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STRASBOURG

**COMMISSION DES BUDGETS
AVEC LA PARTICIPATION DE LA
COMMISSION DU CONTRÔLE BUDGÉTAIRE**

**AUDITION DE M. JACEK DOMINIK
COMMISSAIRE DÉSIGNÉ
(PROGRAMMATION FINANCIÈRE ET BUDGET)**

1-002

PRÉSIDENCE DE M. JEAN ARTHUIS

(La réunion est ouverte à 18 h 30)

1-003

Le Président. – Mesdames, Messieurs, chers collègues, je vous invite à prendre place.

Je voudrais d'abord souhaiter la bienvenue aux membres de la commission des budgets ainsi qu'à la délégation de la commission du contrôle et vous rappeler que cette réunion a un caractère extraordinaire. Elle se concentre essentiellement sur un point: l'échange de vues avec le commissaire désigné, Jacek Dominik, auquel je souhaite la bienvenue et que je salue tout particulièrement.

Je n'ai pas reçu d'observations particulières sur l'agenda et je considère qu'il est ainsi adopté. Je précise que vous avez eu connaissance d'informations relatives aux disponibilités d'interprétation dans la *newsletter* ainsi qu'à la diffusion du direct de la réunion sur le site internet du Parlement.

Je voudrais m'assurer que nous pouvons approuver le projet de procès-verbal de la réunion qui s'est tenue le 11 juin. Je rappelle qu'elle s'est tenue après les élections européennes et qu'il s'agissait d'une réunion extraordinaire de la commission des budgets sortante, convoquée en vue de la présentation du projet de budget par l'ancien commissaire Lewandowski.

J'en viens à l'objet de notre réunion de ce soir.

Ayant souhaité la bienvenue à M. Jacek Dominik, commissaire désigné en charge de la programmation financière et du budget, M. Dominik a été proposé comme commissaire suite à la démission de M. Lewandowski, qui est devenu député européen. Il convient donc de tenir cet échange de vues afin de permettre au Parlement d'exprimer son avis sur cette nomination.

Selon les modalités approuvées par la Conférence des Présidents et par les coordinateurs des groupes, l'échange de vues va durer une heure. Il commencera par dix minutes de propos introductifs de la part du commissaire désigné, puis s'ouvrira une première séance de questions de la part des coordinateurs des groupes. Chaque question durera une minute au maximum et sera immédiatement suivie de sa réponse qui ne devra pas excéder deux minutes. Deux membres de la commission du contrôle budgétaire seront ensuite invités à poser leur question, question d'une minute chacune, avec des réponses limitées à deux minutes. Puis une deuxième séance de questions interviendra de la part des différents groupes politiques. Chaque question durera trente secondes, le commissaire désigné devant toujours répondre en deux minutes au maximum. Puis en conclusion, M. Dominik disposera de deux minutes pour conclure cette réunion.

Monsieur le Commissaire désigné, vous avez la parole.

1-004

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – Mr Chair, honourable Members, first of all I would like to thank you very much for inviting me to this exchange of views and allowing me to present myself, especially since we have some important challenges ahead of us in relation to the European budget for 2014 and 2015. Our cooperation on this issue is extremely important for the future of the European Union.

The European Parliament, as one of the arms of the budgetary authority, has had a crucial role to play in this respect, especially since the attribution of new powers by the Lisbon Treaty. This could be witnessed in the many successful negotiations and initiatives undertaken by the European Parliament over the past few years, especially during the multiannual financial framework (MFF) negotiations and also during the last budget negotiations, concerning the adoption of a very substantial budget amendment of more than EUR 11 billion, which was unprecedented.

I attach great importance to the democratic accountability of the EU budget, as ensured by the European Parliament. Needless to say, observing budgetary principles such as unity and accuracy will remain at the centre of my attention. In this respect, the democratic oversight provided by Parliament remains key.

Before touching on two main challenges – two main issues that I would like to concentrate on in the coming weeks and months – I would like to say a little about myself to those who have not had a chance to meet me. For the past 20 years, which is the whole of my career, I have worked in the Finance Ministry, and for the past eight years I have been Deputy Finance Minister responsible for international affairs and especially EU affairs. This gave me an opportunity to represent my country in the Council during budgetary negotiations. Also, during our Presidency in 2011 I was responsible for conducting budgetary negotiations in the Council and I had very fruitful negotiations with the European Parliament representatives during that time.

I met many very cooperative colleagues, and I would like especially to thank once again Mr Lamassoure, Mr Boge, Mr Fernandez and – unfortunately she is not here – Ms Balzani, who were our main counterparts from Parliament at that time. I learned from them how to be flexible in negotiations and how to resolve many difficult issues in a very good atmosphere, so I hope that we will be able to follow that example this year.

I also had a chance to learn how to find compromises within the Council, and I hope that knowing the philosophy of some Member States concerning budgetary negotiations, and the limitations or restrictions they have in domestic policies, will help me in my future

task of finding compromises. At the same time, however, I would strongly defend the Community interest and Community needs in relation to the European budget. My main priorities will be to find compromise on the 2015 budget and to find compromise on the three amending budgets for 2014 presented already by the Commission. Those are the crucial elements that have to be adopted this autumn.

The first of the two main topics I would like to talk about is payments: the situation with payments which has no precedent. We have more than EUR 23 billion of outstanding payments; the back-log concerning cohesion bills is increasing; and, as the Chair, Mr Arthuis, noted last week, we have to solve this issue as soon as possible. The Commission has already proposed a solution which might also secure future budgets – not only solving the problem currently but also securing the proper management of funds in the future, up to the end of the current MFF – which means we would have to adopt both the amending budgets for 2014 and the budget for 2015 at the payments levels as presented in the current proposals.

I know it will be difficult but I really think this is the moment where we have to change the philosophy, especially in the Council, where the approach for many years has been to cut payment appropriations by big amounts and to think we can live with much lower levels of payments in the future.

This is not only about securing payments, however. There is another aspect to this issue. It is also about gaining or preserving the credibility of the European institutions. The amounts we are talking about are not future expenditure: those are the bills that are in the Commission right now, and they have to be paid. The money has been spent in the Member States, and now the Member States are waiting for refunds. If we fail to deliver, it will create major problems not only at the level of national budgets but, what is even worse, at the level of local government and even small companies. They have all spent this money; they all believe that they will recover it as soon as possible; and now it will be extremely difficult to tell them that there will be substantial delay, delay which they will have to finance in their own way, sometimes paying additional fines for getting additional resources.

The second element I would like to highlight is something which was introduced during these MFF negotiations and which concerns additional flexibility for the European budget, especially in relation to contingency margins. It was clearly stated by President Barroso, when the current MFF was adopted, that to be able to fulfil the requirements we have to use the payments appropriations at their limits, as indicated in the MFF, and also that we have to use ‘specific and maximum flexibility’ as provided for in the MFF negotiations. These two elements have to be combined in order to deliver the required amounts of funds for the European budget.

I think that the contingency margin is the right instrument to use right now in this respect. There are some questions as to whether the solution proposed by the Commission in Draft Amending Budget 3, of using EUR 4 billion from the contingency margin, is really a good choice and whether the payments in question are really unforeseen. In the Commission analysis, which I fully share, we are in such a situation. There was an unforeseen additional amount of bills presented to the Commission at the end of last year – more than EUR 3 billion, which was much more than was expected in any previous analysis – and we have to deal with it right now. If we postpone it we will only generate an additional burden for the following budget. So this is the right moment to use the contingency margin and, especially, to set a standard for future negotiations as to what the contingency margin is for and how it can be used in future negotiations.

I also attach a lot of importance to the proper management of EU funds, which is crucial from the Member States’ perspective too. It should be of particular importance in relation to the 80% of EU budget which is managed with Member States. Implementation should focus not only on eliminating errors but also on demonstrating the added value of the EU funds that are spent so that the citizens of the EU are confident that this money is well spent.

I would also like to refer to one of the important initiatives launched during negotiations by Mr Lamassoure, in relation to the discussion on the future own resources of the European Union. This is a very important discussion, as the current system was established 40 years ago. I think this is the right time to have a thorough review of our own resources, which were established in a completely different economic situation so that currently some of them no longer fulfil their original purpose. In this respect, I appreciate the establishment of a high-level working group which will be chaired by Mr Mario Monti. From my side, I can only assure you of my full cooperation with the working group and that I will look proactively and constructively at all the proposals presented there.

1-005

Le Président. – Je vais maintenant donner la parole aux coordinateurs. Je rappelle que nous devons respecter impérativement les temps de parole, à savoir une minute pour la question et deux minutes pour la réponse, ce qui est un maximum.

1-006

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE). – Em primeiro lugar, congratulo-me pela sua indignação. Aquando da presidência Polaca, na negociação que tivemos dos orçamentos de 2012, foi o Sr. Dominik que liderou da parte do Conselho essa negociação e foi com sucesso que o Parlamento Europeu chegou a um acordo e aí pudemos constatar a competência do Sr. Dominik e hoje podemos afirmar que nos podemos congratular com a sua indignação. É um homem experiente.

Vamos à pergunta? Como é que pensa resolver a questão dos pagamentos?

Também me congratulo por ser uma preocupação sua, atendendo à insuficiência das verbas para despesas que já estão efetuadas. Muito obrigado.

1-007

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – Yes, I agree that we have a difficult situation with the payments, and hence the solution presented by the Commission. We have to adopt Draft Amending Budgets 2, 3 and 4 and adopt the draft budget for 2015 as it is.

We have to remember that the payment appropriations in 2013 were much higher than what we have now in 2014. If I remember correctly, the level this year is about EUR 8 billion lower than last year. At the same time, we have outstanding commitments to be paid. So the only solution in order to secure payments for the future is first of all to adopt these legal texts as they are presented by the Commission, because they are based not on assumptions but on the real figures and the real needs that the Commission has identified. The bills are there.

If we adopt these two sets of documents this year, and then use the maximum levels of payments for the remaining period as well as the possibility to use maximum flexibility, which means using the flexibility instruments to the maximum extent, this is the solution that would give us control over the budget for the coming years and give us the ability to control and manage payment appropriations without having seriously to amend the multiannual financial framework (MFF) in the future.

1-008

Eider Gardiazabal Rubial (S&D). – Sabe perfectamente, por alguna conversación y por los debates que hemos tenido en esta comisión, que el verdadero problema que afrontamos en esta Comisión de Presupuestos es el tema de los pagos. Y ya ha contestado en parte a la pregunta del coordinador del Partido Popular, pero ¿cree usted que podría ayudar a relajar una posición en el Consejo, respecto a los pagos, sacar del déficit de los presupuestos nacionales, del cálculo del déficit, las contribuciones que hacen los países al presupuesto europeo? Porque ese es uno de los problemas que muchas veces nos encontramos. Y le pongo un ejemplo: Suecia, con relación a la garantía juvenil europea, ha bloqueado los fondos, porque le supondría añadir dinero a ese déficit y, por lo tanto, no le merece la pena en las cuentas nacionales.

Y si tiene también alguna propuesta concreta, y ya más en el detalle, para mejorar los trabajos del comité de conciliación y evitar que el Parlamento tenga que estar esperando horas y horas a que el Consejo llegue a una primera posición para poder negociar con el Parlamento.

1-009

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – As far as payments are concerned, and on the question of how to

secure the agreement of the Member States, I would just like to indicate that, if you combine the DAB 3 request for additional funds presented by the Commission with the DAB 2 and DAB 4 proposals, you will find out that you can secure this EUR 4.7 billion without any additional demand on the Member States' budgets because, through the redeployment and additional fines that were collected by the Commission, the actual burden for the Member States to adopt these proposals is EUR 105 million. Dividing it into 28 Member States means that this is not a very substantial burden. So this is another principle that the Commission and I would like also to promote for the future.

The idea right now is to find such solutions within the EU budget so that, with properly-budgeted contributions annually in the national budgets, the Member States will not have to give any additional contribution, or the contributions will be very limited. The current situation for 2014 shows that there is a possibility to stick to the limits that Member States should have foreseen in their national budgets. So the argument that this is a huge additional burden at the end of the budgetary year is not true. It can be managed within the rules and within the possibilities that there are in the EU budget. The only thing which we are looking for right now is the acceptance of this rule by the Member States – that all additional resources will be dedicated to decreasing this EUR 23 billion of outstanding payments.

As far as the conciliation procedure is concerned, I fully share your view. During my chairmanship we finished at 3 o'clock in the morning. I know it was very painful for everybody but fortunately that time was the first time that we had managed to finalise the negotiations on time. There are improvements that can be introduced concerning better governance, especially on the Council side, to shorten some periods when the Council is still hesitating and maybe speed up the discussion a little bit, but this really depends also on the Member States' approach.

1-010

Bernd Kölmel (ECR). – Herr Dominik! Wir haben von der ECR-Fraktion aus einen etwas anderen Ansatz zum Haushalt. Der Haushalt umfasst Ausgaben von rund 140 Milliarden Euro, gliedert in sechs Rubriken, die wiederum gliedert in sehr viele einzelne Projekte. Wir fragen uns: Sind es nicht insgesamt zu viele Projekte? Die Bürger in Europa wollen einen schlanken und einen sparsamen Haushalt. Wie könnte man den erreichen? Indem man vielleicht auch mal an die Prinzipien der Finanzierung herangeht und zumindest teilweise in Frage stellt, ob denn alle Bruttozahlungen so erforderlich sind oder ob es nicht sinnhaft wäre, dass man teilweise nur noch Nettobeträge bezahlt seitens der Mitgliedstaaten. Das würde das Volumen des Haushalts reduzieren, dadurch würde sich Verwaltungsaufwand einsparen lassen, und die Mitgliedstaaten hätten wieder mehr Souveränität über ihre Haushalte. Und wir kämen auch aus diesem Problem heraus, dass man künftig mehr nachfinanzieren muss, weil man weniger Projekte hat. Dazu würde mich Ihre Stellungnahme interessieren.

1-011

Jacek Dominik, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think that there is huge budget sovereignty of the Member States, because they still have full power to decide what they want to spend their money on. We have to remember that the average contribution to the EU budget is about 1% of European GNI, which is more or less a few percentage points of the different national budgets.

The complexity of the EU budget reflects the full scope of the policies that are conducted in the EU. Of course, sometimes we have a lot of different names and different lines in the EU budget which, altogether, go to finance more general topics like growth and employment, like climate change issues, energy and infrastructure. But you do it from different resources.

We can have this debate on whether to simplify the budget or not, and then to analyse whether the money should be limited or not, but for the moment I see the budget trying to reflect all the political priorities that were decided at different levels: first of all, the priorities decided in the MFF negotiations; the priorities decided by the European Council; and the priorities decided by the European Parliament. We can simplify and limit some of these priorities, and then have a much smaller EU budget but, for the moment, I think resources have been distributed among the priorities and reflect the needs of European citizens.

1-012

Gérard Deprez (ALDE). – Monsieur le Commissaire, j'admire très franchement la facilité avec laquelle vous semblez passer du rôle – ne prenez pas l'expression de manière péjorative – de chien de garde budgétaire du Conseil au rôle de bon berger budgétaire de la Commission. Franchement, j'apprécie la performance!

Je veux la tester sur un point précis, qui concerne les budgets rectificatifs: les paquets II, III et IV. Je partage globalement ce que vous avez dit. Dans le paquet III, la Commission propose une utilisation de la marge pour imprévus. Vous savez qu'un certain nombre d'États, et pas des moindres, contestent cette utilisation. Ma question est simple: trouvez-vous que ces États se trompent, c'est-à-dire que l'interprétation par la Commission de l'utilisation de la marge pour imprévus en matière de paiements est la bonne? La soutiendrez-vous avec nous jusqu'au bout?

1-013

Jacek Dominik, *Commissioner-designate*. – Yes, I can confirm that I will support the fruitful final decision of the Council to accept it. To secure this, there are two legal opinions, both from the Legal Service of the Commission and the Legal Service of the Council, indicating that there are no obstacles in the text to prevent the Commission from using this contingency margin in such a way as was presented in DAB 3. So, if there is no legal constraint, then we have only political constraints to deal with, and I hope that the European Parliament will help the Commission in this respect. In addition it is easy for me to switch and present the Commission position, because it was very close to my

previous positions. Those who attended the meetings in the past in the Council know very well that I was always very close to the Commission positions concerning budgets.

1-014

Pablo Echenique Robba (GUE/NGL). – Señor Dominik, yo vengo de un país en emergencia humanitaria, un país con más de un 50 % de desempleo juvenil y más de tres millones de personas viviendo en pobreza extrema. A pesar de ello, los poderes financieros, a través de la troika, han forzado una reforma constitucional «exprés» que obliga a pagar la deuda antes de hacer cualquier inversión pública que pueda aliviar este sufrimiento.

En esta terrible situación que, obviamente no afecta solo a España, los Gobiernos europeos insisten en no dotar de recursos suficientes —como ya se ha dicho aquí— a la Unión para que esta pueda hacer frente a los compromisos de créditos asociados con los Fondos de Cohesión.

Ya ha explicado usted cómo propone romper el bloqueo en las negociaciones, para así afrontar los pagos de las indispensables inversiones públicas europeas, y que la Unión deje de hacer lo contrario de lo que obliga a hacer a sus Estados miembros más vulnerables. Pero a mí me sigue sorprendiendo una pequeña contradicción: usted ha formado parte mucho tiempo de un Ejecutivo que ha apoyado, año tras año, infrafinanciar los pagos. Por eso explícito la pregunta tácita en la intervención anterior: ¿qué le ha hecho a usted cambiar de opinión?

1-015

Jacek Dominik, *Commissioner-designate*. – I must say that I have not changed my opinions during this period. Not many people know that the annual budgets were not always adopted by the Council unanimously and there were always some countries with major problems to accept those proposals where there were substantial cuts – especially to the payment appropriations – and Parliament was usually one of the leaders in this respect.

We have always indicated that there are commitments that we have to respect. If you take the MFF negotiations seriously, this is the moment when political choices were made and certain support was promised to European citizens on different levels. The annual budget negotiations are only negotiations on how to implement these political commitments, and not to question those political commitments. So if there is a decision that we have to facilitate programmes related to youth unemployment or that we have to devote more money to growth and jobs, there is nothing to be questioned in this any longer. We have to check, on the basis of the available resources, on how to distribute them through the whole budget and how to secure this commitment.

So I do not see any contradiction, especially being the Commissioner for the budget, and I will try to do my best to secure this amount and to really convince the Council that the old type of budgetary negotiations are over. We have to now look at things in a new way and

also respect all the commitments which were made during the last MMF negotiations.

1-016

Indrek Tarand (Verts/ALE). – Commissioner-designate, thank you for your detailed comments on the embarrassing issue of delaying the payments. I understood your techniques will be close to Parliament and finally explain to the Council how wrong the majority in the Council has been there.

But these are current issues, and I would like you to elaborate a bit on the issue of how to get more flexibility into the EU budget and how we can get rid of the very same rigidity of the whole process of making the budget – that would perhaps bring the change in Europe which we are longing for. We need inspirational Europe, not just delaying the payments.

1-017

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – Personally I would prefer much greater flexibility in the EU budget, and that is what Poland was advocating during the previous and the current multiannual financial framework (MFF) negotiations. If we really want to solve the problems and all the issues that arise during the period of the MFF, we need more flexibility. It is extremely difficult to foresee events seven years ahead. Obviously, from that point of view, you need more flexibility.

The last MFF negotiations ended with a very limited level of payments, and that is why we have to use to the full the flexibility agreed on during these negotiations, which means using all the special funds that can be used, and especially the contingency margin that is available. This will allow us to modify the profile of payments to a certain extent, in such a way that the European budget will be able to cope with the increase in commitments in the future – to secure the money and not be in the position of saying ‘no, we are not going to meet our obligations’.

We know what the result of postponing payments is. We are now in that situation, with EUR 23 billion in payments that we have to make immediately. So this is not the solution, and I will try to convince Member States that we should not take this path again. I can understand why it was done in 2011 and 2012: that was the period of crisis and huge strain on national budgets. But now we are seeing the beginning of recovery in the European Union, and it is also time for us to deal with our outstanding commitments.

1-018

Marco Zanni (EFDD). – Grazie presidente e complimenti a lei signor Dominik per la sua nomina a Commissario.

Siccome probabilmente lei rimarrà in carica solamente per tre mesi non voglio farle una domanda vincolante o particolare ma voglio chiederle un suo parere. Come tutti sappiamo, la situazione del bilancio europeo è particolarmente drammatica, come quella dei bilanci

nazionali. Io le chiedo: ci sono molte voci, probabilmente, di spesa improduttiva che possono essere tagliate in un periodo di crisi, dove si richiedono molti sacrifici. Lei, dove agirebbe principalmente per provare a riportare la situazione, diciamo, nella normalità? E volevo chiederle: cosa ne pensa, a questo proposito, dell'enorme spreco che l'Unione europea ogni anno avalla con la tripla sede parlamentare? Si parla di circa duecento milioni di euro di spreco all'anno, che in una legislatura fanno un miliardo di euro, una cifra considerevole.

1-019

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – Concerning your last question, I am not going to comment about the seats of the European Parliament. That is something which is in the Treaty, and it is not for the Commission to comment on it. But as regards your first question, concerning types expenditure that could be cut because they are not very relevant, I tend to disagree with you.

Most of the European budget now is dedicated to growth and jobs, although the amounts are distributed under different headings, not only heading 1a but also heading 1b and heading 2. It all really depends on particular Member States, on what sort of policies they conduct and how well they are willing to use this money – it depends on what they really want to spend the money on.

You can generate growth, you can generate jobs, even by using most of the various types of agriculture expenditure. We have quite substantial amounts dedicated to rural development and, to look just at the experience of my own country, this really generates growth and improves the situation of many people. So probably 80% of the EU budget is, for the moment, focused on growth and jobs and improving the Member States' competitiveness, and I do not see any space there at all for making cuts.

The remaining part deals with very sensitive issues like humanitarian aid, security in the Member States and border controls – all very sensitive issues for EU citizens. After so many thorough political debates, it is really difficult to find policies that could be limited now or in the future.

1-020

Ελευθέριος Συναδινός (NI). – Ευχαριστώ κύριε Πρόεδρε. Κύριε Dominik, πριν ακριβώς μια κοινοβουλευτική περίοδο, βρισκόταν στη θέση σας η εκ Βουλγαρίας Rumiana Jeleva, τότε Υπουργός Εξωτερικών της χώρας της, απαντώντας επί τρεις ώρες στις ερωτήσεις της αντίστοιχης επιτροπής. Δυστυχώς βέβαια για την ίδια, επικρίθηκε τόσο έντονα από τους ευρωβουλευτές για τις απαντήσεις της, ώστε υποχρεώθηκε να αποσύρει την υποψηφιότητά της λίγο μετά την ακρόαση.

Ασφαλώς δεν έχουμε την ίδια κατάληξη για εσάς, όμως υποχρεούστε να μας πείσετε με τις απαντήσεις σας, σύμφωνα πάντα με το άρθρο 17 της Συνθήκης για την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση, ότι η Επιτροπή πρέπει να προάγει

το κοινό συμφέρον της Ευρώπης και οι Επίτροποι πρέπει να επιλέγονται βάσει των γενικών τους ικανοτήτων και της προσήλωσής τους στην ευρωπαϊκή ιδέα, παρέχοντας πλήρη εχέγγυα ανεξαρτησίας.

Εσείς μέχρι πριν λίγες ημέρες ήσασταν αναπληρωτής Υπουργός Οικονομικών της Πολωνίας και μάλιστα δεν έχετε νομίζω τη μεγάλη εμπειρία στη χρήση του ευρώ ως εθνικού νομίσματος της χώρας σας. Είναι αναμενόμενο λοιπόν να μη μπορείτε - κατά την άποψή μας - να αποκοπείτε ξαφνικά από τους χώρους με τους οποίους είχατε δεσμούς μέχρι πρότινος.

Πείτε μας λοιπόν πως σκοπεύετε να συμβάλετε στη διαχείριση της οικονομικής κρίσης που μαστίζει χώρες, ιδρυτικά και παλαιά μέλη της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης, όπως η Ιταλία, η Ισπανία, η Πορτογαλία και η χώρα μου η Ελλάδα; Πώς νομίζετε ότι μπορείτε να πείσετε για την αναγκαιότητα της ευρωπαϊκής ολοκλήρωσης, όταν η ανεργία, η υπερφορολόγηση, η φτωχοποίηση, που επιδεινώνονται με επιβολή απάνθρωπων και αντικοινωνικών μέτρων και μνημονίων, έχουν ωθήσει αρκετούς λαούς, δικαίως θα έλεγα, σε ευρωσκεπτικισμό;

Και τέλος, πώς σκέπτεστε να αυξήσετε, σύμφωνα με τον προϋπολογισμό, τα κονδύλια που θα αποσκοπούν στην καταπολέμηση της ανεργίας, στην επανεκκίνηση της ανάπτυξης και στην εξαφάνιση των κοινωνικών ανισοτήτων.

1-021

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner designate. – As far as my parachuting is concerned, my last 20 years have been devoted to European Union affairs. I was responsible for our accession negotiations, I was the Permanent Representative in Brussels for eight years, and, as I mentioned, as part of my job in the Polish Finance Ministry I was responsible for EU affairs, taking an active part both in the regular Ecofin Council and in the Budgetary Council, so I think I know a little bit about the EU and its problems and about the Member States' concerns.

The level of payments is decided by Parliament and by the Council. I can only assure you that, as future Commissioner for the budget if you so decide, I will do my best to secure sufficient resources to fulfil all the obligations of the EU, subject only to the limitation of the amounts adopted by Parliament and the Council in the conciliation procedure.

In my opinion, most of the funds currently provided for in the European budget can have huge added value, particularly for Member States which have economic problems. Just looking at the experience of my own country, the structural funds, the cohesion policy and many other policies have brought a lot of positive elements to our growth and, indeed, have secured constant growth in Poland throughout the crisis. So it is more about how the Member States would like to use this money than it is about EU policies. The EU policies are designed very well and give the Member States a lot of flexibility.

It depends on political concerns domestically how well you can use these funds, but the funds are there and they are available. As Commissioner, my task will be to secure these funds, and that is what the Commission is now proposing with amending budgets and the budget for 2015.

1-022

Le Président. – Viennent maintenant les deux questions des représentants de la commission du contrôle budgétaire.

1-023

Ingeborg Gräßle (PPE). – Vielen Dank, Herr Kommissar! Wir freuen uns dann auch auf die Zusammenarbeit, die ja vielleicht länger dauern kann, als wir alle jetzt annehmen. Wir haben im Moment 222 Milliarden Euro an RAL – also an noch abzufinanzierenden Dingen –, und wir stellen fest: Je weniger Geld wir haben, desto mehr kommen Finanzkorrekturen oder Wiedereinziehungen oder auch Zahlungsstopps. Da hat man ja den Eindruck, dass Geldmangel durchaus auch die Handlungen der Kommission beeinflusst. Für die Glaubwürdigkeit von Kontrollsystemen halten wir es aber für wichtig sicherzustellen, dass Kontrollsysteme keine Frage von Kassenlage sind. Umgekehrt haben wir Länder, die jetzt seit 20 Jahren die Liste von Unregelmäßigkeiten anführen, ohne dass die Kommission hier größere Dinge zum Abstellen unternommen hätte. Wie werden Sie sich denn verhalten in diesem Zwischenweg zwischen Kontrollsystemen zur Steuerung von Geldknappheit, aber dann auch der Haltung, dass man doch den Mitgliedstaaten eigentlich nicht wehtun dürfe? Nur so ist es ja erklärbar, dass wir im Moment nicht bessere Ergebnisse haben, trotz vielfältiger Bemühungen auch der EU-Kommission.

1-024

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – Of course it is obvious that when there is a shortage of payment appropriations the Commission will look very closely at the bills presented for payment, and of course if they are eligible they should be paid. By postponing these payments we just increase the outstanding commitments (*restes à liquider*, or RALS) for the future so we are not solving the problem of RALS.

At the same time, however, I understand that the whole system of monitoring and controlling EU expenditure is constantly improving and we see a lot of positive elements. Although some errors are found, the number of errors is at a constant level. A further element to be considered is whether there is an issue of money or simply an error. Sometimes errors occur not because a project is badly managed or not well designed but because certain EU procedures are very complex and they are carried out by end-beneficiaries who sometimes simply make a calculation mistake or fail to submit certain documents on time.

Apart from these simple errors which can be corrected, however, the Commission will look very closely at the situations where money is misused, and of course, under

the rules, such money has to be returned to the EU budget from the budgets of the Member States as soon as possible. So I hope that, simply by applying these rules, payments to the EU budget will be secured.

1-025

Inés Ayala Sender (S&D). – Bienvenido, señor Dominik. Para ser realista, de momento creo que su mandato se limita al tiempo de vigencia de esta Comisión, o sea, que, teniendo en cuenta los cuatro meses que le quedan, querría preguntarle por dos cuestiones que últimamente hemos votado antes de las elecciones: la primera, la aprobación de la gestión, y ahí nos hemos encontrado con que la Oficina de Regulación Europea para las Comunicaciones Electrónicas tenía serios problemas sistemáticos, por así decirlo. Querría saber cómo puede usted ayudarles para que un organismo que nos interesa tanto pueda en octubre pasar realmente el examen parlamentario con plena capacidad.

Y, en cuanto a la segunda cuestión, la protección de recursos propios de la Unión, querría preguntarle qué medidas tiene usted previstas para luchar esencialmente contra el fraude fiscal, allí donde se encuentre, que desde luego está haciendo mucho daño al presupuesto de la Unión.

Terminaré diciendo que usted viene ahora mismo del Banco Europeo de Inversiones. La Unión Europea le está dando al Banco Europeo bastante parte del presupuesto, entre otras cosas para instrumentos financieros, ¿cree usted que los controles actuales son suficientes?

1-026

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – As far as tax frauds are concerned, there is ongoing work both at Commission and Council level because we have two types of what I would call irregularities in the tax area.

The first one concerns mainly VAT, and it is due to the complexity of the EU VAT system. I remember that when we started our accession negotiations in the mid-90s I was told by my colleagues from the Commission that we should not really look closely, because this is a system which should last just for a few years. We have been members of the EU for ten years and we still have this interim system in VAT.

So there is ongoing work to at least increase monitoring of VAT transactions, especially in intra-Community trade, and to limit any possibilities of fraud. As far as direct taxes are concerned, we have a lot of mutual agreements to control different deposits in different Member States, and there is also substantial improvement there.

As regards the EIB, having been a director of the EIB representing Poland for many years, I think I would say that there is really quite strict control over funds distributed by the EIB by all Member States, but also by the EIB services, and it is very difficult to find any example of misused EIB loans in the Member States. They are controlled very well before distribution and

also during the whole process, so I would not worry. The only problem is whether they have sufficient resources to finance all the needs, especially related to investments and growth.

I am sorry but I do not know the details of the problems of this agency that you have just mentioned, but I can promise you that I will look closely at how this issue can be resolved, at what sort of errors there are and then how this can be improved.

1-027

Le Président. – Nous arrivons maintenant à une deuxième séance de questions. Nous avons pris à peu près dix minutes de retard. Je vous demanderai d'être aussi concis que possible. Sept questions de trente secondes et des réponses de moins de deux minutes.

1-028

Jan Marian Olbrycht (PPE). – Mr Commissioner-designate, I would like to follow up on your previous answers and ask you whether, as we observe the growing gap between commitments and payments, you think this is a lasting tendency. What is your position on how we can reduce that gap? There are different proposals we have heard about, but what is your proposal for reducing the gap between commitments and payments? Where do we start?

1-029

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – The reply is that we have to start now. We have to start with the proposed budget amendments. I hope this is not a trend. I understand it is the outcome of the general economic crisis we had in Europe a couple of years ago and the huge tensions in the national budgets. At least that was the justification given by some Member States during budget negotiations: that they simply could not afford it at that stage.

However, the economic situation in Europe is improving and, as I said, the proposal from the Commission is to manage the funds in such a way that there is no additional burden for national budgets, especially at the end of the budgetary year. I think that if we stick to the rules, or proposals, being presented by the Commission we can regain control over the EU budget.

1-030

Jens Geier (S&D). – Herr Dominik! Meine Frage bezieht sich auf die Arbeit der *High Level Working Group* zu den Eigenmitteln der Europäischen Union, die ja eingerichtet worden ist. Meine Frage ist: Werden Sie an deren Sitzungen teilnehmen? Haben Sie das vor? Wie stellen Sie sich die Unterstützung dieser *High Level Working Group* durch die Kommission vor? Haben Sie eine Idee, wie sicherzustellen wäre, dass alle denkbaren Wege, wie sich die Arbeit einer solchen Gruppe entwickeln kann, von der Kommission unterstützt werden? Wie wollen Sie verhindern, dass sozusagen durch die Mitgliedstaaten von vorneherein bestimmte Denkblockaden für ein zukünftiges Eigenmittelsystem durchgesetzt werden? Und wie wären denn Ihre persönlichen Ideen für die Neugestaltung des Eigenmittelsystems der EU?

1-031

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – As long as I am Commissioner I will be willing to attend these meetings, and I think it is a really good initiative to have a thorough debate on resources. As I mentioned at the beginning, the current system has been operational for many decades and it is probably the right moment to have a fresh view on certain own resources that are collected right now.

I think if there is a general will there might be a substantial improvement achieved in the work of this group. Of course we should be aware that probably we will not be able to reach full autonomy as it is understood by international budgets, where you have simply a dedicated number of revenues and you have to cope with fluctuation. I think that would not be a good solution if we have a multiannual financial framework, because then it will create uncertainty over this period because we will not be sure about the level of payments available during particular years, so the GNI element probably will need to be used anyway. But I hope that this group will not only solve the problem of new genuine own resources for the European Union but will also simplify the own-resources system, especially concerning different rebates, which are a nightmare, especially for the Commission to calculate.

1-032

Anders Primdahl Vistisen, (ECR). – Mr Dominik, you talked in your first statement about showing voters the added value of EU co-spending. Could you please tell us what kind of extra scrutiny you would put in place to show the voters how they are getting value for money for this extra EU co-spending.

1-033

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – For me there is a clear value added for all EU resources that are spent in the Member States. First of all they generate much higher investment than is generally foreseen by national budgets – the leverage effect is huge. The other element of value added of the EU funds which is sometimes not well emphasised is that they force governments to look proactively at the expenditures in the budget. They have to secure sufficient resources for investments in the future so, if there are some constraints for the national budgets, they have to find savings in other areas than those related to EU cofinancing, which automatically secures investments in the economy. That is at least how it happens in the country I know best. We have a general political consensus of all parties that we have to observe EU funding in the best possible way, and these resources generate a lot of growth in Poland. There are many examples that can be presented to EU citizens to show that, due to EU funding and due to the leverage effect that EU funding brings, there is a lot of growth coming to EU countries.

1-034

Nils Torvalds (ALDE). – Mr Dominik, will the Commission follow up on Parliament's request for a case-by-case breakdown of agencies' needs in terms of financial resources, establishment plans and administrative structures? Will the Commission present

a study or assessment taking into account the overall tasks conferred on agencies and the overall resources available?

1-035

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner designate. – As far as I understand, there was an interinstitutional working group established to deal with this issue and the Commission has presented an initial methodology on how to divide up those agencies so as to be able to evaluate them in future. Those are the fully operational agencies, those that get additional new tasks or the newly-established agencies.

I fully support the approach that, whatever the source of financing of such institutions, we should be very careful when looking at their expenditure and the cost of their operations. Because wherever you take the money from, it is an additional burden for somebody. It is either a burden for the EU budget or a burden for industries that are supervised by these agencies. That is why the approach to carefully evaluate whether they need such an amount of money or such a number of posts right now to deliver their task is something that could be discussed thoroughly in the working group.

Of course, there might be a situation that a specific solution should be found for particular agencies because they have suddenly changed their new tasks and they have been mandated to complete new and much bigger tasks, but at the same time we can always check whether the previous tasks have not disappeared and already have additional resources that could be transferred to the new tasks. I think the agency problem really requires a specific approach to check them one by one and then find a solution for particular agencies.

1-036

Cornelis de Jong (GUE/NGL). – Mr Dominik, we discussed errors and irregularities in connection with the expenditure of EU funds just a minute ago. Do you not think that in your discussion with the Council about the payments issue there would be merit in connecting the two and saying there should be specific sanctions, including for delayed payments perhaps, for states with a high level of irregularities and errors.

1-037

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – I would be very careful about imposing any additional restrictions on Member States, especially concerning errors. Many of the errors occur due to the complex system of EU programming and expenditure, and some of those errors are made by final beneficiaries that are not subject to the control of the Member State. I mean they are not part of the government. Governments take responsibility for the misuse of EU funds anyway, but to freeze money or freeze commitments in advance because somebody has indicated a number of errors would be very questionable.

The variation of errors also depends on the methodology that is used by the Court of Auditors, and they are improving every year, so sometimes we see that, although the actual number of errors is decreasing, the

statistics show this to be stable because there are much better controls. I think we should have a debate on how to improve the distribution of EU funds, to decrease errors and especially to decrease the number of misused funds. However, the figure for misused funds is below 0.5%, so it is not that big compared to the volume of funds distributed. There is of course an area for improvement on how to detect errors and what to do with them, but I would be quite reluctant to enter the path of freezing the funds and penalising Member States for a small number of errors.

1-038

Monika Vana (Verts/ALE). – Herr Dominik! Ich habe eine Frage zum *Gender Budgeting*, also den Auswirkungen der Budgetpolitik auf Frauen und Männer. Das Europäische Parlament hat sich ja wiederholt für die Implementierung des Ansatzes des *Gender Budgeting* ausgesprochen, zuletzt auch im Rahmen der Diskussion über den mehrjährigen Finanzrahmen. Ich komme aus Österreich. Wir haben *Gender Budgeting* in der nationalen Verfassung verankert und sehr gute Erfahrungen damit gemacht. Jetzt gibt es ja viele interessante Informationen in den EU-Dokumenten, aber keine Spur von *Gender Budgeting*. Meine Frage ist daher: Können Sie sich vorstellen, den Prozess der Implementierung von *Gender Budgeting* im EU-Budget voranzutreiben bzw. zu initiieren?

1-039

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – As you know I will be Commissioner for only a few months or even a few weeks, so I do not know whether I can finalise such a process. I have nothing against the gender balance. In our ministry we were advocating this because most of the heads of departments in our ministry were women so we would prefer to get more men into this process. There was also a moment when most of the deputy finance ministers were women, so I can understand you very well as to what gender balance means. But I cannot promise you that I will start and finalise this process if I am in office just for a few weeks.

1-040

Jonathan Arnott (EFDD). – As a newly-elected MEP, I have been astonished to learn that there are no pre-set failure criteria for EU projects. We have seen costs spiral on EU projects like the House of History. We have seen countless examples of EU funds being spent in the Member States on projects that are not actually making the difference that we might expect. I believe that every large project should have criteria set in advance for whether it is a success or failure, and that we should know which official is responsible if it fails. Do you agree?

1-041

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – I cannot agree that there are no standards for what can be financed through the EU budget. We have national programmes that are checked and discussed with the Commission, concerning where EU funds should go in every Member State.

Then there is another issue of evaluation. I often hear that some people say certain funds have been misused because they do not like the outcome of a particular project. Of course it is difficult to find the proper methodology. Do you mean that the project is fully successful whether there is a common rate of return on every project, like a single set level, or not? I think the question is more complex, and very often there are different views on how useful certain projects are. If you ask people from local government, they often find certain projects very important for their region and they want such projects to be financed by European funds. If you ask people from central government they would probably prefer something else to be financed.

Generally speaking, most projects are evaluated annually, either ex-ante or ex-post, and there are few examples indicating that funds have not been properly used. This is often a topic of general debate in particular Member States but it is difficult to find or to justify a general opinion that a lot of EU funding is useless. I would disagree with this type of comment. I think that the current system of evaluation of EU funding ex-ante and ex-post fulfils its tasks and that the huge majority of funding is very well spent.

1-042

Le Président. – Je salue les efforts que vous avez consentis pour respecter le temps de parole, mais nous avons pris dix petites minutes de retard. Par conséquent, nous allons clore notre série de questions et de réponses et je vais demander à M. Dominik de conclure en deux minutes cette séance d'interrogations.

1-043

Jacek Dominik, Commissioner-designate. – Mr Chair, I will try to be very brief as you have heard a lot of my replies. I just want to emphasise once again that there is a serious problem which we face – the problem of payments. There is a solution to the problem, which has been presented by the Commission, and – if you confirm me as a Commissioner for the next few months – I would like to ask you for as much support as possible from your side in this joint fight to improve EU public finances, to restore confidence concerning the EU budget and to improve the liquidity in the budget.

There is light at the end of the tunnel in that we will regain much better control over the EU budget. The only thing to do is to join forces and to find solutions both in relation to payments and on how to use to their full extent the flexibility instruments offered during the last MFF negotiations.

1-044

Le Président. – Monsieur le Commissaire désigné pour le budget la programmation financière, je vous remercie pour cet échange de vues. Merci pour la clarté de votre propos et de vos réponses. Ainsi s'achève cette audition.

Je voudrais préciser aux coordinateurs que nous devons nous réunir pour tenter de nous accorder, et ce le plus rapidement possible, afin de préparer une lettre d'évaluation qui devra être discutée par la Conférence

des présidents des commissions ainsi que par la Conférence des présidents des groupes.

Le vote en séance plénière sur cette nomination ainsi que sur celle des trois autres commissaires désignés a été avancé au mercredi 16 juillet 2014.

Je précise aux coordinateurs que nous allons nous réunir dans les minutes qui suivent au niveau LOW S 3.4.

Il n'y a pas de questions diverses et donc je clos notre séance en précisant que la prochaine et première réunion ordinaire de la commission des budgets se tiendra le mercredi 23 juillet prochain.

Je vous remercie pour votre participation.

1-045

(La réunion est levée à 19 h 40)