

# Commitments made at the hearing of

## **VĚRA JOUROVÁ**

### Vice-President-designate

### Values and Transparency



The Vice-President-designate, Věra Jourová, appeared before the European Parliament on 07 October 2019 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committees on Constitutional affairs, on Civil liberties, justice and home affairs, and on Legal affairs. During the hearing, she made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to her portfolio, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to her by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, including:

- Strengthening democracy and transparency; and
- Upholding Europe's values and rights.

Please note that the quotes included in this document only make reference to oral commitments made during the [hearing](#). The [verbatim report](#) of the public hearing is available on the [Commissioners-designate hearings website](#). The Vice-President-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which she provided [written answers](#).



## Strengthening democracy and transparency

### **Moving forward with the issues on lead candidate system and transnational lists**

"[...] we need to improve the lead candidate system, including by addressing the issue of transnational lists. I will use my role as Chair of the Commissioners' Group on a New Push for European Democracy to ensure that the Commission makes a strong contribution to the work on the Conference on the Future of Europe on these issues and acts as an honest broker between the institutions."

### **Setting up a working group under the Conference on the Future of Europe**

"[...] What I will do in this role is to set up the group under the Conference on the Future of Europe, where we will look back on the initiatives and compare different options for the system of lead candidates and transnational lists. I will seek a mechanism that will fulfil the necessary criteria of voting arithmetic, so that no country is somehow placed at a disadvantage or in a position that would break the balance in the election system."

### **Lead candidate**

"The lead candidate should be the candidate for the President of the Commission. I will do my best. First of all, there will be the expert debate, and later the political debate. According to a realistic timetable, I would count on coming back in the summer of 2020 with the first proposals."

### **Transnational lists**

"I will also look at the feasibility and workability of the system of transnational lists."

### **Electoral law**

"[...] we will work on the new push for democracy, which will cover elections, and thus electoral law, disinformation and again media pluralism in a wider scope."

### **Paid political advertising and financing European political parties**

"[...] I will work on solutions to bring more transparency on paid political advertising and more clarity on financing European political parties."

### **Building the resilience of our democratic systems**

"Then there is creating the resilience of society and the volatility of the timing, especially before the elections. [...] according to different surveys, the political parties

are very active producers of fake news and disinformation, [...] and that's why we want to look at the political campaigning rules. Here I see the way forward in some very concrete steps."

### **Code of Practice on Disinformation**

"[...] I will also assess carefully whether platforms have fulfilled the obligations they accepted under the Code of Practice on Disinformation."

### **Comprehensive approach to counter disinformation**

"So, to effectively counter disinformation and to build resilience, we must have a comprehensive approach, involving governments, political parties, platforms, journalists, researchers, educators and civil society. And in developing this important policy, I will want to stay in close dialogue with you and will very much appreciate your input."

### **European Democracy Action**

"[...] I will design the European Democracy Action Plan [...] as a vehicle for a new push in addressing the issue effectively so that our democracy is more resilient. This requires putting in place a smart regulatory framework, as well as coherent and interconnected structures."

### **Taking citizens on board**

"[...] I see my role as being a strong advocate of the people. I want to make their individual and collective voices heard, not ignored. I want to see their rights respected, not trampled."

### **European citizenship**

"I plan to look very closely into how we will design the Values and Citizenship Programme [...] I want this money to be used on the things which we need."

### **European Citizens' Initiative**

"I will use the best of, or take the most from, the new legislative version of the Citizens' Initiative, which will come into force on 1 January. [...] we have to speed up the electronic system for communicating with the organisers, and consider some helplines and some active support, so that people who want to bring forward an initiative know what we want them to do in order to fulfil the legal obligations. I promise I will do my best to change this."

### **Media pluralism**

"[...] We should continue to use our funding for independent projects monitoring media pluralism, map violations to media freedom, and support journalists whose safety is under threat. I will use all the political

and legal tools I have to follow up on ideas like the Report of the High-Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism.”

### **Freedom of expression**

“[...] This is untouchable unless there is some content which is prohibited by the law. This is the principle which we keep, for instance, in what we do against online hate speech. I will not promote any solution or any proposal involving somebody being the arbiter of what should be written or what should be announced in the media. There will be no Ministry of Truth, there will be no Commissioner of Truth – nothing like that.”

### **Suing journalists for defamation**

“[...] I will be mapping all the possible situations of the abuse of litigation against journalists. [...] we will be considering some legal aid or some funding for the journalists who suffer from such abuse of law.”

### **EU-wide anti-SLAPP legislation**

“In the first year of my mandate, I will work intensively on the proper designing of the funding programme which is under the Creative Europe programme and is intended to support independent journalism. [...] we have to come up with systematic measures which will cover all the Member States to protect better – not only in situations when systems in the Member States are endangering journalists, but also individual threats to individual journalists. So we will look at the best possible use of this funding.”

### **Improving transparency**

“[...] on transparency, I would like to come with initial proposals to Parliament and the Council already this year. So this should be started as soon as possible.”

### **Transparency of the legislative procedure**

“[...] this is one of my key tasks, so I should start working on it immediately – and having some partial results maybe over the next half of the year. [...] We need to improve it now. So I will be quick.”

### **Access to documents**

“[...] we should look into the possibility, especially of improving access to documents based on the Ombudsman’s proposal. [...] these are very important things to discuss in the renewed dialogue. We need to start looking at these things afresh.”

### **Transparency of the discharge procedure**

“[...] I will [...] seek the advice of my experts as to whether that is the legal condition that enables the Council to fully share the information and documents. [...] if there

is no legal obstacle, I don’t see any reason why the Council should not share the information.”

### **More transparency to the legislative process**

“[...] we should look at all the stages and we should also look at the comitology procedure.”

### **Transparency in trilogues**

“[...] especially for the trilogue as the final stage of adopting the legislation we should be as transparent as possible. [...] we will come back to the debate about how to make the trilogues more transparent with the Commission’s older proposals. And again, we have to invest some energy in it or to achieve a better model.”

### **Common transparency register**

“[...] we should work towards a common transparency register [...]”

### **Right of initiative**

“[...] I can see that Parliament wants to have this fixed in a formal procedure, and this is what I want to support, in line with what the President-elect promised.”

### **Implementation report on better law-making**

“We will have to do more on this and to publish the report on implementation, I see this as a very possible solution.”

### **Setting high transparency and ethical standards for all institutions**

“[...] I want to fight for people’s trust in Europe by improving the way we select EU leaders and by setting high transparency and ethical standards for all institutions.”

### **Independent ethics body common to all EU institutions**

“[...] I will analyse or look into the systems and staff regulations and the codes of conduct of the European institutions and will try to filter out matters which might go under the remit of the ethics body. In my view, it could be an advisory body – a body which will recommend the possible steps in the case of concrete cases or possible sanctions against the different institutions. But this is just at the beginning, I am only confirming my very strong determination to start working on this very soon.”

### **Bringing relevant policies under one roof**

“I would also work very closely with colleagues, in particular the Justice Commissioner, and use my

horizontal role to break silos and bring under one roof all relevant policies."

### Cooperation with Parliament

"[...] I will always be ready to engage with Parliament, and your committees in particular, at all stages of our policy-making process and political dialogue in the spirit of loyalty, trust and full transparency."

### Upholding Europe's values and rights

#### Rule of law culture based on mutual respect

"[...] This is why we need to build a rule-of-law culture based on mutual respect. We should prioritise dialogue and prevent crisis situations from happening, but equally, we have to address problems where they exist. I will be principled and act with determination, if needed, using all the available tools."

#### Annual rule of law review cycle

"[...] I will join forces with the Justice Commissioner to further strengthen the toolbox to deliver on the rule of law, notably with the annual rule-of-law review cycle."

#### Parliament's role in Article 7 procedure

"I cannot imagine how the European Parliament could be exempted from the procedure on Article 7 when Parliament was the one which triggered the Article 7 process, so I say this this way."

#### Corruption

"First, on corruption, indeed, we want to include an annual assessment of corruption in the Rule of Law Annual Review because it belongs there. [...] So we will look at corruption in a systemic manner."

#### European Convention on Human Rights

"[...] I want to ensure that the EU accedes to the European Convention on Human Rights: this will be a strong sign of our commitment to fundamental rights."

#### Defending fundamental rights

"I am very conscious of the need to defend people and their fundamental rights every hour, every day and every time they are under threat. We will not leave anyone behind."

#### Charter of Fundamental Rights

"I will pursue [...] to promote the Charter of Fundamental Rights. [...] I want to promote fundamental rights in everything we do. I want to see fundamental rights in the design of the Commission's policy-making; be it on artificial intelligence, be it on digital transition or equality policies."

#### Update on the strategy on fundamental rights

"The third thing we will work on is updating the strategy on fundamental rights. This is the Holy Trinity for me. Fundamental rights, rule of law and democracy, which we will be covering through three strands of work and where I count on the very strong engagement of Parliament."

#### Engaging to fight all kinds of anti-semitism

"Here, we have to join forces and be absolutely clear in one message – that this is absolutely unacceptable."

#### Dialogue with churches and religious associations or communities

"I am glad that there is provision in the Treaty for dialogue with churches and philosophical and non-confessional groups. [...] It's envisaged twice a year. I am still thinking about the arrangements and method, but I will be happy to engage in this dialogue."

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