual members of minorities. He added that the EU Fundamental Rights Agency was already working on this matter.

Martine Roure (PES, FR) was concerned about the framework decision on fighting racism and xenophobia, which has not yet been adopted. The Commissioner said he had "berated ministers at the last Council about this, as it is unacceptable that this text should remain in the pending tray".

Sophie In 't Veld (ALDE, NL), raised the issue of Passenger Name Record (PNR) agreement with the United States, saying she was disappointed that the EU-US high level working group had "snubbed" the EP. Mr Barrot stressed his willingness to work with the EP Civil Liberties Committee on this issue, where a number of disagreements remain with the US, "whose processing of the data provides no guarantee of independence". By contrast, unless care is taken the risk in Europe is fragmentation, with Member States adopting "separate PNR agreements" with all the consequences that would entail for air traffic.

On the question of protecting children, a matter raised by Roberta Angelilli (UEN, IT), and the strategy adopted by Parliament in January, Mr Barrot said this was "among his priorities" and he announced that new legislation would be put forward to fight the sexual exploitation of children.

Immigration

Carlos Coelho (EPP-ED, PT) opened the third topic, by speaking of the transition from the SIS-I system to SIS-II. "The EP must be involved in the negotiations on the transitional period" regarding data protection and other matters, he said.

Javier Moreno Sanchez (PES, ES) asked whether the Frontex agency might soon have regional offices and its own material resources. Mr Barrot said he hoped to "deploy the necessary resources" to achieve that and to do something about the legal base of Frontex so it could "intervene in operations that third countries would like to carry out".

Jeannine Hennis-Plasschaert (ALDE, NL) asked "When will we have a Commission proposal on crossing frontiers?" Mr Barrot revealed that the Commission is looking into the matter, with feasibility studies on electronic travel permits. The Commission vice-president saw in this "the beginnings of a complete system" but he thought that it was "rather soon to say that visas are obsolete!"

"Visa policy" is "not dead" but has been made easier, with lower visa costs, was Mr Barrot's reply to a question by Henrik Lax (ALDE, FI). Russia and Ukraine were already benefiting from this fact but "this cannot be done without conditions", including certain implications for human rights.

As to visa exemptions, Mr Barrot said he had a "mandate" to negotiate with the United States so that all European citizens could benefit from the visa waiver programme, although he stressed that this "will not be done at any cost".

Giusto Catania (GUE/NGL, IT) spoke of today's "immigration toll" in Europe: 140 people dead in the Mediterranean on 16 June, a return directive that provided for 18 months of detention and Frontex that did not rescue refugees at sea. Mr Barrot replied "Frontex's remit is to coordinate national [surveillance] teams. It cannot be held responsible for these tragedies. The return directive could be tidied up but overall it contains

a number of improvements”.

Roberta Angelilli (UEN, IT) also referred to the “immigration pact” due to be presented by the French presidency and proposed a “European code for the integration of legal immigrants”. Jacques Barrot said he would like “to have indicators on the integration policies conducted in different Member States” and announced that a paper would be produced on the subject.

Turning to asylum policy, Urszula Gacek (EPP-ED, PL) asked how the Dublin II system could be overhauled “to share the burden better between Member States at the centre and those at the periphery”. Mr Barrot stated that he would announce plans to revise the Dublin system “to make it more efficient and more fair” so as to move towards “a common European asylum system”.

Strengthening the European legal area

Manuel Medina Ortega (PES, ES), a member of the Legal Affairs Committee, said that citizens did not seem to be well informed about developments in civil law. To this Mr Barrot replied “Things must be explained in concrete, simple terms. But the Member States must take the trouble to explain that this or that form of progress bears a European stamp”.

Plans for “e-justice” are likely to create disparities between citizens. Diana Wallis (ALDE, UK) wondered if the EU would have a standardised approach. Mr Barrot felt this was a good point: care was needed in case the equipment did not keep pace.

Regarding another consequence of the Irish “no”, in reply to Ioannis Varvitsiotis (EPP-ED, EL), who called for a European criminal law, Mr Barrot said “Lisbon would have helped us! We’ll need time to get there now”.

“Only Europol can enlighten us about the scale of forced prostitution but I will propose that a related framework decision be revised”. Anna Záborská (EPP-ED, SK) believed there was a link between this problem and the access that young people had to pornography.

Stavros Lambrinidis (PES, EL) was concerned about the lack of sanctions when private enterprises misused personal data. The Commissioner said he would like to expand the existing directive in this field. Turning to police cooperation, Agustín Díaz de Mera (EPP-ED, ES) asked when the Union might have “a Community police agency without immunity for its staff” so as to “build trust” between Member States. Mr Barrot replied that “we are going to turn Europol into a real agency, financed from Community funds, and Parliament will exercise its full powers of scrutiny” over its activities.

16/06/2008

Chair, Civil Liberties Committee : Gérard Deprez (ALDE, BE)

Chair, Legal Affairs Committee : Giuseppe Gargani (EPP-ED, IT)

This hearing took place before the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, with the participation of the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Committee on Womens' Rights and Gender Equality.