



Wednesday's round-up: Andor, Barnier, Geoghegan-Quinn, Potočník

Employment, internal market, research and environment Commissioner nominees were quizzed by MEPs on their priorities during the third day of the hearings. László Andor said avoiding job losses in the midst of crisis would be a priority, whilst Michel Barnier called for smart and efficient regulation of Europe's financial sector. Máire Geoghegan-Quinn emphasized the role of innovation in EU policy and Janez Potočník focused on implementing environmental legislation.

Andor: "I want to avoid further job losses in the EU"

"The crisis we are currently experiencing is the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression. The most vulnerable have been affected. I want to avoid further job losses in the EU," László Andor, the Hungarian commissioner-designate for employment and social affairs said.

Among his priorities are the EU2020 strategy (Post-Lisbon Agenda), the ageing population, the fight against poverty, EU like the working-time directive and the modernisation of the structural funds with the aim of simplifying their management.

Answering a question on his "opposition to the Maastricht Treaty and NATO", Mr Andor said these comments contained "considerable exaggerations" and that it was not possible to cover all those issues in such a short time.

Barnier: "the internal market is about the citizens and businesses"

Kick-starting the internal market and better regulating financial services were the main points made by Michel Barnier, French commissioner-designate for internal market and services. MEPs from the industry and economic committees questioned him on the social dimension of the single market and his ideas for regulating Europe's financial sector in the long term.

Mr Barnier used his opening remarks to emphasise his intention of restoring citizens' faith in the European project by "making sure the essence of the internal market is about those who live it on a daily basis: the citizens, consumers and businesses".

On regulating financial services, he said, "we must learn lessons from the crisis. It is in the interests of Europe's financial sector to be regulated smartly and efficiently". Replying to doubts about his impartiality in this area, Mr Barnier said, "I will take no orders from Paris, London or elsewhere".

Geoghegan-Quinn: "innovation goes right across every EU policy area"

"The EU must become a true innovation union," Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, the Irish commissioner-designate for Research, Innovation and Science said, stressing that her "task will be to put research, innovation and science at the heart of EU policies". Completing the European Research Area, addressing major challenges such as climate change, creating an innovation research culture were the three priorities she proposed for her term of office.

Regarding funding, Ms Geoghegan-Quinn, a former member of European Court of Auditors, said that "no matter what the research is, it is always valuable, it can always be used" and the 7th Research Framework Programme would support all kinds of research. Simplifying the bureaucracy for private companies who wish to take part in this programme will also be one of her priorities.

"We have to put in place a climate to encourage researchers to come into the system, to remain in the system, to be able to move in the 27 Member States" she said.

Potočnik: "By investing in environment we are putting jobs first"

Resource efficiency, biodiversity and an effective implementation and enforcement of existing environmental legislation are the main issues for Slovenia's Janez Potočnik, commissioner-designate for environment. MEPs questioned him on water policy, the implementation of REACH, nanotechnology, the soil-directive and Natura 2000.

In his opening speech, Mr Potočnik said he wants the environment to be "higher on the political agenda" and to ensure "the economy goes hand in hand with the environment". He said an holistic approach is necessary since many issues overlap.

Implementation of existing legislation would be high on Mr Potočnik's agenda as "what has been adopted, needs to be fully implemented". He said implementing the REACH chemicals legislation would not mean re-negotiation.