I. Personal and professional

1. What aspects of your personal qualifications and professional experience do you feel were of particular relevance with regard to your nomination and your prospective role as Commissioner?

I have been continuously involved in international and, in particular, European affairs since 1974 and have held different high-ranking political positions over the last 30 years. I have always taken a particular interest in foreign affairs, security policy and international economic policy. As a Member of the German Bundestag and as a member of the German Government I have obtained detailed knowledge and experience in these fields. My duties as European Commissioner responsible for Enlargement represented an important phase in my political and professional life. I had to act as honest broker between the interests of the EU and its future Member States in implementing the pre-accession strategy and conducting the enlargement negotiations. This task also consisted of helping the candidate countries carry out the transformation of their political system and of their economies, through inter alia macro-economic reform and the restructuring of their industries. Close coordination and intense contacts with all relevant partners were the key elements for success. In addition, as a Member of the Prodi Commission, I have continuously contributed to the decision-making process, including the Commission’s role in the Lisbon Strategy.
II. Independence

2. How would you describe your obligation to be independent in carrying out your duties and how do you concretely envisage putting this principle into practice?

Article 213(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Community defines the obligation of Members of the European Commission to be completely independent in the performance of their duties, to refrain from any action incompatible with their duties and not to engage in any other occupation, whether gainful or not, during their term of office. I fully subscribe to these principles and will also take all necessary precautions to avoid any possible conflict of interests in the performance of my duties. If confirmed, I will swear an oath to this effect before the Court of Justice. I will honour the spirit and letter of this oath in all my activities. I also strongly believe that the general interests of the Union require prior consideration of all interests at stake, whatever the origin of these interests might be (national, regional, professional), and I have positively experienced the added value of proper consultation of all stakeholders before finalising decisions during my current term as a Member of the European Commission.

3. Could you provide the European Parliament with details of your recent and present business, financial and political interests and positions, and of any other commitment that might clash with your prospective duties?

According to the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, Commissioners must declare any financial interest or asset which might create a conflict of interests in the performance of their duties. I fully subscribe to this practice. In addition I would like to stress that this practice is essential in order to ensure full transparency of the Institutions and the credibility of those having a political mandate. As can be seen from my declaration of interests that will be made public, neither my spouse nor I have any holdings that might entail a conflict of interests with my duties. My spouse is not engaged in any professional activity, but in charity work.

III. Future of the European Union

4. It is clear that until full ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, the Commission and its members are bound by the existing Treaties. However, the Constitutional Treaty having been adopted, which are in your view the actions the Commission can already undertake without waiting for its formal ratification?

I very much welcome the adoption of the European Constitution by the Heads of State and Government in June 2004 and I believe the new Constitution will provide us with
the means to achieve prosperity and peace for almost half a billion citizens throughout a largely united European continent. I believe that convincing our citizens and national Parliaments is not merely a formality under international law; it is first and foremost an opportunity to firmly engage in a democratic and more transparent Europe.

I intend to actively contribute to the informing of citizens about the new Constitution. I am prepared to play my part.

In that light, preparatory work on some of the issues addressed by the Constitution may be necessary. In my own prospective area of competence, the Constitution introduces a new legal base for a European Union space policy. The ongoing activities in this area, in particular the implementation of the roadmap announced by the Commission in 2003, will contribute to shaping future action in the field of space policy. More generally, the Commission should, in its actions and proposals, take into account the perspective of the new Constitution, without prejudging the result of national ratification procedures. Where possible and appropriate, the spirit of the Constitution should be respected.

5. The Lisbon Strategy is a ten-year strategy to make the European Union the world's most dynamic, competitive and sustainable economy by 2010. The Lisbon Strategy comprises the three pillars of sustainable development: the economy, social affairs and the environment. The date of 2010 will coincide with the term of your mandate. What would you do, as Commissioner, to accelerate progress towards the Lisbon goals and what in your views should be the main priorities?

The Lisbon Strategy is the strategic choice of the EU to preserve the European model in the 21st century and to bring its economic influence to bear in a global context. However, after four years of implementation at both European and Member State level, the situation is far from being satisfactory and it will be a great challenge to reach the Union’s strategic goals of Lisbon already by 2010.

Analysis of the situation shows the disappointing growth performance of the Union, which is all the more alarming since we are facing not only the pressing challenge of an ageing population but also stronger global competition and new emerging competitive pressures from new competitors. Political will to achieve the Lisbon objectives and a broadly shared sense of ownership will be crucial to overcome the considerable delivery gaps that we have to acknowledge at the moment. The European Parliament, social partners and European citizens at large are indispensable allies to turn the Lisbon Strategy into success. Consistency in Community action remains to be improved and synergies between actions on national and on Community level should be strengthened. There is also further room for improvement of the Open Method of Coordination, in particular if it comes to the exchanges of best practices.

2005 marks the half-way point on the Lisbon Strategy time horizon and is an opportunity to take stock of the EU progress towards the 2010 set of objectives. The
March 2005 rendez-vous must be the moment, not just to take stock, but rather to seriously review the Lisbon Strategy in order to give it new and fresh impetus. In this respect the European Council asked the Commission last March 2004 to set up a High Level Group chaired by Mr Kok in order to make an overall assessment of the Lisbon process and to propose recommendations to improve its level of delivery. The resulting report will constitute an important contribution to the preparation of the 2005 Lisbon Strategy mid-term review and it should be awaited before drawing conclusions. In my view it is important to stress that the key words for success are joint ownership and joined responsibility for a reform oriented policy aimed at growth, competitiveness and employment.

As a result we must establish strategic priorities among the long list of objectives and targets associated with the Strategy, based on a careful analysis of the current EU and international economic contexts. We should also take advantage of the recent enlargement. We must focus on promoting competitiveness, with the aim of boosting growth and employment.

I strongly believe that enlargement offers important new opportunities, not only as a result of the extension of the internal market but also because it offers the possibilities of reorganising value chains across a large part of the continent. In addition, new Member States are reform oriented and bring added value to the exchange of best practices. It is, therefore, the right moment to consolidate and to further build on existing strengths.

In my view, European industry, in particular the manufacturing industry and small and medium enterprises, plays a key role in Europe’s prosperity. Therefore, I am convinced that we have to adapt our policies to the changing international environment and challenges and to better focus on competitiveness. We should take stock where the Union of 25 is already world-class and to further concentrate and explore where the Union of 25 could rapidly catch up with global best performers. That requires a thorough sector analysis and appropriate decisions afterwards. In this regard the European space policy and enhanced European efforts towards a highly efficient security and defence industry could be decisive.

Another key concept is “better regulation”. We have to create a favourable environment for European industry, including SMEs and services, which stimulates their competitiveness and we should also reflect on how to better promote the efforts of European industry towards improved corporate social responsibility and sustainability. While completing the Internal Market contributes to a stable and predictable legal environment, we have to be more vigilant when it comes to European legislation and should, therefore, always undertake broad public consultation. Moreover, we should further develop the concept of impact assessment that would enable us to take into account the impact of legislative proposals for the competitiveness of the European economy.

Reinforcing the knowledge dimension remains crucial for our success. Europe’s asset is a highly qualified labour force, however there are already first indications of a shortage of skilled workers, an issue which has to be urgently addressed. High quality education and life-long learning are important for a good business environment and a precondition for more and better jobs. We have to enhance the participation of women in the labour market and, wherever possible, we should encourage a children and family friendly environment. Increasing the momentum for reforms also means strengthening efforts in research, innovation and entrepreneurship.
Support from citizens, social partners and stakeholders is crucial to making the Lisbon Strategy an inclusive process, a condition for its success. I am fully aware that a reform-oriented policy can have short-term negative side effects or may create social hardships. However, we have to be honest with our citizens that we are engaged in a reform process to maintain what we call the European model. We need a common message of a re-enforced commitment to the Lisbon goals, shared equally by the European Institutions and the Member States. We need a policy both at European and at national level that is driven by the strategic needs and we should honour those who carry this burden. Finally, information and communication remain important for public support and final success.

6. **How do you intend to improve the public image of the Commission?**

I welcome the decision of the President-designate to appoint Margot Wallström with overall responsibility for communicating to the public. After five years experience as a Member of the current Commission, I consider it necessary to give the European Commission a face and to further “mainstream” the communication dimension in all policies. There is a need for continuously taking account of the communication aspect of every policy: from the inception stage of a proposal through to the stage of implementation. This is not a bureaucratic exercise. It takes the commitment and involvement of all actors concerned (Commissioners, MEP’s, national Parliaments and national Governments).

I intend to explain the nuts and bolts of my portfolio in Brussels and in the Member States on as many occasions and visits as possible. In parallel, I will seek to seize the occasions of my visits on the ground and engage in debates with citizens of all ages concerning the broader notion of Europe, its purpose and function. We must show that Europe connects to the lives of each and everyone in the Member States – and we must similarly understand that views, perceptions and questions of citizens also connect back to our work in Brussels. I believe that the visibility I have gained through my current function as Commissioner responsible for Enlargement in the ten new Member States will help me engage in such a dialogue.

IV. **Democratic accountability to the European Parliament**

7. **How do you envisage your accountability to the European Parliament?**

The European Parliament, as the only European Institution directly elected and thus enjoying full democratic legitimacy, represents the peoples of the EU Member States. The accountability of Commissioners and the entire College to the European Parliament is therefore of fundamental importance and an indispensable part of democracy inside the European Union.

Moreover the European Parliament has been and continues to be an engine of European integration. It expresses the will and also the vision of European citizens and brings Europe
closer to its citizens. I warmly welcome the continuous strengthening of the powers and influence of the European Parliament in the past and particularly the relevant provisions in the draft Constitution. However, I believe that the process of democratisation inside the EU is not yet complete.

Both from an institutional and political point of view, the European Parliament is the natural ally of the Commission. It is crucial for the general success of European integration, but also for the quality of European legislation, that the Commission and its Members carefully listen to the voice of the Parliament and seriously consider its proposals and concerns. The closest possible cooperation and constructive political dialogue are prerequisites in this respect and I am fully prepared to do so, as I outline in more detail further under question 7 and 8.

**a. From a strictly political standpoint, do you consider that, in case a hearing should lead to a negative conclusion, the Commissioner-designate concerned should withdraw his/her candidacy?**

The hearings are a decisive step in the procedures established by Parliament as part of the approval process of the Members of the new Commission. The hearings strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the new Commission. I also believe that hearings provide an important opportunity for establishing confidence between Parliament and the Commissioners and I am fully aware that the success of the work of the Commission is only guaranteed if it is based on confidence from the European Parliament. For all these reasons, I take this important exercise very seriously. It is the responsibility of the President-designate of the Commission to evaluate the situation and to draw the appropriate conclusions in case a hearing should lead to a negative conclusion. In the event of a negative conclusion to a hearing, I will fully accept the principle defined in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission according to which the President of the Commission can request a Member of the Commission to resign, if Parliament expresses a lack of confidence in him or her. Moreover, it stays within the competence of the new President to ask a Commissioner to resign if he/she clearly underperforms or fails in his/her duties under the Treaty as announced by the Commission President-designate in his recent speech before the Parliament.

**b. To what extent do you consider that you are responsible for the answers provided by your services to the Parliament as a result of requests emanating from its Committee on Petitions or other responsible committees? If called upon to justify or explain previous acts of the Commission, or previous omissions, to what extent do you consider yourself as being accountable to Parliament?**

I fully subscribe to the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission, which clearly states that “without prejudice to the principle of Commission collegiality, each Member of the Commission shall take political responsibility for action in the field of which he or she is in charge”.

According to the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, I am answerable to the College for my activities and those of my department. On the other hand, the
Director-General is answerable to me and the College for the proper implementation of the guidelines set by the College and myself and, in particular, for the management of the Directorate-General or Service in line with the distribution of powers.

On taking up office, I will make sure that I am fully informed by my Directorate-General of the scope, the respective responsibilities, the problems and risks linked to the daily work. If a problem arises, I will make a thorough assessment of the situation and, if need be, take those measures possible under my authority or make speedy proposals for action to remedy the situation that could affect my portfolio and speedily implement any measures decided upon by the College.

It is of paramount importance, nevertheless – also according to the commitment of the Commission to ensure transparency and a proper flow of information to the Parliament – to keep the Parliament up to date on any significant changes or adaptations whose implementation I consider important, especially if these new actions are aimed at improving a particular situation.

While respecting the principle of collegiality, I will seek to ensure institutional continuity and coherence, particularly within the field of my responsibility. However, I will not hesitate to propose changes to the policy for which I am responsible, that deem to be necessary, which would then be subject to a College decision.

c. What do you understand by the concept of political responsibility before the Parliament for the activities of your Directorate(s)-General? What steps do you intend to take to ensure your Directorate(s)-General is/are well-managed?

My relations with my Directorate-General and other services reporting to me will be based on loyalty, trust and transparency.

I will assume political responsibility within the Commission for the implementation on policies in my area of responsibility and for their management by DG Enterprise and Industry in line with the Framework Agreement.

As in the previous Commission, I will ask the Director-General reporting to me to agree to a mission statement that describes the scope of my mandate as well as our respective roles and responsibilities and the rules of procedure for our cooperation.

According to the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, each Commissioner is answerable to the College for his/her activities and those of his/her department. On the other hand, the Director-General is answerable to the Commissioner and the College for the proper implementation of the guidelines set by the College and the Commissioner. This includes, in particular, the management of the Directorate-General in line with the distribution of powers as defined in the Staff Regulations, the Financial Regulation, the rules of procedure and the rules laid down as part of the administrative and financial reform of the Commission.
The Code of Conduct – regarding relations between the Commissioners and their services – clarifies and reinforces the obligation for Directors-General and the services to inform the Commissioner. It should also be noted that the Head of Cabinet and the Director-General have an obligation to keep each other fully informed of external contacts regarding the dossiers in my portfolio.

Concerning internal communication, the Commission has already implemented an action plan precisely aimed at improving internal communication and information received by the Commissioners.

8. **How important would you consider implementing interinstitutional cooperation (Commission-Parliament), in particular with the relevant parliamentary committees in your area of competence? In this new context, what does transparency mean for you, in the interinstitutional legislative procedure between the European Parliament, Council and Commission, as well as in interinstitutional relations in general?**

I attach utmost importance to the implementation of interinstitutional cooperation which is indispensable in order to ensure the functioning of the European institutional system, the efficiency and legitimacy of the EU decision-making process as well as the implementation of the principle of good governance. Interinstitutional cooperation should be based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, efficiency, constant dialogue, regular reporting and exchange of information.

In this context, I reaffirm and endorse the Commission’s commitments already entered into under the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission.

The concept of transparency and openness enables citizens to participate more closely in the decision-making process and it also guarantees that the administration enjoys greater legitimacy and is more accountable to the citizens and their elected representatives. Transparency contributes to strengthening efficiency and good governance and is the crucial precondition of a sound interinstitutional cooperation. Transparency is also important for improving the quality of law-making and for implementing the principles of democratic legitimacy, subsidiarity, proportionality and legal certainty. For all these reasons, I welcome the progress already made to promote greater openness, transparency and accessibility in the working of the EU Institutions, both with regard to the public but also among the Institutions themselves and I fully endorse the principles and rules underlying Regulation 1049/2001 regarding public access to documents.

I also welcome and endorse the commitments entered into by Commission, Council and Parliament in the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making. I will honour and fully respect all commitments made by the Commission in this respect and I will undertake to properly implement the existing provisions laid down in the different agreements and to improve transparency and the flow of information in my daily work as Commissioner.

As Commissioner for Enlargement I established close cooperation with the previous European Parliament and I am committed to continuing to do so with this Parliament.
I consider myself duty-bound to be as open as possible with the European Parliament and in particular with the relevant committee(s). I affirm my availability to committee members. Moreover I consider it as my duty to be present at the European Parliament as requested and I wish to refer to the fact that I have fulfilled this obligation during the course of the previous Parliament. I appeared a total of 19 times before the Foreign Affairs Committee during the last legislature, participated regularly in Joint Parliamentary Committees’ meetings over the last five years and always attended plenary meetings when subject matters were discussed for which I assumed responsibility in the present Commission.

I am ready to provide oral and/or written information on all policy areas I am responsible for within the Commission. I am ready to report and discuss with the relevant committees whenever they wish and I am willing to take into account the views and concerns expressed. I consider the present hearing as a first occasion to establish a good working relationship with “my” committee, based on mutual trust and respect.

V. Gender mainstreaming

9. What concrete measures do you consider necessary in order to ensure that the concept of gender mainstreaming is implemented in your specific policy area? Do you have a policy strategy, and what financial and human resources do you think are necessary to implement gender mainstreaming in your portfolio?

Gender equality is at the centre of the principle of gender mainstreaming. As a result, all EU Institutions and the Member States must incorporate a gender equality perspective in all policy fields and at all stages of policy-making at all levels. As Commissioner for Enlargement, I put high personal emphasis on the issue of gender equality which is an indispensable part of human rights. I developed close cooperation with the European Parliament’s Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and with relevant NGOs and I am fully committed to continuing this close cooperation.

The available analysis still reveals the existence of significant gender gaps in most policy fields and highlights the need to remain vigilant. There is clear evidence of slow progress towards narrowing gaps in certain areas, such as employment or entrepreneurship for example. The fulfilment of the goals of Lisbon Strategy, in particular the increase of female employment rate and the encouragement of female entrepreneurs, could be crucial in this respect. Following the European Council in June last that supported the creation of a European Gender Institute and in view of the Lisbon Agenda, the Commission is now invited to bring forward a specific proposal, which should be tabled before the end of this year. The Institute should contribute greatly to the framework necessary for the full implementation of gender mainstreaming in the EU through activities such as data collection, dissemination of information and awareness-raising.

DG Enterprise has already started to address the issue of female entrepreneurship with the Best Project “Promoting entrepreneurship amongst women” among the 28 EU/EEA countries and the candidate countries. This project identified good practices
concerning the promotion of female entrepreneurship in relation to start-ups, information/advice, training, mentoring, funding and networks. As a follow-up to this project, the Commission encourages Member States to learn from the good practices identified and to apply these lessons at national and regional level. On the basis of the Best Project and the “Entrepreneurship Action Plan” recently adopted by the Commission, several expert meetings on relevant issues such as access to finance for women entrepreneurs and networking are foreseen. An expert meeting on “Social protection of women entrepreneurs, independents and co-helping partners” was organised in Brussels in June 2004.

Within the framework of the “Entrepreneurship Action Plan”, further work on the social protection of entrepreneurs will be necessary. In particular, the Commission intends setting up a working group with Member States’ experts and launching a study on the issue of social protection for new entrepreneurs, including women. It is also intended to launch a special website for the promotion of female entrepreneurship on the DG Enterprise webpages.

I am fully aware that further strengthening of gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Lisbon Agenda will need close cooperation with the Commissioner responsible for Equal Opportunities, with the Parliament’s Committee on Women’s Rights as well as with relevant NGOs. The closest possible cooperation with the European Network to Promote Women’s Entrepreneurship (WES), with professional organisations and networks of women entrepreneurs and with international organisations such as the OECD and ILO and UNECE will also be of crucial importance.

The European Commission pursues a policy of equal opportunities. The new Staff Regulations formally endorse equality between women and men and state that full equality in practice is one of the aims of the Institutions. Gender mainstreaming inside DG Enterprise follows this new Commission policy and is presently based on the pillars of gender related training, an equal opportunities plan and the launch of a local networking. While fully respecting the administrative responsibility of the Director-General, I will politically encourage all his initiatives that aim at improving gender equality. The composition of my cabinet will serve as a positive reference point for gender equality.