MEPs quiz four candidate EU Commissioners

Committees Committee on Budgets, Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, Committee on Legal Affairs, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs [15-07-2014 - 10:47]

Four candidate EU Commissioners, nominated to replace those who left to become MEPs, were given committee hearings on Monday. The four, who if confirmed by the full House will serve for the rest of the Commission’s current term, are Jyrki Katainen (Finland), Ferdinando Nelli Feroci (Italy) Martine Reicherts (Luxembourg) and Jacek Dominik (Poland).

The current Commission's term of office expires on 31 October 2014. In line with Parliament's rules of procedure, the Commissioners-designate appeared before the committees in their areas of responsibility.

Martine Reicherts for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Data protection reform, EU-US data exchanges, enforcing fundamental rights and fighting discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, migrants, Roma and other minorities were the key issues raised by the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee at the hearing of Commissioner-designate for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, Martine Reicherts(Luxembourg).

Civil Liberties Committee MEPs also quizzed Ms Reicherts on the European Public Prosecutor's Office, cross-border cooperation to combat serious crime and on the reform of the European Arrest Warrant. Legal Affairs Committee MEPs asked Ms Reicherts about the training of judges, the Common European Sales Law, patents, the acceptance of public documents, insolvency proceedings, arbitration, matrimonial arrangements, the mutual recognition of adoptions and international child abductions.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee MEPs asked Ms Reicherts about plans to withdraw the proposed directive on maternity leave, the gender pay gap, women on boards, preventing violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and rights, childcare and the gender effects of austerity policies designed by the EU Commission/ECB/IMF "Troika".

Ms Reicherts told MEPs that she would keep them informed of data protection developments - "the most important dossier at the moment", she said - and EU-US deals in this field. On maternity leave, Ms Reicherts agreed with the Commission that the proposal "would have to be reassessed". "This proposal will come through the pipeline if the Council moves", she concluded.

Ferdinando Nelli Feroci for Industry and Entrepreneurship

Industry Committee MEPs asked Mr Nelli Feroci how he would help small and medium-sized firms, especially with regard to winning EU funding, reducing red tape and improving access to information. They also asked him about his plans for energy efficiency and independence, talks under way with the US on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and EU climate and energy goals.

In his replies, Mr Nelli Feroci mentioned a planned public consultation on the Small Business Act, a forthcoming proposal on energy efficiency and the importance of using the expertise of the European Enterprise Network and EU "SME envoys". He also promised to be "vigilant" with regard to decisions that could affect SMEs negatively in the TTIP talks.

Jyrki Katainen for Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Euro
Press release

EU countries’ slowness to implement the Commission’s country-specific economic reform recommendations, “too rigid and one-sided” interpretations of the EU Stability and Growth Pact and austerity policy advocated by the EU Commission/ECB/IMF “Troika” were the key issues raised by Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee MEPs in their hearing with candidate Commissioner Katainen.

"We need to restore confidence to attract investments", he stressed, adding that "I believe in creating jobs, but not by increasing the deficit, because nobody would be ready to lend money for that purpose. Only by implementing structural changes do you gain confidence. The private sector needs to be encouraged to invest on our continent and we have to use public money more effectively, for example by investing in R&D, green growth and SMEs."

Mr Katainen did not agree that the Stability and Growth Pact needs more flexibility. "The current rules leave enough room for that. The European Council said so and you know the Council is always right", he joked. On the Troika, he noted that its members are accountable to lenders, but he promised to consider how the Parliament and Commission could improve their cooperation so that the Parliament also has a say in Troika work, through the Commission.

**Jacek Dominik for Financial Programming and Budget**

Budget Committee MEPs focused their questions to candidate Commissioner Jacek Dominik, who is Undersecretary of State in the Polish Ministry of Finance, on the shortage of funds in the EU budget for 2014. They asked how he plans to drive the European Commission's €4.7 billion corrective budget plan to plug this gap through the Council of Ministers.

Mr Dominik, who led EU budget negotiations during Poland's EU Council Presidency in 2011, was also asked about his plans to strengthen Commission control over how member states spend EU funds and fight tax fraud more efficiently.

**Next steps**

Each committee will evaluate the hearing and inform the Conference of Presidents, i.e. EP President and political groups' leaders, who will draft a proposal on the candidates for the plenary. The full House will vote at 09:00 on Wednesday.

*Procedure: consultation*

*Hashtags: #EU #Commissioners #hearings*

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