

# Commitments made at the hearing of

## JANEZ LENARČIČ

### Commissioner-designate Crisis Management



The commissioner-designate, Janez Lenarčič, appeared before the European Parliament on 02 October 2019 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committee on Development, and from the Committee on Environment. During the hearing, he made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to his portfolio, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to him by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, including:

- European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid.

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 Commissioner-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which he provided [written answers](#).



## European Civil Protection

### Efficiency and effectiveness

“The EU must upgrade its capacities to be able to help more people in need, swiftly and efficiently.”

“As Commissioner for Crisis Management, as well as the European Emergency Response Coordinator, my first goal will be to support people in need, as rapidly and efficiently as possible, in full respect for humanitarian principles. In this regard, I will maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of our crisis response so as to reach as many people in need as possible.”

“I intend to strengthen the EU’s Emergency Response Coordination Centre, so that it can respond swiftly and effectively to a broad range of crises.”

“I intend to work on building the capability of the European Union to respond to such a low probability high impact crisis as a radiological or nuclear one.”

“I intend to work first on making sure that we have the required number of firefighting planes.”

### RescUE

“I intend to vigorously pursue a strengthened implementation of rescEU – the enhanced Union Civil Protection Mechanism – in close collaboration with the Member States. We need reinforced capacities to deal with forest fires, acute medical emergencies, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear disasters.”

### Disaster preparedness

“Recent events, including the deadly forest fires in Portugal, have shown that we must get better at preventing disasters, and we must be better prepared to respond when prevention fails.”

“There are already things that we can no longer prevent, but we can at least adapt. I will work on that. I will speak with Executive Vice-President Timmermans and argue in favour of including the disaster-risk strategy in all the climate activity of the Union.”

### Cooperation with Member States

“We do have to take into account the fact that civil protection is primarily the competence of Member States, and the EU only plays a supporting role. But I intend to take this role seriously and work intensely. I intend to work with the Member States to persuade them that this is something that we need, the whole European Union and its Member States because when things happen, and we are not prepared, it will be too late.”

## Humanitarian aid

“I will dedicate all my energies and almost three decades of experience in international and European fora to help alleviate suffering and provide relief to people affected by crises, thereby confirming European solidarity – a value I strongly believe in.”

### Humanitarian principles

“The EU is highly respected for its strict adherence to basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. I intend to firmly defend these principles also in the future.”

“Among them is the principle of impartiality, which I intend to vigorously defend. This principle means that we go with humanitarian aid where it is most needed, without regard to any personal characteristics, including religious beliefs.”

“Decisions on allocating humanitarian assistance should be taken independently from the European Union’s other objectives – political, military, economic, strategic, whatever. This independence is something I will defend also at the table of the external action cluster.”

“The adherence to these (humanitarian) principles, including the principle of independence, of neutrality, this is an operational necessity. We cannot afford to be perceived by let’s say any side, anybody involved in an armed conflict, as being on the other side, because if we are perceived as such, we would endanger the access to humanitarian assistance by the affected population. We would endanger the affected population itself and, above all, we would endanger the safety of humanitarian workers. [...] this is the sine qua non for the European Union’s humanitarian aid.”

### Humanitarian aid and EU’s external action

“Humanitarian aid is undoubtedly part of the European Union’s external action. However, it is a very special part. It’s a part which is governed with a clear set of principles that are different from whatever guides our other external action activities. So my intention is to work closely with colleagues in this external cooperation cluster, and at the same time to defend the humanitarian space and humanitarian principles.”

### International Humanitarian Law

“I will strongly focus on advocating globally in support of international humanitarian law. In my contacts with state and non-state actors, I will firmly urge the preservation of humanitarian space. It is unacceptable that humanitarian actors are increasingly being targeted, and their access to people in need regularly blocked.”

"I intend to work with those organisations that have privileged access to armed actors, be it state armies or non-state armed actors, to draw their attention to the importance of respecting international humanitarian law."

"I intend to [...] insist that such training (missions in the security sector) include topics like international humanitarian law, gender issues."

### **Humanitarian aid and civil protection**

"Our humanitarian aid activities are fully complementary with civil protection activities. There is no contradiction in that. There is room for both tools, both mechanisms when we deal with emergency responses, but also when we deal with measures like prevention and preparedness."

### **Resilience and disaster preparedness**

"I intend to intensify the EU's efforts to prevent disasters from occurring in the first place, while also strengthening our capacity to adapt to a changing environment. In light of climate change projections, protracted conflicts and increasing instability around the world, we – the European Union and its Member States – must work in an integrated manner."

### **Inter-institutional cooperation**

"I can assure you that I have every intention to work with you (the European Parliament) in partnership, to keep you informed, and to listen to your views and concerns."

"I intend to work closely with the High Representative / Vice President and other Members of the college responsible for areas such as climate change, the environment and development. The aim is to ensure that disaster risk reduction becomes an integral part of our efforts to enhance the resilience of our societies and ecosystems – starting with the European Green Deal."

### **Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus**

"I see a role for development, the so-called humanitarian development Nexus. I will advocate the involvement of both my colleague for international partnerships, Commissioner-designate Urpilainen, and her Commission services, to get involved as soon as possible from the outset, because if you tackle long-term needs and the root causes of the assistance situation, this can also facilitate the transition from humanitarian aid to development cooperation."

"We need to move people out of the 'emergency ward' as fast as possible into recovery, so that they can benefit from more long-term, sustainable solutions."

### **Collaboration with local actors**

"We must take local specificities into account, deliver the best possible assistance to those in need, while

paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups, like women and children."

"I want to do more to empower local actors in delivering aid on the ground. They know the context best, they can work more efficiently, and they know what works."

"I will consistently promote the inclusion and engagement of local partners, both in humanitarian activities as well as in building their capacities in this field and including them in national coordinating mechanisms, for instance, so that they participate in a very active manner in the entire cycle of humanitarian assistance."

### **Management of EU funding**

"I want to build on the strong support the European Union's humanitarian aid already enjoys among European citizens, and I want to reassure them that every single euro spent in this area is a euro well spent. Our most important audience should be EU citizens and beneficiaries. I will, therefore, place high priority on communication with them."

"I will guarantee that funding is disbursed to those in need, transparently and on the grounds of sound financial management."

### **Collaboration with international partners**

"We rely on our partners, partners that come from the United Nations system, like UNICEF, like UNHCR, like the World Food Programme."

"The United Nations, and in particular its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should have the overall coordinating role (in the international humanitarian universe). It will be one of my first steps if I'm confirmed to enter into contact with the United Nations and its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs."

### **Collaboration with NGOs**

"NGOs are important actors, especially in the area of humanitarian assistance. We have the most positive experience with working with NGOs; they are our trusted, reliable, effective partners."

"Humanitarian activity should never be subject to criminal sanctions. [...] People cannot be prosecuted for their efforts in the humanitarian field."

### **Humanitarian aid and migration**

"Humanitarian aid is not a migration management instrument. The European Union has other instruments for that area, and humanitarian aid is not one of them."

"When we assess whether there is a need for humanitarian assistance, we usually focus on people that are forcibly displaced, mainly refugees. That doesn't mean that we would deny humanitarian

assistance to migrants, let's say economic migrants. [...] we provide humanitarian assistance on the basis of the need and not of the status."

"I will pursue the principled position when it comes to returns. That means we will support returns and promote returns that are safe, that are dignified and that are sustainable, and – perhaps even more importantly – that are voluntary."

### The role of the private sector

"We should look at the possibility of involving the private sector. When we do so, one thing should be made clear: this should not be done at the expense of our adherence to the principles that govern humanitarian assistance. That's clear."

"Nobody should be in a position to make business, so to say, out of humanitarian assistance, that should also not be possible. It should not be an option. Humanitarian aid is a noble mission. It is not a commercial activity and should never become one."

### Climate change

"We need to do much more and much faster in the area of facing the challenges posed by the impact of climate change that we already feel."

"I do commit to work, especially with the United Nations because the United Nations is the custodian of the UN Convention on the status of refugees. I will work with our partners on the definition of the phenomenon that you describe (people who have been displaced due to climate change) because one thing is clear: these people need protection."

### Women and girls

"I cannot imagine humanitarian aid without addressing, taking special care to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups, especially women and girls. [...] So our humanitarian aid should bear in mind this specific situation of women and girls, and should include measures in all the stages of our humanitarian work –

prevention, protection. [...] We should bear in mind these special needs, and in my view these special needs also include sexual and reproductive health services whenever we are dealing with victims of sexual and gender-based violence."

### Education

"Education will be one of my priorities when I go about the humanitarian aid. Traditionally, humanitarian aid was focused on food, shelter, water and sanitation, and basic healthcare. But we know that when September comes, kids have to go to school, they cannot wait for the humanitarian situation to be solved and for development to take place and so on."

"There is no distinction when it comes to education, absolutely no distinction on the basis of gender. Not at all. This is one of the key European values and I will insist that we provide education in emergency situations, that we deploy sufficient funding for that, because we cannot afford to lose generations of children who don't go to school because they are in emergency situations. We should work on expanding this concept of education in emergencies."

### Financing of humanitarian aid

"I will insist on faithful implementation of all the commitments that the EU entered into, and in particular of the Grand Bargain."

"We need to move towards the needs of the NGOs, but at the same time demand the right measures of control and assurances with regard to the financial management of the funds that are actually EU taxpayers' funds."

### Armed conflicts

"It will be my duty if I'm Commissioner for humanitarian aid and crisis management to point out the fact that yes, we should behave consistently, we should not export arms in such a way that would aggravate a humanitarian crisis."

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