

ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE

László TRÓCSÁNYI

Neighbourhood and Enlargement

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? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio?

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?

It is 30 years since I formally began my professional life including being a lawyer; university professor; ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, France; constitutional judge; substitute member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe; Minister of Justice and currently Member of the Honourable institution called the European Parliament. During all this time via all my private and public engagements, I have been in contact with the European institutions, and contributed to European integration and its various causes and projects.

All my commitment and engagements had nevertheless one common denominator: my wish and my way to advocate dialogue and team work within which individual achievement for the common good is welcome.

My personal main aim has always been the wish to do better, faster and deliver tangible results. That was my motivation as a Minister, a diplomat, a university professor and also as a liberal service provider. But motivation without goal is nothing. My goal is simple: deliver tangible results in the service of general interest. I sincerely believe this is the most important added value one can achieve in this field. While it sounds simple, it is tremendously complex: it cannot be achieved alone and without dialogue. Precisely this constitutes the foundation for my contribution as part of a team – a team within the European Commission but also with the Council and the European Parliament.

I was Minister of Justice in my country for just over five years. Every other month I participated in meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, where often difficult issues had to be discussed and equally difficult decisions taken. One of the major results was the new European framework related to data protection striking the right balance between public and general interest. I am particularly honoured that during my ministerial mandate the European Network on Victim's Rights created in 2015 could become a network with a structure hosted in Budapest on a continuous basis since 2018. This is a major achievement in this field, having been the fruit of a significant negotiating effort by Member States, the European Commission and my Ministry spearheading these efforts. That is precisely a concrete achievement in the interest of European citizens.

As a Member of the European Parliament, a substitute member of the AFET Committee within the European Parliament, I participate in its work and I will naturally do so in the future as Commissioner, it confirmed. During my ministerial mandate, I kept a very close relationship with the regions in the portfolio. As a Minister of Justice, I organised a ministerial level conference on 20 June 2019 on the issue of reinforcing judiciary cooperation between Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Ukraine, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and naturally Hungary with the participation of Commissioner Johannes Hahn. This conference concluded with the adoption of the Budapest Declaration. But my diplomatic past can also be mentioned in the context of a portfolio based to a large extent on a negotiating process and I am also very honoured - taking into account my academic background - to have been invited to intervene in the Universities of St Joseph in Beirut and Senghor in Alexandria.

It is precisely my academic background that explains my lack of affiliation to any political party. I have my vision, my values, my independence and I stick to them.

My legal background paves also the way with regard to my visions for the future. The letter of the Treaties has always been and will remain my guide: rights and obligations go hand in hand; small and big, wealthy and modest, men and women have to be treated equally.

Equality between women and men is indeed a fundamental European value enshrined in the EU Treaties. I am strongly committed to strengthen gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment in the neighborhood and enlargement regions, in line with the EU Gender Action Plan II Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020. Many neighboring countries face serious problems in this area, such as gender-based violence, exclusion from the labour market and from property rights to name just a few. I am committed to raising these issues in our policy dialogue and to strongly supporting gender equality through our financial assistance. I also want to strengthen gender equality within the European Commission, including in the services under my responsibility, and fully support the goal of the President-elect to ensure full equality at all levels of Commission management by the end of the mandate. I will work in close cooperation with Commissioner for Equality.

It goes without saying that I fully support our new commitment to strengthen the links between people, nations and institutions. I am also fully committed to the geopolitical nature of the new Commission. Openness, fairness but also sense of reality in the common interest in a world that became less stable and secure.

My obligation will be to comply with the highest ethical standards and the obligations set out in Articles 17.3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Articles 245 and 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. My declaration of interest is complete and accessible to the public and I will amend it should there ever be changes.

I will also always avoid any situation where my impartiality and independence could be put in question and will inform the President of the Commission of any situation, which might involve a conflict of interest.

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?

Role and co-operation with the European Parliament and its committees

If confirmed as Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, I will take full political responsibility for the activities in my area of competence, as set out in the Mission letter sent to me by the President-elect von der Leyen on 10 September. I attach great importance to the principle of collegiality and will collaborate constructively with all other Members of the College to ensure effective decision-making. I will closely involve my fellow Commissioners in the development and implementation of policy initiatives. In this 'geopolitical Commission', it will be even more important to establish an excellent working relation with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission.

Engagement with the European Parliament is of paramount importance to me. I will work with the Parliament and the relevant committees at all stages of both the policy-making process and the political dialogue.

Effective interinstitutional cooperation is essential for the EU's institutional system to work, and for the efficiency and legitimacy of EU decision-making. It relies on a number of guiding principles that I am fully committed to follow. These include openness, mutual trust, efficiency, and regular exchange of information. President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines and Mission Letters fully reflect these principles, and stress the intention to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will work towards this objective and in doing so I will fully respect the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and Commission and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. I will manage my interactions with Parliament in an open, transparent and constructive way, to build that relationship of mutual trust.

I will make sure that the European Parliament is briefed regularly and make myself available to take part in plenary sessions, relevant committee meetings and trilogue discussions. I will ensure that parliamentary committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility and are informed before major events and key negotiations. In the following months, for example, we will have to work closely for the finalisation of the future financing instruments (Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III). I am fully aware of the importance of equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council, and will respect their institutional roles. This is more than a requirement of the ordinary legislative procedure, but also a must for a Commissioner who, as a Member of the College, is accountable to directly elected Members of the European Parliament.

I will ensure a regular flow of information with the Chair of relevant parliamentary committees, and continue best practices established by my predecessors, namely exchanges with individual political groups and key Members of the European Parliament within working groups, such as the one on the Eastern Partnership.

In following up on Parliament's positions, I will also ensure the questions from Members of the European Parliament to the Commission that come under my responsibility are responded to swiftly and accurately. I will appear before the European Parliament's plenary, as well as before committees whenever called to answer a question or provide any particular response.

Transparency

President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines stress that in order to regain citizens' faith in the Union, our institutions should be open and beyond reproach on transparency issues. This requires that citizens know the positions defended in the legislative process, including those of the Commission. Strengthening interinstitutional cooperation by promoting legitimacy and accountability will boost the EU's efficiency and good governance.

I am therefore fully committed to implementing the wide-ranging provisions on transparency and the flow of information in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. In particular, I will ensure that these provisions are respected in my structured dialogues and other contacts with Parliament committees.

This Commission will also continue efforts to inform citizens on its role in the EU's institutional set-up. In addition, policy proposals under my responsibility will be based on proper consultations of experts and the public, in line with Better Regulation principles.

Follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives

President-elect von der Leyen supports a right of initiative for the European Parliament. She committed that her Commission will follow-up on Parliamentary resolutions adopted by a majority of its members with a legislative act, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. I fully subscribe to this objective.

As part of the next College's commitment to a deepened partnership with the European Parliament, I will work hand in hand with the Parliament at every stage in debating resolutions under Article 225 TFEU. I commit to work closely with the relevant parliamentary Committees, and be active and present during the preparation of Article 225 TFEU resolutions. I strongly believe that this will improve dialogue, foster confidence and a sense of working together towards a common goal.

The Commission will effectively respond to Parliament's resolutions within three months after their adoption, in accordance with the Framework Agreement. The Commission will ensure political oversight over the process.

Provision of information and documents

Further to my statement above about ensuring that parliamentary committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility, I am fully aware that the provision of information and documents is an essential aspect of deepening the partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission. I therefore commit to fully implement the relevant provisions of the Framework Agreement between the two institutions, and of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. The Lisbon Treaty sets out the equality of Parliament and Council as co-legislators, and I will ensure that this is respected in terms of how information is shared in areas under my responsibility.

Question 3

How do you intend to further improve inter-institutional dialogue and cooperation between the Commission and Parliament - notably the Committee on Foreign Affairs - building on the commitments and good practices of previous Commissioners, with particular regard to:

A better synchronisation of Commission and European Parliament's activities, for example through the systematic advance sharing of planned timelines of publications (strategies, communications), ministerial meetings and summits, proposals to open negotiations on international agreements, human rights dialogues;

Cooperation and information sharing with the Committee on Foreign Affairs, including in writing, as regards the negotiation of international agreements, notably through an immediate implementation of those parts of the text already pre-agreed in the framework of negotiations on Paragraph 40 of the inter-institutional agreement on Better Law-Making falling within the Commission's prerogatives;

The timely consultation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs EU foreign policy priorities and positions, notably ahead of the publication of new or updated EU communications, strategies and mandates, including the enlargement package;

The assessment in writing of how Parliament's views have been taken into account following the adoption of resolutions or the consultations referred to above;

The cooperation and coordination of democracy support activities, especially as the European Parliament has a proven record in the implementation of democracy support activities (particularly in the four key pillars of election observation, capacity-building for parliaments, mediation and dialogue, human rights actions), as recognised in the 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, which highlights the EP's mediation and dialogue initiatives.

In line with the Political Guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen, I confirm my full support to her intention to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the European Commission. I intend to work closely with the European Parliament implementing the provisions of the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission, and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making regarding transparency and the flow of information between the two institutions.

Synchronising our activities can reinforce the voice of the Union in external affairs. In that light, I would like to emphasise the importance of consultation in the policy-making process, including on foreign policy priorities. I believe that ensuring a good flow of information between the Commission and the European Parliament is of paramount importance.

I will work with the European Parliament in an open, transparent and constructive manner, and am willing to conduct a constructive political dialogue on any matters of my portfolio, including exchanges on the implementation of the financing instruments, in line with what will be decided in the legislative procedure for these instruments. I will also instruct my services to be at the European Parliament's disposal to debrief on any technical dialogues if deemed necessary.

In line with the specific commitments set out in the Framework Agreement and in the Interinstitutional Agreement, and in cooperation with the High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission, I will ensure cooperation and timely and full information sharing at all stages of the procedure with the responsible Committee as regards the negotiation of international agreements, and ensure that the European Parliament's views and recommendations are taken into consideration.

I am committed and at your disposal to exchange information, ensure timely consultation and have regular exchanges of view with the responsible Committee on strategies and annual reports, and to exchange information on other ongoing or planned initiatives and mandates. I will be available for an exchange of views with the Committee on the enlargement package directly after adoption by the

College and before presentation to the press. I intend to inform you, in writing, on my visits to the countries falling under my competence, and will engage with the AFET bureau, group coordinators and rapporteurs on Parliament's position and share information. I express my interest in the Parliament's inter-parliamentary meetings with national parliaments of partner countries, the engagement of which allows for a strengthened cooperation and mutual understanding.

I am committed to work hand in hand with the European Parliament in designing and debating resolutions and to respond to issues raised in resolutions, in order to identify the best way forward. The Commission will follow up on resolutions in accordance with the Framework Agreement and the commitment made by the President-elect in her Political Guidelines. The European Parliament's resolutions, and follow-up to our consultations, are taken into consideration in our reflection of engagement in the framework of our bilateral or multilateral relations with the partner countries.

I look forward to a close cooperation with the European Parliament on democracy support and I highly value the role the European Parliament can play in mediating and promoting dialogue in difficult circumstances. I am committed to working closely with the European Parliament in the follow up to Electoral Observation Missions' recommendations to maximise the EU impact of our combined efforts to support democracy and ensure stability in our immediate neighbourhood.

Question 4

How do you envisage the division of tasks and complementarity of roles with the High Representative/Vice President of the Commission on the enlargement and neighbourhood policies?

As Commissioner in charge of an external relations portfolio, I will work very closely with the High Representative/Vice-President as well as with other Commissioners.

The nature of the challenges the EU is facing in its neighbourhood require a coordinated response by the EU. Close cooperation with the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission is essential to ensure effective and coherent EU external action. It is this close cooperation and coordination that will support the capacity of the EU to reinforce its global role making it stronger, more coherent, more visible and more effective.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will build on the current working arrangements and work hand-in-hand with the High Representative /Vice-President of the Commission to ensure complementarity of our work, avoidance of overlap and effective coordination of EU's actions and strategies. These will require regular, fruitful and constructive cooperation, clear agreement on priorities as well as day-to-day cooperation and consultation. In view of enlargement negotiations in particular, I will also ensure close coordination between the different Commission services to best support the partner countries in their reform efforts and their alignment with the EU acquis.

Together with the High Representative /Vice-President of the Commission, I want to build on our strengths and learn from our weaknesses to ensure the maximum impact and influence of our policies. I will work as of the first day of my mandate to define a common vision on the important regions under my portfolio. This will guide my relations with the High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission throughout my mandate.

As indicated in the President-elect's Mission letter, I will represent the Commission in the Foreign Affairs Council.

Question 5

With regard to the future generation of external financing instruments (2021-2027), how do you intend to ensure improvements in the following areas:

Genuine role of the Parliament in the strategic steering of the instruments (NDICI, IPA III), including the use of delegated acts for the adoption of strategic programming decisions and Parliament's attendance of the Commission expert groups drafting delegated acts,

Governance, including a proposal to establish a horizontal steering group potentially led by the VP/HR in order to ensure the overall political coordination of all external financing instruments,

Preservation of a strong support for the neighbourhood, including in case the European Neighbourhood Instrument should be replaced by a single instrument for the external action of the EU (NDICI).

Effective interinstitutional cooperation is essential for the EU's institutional system to work, and for the efficiency and legitimacy of EU decision-making. President-elect von der Leyen's Mission letters fully reflect these principles, and stress the intention to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will work towards this objective.

I want to build a relationship of mutual trust by making myself available to take part in relevant committee meetings, by meeting the different political parties and Members of the European Parliament. I will ensure that the committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility and are informed before major events and key negotiations. And I want our financial assistance to stem from this frank, rich and timely political dialogue and interinstitutional cooperation.

We will have the opportunity to discuss during the trilogues on the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), different ideas to increase political steering while preserving the inter-institutional balance established by the Treaties. My main message and my key objective in that discussion will be to ensure that governance arrangements have to remain efficient, so that the financing instruments deliver on their objectives.

Our objective in European neighbourhood is to build true partnerships based on common values and shared objectives. Programming therefore has to be open to taking into account the context and the concerns of partner countries.

Our partnerships in the Neighbourhood is of paramount importance. The core of my mission will be to continue accelerating cooperation with the neighbourhood partners on the common challenges and opportunities ahead in order to foster stability, security and prosperity in and around Europe. This includes financial assistance but goes far beyond – it is first and foremost about dialogue and partnership.

The EU's Neighbourhood is marked by great diversity. That is why some of the key principles of the European Neighbourhood Policy are differentiation and ownership. I would add one more: flexibility. We have in both the Eastern and the Southern Neighbourhood, two of the most volatile and uncertain regions in the world but also regions of great opportunity and interest to the EU. We have a diverse group of countries. We will need to be prepared, in the course of this Commission's mandate, to respond to the evolving situation in Syria, to promote the EU's steadfast commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity, to support democratic transition in Algeria, to continue our privileged partnerships with Morocco or Tunisia as well as to support reforms for growth in Georgia.

In my view, to preserve the special relationship with our neighbouring countries we need an architecture that continues to serve our policy goals and priorities in the European neighbourhood but that enhances flexibility in order to address our priorities in a more timely, efficient and coherent manner. And I believe the new instrument, the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) is the best way to achieve this – it keeps all the specificities of our cooperation with the Neighbourhood. It proposes to increase and ring-fence an important amount of funding for the Neighbourhood, which can be increased from a sizeable flexibility cushion to address emerging needs. Moreover, it includes budgetary flexibilities that have proved their benefits in the Sub-Saharan Africa region currently covered by the European Development Fund.

Question 6

What will be your priorities in reforming the Neighbourhood policy, including introducing some further differentiation (political, financial etc.) on the basis of needs, merits and EU priorities as well as the implementation of the Human Rights conditionality?

It is in the interest of the European Union in terms of stability, resilience and prosperity to maintain a privileged relationship with all Neighbourhood countries based on our key priorities for cooperation in the areas of democracy, human rights and good governance, socio-economic development, security and migration.

Over the years, the European Neighbourhood Policy has been much more than just a framework to provide assistance. Our cooperation with Neighbourhood partners under a single policy framework has covered political, sectoral and financial aspects. We have a solid framework that has been instrumental in addressing EU's and partners' joint interests and common challenges, and for exercising genuine joint ownership.

I am committed to reaping the benefits of this framework, nurturing opportunities for cooperation and wherever possible supporting the transformational reforms that would strongly underpin our mutual interests. I will further embed the differentiation principle in the policy to ensure that it remains relevant to each of our partners, while, at the same time, securing EU's strategic interests. And I will make full use of the opportunities to bolster our bilateral and regional engagement under the next Multiannual Financial Framework through the proposed new financing instrument, which foresees further differentiation and flexibility in EU's support to partner countries while preserving the specificity of the EU Neighbourhood policy.

At the beginning of my mandate, I will use the opportunity to advance work on the revision and update of Partnership Priorities that we have with our partners, in particular those from the Southern Neighbourhood. I will endeavour to do so in line with the EU's interests and with a view to ensuring the full application of the principles of differentiation and flexibility. As regards the Eastern Neighbourhood, I will seek a deeper sectoral cooperation with our most advanced partners – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – working in the most flexible manner and based on an accelerated implementation of the Association Agreements and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas. As indicated in the President-elect's Mission letter, I will put forward a new set of long-term policy objectives for the Eastern Partnership by mid-2020 based on the ongoing structured consultation on the future of this partnership.

As we review the Partnership Priorities, it will be my priority to further anchor human rights and democracy elements in these political frameworks. At the same time, I would like to underline that promoting the EU's interest, as required in Article 21.2 of the Treaty on European Union, and partner countries' interest is not in conflict with the EU's values-based agenda. The EU has worked to develop true partnerships of equals based on shared interests, while continuing to promote the uni-

versal principles of democracy and human rights through political dialogue. The EU's own stability is built on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These principles and promotion of reforms in these fields feature as an integral part of all bilateral political partnerships.

The Commission regularly assesses the commitment and record of partner countries in this area and can take a gradual approach to non-compliant countries, ranging from temporary “freezing” of budget support disbursements, to the application of human rights suspensive clauses in EU’s financing agreements. While a suspension of EU support is seen as a last resort solution, it is not inconceivable, as illustrated by the suspension of financial assistance to Syrian authorities in 2011, or more recently the suspension of budget support operations in Moldova and Azerbaijan.

However, while applying strict conditionality and appropriate measures is key, I will pay particular attention to those mechanisms that put an emphasis on positive developments in the partner countries. In this regard, I welcome the Commission proposal to preserve the incentive-based approach in the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument to reward those EU neighbours who make progress in democracy, human rights, rule of law, cooperation on migration, economic governance and reforms. Taking a rights-based approach and promoting gender mainstreaming will be at the heart of my action. In this sense, I will use the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme and our support to the European Endowment for Democracy as main tools to ensure that the new instrument will contribute more to the anchoring of human rights, supporting human rights defenders, vulnerable groups and the persons most at risk and other minorities, and ensuring media freedom and the freedom of expression.

Question 7

Which priority initiatives do you intend to take vis-à-vis Member States to ensure that a credible enlargement perspective is possible and can advance in compliance with the Treaties, the Copenhagen criteria and the negotiating framework? Are you prepared to review the methodology of collecting data for progress reports and to envisage a different structure, which would better allow comparing countries across sectors and policies?

More specifically, which concrete steps would you take should an enlargement country take measures or adopt policies that are not in line or compatible with the acquis, values and principles of the EU, notably as regards democracy, the rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary, and the fight against corruption?

In this regard, which initiatives could be envisaged to reinvigorate the accession process and push for fundamental reforms in the accession countries, especially in areas of the judiciary, the rule of law and media freedom? Which initiatives could be envisaged, where relevant, to enhance political dialogue between the opposition and the ruling parties in accession countries? Which policy instruments could be used in order to support and enhance the functioning of national Parliaments in accession countries with a view to strengthening their role in the accession process?

How will you ensure that your past actions and work as a member of the Hungarian Government will not affect your work as Commissioner responsible for Enlargement and Neighbourhood?

Member States have repeatedly underlined at the highest level their commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkans. Based on the Treaties and the Copenhagen criteria, the conditions for becoming a Member State of the European Union are clear. So too is the enlargement process and the expectations of aspiring countries throughout, with consensus among Member States that this process is based on strict and fair conditionality and the principle of own merits.

In 2018, the Commission adopted the strategy 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans', outlining that for this perspective to be concrete, it requires sustained efforts and irreversible reforms. With progress along the European path being an objective and merit-based process, which depends on the concrete results achieved by each individual country, it is important that we as the EU give credit where credit is due. During my mandate, I will work hard, together with the Member States, to make sure this happens. It is important to acknowledge that there are countries, as is the case with Albania and North Macedonia, which have made impressive progress on difficult reforms and are meeting the conditions set for the opening of negotiations. Opening accession negotiations with these countries should give a boost to the reform momentum elsewhere in the region and inject new confidence in the enlargement perspective. In regards to Turkey, the General Affairs Council concluded on 18 June 2019 that "Turkey's accession negotiations have [...] effectively come to a standstill and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing".

The Commission already has a strong basis for its assessments in the annual reports. The reporting methodology ensures that in addition to reporting on progress, emphasis is put on the actual state of play or level of preparedness for membership. Reporting is harmonised, with a clear assessment scale allowing each country to see clearly where they stand in key areas. This increases the transparency of the process making it easier for citizens and civil society to scrutinise reforms, and has been welcomed by Member States and the European Parliament alike.

In terms of identifying and addressing breaches of core values, the enlargement package makes a factual and fair assessment of progress or lack of it and provides concrete recommendations to remedy shortcomings. The Commission is monitoring the follow-up to these recommendations through well-established instruments such as Justice and Home Affairs Committee meetings under the Stabilisation and Association Agreements or peer-review missions. For countries negotiating accession, safeguard provisions - the so called imbalance clause - of the negotiating frameworks offer us the possibility to stop further work on other negotiating chapters should progress under the rule of law chapters (chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights and chapter 24 on justice, freedom and security) lag significantly behind progress in the negotiations overall. Should such a situation arise, I would not hesitate to take the decision to stop technical work on negotiations in other chapters, including withholding the recommendation to open and/or close other chapters, until this disequilibrium is resolved.

Of course, there remains also the possibility to suspend negotiations in case of serious and persistent breaches of principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

I am also committed to ensuring we use our significant financial support as a tool to incentivise results, and where needed, sanction a lack of reforms or re-orient funds, for example to civil society. In the future Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance III Regulation, the Commission proposal offers more explicitly the possibility to adapt the scope and the intensity of financial assistance based on performance and the commitment of our partners on areas of key importance. This will allow us to avoid compromising further support for improving fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law, including support to civil society and close cooperation with local authorities.

The effective functioning of national Parliaments is an essential element of the political criteria that all candidate countries must satisfy to become an EU Member State.

Considering the complexity of reform processes required for countries to meet EU membership requirements, it is of the utmost importance that national Parliaments are accountable, effective, transparent and accessible to their constituents. I am committed to continue supporting the role of

national Parliaments in accession negotiations and to support the strengthening of their capacities and hope to be able to count also on the valuable expertise of the European Parliament in this domain.

Consequently, the accession process today is more rigorous and comprehensive than in the past. However, success in anchoring rule of law and democratic values ultimately depends on the political will and on overcoming institutional resistance in beneficiary countries. Where fundamental values on which the EU is built and which are central to the accession process are breached, I will not hesitate to use all instruments available in our toolbox to incentivise the respect of such values and to try to remedy any shortcomings.

Finally, as for my personal ministerial experience of over five years, I would like to stress that it is neither unusual, nor unique that a Commissioner-designate served in the past in a Government in quality of minister. It is actually an add-on taking into account the similarities of the functions of a Minister and a Commissioner. In terms of workload, teamwork, collegiality, accountability or negotiation process, the functions are alike.

As already stated and committed in case of confirmation I commit to fully observe the rules related to the functioning of the European Commission and in particular, the ones related to Commissioners. I will act in the general interest of the European Union in line with Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union. In my functions as Commissioner I will act independently; I will not seek nor take instructions from any Government or other institution, body, office or entity in line with Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union. Furthermore, I commit also to fully observe the obligations set out in Articles 245 and 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of European Union and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners.