

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

Věra JOUROVÁ

Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality

1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence

What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission?

What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?

I am honoured to be proposed as the Commissioner–designate for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. I will be a strong voice and ardent advocate for these policies, both within the Commission, and to the outside world. For many years, I have been a committed European with a deep respect for the importance of European integration. I am proud to be an elected member of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, Minister of Regional Development and part of the leadership of the ANO political movement. I have a deep sense of duty to work for the good of others. I am above all a politician and a committed advocate of action that will improve the lives of the citizens that I represent.

I have had the privilege to hold elected office and represent citizens at local and national level, and should the European Parliament approve my nomination, I hope to have the opportunity to take up this appointment at the European level. I have been a vocal advocate of European integration in my country. I strongly argued for accession of my country to the European Union in 2004 and I firmly believe that membership has brought significant benefits to both the Czech Republic and the European Union.. I am extremely pleased that as a Minister in the current government, I have been able to play a small part in helping my country to project a more open and progressive approach to European cooperation and to the Community method. I have played a pivotal role in seeking to improve the absorption and oversight of structural funds so that the full benefits of membership can be felt by citizens and businesses alike.

My educational background of Masters Degrees in cultural anthropology and law bring a unique mix of understanding to the different cultural and legal traditions throughout the European Union. I have extensive experience from the private sector in advising both private and Governmental bodies throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. I have shown this in my work as a Minister in the drafting of six legislative acts and the adoption of the Civil Service Act in the Czech Republic. This background gives me a keen awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of justice systems – beyond the pure institutional sense of the word - and the role of legislation and what is most appropriate at a European or national level.

My career has brought many positive experiences, but also one of the most difficult periods in both my personal and professional life. The principles of freedom and security have a specific poignancy for me as in 2006 I was falsely and unlawfully accused and was held in pre-trial detention for a month. Thankfully I was fully exonerated by the Courts in every respect. While this experience is not to be recommended, it gives me a unique insight into the significance of the rule of law in criminal proceedings. When you have been through this experience, you start to understand what it means to be confronted with clear injustice. That is why I am so passionate about the freedom of individuals and liberty, which I consider to be of the highest value that should be promoted and

defended. In the European Union we have a duty to ensure that citizens, from whatever country in the European Union, are able to enjoy the same rights and freedoms. The European Union is unique in its way of life and the values that it espouses and we must continuously work to defend and uphold these fundamental rights.

I passionately believe in the importance of building trust in our democratic institutions. Public confidence in the work of the European Commission can only be assured if it is fully independent and free from outside influence. I take the oath of independence extremely seriously. I can assure the European Parliament that I have scrupulously ensured that I have avoided any links to economic activity that would lead to conflicts of interest and I have faithfully fulfilled my obligations under the Declaration of Interests. This will be updated should any changes occur. I will fully respect the Code of Conduct of Commissioners and the ethical standards enshrined in Article 17.3 TEU and Articles 245 and 339 TFEU. I shall neither seek nor take instructions from any government or any other body and will refrain from any action incompatible with my duties such as to engage in any other occupation.

Furthermore, I fully support our new commitment to transparency set out in the political guidelines by the President-elect. I commit to making public all the contacts and meetings I hold with professional organisations or self-employed individuals on any matter relating to EU policy making and implementation.

2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament

How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?

What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

If I am confirmed as Commissioner I will take my responsibilities within the College extremely seriously. I strongly believe in collegiality – it is a core principle for the functioning and the credibility of decision-making in the Commission, and delivers better reasoned and more coherent decisions.

President-elect Juncker has proposed a new way of working for the College; one that should increase the political ownership of its decisions and the teamwork involved to come to these decisions. I share the objective of President-elect Juncker of breaking the Commission out from its traditional silos so that different perspectives can be brought to bear on the decision-making process. I will seek to deliver on the commitments made by President-elect Juncker in his political guidelines presented to the European Parliament, both in the ten priority actions and the areas more specifically falling under my responsibility. To achieve this, I will obviously work extremely closely with Vice-President Timmermans but also with a number of other colleagues on issues of common interest like the digital agenda, migration and home affairs. I'm a team player and I will seek to bring reliability and certainty to the dealings I have with colleagues so that we can work in mutual trust. I believe that the Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality portfolio is a perfect example of the type of joined up thinking that is needed if we are to rebuild mutual trust between judicial systems based on compliance with fundamental values, stimulate growth and confidence, and create a progressive society.

We have a unique opportunity to make this portfolio a success and I will be looking to work with you on a constant basis to achieve real change. I have strong convictions which I will try to defend with common sense, hard work and a commitment to find solutions which are efficient and effective. All my political life, I have not shied away from making the difficult political decisions. We will not always agree. I will be careful to respond to your concerns and requests while also being mindful that we need to focus on the big things that matter rather than trying to fix every conceivable problem, in line with the better regulation agenda.

Being more political also means being more accountable. I will assume full political responsibility for the activities of my services in the areas of Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, in order to allow the European Parliament to exercise its democratic oversight to the fullest possible degree, as defined in the Framework Agreement. In my current responsibility as Minister of Regional Development, I have already had the opportunity to meet with many members of the European Parliament and I look forward to continuing this close cooperation. If confirmed as Commissioner, I am firmly committed to regular dialogue and exchange of views

with the European Parliament and its committees, based on full respect for our respective roles, openness and transparency.

In many of the areas falling under my immediate responsibility, the European Parliament and the Council act as co-legislators. This has time and again produced more balanced and representative decision-making. I will ensure that the two branches of the legislator are treated on an equal footing, both in terms of accountability and information sharing. I will ensure that I take a personal involvement in negotiations and will make myself available to the European Parliament and the relevant committees wherever possible.

I'm a strong believer in transparency and openness while retaining the necessary space for confidential negotiations. Transparency will be the default approach. Of course, in certain limited cases, given the areas I am responsible for, this will require special treatment of confidential information, in accordance with the applicable legal framework.

The current treaty provisions assign specific roles to each of the European institutions. The European Commission's sole right of initiative is an important feature of this unique system. Concerning the follow-up to European Parliament's positions and requests, I will apply the provisions of the Framework Agreement and, in my areas of responsibility, make sure that the Commission responds to parliamentary resolutions or requests made on the basis of Article 225 TFEU, within 3 months after their adoption. In this context, I support and fully endorse the commitment made by President-elect Juncker that the future Commission will be particularly attentive to legislative initiative reports.

Questions from the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection

3. Consumer protection, enforcement of consumer rights and redress

How will you promote enhanced competition, consumer choice and consumer protection in the sectors under your responsibility?

If I am confirmed as Commissioner my intention is to fully include consumer aspects as cross-cutting issues in EU policy making and to shape the EU consumer agenda in its next phase. I will be over the next 5 years the voice of citizens concerns. This is a horizontal issue that affects every portfolio. Consumers expect the European Union to help them to buy easily cross-border both on- and offline, protect and enforce their rights and ensure fair competition through market surveillance so that consumers get the best deal.

My main objective will be to ensure trust of EU consumers: trust in the information and the tools to exercise their rights; trust that only safe products are on offer; trust that their authorities are safeguarding markets so that they can play their role as economic actors.

One important aspect to build on is how consumer policy can contribute to our jobs and growth agenda. With consumer expenditure representing 56% of the EU GDP, consumers have the power to move markets.

To improve consumer choice information and awareness building tools and campaigns remain key. If confirmed as Commissioner in charge of consumer policy I will put our tools to the test to see whether we provide consumers with clear, easy to understand information. I will work closely with the European Parliament and consumer organisations on this in the EU.

How do you see the state of play regarding the market surveillance and product safety package?

My intention is to play my role as honest broker in order to overcome the current stalemate in the Council so that this important package can finally be adopted. This proposal is about modernising current rules and reducing administrative burden while also addressing current market needs. It serves many of our priorities for the next years such as addressing the on-line challenge in the internal market, maintaining the EU as a safety champion in global trade and presenting better regulations.

I will engage with stakeholders and with Member States to understand the concerns and will try to contribute to finding a solution.

New market developments in the digital sphere, such as the data-driven economy and the emergence of shared economy services, have raised important further challenges for consumer protection. How do you intend to address those?

Dynamic market and technological developments are generally welcome. Innovative solutions can help consumers save time and money and generate business opportunities and economic growth. At the same time we need to make sure consumers are not misled and abused when using new technologies. We also need to safeguard the particular needs of the most vulnerable in the digital markets, the children or the elderly. This is essential if consumers are to maintain trust in the digital economy. My overall objective is to create a level playing field where all companies offering their goods or digital services in the EU are subject to the same strong data protection and consumer rules, regardless of where their server is based.

My top priority will be to swiftly conclude negotiations on common European data protection rules. We will also need legislation to modernise and simplify consumer rules for online and digital purchases and to advance the work done by the Commission and the European Parliament on a modern and consumer-friendly contract law Regulation, notably for the digital environment. For example, I also want to ensure that consumers can access services, music, movies and sports events on their electronic devices wherever they are in Europe and regardless of borders.

Business models such as the “sharing economy” raise questions concerning the responsibilities of internet and telecom intermediaries. These players may or may not be a direct party to the contract with consumers: but it is important that accountability towards consumers is built in the system. I will work closely with the network of national enforcement authorities to share experiences about the consumer issues related to such models and to define a common approach that applies across the EU.

I will liaise closely with Vice-President Ansip and coordinate with Commissioner Oettinger on these issues to ensure a coherent approach in the different EU policies involved.

Which further measures do you envisage in order to achieve effective enforcement and redress for consumers and compliant businesses apart from the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms?

Enforcement will be one of my top priorities. It is important that consumer protection legislation is equally applied and enforced throughout the Union: not only to tackle actual infringements and avoid market fragmentation but also to provide a deterrent effect and prevent new infringements. This question will be at the heart of the review of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation. I want to work closely with consumer organisations and industry to make sure that the enforcement solutions we are proposing are fast, efficient and EU-wide.

I will follow-up on the Commission Recommendation on collective redress. Member States have started to put in practice the principles set out in the Recommendation. Once the implementation period mentioned in the Recommendation is over, I will launch a detailed assessment of these national measures to verify that they are in line with the objectives of the Recommendation. Following this assessment, the College will be in a position to decide if further action is needed.

I will encourage swift adoption of the revised Small Claims Regulation. Europe's consumers and SMEs deserve a low-cost and modernized procedure to ensure effective access to justice for cross-border small claims. Without such a mechanism they are simply deterred from pursuing such claims and access to justice is denied.

I will also safeguard the right of consumers to go to court in their home country and to benefit from the protection of the laws of their home country. With I will closely monitor the implementation of the recent revision of the Brussels I Regulation so as to ensure that it delivers easy access to justice close to home.

4. Smart regulation

How will you improve impact assessments, both ex ante and ex post, in order to ensure a holistic and balanced assessment of new legislative proposals and existing legislation in the area of consumer protection? In particular, how will you ensure that they are evidence-based and are based on enhanced and improved SME and internal market tests?

The President-elect has made clear that Better Regulation is a priority of the new Commission. Consumer protection is by definition a horizontal area which has an impact on a huge range of citizens and businesses, and full assessment of the impact of different options will be critical to future development of the policy.

As regards existing legislation, I am committed to the ambitious target set for regulatory simplification in the previous Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme (REFIT), to achieve, in collaboration with Vice-President Timmermans, a simple, clear and predictable regulatory framework for businesses and consumers. At the same time I will ensure that the objective of the best quality EU Regulation does not lead to an unintended reduction of essential consumer protection.

In the field of consumer policy, I will make sure that the rules are easy to understand and to implement. I intend to take forward the announced REFIT evaluation of existing legislation, including for example the Timeshare Directive and the Consumer Rights Directive, which recently became applicable, the Consumer Sales and Guarantees Directive, the Unfair Contract Terms Directive, and the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive. On the basis of the result we should look at how best to simplify and consolidate these rules.

One very important tool in my work will also be the use of evidence collected for a solid, evidence based and forward looking policy making. Data collected from instrument such as the Markets or Consumer Conditions Scoreboard can offer valid input for the regulator's work. I also intend to ensure that the Commission's services make full use of impact assessments when preparing new legislation falling under my responsibility, carefully considering the likely effects of a given policy initiative on consumers, SMEs and microenterprises.

Prior to launching any initiative, I will ensure timely consultation of all stakeholders concerned, including relevant business and consumer organisations. The effects of a given policy initiative on SMEs and microenterprises will be carefully considered, to avoid excessive burden. Finally, in line with President-elect Mr Juncker's political guidelines and in coordination with the Commissioners in charge of the relevant EU policies, I will give priority to initiatives that could contribute to the creation of a connected digital single market.

How would you propose to improve the pre-legislative involvement of parliamentary committees, in particular with regard to legislative initiatives taken under Article 225 TFEU? What measures will you take to ensure that full and proper stakeholder consultations are carried out with a view to ensuring regulations are fit for growth, employment creation, innovation and competitiveness?

The President-elect has already underlined that Parliament's legislative reports should receive the highest level of attention. I fully share the President-elect's commitment.

Stakeholder consultations are at the core of better regulation and central to ensuring that proposals meet our goals and can have an impact. The steps taken in recent years to help focus stakeholders through roadmaps and to give more time to consultations should be consolidated. Consultation is not only a Treaty obligation. I am convinced that it leads to higher quality proposals and to real impact on the ground.

How will you ensure better enforcement and implementation of consumer rights and make sure Member States fulfil their commitments?

First, timely and correct implementation of EU law by the Member States is essential. The transposition of the recent Consumer Rights' Directive will be a first test in that regard. In case of inadequate transposition or implementation of EU provisions, and if dialogue with Member States fails to produce conformity with EU law,, I will not hesitate to launch infringement proceedings.

Second, we need a new deal on how we work with Member States' authorities on effective enforcement. For instance, some cases are much more efficiently tackled by rapid interventions at EU level rather than individual national actions. We will have to look at the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) framework in that regard so that we enable joint enforcement actions coordinated by the Commission on issues of common interest across the EU.

Third, consumers need to have the full knowledge about their rights and the necessary tools at their disposal to exercise them. This is about the right to choose.

Questions from the Committee on Legal Affairs

5. Civil justice

The strategic guidelines for the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice adopted by the European Council in June 2014 provide, in particular, for further action at European level to enhance the mutual recognition of judgments and decisions and to facilitate their enforcement. The guidelines also call for better exchange of information and cooperation between authorities.

The European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission have in the past all agreed on the importance of modernising the justice system and improving judicial training with a European perspective. The European Commission carried out a pilot programme in this field over the last two years.

How does the Commissioner-designate intend to further promote cooperation on civil justice matters at European level? In particular, what specific legislative proposals are envisaged?

If I am confirmed as Commissioner I am committed to further develop civil justice cooperation so that justice policy fully serves Europe's citizens and contributes to the EU's growth and jobs agenda. I am convinced that this is an area where we can make a real difference for citizens and businesses by simplifying otherwise complex and potentially conflicting legal situations.

In the area of commercial law, I will examine how we can increase legal certainty for companies doing business across borders, in particular regarding the law applicable to their establishment, functioning and winding up. This is an important gap which was pointed out in the Parliament's "Costs of non-Europe" report.

I will also prioritise another justice initiative contributing to growth by looking closely at further steps to reform insolvency frameworks in Europe. We should move from a liquidation-oriented approach towards a more rescue-oriented one. I believe that this could save many viable businesses and jobs. If confirmed as Commissioner I will evaluate how Member States have responded to the Commission's Recommendation on a new approach to business failure and insolvency, bearing closely in mind the Parliament's 2011 resolution calling for harmonisation in certain areas of insolvency law.

In the area of cross-border family law, I see the review of the rules on conflicts of law issues in family law (the so-called Brussels IIa Regulation) as a top priority given its importance in the sensitive cases of family breakdown. I want to discuss the current shortcomings thoroughly and find innovative solutions including mediation mechanisms and, if necessary, legislative steps. I want to tackle the lengthy and sometimes ineffective proceedings for the enforcement of decisions on child custody, on parental access and on return orders in cases of child abduction. I also believe that unnecessary formalities should be removed.

But I am willing to engage in a debate with stakeholders on whether and how to consolidate and to complement the existing *acquis* in the area of civil justice further. More needs to be done to increase the mutual trust between the legal systems and to increase the knowledge of legal practitioners and judges. This will be key to improve the mutual recognition of judgments and their enforcement in other Member States which is crucial in the internal market.

One essential aspect of mutual trust is the assurance that the civil procedural rights of the parties are protected in judicial proceedings in other Member States, in particular in matters relating to the service of documents, the taking of evidence and the best interests of the child in family proceedings. I want to engage in a discussion and analysis of the options available to reinforce the rights of parties in civil proceedings and, where appropriate and necessary, to reflect on the creation of minimum standards of procedure.

Another important way to consolidate mutual trust and confidence lies in boosting cooperation mechanisms. We do have an excellent tool at our disposal – the European Judicial Network in civil and commercial matters. The network is composed of Member State experts and contact points of the Member States and all the legal professionals are represented. This makes it a key partner and I will evaluate the operation of the network to see how we can further optimise its usefulness.

A second tool to improve the exchange of information is the e-Justice portal. This website contains a wealth of information on European and national law. It should also allow access to interconnected registers, for instance in the area of insolvency. I intend to examine to what extent further such exchanges can be realised, for instance in the area of wills and successions.

What new initiatives will the Commissioner-designate take in the field of e-Justice and judicial training, which are important for mutual trust and thus mutual recognition?

Mutual trust in justice systems is a key element of a functioning of European area of justice. I agree that training of legal practitioners and ensuring easy access to information are crucial tools in this respect. I am committed to promoting them.

In the field of judicial training, if I am confirmed as Commissioner I will ensure we reach the objective of enabling half of all legal practitioners in the EU to receive European judicial training by 2020. We need to change the legal culture by helping practitioners integrate European law in their daily work.

I will work closely with our partners at national and European level to ensure that training providers in all Member States have access to the best practices identified by the successful pilot project initiated by the European Parliament. We can build on this and develop it further, including by making it more visible. One idea could be to organise a yearly high level meetings to keep the momentum.

We need to extend the experience obtained from training judges and prosecutors to other legal professions such as lawyers and court staff. They have to be able to apply EU rules such as the new succession rules to a much wider extent than in the past. We must promote stronger co-operation between training providers.

I also intend to make access to funding for training projects easier, quicker and more targeted, to reduce administrative burden and allow participation of smaller training providers, for example by launching specific calls for proposals for training projects only.

My objective is to make e-Justice an operational and living tool, providing practical services for citizens and legal practitioners with regular updates. We could consider launching a search tool for citizens to find a lawyer or a notary in the EU who speaks their language and is specialised in the area of law needed. I will make sure that as from the beginning of 2015, new tools to allow direct electronic communication between citizens and courts in other Member States will become available on the e-Justice Portal. In this way, citizens will be able to submit a European Small Claim or European Payment Order directly to the competent court in another Member State.

The time has come to provide the e-Justice Portal with clear governance structures and robust data protection provisions.

6. Corporate governance

In 2012 the Commission presented an Action Plan on European company law and corporate governance, based on the principle that company law and corporate governance should make sure that companies are competitive and sustainable. The action plan was disappointingly only partly implemented and some of the proposals announced were never presented. Sustainable and competitive companies are indeed essential to recovery of the EU economy, the creation of growth and the promotion of innovation, long-term investment and employment. What would be in your view a sound corporate governance policy and what measures do you intend to put forward to push EU companies to attain high standards in corporate governance and corporate social responsibility in terms of promoting balance of income and wealth?

I fully agree that effective corporate governance is of key importance for the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of companies. I support the 'comply or explain' approach as set out in the relevant Directive on financial statements and detailed in the 2014 Commission recommendation, as it allows companies to depart from certain recommendations provided they explain sufficiently the reasons for doing so.

The Commission has delivered on most of the initiatives announced in the 2012 Action Plan, including the directive on disclosure of non-financial information, the proposals for directives on the revision of the shareholder rights directive and on single-member company, as well as the recommendation on 'comply or explain'.

In addition, work is on-going on other initiatives, such as a possible revision of the cross-border mergers directive and the introduction of rules on cross-border divisions and the identification of obstacles to the development of employee share ownership. If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will make sure that existing commitments are fulfilled.

I believe that further improvements in corporate governance will be necessary to enhance companies' sustainability in the long term. Encouraging more long-term oriented and engaged shareholders remains one of the key challenges. A report will be delivered next year on how to further incentivise institutional investors and asset managers to take long-term risk factors (including environmental, social and governance issues) into account in their investment strategies. This report will explore further measures to foster a longer-term horizon and a more responsible approach in the investor community.

Questions from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

7. Question:

What will be your 2 priorities in the area of judicial cooperation in criminal matters and of data protection? Which specific method will you apply to make sure these 2 priorities are delivered?

In the area of judicial cooperation in criminal matters, I intend to prioritise the establishment of an independent and efficient European Public Prosecutor's Office by 2016. We have a firm legal basis in the Treaty for it, and it will play a key role in protecting the European budget against fraud. I believe that 2016 is a realistic target given the political urgency of combating fraud to help with fiscal stabilisation, the political support of the European Parliament and an increasingly constructive approach of Member States in the Council, with a strong commitment from the current and upcoming Presidencies.

I will work constructively and transparently to facilitate the participation of a maximum number of Member States. However, this should not be at the expense of the European Public Prosecutor's Office independence, efficiency and accountability. If I am confirmed as Commissioner I will work to ensure that these key notions of the proposal are maintained.

At the same time, I am determined to ensure that the highest level of procedural safeguards and a comprehensive level of judicial control will be in place. I have taken note of the valuable recommendations provided in the Parliament's Interim Report on the European Public Prosecutor's Office. I will continue to listen closely to the views of the European Parliament in the discussions that will take place. We must also be transparent and continue involving national parliaments, from which there have been many constructive contributions, in accordance with the legal framework provided for by the Treaties. Ensuring the political support of parliaments is necessary in order to have full legitimacy and achieve a good result.

As criminal and procedural law is not harmonised, mutual recognition enables judges and prosecutors from different Member States to communicate directly with each other, to recognise and if necessary enforce each other's decisions, reducing formalities to a minimum. I would like to expand this area further and to engage with you and my colleagues in the Commission in discussions on possible initiative on mutual recognition instruments on cross-border asset recovery to make sure that crime doesn't pay, wherever criminals hide their assets.

Regarding data protection, if I am confirmed as Commissioner I will focus on a swift conclusion of negotiations on common European data protection rules. The reform is vital for the functioning and completion of the Digital Single Market as recognised by the European Council which called for adoption in 2015. This is equally important for the respect of data protection as a fundamental right of citizens in a fast moving technological context. It will introduce a single data protection law for Europe, create new, stronger rights for individuals, simplify the life of business, and ensure strong and coordinated enforcement by supervisory authorities. I will therefore work closely with the European Parliament and Member States and strive for the adoption of the reform package within the first six months of my mandate should I be confirmed. This is a goal that the European Commission and the European Parliament share. We should work together to make it happen.

I welcome the European Parliament vote in first reading, which supports the structure and the main elements of the reform. The partial general approach agreed in the Council in June this year is another important step forward. It indicates that we are very close to a common position of the Member States. It shows that all three institutions have understood the importance of the reform for the rights Europe's citizens as well as for the growth of its businesses.

Are you ready to participate in a question time with the LIBE Committee upon request to review these priorities and discuss relevant topical matters?

I am fully committed to working closely with parliamentary committees and look forward to a close ongoing dialogue with LIBE. I believe this dialogue should both look ahead, including in the context of the preparation of the Commission Work Programme, and be a way to monitor and account for the state of implementation. So I look forward to start the dialogue with the LIBE Committee as well as with the other relevant Committees.

8. Question:

Among the key issues identified in your portfolio, could you indicate:

What steps are you planning to ensure a successful adoption of the horizontal anti-discrimination directive under your term?

Discrimination must have no place in our Union, whether on the basis of nationality, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, or with regard to people belonging to a minority. We already have comprehensive legislation at EU level prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of nationality, sex and race, yet for other individuals, their protection is restricted to the employment field.

For this reason I am determined to see the Horizontal Anti-Discrimination Directive adopted and I will make renewed efforts to enable the Council to reach the necessary agreement. I fully share President-elect Juncker's view: he identified the Directive as a priority in his political guidelines presented to the European Parliament in July.

Thanks to the work of previous Presidencies and the Commission, technical issues in the proposed Directive have been resolved and we have a text that is mature and ready for adoption. The text respects the principle of subsidiarity and does not impose disproportionate burdens. The remaining barriers are not economic but political, and this is where I will focus my efforts.

I will work with the governments of those few reticent Member States to understand and overcome their remaining concerns.. I would also like to work with national parliaments and would particularly value the support of Members of the European Parliament to do this. We should not give up on this important proposal.

Should the current negotiations on the EU-US agreement for data protection in the framework of judicial and police cooperation for criminal matters (so-called "Umbrella agreement") come to an end, do you intend to proceed to the provisional application of the agreement before its conclusion in case the US legislation required to grant EU citizens the rights of administrative and judicial redress would be still pending?

On this question I can be very clear. There will only be an "umbrella agreement" if the agreement respects EU fundamental rights, notably if US grants EU citizens rights of effective judicial redress regardless of nationality or residence.

The US Administration has committed itself to legislation that would provide EU citizens with the guarantees given to US citizens and residents in the US Privacy Act. If legislation is adopted, this would be a major breakthrough, a step that the Union has been fighting for the past 10 years.

Given the importance of this issue I will give my full attention to these negotiations with the US administration and keep the European Parliament regularly informed.

I would greatly value if Members of the European Parliament could likewise use their contacts with Members of Congress to stress the importance of passing this legislation.

Questions from the Committee on Women's Rights & Gender Equality:

9. Future Strategy for gender equality post 2015

Considering the current Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015), what is your evaluation of its failures and successes? Based on a thorough evaluation, what would be your concrete proposals as regards a future Strategy for gender equality for the period 2015-2020 and beyond? How would it take into account new challenges, cover all areas of action for gender equality, be integrated in

the international post 2015 framework for women's rights and gender equality and correlate effectively with other policy areas of the EU?

The Strategy on equality between women and men 2010-2015, showed the Commission's commitment to deliver on gender equality. A large majority of the key actions set out in the Strategy on equality between women and men 2010-2015 have been acted upon and important results have already been achieved. For example, we have witnessed some improvement in the presence of women on boards in the EU, as a result of the catalyst effect of the Commission's proposal for a Directive on this issue.

Despite the progress achieved, we still face important challenges and it is essential to continue the fight against persisting gender inequalities and to fight discrimination and violence. I strongly believe that we need a clear approach on equality and I will make it a priority to explore further options for a renewed strategy.

Gender equality must be protected and fully implemented as fundamental principle of our society. It is also essential if we want to promote sustainable development at global level. The EU will support a stand-alone gender equality goal and gender mainstreaming in other goals in the post-2015 agenda.

We should focus on the "unfinished business": overcoming inequalities in pay, and participation. We could also tackle the problem of a very high gender pension gap in the EU. Last but not least, shaping a comprehensive European approach to continue to fight against violence against women is, of course, on my list of priorities.

10. Gender mainstreaming

How do you envisage to include the gender perspective in your policy area and what would you do concretely in view of reinforcing the systematic implementation and monitoring of gender mainstreaming in the policies and programs of the EU, in legislative but also budgetary processes and at all levels and stages of decision making? How would you plan to cooperate with the other commissioners in order to reinforce gender mainstreaming in all policy areas?

As the Commissioner responsible for gender equality, I will spearhead efforts across the Commission. I want to obtain a clear commitment to gender mainstreaming from the Commission through a new specific strategy based on the dual approach: specific measures to promote equality between women and men on the one hand and gender mainstreaming on the other hand.

For the elaboration of this strategy, I intend to work closely with my fellow Commissioners to mainstream a gender perspective in at least one policy action, legislation or spending programme within their portfolio – in addition to already on-going gender equality activities.

I also commit to further deepening gender mainstreaming in all policy areas that fall under my specific responsibility, namely justice and consumer protection.

I will explore with Vice-President Timmermans how we can strengthen three very important gender mainstreaming tools: impact assessments, evaluations and gender budgeting. This is crucial at a time when on-going structural reforms in the EU Member States may have a different impact on women and men, on their lives and on their working patterns. In this respect, it will be important to work in cooperation with the Vice-President responsible for Social Dialogue. In addition, I will work with the Vice-President for Budget and Human Resources on how to implement the gender mainstreaming declaration in the Multiannual Financial Framework.

I am convinced that all these activities, taken together, will provide a comprehensive policy framework for gender mainstreaming in the Commission which will inspire Member States to advance their own gender mainstreaming.