

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND  
HOME AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

ASSOCIATED COMMITTEE:  
COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS

INVITED COMMITTEES:  
COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION

## **HEARING OF VĚRA JOUROVÁ**

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE

(Values and Transparency)

MONDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2019

BRUSSELS



1-002-0000

**IN THE CHAIR:****JUAN FERNANDO LÓPEZ AGUILAR***Chair of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs***ANTONIO TAJANI***Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs**(The hearing opened at 14.37)*

**Juan Fernando López Aguilar**, *Chair LIBE*. – Good afternoon colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, first of all welcome to this joint hearing by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO). We also have Members here from the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI), as an associated committee; Members of the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) and the Committee on Petitions (PETI) are also invited to attend this hearing. We are most pleased to warmly welcome our Commissioner-designate and Vice-President-designate Věra Jourová. Thank you for being here.

The name of the Commissioner-designate's portfolio is Values and Transparency, and according to Annex VII of our Rules of Procedure containing the guidelines for the approval of the Commission, Parliament shall first evaluate the Vice-President-designate – in this particular case – on her general competence, European commitment and personal independence, as well as assessing her knowledge of the portfolio and her communication skills.

So let's recall that the JURI Committee, after examining the declaration of interest of Vice-President-designate Věra Jourová raised no objection to holding this hearing, and we all know that is of the essence. And the debate we're about to have is structured as usual as follows.

The Vice-President-designate will take the floor to present her case by means of an oral statement lasting no longer than 15 minutes. After that we will have a maximum of 25 questions from Members. It will be the usual round of representatives of every political group of this House. Then other Members on the speakers' list will be able to take the floor and ask their questions up to a maximum of 25. Each one of the questions will have the same structure: a one-minute first-shot question, then a two-minute first answer; then a one-minute follow-up or complementary question or remarks, and then the final reply to every block up to a maximum of 25 by the Vice-President-designate. We will be getting started with representatives of political groups, namely coordinators or Members who are entitled to represent their groups in the first round.

Interpretation will be provided in 23 official languages. Please be aware that this is a hearing co-chaired by the two committees involved, LIBE and AFCO. That means Mr Tajani and myself will be handling this hearing all the way, and we are both compelled to be strict as to the timing, because there is a scheduled timing for the room, for the interpreters, and in order to respect each other please try to keep to the timing in your precise questions and replies, Mr Tajani and I do not have to interrupt you. Thank you for your understanding.

Just a remark on LIBE's involvement and on the importance of this hearing of Ms Jourová. She's familiar to us. She has been here for the past five years. She already has experience as a Member of the College of Commissioners in charge of the portfolio of justice and consumer

protection. Now she is to present her case on Values and Transparency, including guidance as Vice-President of the Commission and Coordination with Commissioners-designate. We have already heard Didier Reynders for Justice and Helena Dalli for Equality. Ms Jourová's portfolio covers areas of the utmost importance for the LIBE Committee, namely coordinating the Commission's work on upholding nothing less than the rule of law, including the implementation of the new, comprehensive rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights mechanism. There is also the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, and enforcement of the Charter of Fundamental Rights which is binding law – it came into force with the Lisbon Treaty itself 10 years ago. The issues of countering disinformation and fake information, fake news, as well as preserving freedom of expression, freedom of the press and media pluralism, are also component elements of the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights agenda, which are very close to the hearts and minds of the Members and of the work of the LIBE Committee, amongst many others. So we'll be listening carefully to the explanations that are to be made by Vice-President-designate Jourová in these key fields for the LIBE Committee.

I now pass the floor to Mr Tajani, the AFCO Co-chair for this meeting, for his opening remarks.

1-004-0000

**Antonio Tajani (PPE)**, *presidente della commissione AFCO*. – Saluto la vicepresidente Jourová e ricordo che il suo curriculum vitae e le sue risposte alle domande scritte sono stati distribuiti a tutti i deputati e pubblicati sul sito del Parlamento. Ricordo che la durata dell'audizione sarà di tre ore.

Saluto anche con favore il fatto che, tra l'altro, il portafoglio della vicepresidente include un ruolo di mediazione nelle discussioni tra il Parlamento europeo e il Consiglio in relazione al potenziamento del sistema degli *Spitzenkandidaten* e alla questione delle liste transnazionali, e che ciò sarà uno dei suoi primi compiti se sarà confermata vicepresidente. La vicepresidente designata avrà il compito di rappresentare la Commissione europea nella conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa proprio su queste questioni. Dovrà anche eseguire il compito di sostenere il Parlamento nelle modifiche della legge elettorale e assicurare anche un accordo con il Consiglio. Io auspico che la vicepresidente designata appoggi le ambizioni del Parlamento in materia per rafforzare la dimensione transnazionale delle elezioni europee e di conseguenza la legittimazione democratica dei processi decisionali dell'Unione.

Saluto anche con favore il fatto che le responsabilità della signora Jourová includono anche il miglioramento del funzionamento dell'iniziativa dei cittadini europei e confido che la vicepresidente designata lavorerà per un rafforzamento significativo della partecipazione dei cittadini ai processi decisionali della nostra Unione. Nelle risposte scritte ha indicato di volere avanzare in dossier particolarmente importanti per il Parlamento e per la nostra commissione, come la ratifica della legge elettorale da parte degli Stati membri, il Mediatore europeo e il registro di trasparenza comune. Io mi auguro che la signora sia un nostro alleato importante nei prossimi cinque anni.

Come ha ricordato il presidente López Aguilar – e permettetemi di sottolinearlo come giornalista –, uno dei temi che dovrà affrontare è proprio quello della libertà dei media. Il 16 ottobre sarà l'anniversario dell'omicidio di Daphne Caruana Galizia a Malta. Io voglio ricordare oggi Daphne Caruana Galizia, Jan Kuciak, Antonio Megalizzi e Barto Pedro Orent-Niedzielski. Con loro ricordiamo tutti i giornalisti che sono stati vittime per la loro lotta per la verità. E vorremmo che la verità sull'assassinio di Daphne Caruana Galizia come su quello di Jan Kuciak emerga quanto prima.

Come possiamo noi, signora vicepresidente, cari amici, chiedere alla Russia di garantire la libertà di informazione e di rispettare i giornalisti, come possiamo chiedere alla Turchia di garantire la libertà dei giornali e dei giornalisti, cose sacrosante che noi facciamo e dobbiamo fare in tutto il mondo, se poi non siamo noi i primi a tutelare i diritti dei giornalisti?

Do subito la parola alla vicepresidente designata Věra Jourová. Ha tempo per 15 minuti.

1-005-0000

**Věra Jourová**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Chairs, honourable Members, I am grateful to have the opportunity to be here again for a hearing and to ask for your trust. I have been a frequent visitor to this House in the last five years and I am glad to see so many familiar faces. I am looking forward to working with all of you in the coming years.

My role in the next Commission – if confirmed by you – will be to deal with critical and sensitive issues. This portfolio is about what I would call Europe's soul. This portfolio is about the European people. As the President-elect stated, this portfolio is a response to the challenges Europe is facing, be they internal or external.

My goals will be: to make Europe more democratic and transparent; to make Europe more resilient against new threats, including digital ones; and to make Europe more capable of defending the values we cherish, including the rule of law and media freedom. As Timothy Snyder wrote: 'The Constitution is worth saving, the rule of law is worth saving, democracy is worth saving, but these things can and will be lost if everyone waits around for someone else.'

This portfolio is a testimony that the new Commission will not wait. And I know I will be able to count on the European Parliament as a trusted ally. I would also like to make Europe stronger and more united by building bridges between different parts of our Union. This year, in the Czech Republic, as in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the end of totalitarianism. Today's European Union is built on the ruins of the Berlin wall, on the spirit of the Solidarity movement in Poland, on the Baltic Way, and the Velvet Revolution in former Czechoslovakia.

And I have a vivid recollection of those days, I remember them very well. We wanted change, we wanted to join the European Community, not in search of material goods, but in search of its freedoms.

European values are our common foundation. They bind us together, from North to South, from East to West. They overcome our differences of language, of culture, of traditions. This is why upholding our values, our fundamental rights, our rule of law, must be our key objective. And it should be a driver of European unity, rather than a source of division. This is the spirit I would like to uphold in the next Commission.

Now let me outline my three priorities. Firstly, we need to improve the way European democracy works, including the way we appoint and select EU leaders. This year saw increased turnout in the European elections. This is an opportunity and also a responsibility. We must not disappoint the hopes of our citizens.

As the President-elect has stated, one lesson is that we need to improve the lead candidate system, including by addressing the issue of transnational lists. I will use my role as Chair of the Commissioners' Group on a New Push for European Democracy to ensure that the Commission makes a strong contribution to the work on the Conference on the Future of Europe on these issues and acts as an honest broker between the institutions.

To be credible and fully accountable in the eyes of our citizens, I believe we in the EU institutions must set an example. This means ensuring that our legislative process is well understood and free from any hidden interest. This is why we should work towards a common transparency register and an independent ethics body common to all EU institutions, as set out in the Political Guidelines. This would be a powerful symbol of our determination to build together on the European political culture by respecting the highest moral standards.

My second pillar of work will be based on values, including the rule of law and media freedoms. The rule of law is the basis of European solidarity and mutual trust. It is essential for the functioning of EU law and the single market. And one thing is certain – we cannot take the rule of law for granted. This is why we need to build a rule-of-law culture based on mutual respect. We should prioritise dialogue and prevent crisis situations from happening, but equally, we have to address problems where they exist. I will be principled and act with determination, if needed, using all the available tools.

As you all know, Frans Timmermans has worked tirelessly on this topic, and I see my role in continuing this work in the next Commission. If confirmed, I will join forces with the Justice Commissioner to further strengthen the toolbox to deliver on the rule of law, notably with the annual rule-of-law review cycle. This also echoes a call from this House for a mechanism that looks at the situation in all the Member States. I count on the European Parliament to join these forces and join these efforts to ensure that the rule of law is upheld with full determination and fairness.

Digitalisation has brought many benefits and can strengthen democracy, but it has also exposed it to new threats and amplified old ones, including external intervention and the spread of disinformation. And this is not a trivial matter, it is a real threat. The recent Oxford study on the ‘Global Disinformation Order’ found ‘evidence of organized social media manipulation campaigns’ in 70 countries, up from 48 countries in 2018. Around the world, governmental and non-state actors increasingly use social media to undermine trust in democracy. They increasingly use political bots to amplify hate speech, harvest data illegally and deploy armies of trolls. All of this contributes to increased polarisation of our societies. And this might in turn even lead to violence as physical attacks on politicians, journalists or members of minorities take place also in Europe. We cannot be naïve; enemies of democracy have already weaponised the digital sphere. We must increase our ability to resist and to react.

Václav Havel captured the democratic challenges well when he wrote in the pre-Internet era: ‘The natural disadvantage of democracy is that it is extremely tiring to those who mean it honestly, while it allows almost everything to those who do not take it seriously.’ And if I may add something today, I would also include ‘to those who want to abuse it’. Indeed, defending democracy and freedoms is not an easy exercise and our work is not finished.

I am determined to consolidate our response to this threat while fully respecting the freedom of speech. We are not starting from scratch on this, and I pay tribute to all colleagues in this Commission who worked on this with me in 2018, in particular High Representative / Vice-President Mogherini, Vice-President Ansip and Commissioner Gabriel. We have taken the relevant first steps. But they remain first steps.

If confirmed I will design the European Democracy Action Plan, which President-elect von der Leyen has entrusted to me, as a vehicle for a new push in addressing the issue effectively so that our democracy is more resilient. This requires putting in place a smart regulatory framework, as well as coherent and interconnected structures. I will work on solutions to bring more transparency on paid political advertising and more clarity on financing European political parties. I will also assess carefully whether platforms have fulfilled the obligations they accepted under the Code of Practice on Disinformation.

But we need more if we really want to address disinformation and manipulation. We need capacities and research to detect the threats as they emerge, including at Member State level. We need to empower society to better understand the scale of the danger, and help people protect themselves by raising awareness and improving education, especially in digital literacy.

So, to effectively counter disinformation and to build resilience, we must have a comprehensive approach, involving governments, political parties, platforms, journalists, researchers, educators and civil society. And in developing this important policy, I will want to stay in close dialogue with you and will very much appreciate your input.

Another key area of my focus will be media freedom and pluralism. Here I think we definitely must do more. We should continue to use our funding for independent projects monitoring media pluralism, map violations to media freedom, and support journalists whose safety is under threat. I will use all the political and legal tools I have to follow up on ideas like the Report of the High-Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism.

The third pillar of my tasks is fundamental rights. Fundamental rights are key to what makes Europe the place we love to live in: inclusion for all, equality for all, security for all, a human-centric digital transformation. I am very conscious of the need to defend people and their fundamental rights every hour, every day and every time they are under threat. We will not leave anyone behind.

I will pursue the work I started under the current Commission to promote the Charter of Fundamental Rights. We will soon celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Charter. I will use the moment to review our strategy. My position as Vice-President – if confirmed – brings a horizontal responsibility, and I want to promote fundamental rights in everything we do. I want to see fundamental rights in the design of the Commission's policy-making; be it on artificial intelligence, be it on digital transition or equality policies.

I want to underline one thing: fundamental rights are not an obstacle to innovation. On the contrary, they help us to ensure that our solutions put people first, and will be more sustainable as a result. I see this, for instance, as an important aspect of what we will do next on our strategy on artificial intelligence. This approach, I am convinced, will put us in a strong position as global standard-setters, just as we have done with the General Data Protection Regulation. Finally, I want to ensure that the EU accedes to the European Convention on Human Rights: this will be a strong sign of our commitment to fundamental rights.

I believe Europe can only be strong and project its values internationally if we are united. We need a better and more self-confident Europe to stand up for our citizens and defend them from global threats. To achieve this we need to work better together.

All of these areas will rely heavily on a special relationship between the Commission and the European Parliament. We will only achieve results with strong interinstitutional cooperation. I will always be ready to engage with Parliament, and your committees in particular, at all stages of our policy-making process and political dialogue in the spirit of loyalty, trust and full transparency. Thank you for your attention.

*(Applause)*

1-006-0000

**Roberta Metsola (PPE).** – Thank you, Vice-President-designate for your comprehensive introduction, and for your commitment as a Commissioner over the past five years. Now, you

have been entrusted with a portfolio that is a fundamental pillar of the European Project, and we know that if we allow the rule of law to be threatened anywhere then it risks collapsing everywhere. We have long called in this Parliament for a proper system of checks that allows for a mechanism to effectively review practices in every Member State. Will you commit concretely to having such a mechanism? Related to this is, of course, media freedom, as mentioned by President Tajani in his introduction. In recent years, we have seen Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak assassinated. Concretely, what can you do to ensure that journalists are protected not only from murder in the worst cases, but from constant harassment and vexatious lawsuits? Is it time for an EU-wide anti-SLAPP law?

1-007-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I will try to be as concrete as possible, but that may be a little bit personal at the beginning.

You mentioned the murders of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak. I met the family of Daphne in Malta. I met her mother, her father. I met her son. And I gave a promise to her mother that I will watch very closely how the investigation of the matter will be going on, because the family, the mother is waiting for justice. And I made a promise to her son that I will do my best to better protect journalists in Europe because he himself is a journalist.

And these promises, believe me, are very strong commitments. I am quite happy, if confirmed for this position, to be able to do more to keep the promises and to better guarantee that there will be no murdered journalists in Europe.

On the rule of law and media freedom, these are two connected matters. The rule of law is the principle without which Europe would not function. As we all know, the European Union is, if I may say it like this, the ever-developing compromise of continental scope, based on hundreds of agreements. And we are good at making compromises, but we also have to be good in keeping something where we don't want to make compromises because we know it would be too dangerous. And it is the rule of law, it is the freedom guaranteed for all, it is equality before the law.

This is how I take the rule of law principle, which we have to protect better. The lessons learned from this mandate showed us that we took it for granted, and that it requires more care, it requires continuous attention and continuous dialogue with the Member States. Because if the rule of law fails in one or two Member States in the EU, then the whole judicial area and the whole rule of law area will be finished.

I will probably come back to the rule of law in other questions, but on SLAPP laws – suing journalists for defamation – this is a shameful story. I will be mapping all the possible situations of the abuse of litigation against journalists. I will look into the possibility of coming forward with some proposals in international private law, and we will be considering some legal aid or some funding for the journalists who suffer from such abuse of law – just a short answer.

1-008-0000

**Roberta Metsola (PPE).** – Something that Daphne Caruana Galizia had investigated before she was assassinated were the cash-for-passports schemes, and we know that these schemes have no genuine link with Member States or with Europe, so much so that this is their main selling point. And we know only too well the security gaps, the corruption, the money laundering and electoral manipulations that they create.

The monetarisation of the rights enjoyed by EU citizens should not be what Europe is about, and our way should not be about giving open-door access to those who can afford the cash



price set by the odd prime minister, more so when they leave the poor and vulnerable out in the cold. Would you agree with me that it is time to ban these schemes?

1-009-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I agree. This is the time to ban the schemes but, unfortunately, the European Union cannot do this because we don't have the legal competence to take such a step. What we can do, and we did already under my competence: we came up with the proposal on how to make the system, if the Member States want to keep them, more transparent and to give the Member States more control over the process.

In principle, we said three things. There must be a clearly proven genuine link. It cannot be the case that somebody who has the money can buy one country's citizenship because this is also buying citizenship for the whole of Europe. The countries are selling something which they don't own fully.

The second thing: there must be much better due diligence control in these cases. We need to understand who the people are who want to buy citizenship and what their intentions are, that it's not dirty money and so on. We have the mechanisms.

The third thing is we established the working group, which would enable the Member States to have what's happening in this assessment much better under control.

1-010-0000

**Gabriele Bischoff (S&D).** – Frau Jourová! In Ihrem *mission letter* steht ja, dass Sie eine ganz besondere Aufgabe haben werden, weil Sie als Vermittlerin agieren sollen zwischen dem Parlament und dem Rat, gerade in Bezug auf das Spitzenkandidaten-Prinzip und die transnationalen Listen. Ich glaube, jeder hier im Raum weiß, was das für eine Herkulesaufgabe sein wird, um hier tatsächlich voranzukommen. Jetzt hatte ich gehofft, dass in Ihren schriftlichen Antworten nochmal ein bisschen konkreter ausgeführt wird, mit welchem Selbstverständnis und mit welchen Zielen Sie das angehen wollen. Da steht aber nur, dass Sie die Erfahrungen auswerten wollen. Deshalb würde ich gerne von Ihnen ein bisschen konkreter wissen, wie Sie Ihr Selbstverständnis als Vermittlerin sehen, ob Sie auch schon Ideen haben, wie Sie das angehen wollen.

Und Sie haben darauf hingewiesen, dass Sie einen großen Beitrag als Kommission diesbezüglich auch bei der Konferenz zur Zukunft Europas leisten wollen. Deshalb wäre es schön, wenn Sie das hier ein bisschen konkreter ausführen könnten, damit wir eine Vorstellung davon bekommen, wie Sie diese Profi-Vermittlerrolle einnehmen werden.

1-011-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Ms Bischoff, for your questions. There is indeed a lot of meat on these bones anyway. The task I was given by the President-elect was something like 'try again and better', because there were failures in the past. There were attempts. The first seriously considered idea of lead candidates and transnational lists dates back to 1999.

Given the lack of time, I will not go into the history. You are asking about the future. What I will do in this role is to set up the group under the Conference on the Future of Europe, where we will look back on the initiatives and compare different options for the system of lead candidates and transnational lists. I will seek a mechanism that will fulfil the necessary criteria of voting arithmetic, so that no country is somehow placed at a disadvantage or in a position that would break the balance in the election system.

I will also look at the feasibility and workability of the system of transnational lists. We have to look at the pluses and minuses. To be specific, one of the pluses is that the transnational list

might bring a more European perspective or dimension into the pre-election campaign. This means that the campaigns would not focus purely on national topics. This is about Europe, and this might be the way forward.

One of the minuses would be that, after the elections, the candidates who are elected should be in intensive contact with their constituency, which would be the whole of Europe or part of it. This is therefore a very important aspect. The same applies for the lead candidate system. We have to look into how the system is working now and seek out the option that will improve the situation in the sense of increasing the democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament and of the Commission.

The lead candidate should be the candidate for the President of the Commission. I will do my best. First of all, there will be the expert debate, and later the political debate. According to a realistic timetable, I would count on coming back in the summer of 2020 with the first proposals.

1-012-0000

**Gabriele Bischoff (S&D).** – Do you have a favourite model? You talked about different models for the *Spitzenkandidaten-Prinzip*.

And will you also go to improve the interinstitutional agreement in relation to the two issues?

1-013-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I promise I will keep the time I think my answers will be shorter and shorter. I will start now, because the questions were very clear.

I don't have a favourite model yet. I really want to hear the experts and compare the options and pluses and minuses, and my colleagues, the people who work with me, know that I am result-oriented. I want the result to be brilliant because this is a very important step forward for Europe, if we come up with some option to be very well fine-tuned to the needs of European voters. So sorry, on this I will not be concrete.

On interinstitutional agreements, I think it may not fall under this, but I have to look at the possibility and of course discuss with Maroš Šefčovič, who is already confirmed Vice-President, for interinstitutional relations.

1-014-0000

**Anna Júlia Donáth (Renew).** – Commissioner-designate, currently the governments of Hungary and Poland are both subject to an Article 7 procedure, but with very little result. Corruption and the undermining of European values continue.

What action will you take to ensure that the Polish and Hungarian governments respect the same rules as everyone else, and that the rights of Hungarian and Polish citizens are protected?

Do you intend to follow up on the Article 7 decision taken by Parliament over a year ago?

Would you agree that the current approach of the Commission is ineffective? Do you agree that this gives the green light to other would-be autocrats within the EU, and in the accession countries?

Do you agree that the Commission is serving the citizens of Europe and not the governments?

1-015-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – First of all, on the rule of law in general, the Commission is the guardian of the Treaty: we have to watch the situation in all the Member

States, and where we identify a systemic breach we have to act on it. This was the case with Poland.

We have also joined the debate on Article 7 in the Council in relation to your country, Hungary, and I don't agree that this is pointless. An Article 7 procedure is something I never imagined would ever be triggered, but we have it here, and there is a very important debate ongoing in the Council. The countries have to have a say on how they themselves see the rule-of-law principle: how it should be upheld in practice in the Member States. This is ongoing.

But this is not the only process. As the Commission, we are using all the tools we have, including infringement procedures. There are several such procedures now in progress on Hungary, and some of them – if we cannot reach a good conclusion with Hungary – might end up in the Court. In fact, they are being directed now to the Court, and that's the crucial moment.

Also, with regard to Poland, and of course all the countries, the European Court of Justice is the supreme authority to interpret European law, and when we have European Court of Justice rulings we are much safer in convincing Member States that they need to respect the laws. And they have been respecting the decisions of the European Court of Justice up to now.

I hope this will work. This is the stable pillar. We will continue the discussion under Article 7 procedure, but of course we will continue the infringement procedures. We have proposed rule-of-law conditionality for the new budget. This is a new element, which we want to use in a fair and transparent way, but something should be done on the budget because European taxpayers are waiting for us to protect their money better.

There is a series of things which we can do and are doing. I believe we can achieve progress and, with reference again to the European Court of Justice, this is a very important moment. So I'm sure that, by using all the tools we have in a fair way, we can achieve progress.

1-016-0000

**Anna Júlia Donáth (Renew).** – In your written answers you state, and I fully agree, that the rule of law is inseparable from democracy and fundamental rights, yet during his hearing Mr Reynders confirmed that the annual review cycle would focus mostly on judicial independence, fighting corruption, as well as, to a certain extent, democracy and the media. On this matter I have two short questions: can you guarantee that the annual report will cover the full scope of Article 2, so that, for example, rights of the independent NGOs and academic freedom will be included? Yes or no? And a second one, can you confirm that the annual report will include country-specific recommendations as proposed by Parliament?

1-017-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – This could also require a longer answer, but I will be short. On the new mechanism which we proposed, based on what the Parliament proposed in 2016, there are very important elements and parts taken from this proposal. We will cover the constitutional balance, the balance of powers, as the principle which is very clearly placed under the rule of law. The second will be the independence of the judicial system, the third will be corruption and the fourth will be media freedom and pluralism. So there will be four elements.

There will be another stream of work where we expect Parliament to cooperate with us very closely, and it will be the update of the strategy on fundamental rights, so it will be a parallel process, and there will be other action planned for democracy where we will go more into detail with media pluralism, with disinformation and protection of elections. So I see three

streams of work where we count on a very active and intensive cooperation and engagement of the European Parliament.

1-018-0000

**Terry Reintke (Verts/ALE).** – As has been pointed out, the struggle for the rule of law in the European Union is on and, I mean, no pressure, but half a billion citizens in Europe are counting on you to defend Article 2, so let's see how this will go in the next five years.

My colleagues have already pointed this out – it is not only the judiciary that's under attack, but also civil society and fundamental rights in the European Union, and I believe that we may fall into a trap in this process that we are in right now. On the one hand, to have procedure on the rule of law review, where maybe we get a lot of interesting information, but without really having tangible consequences for the Member States and, on the other hand, having Article 7, but this process can be easily blocked in the Council if one Member State disagrees. So how will you make sure that these procedures are linked in an instrument or financial sanctioning in the budget in case of breaches of the rule of law? And how will you make sure that this will actually have tangible consequences for the Member States affected by this?

1-019-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I don't want to speak about financial sanctions, because what we proposed as a link or conditionality of the new European budget and the rule of law was more the system of monitoring where we want to be absolutely sure at every moment that the elementary steps against the possible abuse of EU money will be taken at Member State level. We look at the independence of the judiciary, we look at procurement procedures, we will look at some other necessary elements of the system. We are not going to sanction.

We will use the mechanism which is foreseen in the proposal, which is under the package of the Financial Regulation which will be triggered, in the case of very complicated situation, where we will really see the lack of control over the money, or abuse of the money, and we will trigger the mechanism in the way which will not punish the mayors, the NGOs, those beneficiaries of the system, because this is not the purpose of it. But we want the governments to have a less easy life when this will happen, and I am glad that the Finnish Presidency announces that there is more and more support for this conditionality in the negotiations of the new budget because I believe that this could be a useful tool.

1-020-0000

**Terry Reintke (Verts/ALE).** – My colleague mentioned the ongoing procedures against Hungary and Poland under Article 7, and you know that there is currently a political attempt to push Parliament out of this process. Are you going to be our ally to have Parliament with a strong role in these procedures? Because we are the directly elected representatives of the citizens.

My second question, if I may: you said when you were asked about what view you take of your role in the upcoming five years that you are not going to be a second Frans Timmermans and that you are going to find your own style, and I think everybody in this committee is very interested in how this will style be and how it will differ from Frans Timmermans. I must say that I was very happy that Frans Timmermans took a very proactive stance defending the rule of law, and it might be interesting to see how you are going to differentiate your style from him.

1-021-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I cannot imagine how the European Parliament could be exempted from the procedure on Article 7 when Parliament was the one which triggered the Article 7 process, so I say this this way.

On whether I am the second Timmermans, this is the question which I already trained the answer for many times, because the journalists keep asking me, ‘Will you be more Timmermans or less Timmermans?’ I will not be Timmermans. I think it’s quite clear when two people do the same thing that it’s never the same thing. I must say one clear thing: I admire what Frans Timmermans did and what he achieved, and it was not easy. To defend the rule of law and fundamental rights or freedoms, surprisingly, it’s not a popular job to do, but he did a great job, and I will continue. I will mobilise all my knowledge, experience – also experience from the region where we have the problems – maybe my ability to lead the dialogue. But I will be firm on the principle. This is clear. And I find this one of the most important matters to be fixed in Europe and I’m happy to be entrusted to work on it together with my colleague Didier Reynders.

1-022-0000

**Antonio Maria Rinaldi (ID).** – C’è un cambio, Rinaldi, per questioni di aereo. Grazie onorevole presidente Tajani e onorevole Vicepresidente designata Jourová. Tra i suoi compiti ci sarà quello di difendere il pluralismo mediatico, pilastro del sistema democratico europeo. Ad esempio, in Italia, mentre 5 milioni di persone hanno accesso all’informazione tramite i quotidiani cartacei, un pubblico di ben cinque volte superiore, ovvero 24 milioni di persone, si informa tramite i *social network*. Che tipo di strategia pensa di portare avanti affinché sia garantita a tutti i cittadini la libertà di espressione, evitando che i proprietari privati di tali mezzi portino avanti comportamenti arbitrari che possono danneggiare il pluralismo e causare discriminazioni?

Alcuni esempi: vengono chiuse pagine *web* e *social* di partiti legittimati dal ministero a partecipare alle elezioni, limitando di fatto il diritto a fare campagna elettorale, censurati video di leader di partito presenti in Parlamento, chiuse pagine di movimenti politici, senza che la magistratura si sia espressa. Non ritiene che tali comportamenti siano una palese limitazione della libertà d’espressione e quali provvedimenti intende adottare per contrastarli?

1-023-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I think I have good news. Free speech will not be undermined – not by what we plan to do. When we look now at the scene in the field of journalism and information-sharing, we have public media, we have independent media, which operate on the free market – and then we have social media, an area which has a special growing role because, according to the Member States’ statistics, it is gaining more and more attention in the Member States. There are some Member States which have already announced that more than half their citizens only use information from the Internet and from social media – so it is huge regarding the impact on public opinion.

Whatever we will do in this field, we will have freedom of expression as the basic principle, by default. This is untouchable unless there is some content which is prohibited by the law. This is the principle which we keep, for instance, in what we do against online hate speech. I will not promote any solution or any proposal involving somebody being the arbiter of what should be written or what should be announced in the media. There will be no Ministry of Truth, there will be no Commissioner of Truth – nothing like that.

But what we want, especially in relation to social media platforms, is more transparency. We are not going to dictate what people should read or write. We want the citizens to know what the source of the information is – whether it is a political campaign that is behind it and who is paying for it.

We want to achieve more transparency on this, and at the same time, we want social media platforms to be more responsible and work against artificial intelligence production, bots and fake accounts which are the distributors of this disinformation.

There is another chapter we want to look at and it is the security angle, and I will maybe come to it later.

1-024-0000

**Antonio Maria Rinaldi (ID).** – Quindi lei è d'accordo a non lasciare più a gestori privati di *social* la determinazione della censura? Cioè che ci sia qualche organismo, magari deciso dal Parlamento europeo, che controlli la censura. Perché fino adesso avviene esclusivamente da parte di soggetti privati e quindi noi non conosciamo quali sono le loro finalità, e le ripeto che stanno avvenendo in tutta Europa situazioni come le ho detto prima.

1-025-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – What we want the platforms to do is to look at hate speech and violence online, and where they come to the conclusion that it is a clear-cut case of calling for violence, killing or horrible things such as I saw in the Dublin headquarters of Facebook, they should remove it.

Of course, those who are the authors of such announcements or such messages can have a defence, they can protest against this removal. I think we have already had some such cases.

This is what we want them to do, to respect the law, because if certain content is prohibited offline, it must also be prohibited online. There is no alternative, unless you want to deploy hundreds of thousands of police officers to watch what's online. That is not the way.

Disinformation is another story. This is something which, in terms of criminal law, is not illegal content, and here we are taking an extremely sensitive approach in what we are doing and what we want the platforms to do. This is what I described earlier.

1-026-0000

**Geert Bourgeois (ECR).** – Dank u wel Voorzitter, vooral de kandidaat-vicevoorzitter. U zei terecht dat u door mevrouw Von der Leyen belast bent met het bewaken en verdedigen van de rechtsstaat en het verdedigen en vrijwaren van onze fundamentele rechten en vrijheden.

Wij zijn allemaal verenigd in verscheidenheid, maar we hebben één gemeenschappelijke taal. Dat is de taal van de verlichting. Nu zien we helaas dat het illiberalisme oprukt: niet alleen buiten, maar ook binnen de Europese Unie. U hebt daarstraks terecht gezegd hoezeer uw Tsjechische landgenoten naar vrijheid verlangden toen ze aansluiting zochten bij de Europese Unie. U zei ook: ik zal alle mogelijke instrumenten inzetten om de rechtsstaat te verdedigen.

Mijn vraag is: hoe denkt u dat concreet doen? Aan welke eventuele bijkomende instrumenten denkt u?

1-027-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – How specifically to defend the rule of law in relation to illiberalism, which, as you mentioned, is now on the rise?

I am convinced that free elections constitute a clear criterion of democracy and that, at the same time, independent judges should be a prime consideration. That's why we are alarmed when we see, in some states, a possible lack of judicial independence. In trying to explain this to people who are not lawyers – and, thank God, not everybody is a lawyer – I sometimes make the following comparison: just imagine your football club is playing a game and they have to play uphill, without a referee. How would you like such a game? This is the situation where there is no judge – no referee – in a society.

That's why, in dealing with this issue, we are taking full responsibility, leading the proceedings in respect of countries where there are problems.

I have already mentioned Article 7 infringements, and we are now launching a comprehensive assessment relating to all the Member States, based on the European Parliament's proposal from 2016, in order to have a comprehensive picture of where we are, because we have also been criticised for not using the same assessment for all the Member States – for 'bashing' only some countries. No.

But we have to take some measures that will have a preventive purpose, and that's where the annual review of the rule of law comes in. This is what we will launch. The first edition should be finished next spring, and then we will see the whole picture.

I believe this is a necessary step forward, and also not too narrow. The debate about the rule of law is not only about the independence of judiciary and prosecution. It is much wider. That's why we want to cover the constitutional balance, we want to cover media freedom, and we need to cover corruption. I believe that this will bring good results in a relatively short time.

1-028-0000

**Geert Bourgeois (ECR).** – We moeten natuurlijk niet alleen toezien op de naleving van de rechtsstaat in de lidstaten, maar ook als Europese Unie zelf daarover waken. Nu volgt uit de rechtspraak van het Europees Hof van Justitie, in het bijzonder het arrest van de Grote kamer in de zaak Aranyosi, dat een nationale rechter die verzocht wordt om een verdachte over te leveren altijd moet kunnen toetsen of de grondrechten van de verdachte niet worden geschonden.

Ik heb een zeer concrete vraag, namelijk of u er bij de wijziging van het Europees aanhoudingsbevel mee akkoord gaat om die toetsing aan de grondrechten altijd toe te staan? Want die grondrechten – die zijn vastgelegd in het Handvest – zijn primair recht, dat boven elk ander recht primeert. Dat is rechtspraak van het Europees Hof van Justitie. Wilt u daar rekening mee houden?

1-029-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I think that the Aranyosi case and some others show that the European Court of Justice has a very important say and it's a big push for the Member States which have a problem.

You touched upon the basic thing, that we need to have the same principle things protected in the same way – such as rule of law and fundamental rights. Because otherwise European judicial cooperation will not work. The European Arrest Warrant is such a successful instrument in judicial cooperation, but with these gaps we have a big problem.

That's why this will be one of the big tasks for my colleague, Didier Reynders – to look into this. We will not review the European Arrest Warrant but we will look into how it works.

On a practical note, in relation to the level of standards in prisons, I offered the Member States advice and information on how to possibly use also EU money to upgrade the level of standards for prisoners. It didn't work so well, so this is ongoing business.

1-030-0000

**Anne-Sophie Pelletier (GUE/NGL).** – Madame la Commissaire, en Pologne, en Hongrie, en Italie, les gouvernements ont adopté des lois portant largement atteinte au droit de manifester, et nous avons été les témoins de brutalités policières dans différents États membres, comme en Espagne et en Roumanie. En tant que citoyenne française, je suis aussi face à cette réalité. La liberté d'association et de réunion sont pourtant des droits fondamentaux consacrés dans la charte des droits fondamentaux de l'Union européenne, et les mesures pour empêcher les brutalités policières ne sont pas suffisantes.

Au moment où je vous parle, je voudrais penser à tous ces citoyens qui ont été victimes de ces brutalités, comme les gilets jaunes mutilés en France, les journalistes comme Gaspard Glanz, empêché de faire son travail, les soignants de rue qui ont été pris à partie par les forces de l'ordre, les militants écologistes qui ont été gazés, les syndicalistes, ainsi que des personnes de la Ligue des droits de l'homme.

Alors Madame, en tant que commissaire aux valeurs et à la transparence, comment comptez-vous aborder ces problèmes et garantir le droit de manifester, qui est inaliénable? Merci beaucoup.

1-031-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Of course, freedom of association is one of the elementary freedoms we have to protect. And we are always watching the situation in the Member States where there are such incidents and in case of need, we engage in a debate with the Member State. But in these concrete cases, I was not participating in such a debate because it was more in the remit of my colleague who was responsible for security – because this is, among other things, also a security matter. Indeed, this is part of what we should do together with the Member States to guarantee security in case people want to exercise their freedom of association. So I consider this as a very important matter.

1-032-0000

**Anne-Sophie Pelletier (GUE/NGL).** – Madame la Commissaire, j'aimerais maintenant vous interroger sur les entraves que rencontrent les ONG pour accomplir leur mission d'intérêt général. La semaine dernière, votre collègue M. Reynders a déclaré que le financement et la formation constituaient des moyens pour soutenir les organisations non gouvernementales; pourtant la réalité est toute autre, Madame.

Là aujourd'hui, on parle d'état de droit. Nous pensons que l'accès au financement et à la formation ne sont pas suffisants. J'ai lu avec attention vos réponses écrites. Ce que je déplore dans celles-ci, c'est le manque de références à l'espace civique et au dialogue avec la société civile. Les ONG n'ont pas d'interlocuteur aujourd'hui au niveau de la Commission pour s'informer sur les campagnes en diffamation ou sur les réductions de financement.

Madame la commissaire, la semaine dernière, nous avons écouté Carola Rackete, qui s'est fait insulter par d'autres collègues de cette commission LIBE; et là on parle de criminalisation aussi des ONG. Alors, je voulais vous demander: à qui, aujourd'hui, les ONG peuvent-elles s'adresser au sein de la Commission lorsqu'elles font l'objet d'attaques? Allez-vous vous engager concrètement pour apporter une aide à celles-ci?

1-033-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I think that I was already their contact person in my current position. I had many debates with NGOs from some Member States, which were not positive at all, because the debate was about shrinking space for their work, about threats, about more and more difficult working conditions, also about shrinking space due to changes in legislation. So I would like to continue to be their contact person.

On the funding for the NGOs which work in the field of social work, there will be continuous funding in the European Social Fund, which can be used for many very useful projects, and also the citizenship values and citizenship rights programme, how it has been designed for the next several years, it will be a very practical financial tool for supporting, I must say not only, but also, NGOs working in the field of social work, but also in the field of fundamental rights and equality in front of the law, equality bodies and so on.

1-034-0000

**Danuta Maria Hübner (PPE).** – Commissioner-designate, since 2011 there has been an interinstitutional agreement between the European Commission and the European Parliament on a transparency register. So there is a voluntary register for lobbyists. There is also a joint



secretariat, which is being run by Parliament. There is a code of conduct and there are many more rules. And then in September 2016 the Commission decided to provide an amended proposal for the interinstitutional agreement, and we agreed with the Council that the three institutions would join the negotiation and would go towards this new agreement among the three institutions. A lot was achieved during a year and a half of negotiations, then the Commission lost interest in continuing the negotiations. They walked away from the negotiating table, in spite of a strong commitment from Parliament and the Council. So we are now in a suspended state of negotiations. My question to you is how to test your commitment to relaunch the negotiation. How do you see it?

1-035-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I can confirm that I have a lot of interest in this. Not only do I have it in my mission letter, but there is a genuine interest and fresh energy to open the dialogue again with both co-legislators – the European Parliament and the Council.

We have to speak about three things, among others: the register of lobbyists and how we use it – a mandatory or voluntary scheme. This should be discussed thoroughly. The second thing is access to documents, and the third thing is how to guarantee that at every moment of the legislative process there is full transparency in what we are doing and where the procedure is directing.

I am very much convinced that the people have the right to know what we are doing and what we are planning. In a majority of cases, the result of our work leads to more obligations for some parts of our society or for all citizens. These are serious things and we have to be as transparent as possible.

So, speaking about the transparency register, there are now around 12 000 registered individuals and institutions. The Commission can lead as an example, because we use the register. There is no meeting without registration. And I believe that it could be the moment for Parliament to look into that with full respect to the freedom of mandate. We are not speaking here about communication with the constituents and with the citizens, but about lobbyists – nothing against lobbyists, but we know that they represent somebody's interests. So we should be transparent on meeting them and what they want from us and how we reacted on it.

On access to documents, it's a similar thing, we should look into the possibility, especially of improving access to documents based on the Ombudsman's proposal. I like the proposal, and we should come back to it. And I know that there is a very important debate going on in the Council where they speak about balancing of transparency and efficiency of negotiations. Fair enough. We have to look into it also from this point of view.

But these are very important things to discuss in the renewed dialogue. We need to start looking at these things afresh.

As far as the legislative process is concerned – the same thing – we should look at all the stages and we should also look at the comitology procedure.

1-036-0000

**Danuta Maria Hübner (PPE).** – The European Parliament is probably the only parliament in the democratic world that does not have the right of initiative, and Ms von der Leyen has shown a strong commitment to start moving on this.

How do you see this passage towards the right of initiative for the European Parliament? Because we believe that as we are directly elected it's important for democracy as well.

1-037-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I think that the President-elect sent a very positive signal to Parliament when she announced that she wanted to support the right of initiative for Parliament when Parliament, acting by the majority of its Members, adopts resolutions requesting that the Commission submit a legislative proposal. The Commission will respond with a legislative act, in full respect of the principles of proportionality, subsidiarity and better regulation.

This is the official answer, and it is fully in line with the President-elect's announcement. I am ready to support this process, because during my current mandate I have always had very important communication with Parliament. However, it was always more or less informal. I got on board with a lot of very good ideas and proposals from the Members of the European Parliament. I can say that they helped me. I can see that parliament wants to have this fixed in a formal procedure, and this is what I want to support, in line with what the President-elect promised.

1-038-0000

**Maria Grapini (S&D).** – Doamna comisar, vă doresc succes în primul rând. Vreau să vorbesc – deși ați răspuns și în scris și aici la câteva întrebări –, evident că vreau să vorbesc de punctul pe care l-ați primit ca misiune de la președinta-desemnată a Comisiei, și anume consolidarea democrației și transparenței. Dacă se poate, să răspundeți cât se poate de concret.

Dumneavoastră, ca vicepreședintă desemnată, dacă veți fi aleasă, ce veți face concret pentru a îmbunătăți rolul Comisiei în stabilirea unor măsuri ambițioase legate de transparență pentru toate instituțiile, pentru că s-a vorbit aici că există încă probleme aici? Ce veți face concret pentru respectarea valorilor comune ale Uniunii Europene și pentru a crește încrederea în Uniunea Europeană, pentru că vorbeați dumneavoastră despre acest lucru?

1-039-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I think that the Commission already now leads by example, because we have very stringent rules relating to transparency. This is not only the obligatory use of the Transparency Register, this is also the way we publish documents, the way we lead negotiations.

I am quite proud of what my colleagues are doing – Cecilia Malmström in trade negotiations, and also the Brexit negotiations. We really use the imperative of being fully transparent very seriously, and it's quite visible.

My own experience with the Transparency Register is a very strong one. You know that I dealt with several very serious cases. To name just some: Dieselgate and data protection. It was a big saga where the very strong interests of the whole digital sector was that we do not come with such strict rules. There was also the case with money laundering – to be precise, the high-risk third countries on money laundering – and terrorist financing. It was a very strong lobbying saga, and I felt much safer, and much freer in decision-making, when I could say I had met these organisations and these people as all of that is in the Transparency Register – read it and then you know whose interest it is and who I protect. I always protect the interests of the people of Europe. That's my general answer.

So we have strict rules in the Commission. We would like the other institutions to follow this example with full respect of the specificity and set-up of the institutions, and I think that it's important that the Commission continues in this trend.

1-040-0000

**Maria Grapini (S&D).** – Da, chiar dacă nu mi-ați răspuns ce faceți cu creșterea încrederii cetățenilor, vreau să fac un test de sinceritate, doamna comisar. Am lucrat împreună în Comisia IMCO la protecția consumatorului în actualul mandat al dumneavoastră. Care credeți

că a fost cel mai mare succes pe care l-ați avut în mandatul trecut și care a fost cel mai mare eșec?

1-041-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you very much for this question. I want to say that the confidence of citizens will be increased, especially by what we speak here about – that they know what we do, why we do it, that we are speaking to people in normal language, that we are not hiding any hidden interests, that we are not applying something that we call in the Czech language ‘cabinet politics’, something like a black box, and that we communicate in an early manner because also sometimes we are too late in our answers.

On my achievements, well of course that’s the new deal for consumers: collective redress, which is still in the making.

The European Public Prosecutor’s Office will be a huge contribution to better fighting financial crime. Everything we do in the anti-money laundering and terrorist financing sphere I think was a great achievement because we stopped some of the horrible wrongdoings by using systemic and strong responses. There have been a lot of things which have been done, but Didier Reynders still has something to work on in his mandate.

Data protection – the General Data Protection Regulation – well I think this is now the global standard.

1-042-0000

**Pascal Durand (Renew).** – Merci M. le président, merci Madame Jourová, et merci d’avoir commencé par une citation de Václav Havel. Cela fait plaisir d’entendre ce grand personnage cité dans cette enceinte.

Pour réagir et rebondir sur ce que vient de dire Madame Grapini, nous pourrions également parler du travail que vous avez effectué sur les lanceurs d’alerte: je tiens à témoigner, à titre personnel, de votre implication et du fait que nous n’aurions pas eu une directive aussi efficace si vous ne vous étiez pas impliquée dans ce dossier.

Vous avez dit tout à l’heure que la Commission était la gardienne des Traités; et je vous en sais gré. Effectivement, c’est important de le rappeler. Nous avons, en commission AFCO, une difficulté récurrente, réitérée, sur la question de la décharge du budget du Conseil. Vous le savez, depuis des années, nous essayons d’obtenir du Conseil qu’il transmette des informations relatives à l’utilisation des millions d’euros, qui est directement liée à son activité.

La Commission, en 2014, s’était mise un peu en retrait, en disant qu’il s’agissait surtout d’un problème entre le Conseil et le Parlement. Depuis, nous avons voté un texte en 2016, en demandant au Conseil de revenir vers nous, et il ne l’a pas fait. Donc, Madame la vice-présidente, allez-vous aider ce Parlement, et donc les citoyens, à avoir un peu de transparence sur l’utilisation du budget par le Conseil ?

1-043-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you very much, Mr Durand. I will do my best, because this falls under the general effort to do things with more transparency, which will lead to more trust. I will look specifically at this discharge area and will seek the advice of my experts as to whether that is the legal condition that enables the Council to fully share the information and documents. I cannot tell you at this moment. I have not studied it, but if there is no legal obstacle, I don’t see any reason why the Council should not share the information.

This charge is about the money – huge amounts of money – and also about the money used by the Member States, so I would plead for as much transparency as possible. I can only promise that I will also help to achieve more transparency, in spite of the fact that it's the Council. Indeed, I have to repeat that the Commission has only limited power or no power – but some informal authority could also be used on this.

Thank you for appreciating the Whistleblower Directive. It was adopted by the Council today, by the Justice Council, so I'm very happy about that. It was a tough file in which we were balancing very carefully in order not to create some space for abusive whistle blowing. There is the question of how to differentiate between the good whistleblower and the bad whistleblower and of how to enable them to use the channels for informing about wrongdoings. It was a really difficult file and a very difficult trilogue, but thanks to a very strong commitment on Parliament's side, we managed to gain quite a good result.

1-044-0000

**Pascal Durand (Renew).** – Puisque vous venez de l'évoquer, je me permets justement de vous parler de la question du trilogue. Ne croyez pas que j'aie une obsession contre le Conseil, mais puisque vous avez évoqué la question du trilogue, je rebondis. Certains qualifient le trilogue de «boîte noire de la démocratie européenne». C'est peut-être excessif, mais pour une part quand même, il y a une réalité derrière cela. Comment imaginez-vous que nous puissions améliorer la transparence des trilogues et des arrivées d'informations de la part du Conseil, qui veut bien avoir le titre, ainsi que les prérogatives de colégislateur, sans pour autant se soumettre aux mêmes conditions et obligations de transparence et de démocratie? Pouvons-nous donc avancer sur la question des trilogues? Et si oui, comment?

1-045-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Well, first of all, I think that, especially for the trilogue as the final stage of adopting the legislation we should be as transparent as possible. I went through many, many trilogues in June and before, and it was surprising how quickly the proposal was changing. In the process, sometimes creative solutions just came along on the spot and I realised, well, this is the only way to do it, because we have to come with a compromise. We have to achieve a compromise, but at the same time, this should be more transparent. This is the moment when the positions of different players should be very well known. In line with the Ombudsman's proposal, the Council will work with the proposal of the Finnish Presidency, which is a very interesting one, especially in relation to trilogues on access to documents. That is a very vivid the debate in the Council. And we will come back to the debate about how to make the trilogues more transparent with the Commission's older proposals. And again, we have to invest some energy in it or to achieve a better model.

1-046-0000

**Jiří Pospíšil (PPE).** – Vážená paní Jourová, já velmi kvituji, jak ve svém vystoupení často zmiňujete otázku právního státu. Já to považuji za kardinální součást Vaší kompetence. Asi se shodneme, že součástí právního státu je i princip zákonnosti trestního stíhání, to znamená, možnost trestat někoho pouze v případě, že porušil trestní zákon.

Ve světle těchto principů bych rád znal Váš názor na konkrétní výrok konkrétního politika. Jedná se o předsedu vlády České republiky Andreje Babiše, který v lednu roku 2018 konstatoval, že v jeho zemi, myšleno je tím v České republice, je možné objednat si trestní stíhání a pravděpodobně dostat někoho do vězení. Mě by zajímalo, jestli s tímto výrokem souhlasíte a jaký na něj máte názor. Ale hlavně, až budete – a já doufám, že budete –, ve funkci místopředsedkyně Komise odpovědné i za právní stát, jak bude reagovat, pokud některý z vrcholných představitelů členských států bude pronášet takto silné výroky na podobu a fungování právního státu ve své zemi, a tím i v celé Evropské unii?

1-047-0000

**Věra Jourová, designovaná komisařka.** – Já si dovolím odpovědět ve svém jazyce a odpovědět v jazyce, ve kterém se mě pan Pospíšil dotázal.

Děkuji za otázku. Já bych tu odpověď rozdělila do dvou kategorií. Jednak asi víte, že já sama jsem se ocitla ve vazbě v roce 2006 na základě naprosto vyhaného obvinění, které bylo součástí špinavé politické hry. Takže já můžu vykládat ságy o tom, jak se cítí člověk, kterého semele trestní justice, která je ve službě státu a politiky.

Ale domnívám se, že od toho roku 2006 česká justice vykonala velkou cestu a že se posunula. Já s názorem kohokoli, ať by to byl premiér mé země nebo kdokoli další, že dnes je možné objednat si případ nebo trestní stíhání, nesouhlasím. Já naopak plně důvěřuji českým justičním orgánům a české prokuratuře, českému státnímu zastupitelství, že koná profesionálně, že koná nezávisle, nestranně a že plní roli, kterou má tento orgán nebo tyto orgány plnit v právním státě.

1-048-0000

**Jiří Pospíšil (PPE).** – Děkuji za Vaši reakci, ale moc prosím o reakci na tu druhou otázku, kterou považuji za hlavní, protože Česká republika byla uvedena pouze jako konkrétní příklad. Mě by opravdu zajímalo, zda v situaci, kdy budete odpovědná za právní stát v Evropě, zda si myslíte, že je nutné a správné, aby Komise, potažmo Vy jako představitelka Komise, která má toto téma na starosti, na takové výroky politiků členských států reagovala či nereagovala. To znamená: Má na tyto výroky, které mohou poškodit právní stát v konkrétních členských státech, zaznít ze strany Komise odpověď anebo se mají takové výroky přejít, protože jsou součástí třeba nějaké politické debaty?

1-049-0000

**Věra Jourová, *designovaná komisařka.*** – Já jsem slyšela tolik různých, někdy i velmi otřesných výroků od politiků v Evropě, že jsem měla velkou chuť to komentovat, ale my většinou komentáře politiků nekomentujeme. Komise jako strážkyně Smluv reaguje, pokud dochází k nějakým systémovým změnám, reformám, zákonům přijímaným přes noc, které vlastně potom přinášejí nižší nezávislost justice a tak dále.

Takže já bych řekla, že je dobře, že se Komise neplete do domácích věcí tím, že by komentovala výroky národních politiků.

I když mám někdy chuť to udělat.

1-050-0000

**Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D).** – Vice-President-designate Jourová, you stated your case as to the brand new name of your portfolio – Values and Transparency. And I'm going to ask you two questions related to names, because names matter.

Vice-President-designate Schinas put it well when he explained the name of his portfolio, referring to William Shakespeare's 'A rose by any other name' and its echo centuries after in *The Name of the Rose* by that great European Umberto Eco. And you, as Commissioner in charge of Values and Transparency, are bound to chair the Group on a New Push for European Democracy, which has been part of the Conference on the Future of Europe. How do you intend to ensure that this conference is neither a routine exercise nor something cryptic, and that it actually reaches out to the public – to European citizens and to civil society organisations, which are involved in this overall operation on the future of Europe?

And can you commit to ensuring that the Commission will go beyond simply supporting the so-called peer review between Member States, and actually consider the proposal by the European Parliament to include independent experts, as the Council of Europe does with the Venice Commission?

1-051-0000

**Věra Jourová, *Commissioner-designate.*** – Of course, names matter, and the content for me is at least as important as the name. I will do my best to give it the proper content. The people

understand why we are focusing on values and transparency, and it's not an easy task because values are such an abstract word or category. We will have to do our best to be very clear about what we are planning and what we are doing.

We will work on three strengths, as I already indicated. On the strength of an annual review of the rule of law, on which I am sure Didier Reynders also worked with his ideas of peer review. It will be an annual assessment that will cover the constitutional balance, the impartiality of the judiciary, the independence of the judiciary, corruption and media. Then we will work on the new push for democracy, which will cover elections, and thus electoral law, disinformation and again media pluralism in a wider scope.

The third thing we will work on is updating the strategy on fundamental rights. This is the Holy Trinity for me. Fundamental rights, rule of law and democracy, which we will be covering through three strands of work and where I count on the very strong engagement of Parliament.

At the same time, I am ready to do the proper monitoring and mainstreaming work to get the fundamental rights aspects principle into everything that we do. What's most important is that I don't want to be in the office much; I want to be out as much as possible and debating with people. Not only with those who are convinced.

You all know the situation when we organise a conference and we always speak to the same people, and we try to convince those who already are on board with us. I would like to go to many of the Member States to speak to students and to do much more to achieve a better understanding of what are the values we strive for in Europe.

1-052-0000

**Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D).** – Just a short follow-up as to the fundamental rights dimension of your portfolio. Are you committed to ensuring that all Member States comply fully with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, including the rights of minorities which might not be to the liking of certain governments of certain Member States at a certain point in time – namely LGBT people, Roma and minorities of whatever kind – and to safeguarding the values connected with the European way of life (which is the label of Vice-President Schinas' portfolio) when implementing Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union?

1-053-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I am fully committed to in fact continue what I've been doing now. And again we use all of the instruments at our disposal, especially the monitoring of compliance with European Law. Here I speak about the Charter and about the specific laws which relate to the protection of minorities and to protection of fundamental rights in general.

What do I have in mind concretely is the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia, which we implement – or the Member States were supposed to implement – I think two years ago. Immediately the Commission started to send letters because we saw gaps, lack of compliance, complications, a lack of interest maybe, and we are still in the process of running several infringement procedures on this.

The same for the Race Equality Directive. We are doing the same thing: monitoring what the Member States are doing. We are not only monitoring the compliance of national law with European law, which is our main business, but we are also looking at how the laws are applied in practice. We are supporting equality bodies in the Member States, maybe, but this is an additional question so I am over time now. I wanted to say something about equality bodies. We are supporting them as well.

1-054-0000

**Antonio Tajani (PPE), Chair AFCO.** – I am very flexible, but I don't know if Mr Lopez Aguilar will also be very flexible during his leadership for the next question.

1-055-0000

**Daniel Freund (Verts/ALE).** – The European Commission estimates that each year we're losing the equivalent of the EU budget to corruption, and in several Member States we see that corruption is touching the highest level of politics, including in your own Member State. Yet when I read the Commissioners' mission letters, I couldn't find the word corruption anywhere. You have said today that you will keep an eye out for corruption, and I would just ask you to confirm that, on an annual basis, you will look at the situation of corruption and make recommendations to each Member State?

And I also think that the EU in order to credibly lead that fight against corruption, we have to bring our own house in order. When the Barroso Commission left, over 50% of Commissioners joined registered lobby organisations, and here in the European Parliament, we have seen 24 violations of the code of conduct in the last 5 years, so for that reason I have long advocated for an independent ethics body. That's now your mission, so how do you make sure that both Commissioners and MEPs are now no longer in charge of checking and sanctioning ethics violations?

1-056-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – First, on corruption, indeed, we want to include an annual assessment of corruption in the Rule of Law Annual Review because it belongs there. Corruption is very often the accompanying aspect when the rule of law is declining in a Member State, including cases when the judicial system and the prosecution don't react to concrete findings because simply there is too big a fish to be prosecuted or some other case of this kind. So we will look at corruption in a systemic manner.

We will continue doing two things. Corruption is covered by the European Semester as the factor which harms the economic situation of the Member States, and we will continue this. This is a more economic analysis than a legal one. And also we will continue looking at corruption from the legal point of view in the Justice Scoreboard, because we have a new chapter there comparing how the Member States react on corruption cases, how long it takes and so on. So there are already two strands of work: the European Semester plus the Justice Scoreboard and now the Rule of Law Annual Review will be the third one.

We will use different channels, not only data from the Member States. We will use data from different trustworthy sources, from GRECO, from the OECD, from the EIB and so on.

With regard to the independent ethics body I think that we need such arrangements. I will analyse or look into the systems and staff regulations and the codes of conduct of the European institutions and will try to filter out matters which might go under the remit of the ethics body. In my view, it could be an advisory body – a body which will recommend the possible steps in the case of concrete cases or possible sanctions against the different institutions. But this is just at the beginning, I am only confirming my very strong determination to start working on this very soon.

1-057-0000

**Daniel Freund (Verts/ALE).** – I wanted to follow up on what you have previously said on the lobby register. This was already the ambition of the previous Commission to establish the mandatory lobby register, but in the mission letters of the last Commission there was clear language to seek balanced consultation with interest representatives, and that language has disappeared. Is that still the ambition of your Commission and of your work – to keep a certain balance in the interest representatives that you consult? Also, would you agree that the

main aim now to finalise the negotiations on the mandatory lobby registry is to make progress to finally bring the Council into the framework?

1-058-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Yes, I want to bring the Council to the round table to discuss it, because there should be a level playing field and there should be a way forward on this. When I read through the reports from the debates at the Council on access to documents, I understood it would not be easy. Some of the countries have a point. We have to strike a balance between full transparency and the possibility to lead the negotiations in an efficient manner. Fair enough, I agree.

This is the work ahead of us, and I am fully ready to start such a dialogue. On the balance you spoke about, I don't know where some language disappeared, but I will look at it, whatever it is.

1-059-0000

**Nicolaus Fest (ID).** – Frau Jourová! Sie sind zuständig für Werte und Transparenz. Aber meine Frage ist: Was verstehen Sie unter Werten? Die Werte des allerbeliebigsten Zeitgeistes und der Trivialität des Augenblicks, die meistens hier im Parlament vorherrschen, oder auch die Werte eher konservativer Bürger? Konkret also: Sind Sie auch bereit, für konservative Werte einzutreten, zum Beispiel für das Lebensrecht von Ungeborenen, so wie es für ein christliches Europa richtig wäre, und das gerade auch meine linken, meine liberalen, meine sozialistischen und meine grünen Freunde hier im Parlament immer und immer wieder einfordern, wenn es um die Flüchtlingsfrage geht? Also, werden Sie auch das Lebensrecht Ungeborener schützen und verteidigen?

1-060-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – The right of the unborn falls under the remit of the Member States.

1-061-0000

**Nicolaus Fest (ID).** – Frau Jourová! Sie haben über Jahre alle möglichen Sachverhalte als Phobien diskreditiert, also als psychotische Fehlwahrnehmungen der Wirklichkeit – Transphobien, Afrophobie oder Homophobie, und natürlich auch und ganz besonders die Islamophobie. Nun wurden letzte Woche in Paris vier Polizisten durch einen Muslim ermordet, in Berlin attackierte am Wochenende ein Mann unter *Allahu-Akbar*-Rufen das Sicherheitspersonal einer Synagoge mit einem militärischen Kampfmesser. Diese und viele, viele andere muslimische Anschläge, auch hier in Brüssel, sind keine phobischen Einbildungen, sondern Tatsachen.

Gegenwärtig ist auf dem deutsch-französischen TV-Sender Arte eine Dokumentation zu sehen, welche die von Katar finanzierte Unterwanderung Europas zeigt und in der führende Muslime offen zugeben, dass sie Europa islamisieren wollen. Halten Sie angesichts dieser Tatsachen, angesichts all der Morde und Attentate die Furcht vor dem Islam weiterhin für eine psychotische Phobie, oder wäre es jetzt nicht mal für Sie an der Zeit, sich endlich bei den Opfern zu entschuldigen?

1-062-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Attacks and murders are absolutely unacceptable, whoever commits them. Speaking about Islamist terrorism, Europe and the Member States did a lot to protect their citizens against them. I myself engaged in working with the digital sector because we have the statistics that around 20% of the Islamists got radicalised in prison and around 80% online. We did a lot to increase security through the coordinated work of Europol and of the security authorities and bodies in the Member States. We are doing a lot to decrease the risk and to decrease the danger, but again, all the attacks, all the murders are not acceptable and we have to simply work on increasing the security of Europeans, because



when you ask Europeans what they expect from us, it's prosperity, security and stability, so these are our obligations.

1-063-0000

**Assita Kanko (ECR).** – Mevrouw Jourová, desinformatie is een van de meest complexe uitdagingen waarmee onze democratieën momenteel worden geconfronteerd. U heeft dat terecht benadrukt. Wat is vrije meningsuiting nog waard als mensen niet over de juiste informatie beschikken?

Als we een eerlijk en open debat willen, wat ook essentieel is in een democratie, dan moeten we op onze hoede zijn voor foute informatie. Desinformatie gebeurt op een sluwe manier, is vaak moeilijk te herkennen of te bespeuren en doet de lijnen tussen waarheid en leugens subtiel vervagen. Het brengt mensen in gevaar. Gewone burgers, journalisten, enzovoort.

Meer regelgeving en de internetplatforms vragen om als arbiters op te treden, kan niet de enige oplossing zijn. Onderwijs en bewustmaking moeten uiteraard een rol spelen. Ook het vertrouwen in de EU-instellingen moet omhoog. Hoe meer burgers de EU vertrouwen, des te succesvoller zal Europa zijn in het bestrijden van desinformatie.

Hoe zijn u en de Commissie van plan het vertrouwensprobleem aan te pakken, met name in het licht van uw bredere taak van het creëren van meer transparantie in de Europese Unie?

1-064-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – This is again a very wide question and I want to be as short as possible. On disinformation – how we define the disinformation which we find it necessary to do something about – let me read the definition: ‘verifiably false or misleading, disseminated for economic or political gain, or to intentionally deceive the public, may cause public harm, threaten democracy, undermine policies in health, environment and security’. This is a new threat, and we don't want to react to it by censoring, by diminishing the freedom of expression. This is also where we have very strong support from our citizens, because various surveys say that what the people want us to do on disinformation is to educate the people better. That sounds arrogant, but what I mean is to enable them to understand better the situations when they are manipulated, to know better who is the source of information, what are the purposes, what are the intentions, simply to have better orientation, especially in digital area. And without a more resilient society that is better prepared for this new threat, we will not be able to solve the problem.

We want to focus on disinformation as a new threat from two perspectives: the intensity and the volatility of some time. I will explain that. First, intensity: there might be some disinformation attacks which might even pose a threat to security, and here we want to work more on this angle. Before the elections we were ready to start the Rapid Alert System for such a case. There was not such an intensive attack before the European elections, but we have to be ready for this. And we have also to discuss with NATO the security angle.

Then there is creating the resilience of society and the volatility of the timing, especially before the elections. Our sphere is full of disinformation. More and more, according to different surveys, the political parties are very active producers of fake news and disinformation, so this will need a reaction, and that's why we want to look at the political campaigning rules. Here I see the way forward in some very concrete steps.

1-065-0000

**Assita Kanko (ECR).** – Ik denk dat het goed is dat u de nadruk legt op het beschermen en bewust maken van de mensen, maar ik vraag mij af: we hebben de indruk dat transparantie meer en meer betekent dat we volledig blootstaan aan hackers. Hoe gaat u de cybercriminaliteit aanpakken met uw collega's?

Ten tweede gaat het over de komende herziening van de richtlijn inzake elektronische handel. Welke rol zouden platforms en dienstverleners moeten spelen in de strijd tegen desinformatie? En hoe gaat u de bewustmaking invullen, zodat gebruikers leren om waakzamer te zijn bij wat ze op internet te zien krijgen?

1-066-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – On e-commerce, I want to say that I'm very much looking forward to working with Margrethe Vestager and Ms Goulard, because there is a clear task and plan to come with the Digital Service Act which will, I think, be a very good step forward in the case we strike the right balance on finding the proper definition of the responsibility of the platforms with regard to content, because the e-commerce Directive is still very strong legislation which says that the platforms are not responsible for the content unless there is 'something'. We will have to look at this better. We need a stronger legislative push to increase their responsibility. I'm convinced that we need such an instrument.

And what was your first question again?

1-067-0000

**Assita Kanko (ECR).** – The first part of my question concerned the fact that transparency should not mean that we are digitally naked when hackers are trying to attack us. How are you going to use the help of your colleagues to fight cyber-criminality and hacking?

1-068-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Of course not. And we have increased two very important things. The first is the level of technical protection against hacking in all the Member States, where, although investment is not sufficient yet, there have been quite big investments against hacking. Increasing cybersecurity is one of the strategic tasks of all the Member States.

The second thing is protection against abuse of the digital space – to prevent us being 'naked' there. I think that is a thing of the past because the General Data Protection Regulation is a really tough regulation against the abuse of our privacy and private data – with provision for stiff sanctions.

I think that, from this point of view, Europeans are the safest people on the planet.

1-069-0000

**Karoline Edtstadler (PPE).** – Vice-President-designate, we got to know one another during the Austrian Presidency and we worked together intensively at a time of many upheavals, including alarming developments in several Member States regarding the rule of law and democracy.

In your written answers, you state that (I quote) 'there can no longer be any doubt that our democracy is under threat'. Can we infer that you can see it's very important for this Commission to focus especially on protecting our values and the European way of life?

And, to name a concrete example of a hacking attack, I would like to mention the attack on the European Central Bank in August 2019. Would you agree that there is a pressing need to coordinate forces and knowledge better in order to protect democratic institutions and strengthen cooperation between Member States?

And, as an additional question to the last one, do you envisage measures which should be taken at European level to ensure rapid response in such cases, especially when critical infrastructure is attacked?

1-070-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Well, I must say that a lot has been done to protect our networks and our digital cyberspace against hacking, and a lot still has to be done.

What have we done? The architecture is built: the ENISA agency is coordinating the action of the Member States bodies focusing on cybersecurity. The network is working very well but, as I said before, more capacity is needed in most of the Member States. Underestimation of the issue is always punished heavily, as in the specific cases you mentioned.

We have legislation: we have the NIS Directive, which should be reviewed in 2021. Currently, the NIS Directive protects critical essential infrastructure. You mentioned this concrete case, and political parties are not protected by that. Maybe this is one thing we should look at in reviewing the directive.

1-071-0000

**Karoline Edtstadler (PPE).** – We also recognise a rise of anti-Semitism, which poses a threat to our common values and to our society as a whole. We welcome the effective measures taken by the Commission to combat anti-Semitism, in particular, the appointment of a European Commission coordinator. She was crucial in the developments which in the end led to the Council's declaration on the fight against anti-Semitism under the Austrian Presidency in December 2018. This declaration emphasises the need for a common security approach and stipulates, for the first time, a general binding definition of anti-Semitism. There are still many challenges ahead, especially in actively establishing that security. In light of this, are you considering strengthening and upgrading the mandate of this coordinator, for example, through a system involving reporting directly to the President of the Commission? And what further concrete steps are you planning?

1-072-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I can tell you that anti-Semitism is not a topic I can cover in one minute, but I will try. This is a shameful story for Europe. Again, Jewish citizens are moving from Europe because they are afraid – and we have the survey where we see that 80% of Jews living in Europe have as their first problem – the main pressing issue – as security. If you ask other Europeans, they will tell you it's jobs or health, and for Jews it's security. It's alarming. That's why we took a lot of measures, including appointing the coordinator, who does a great job. In December last year, the home affairs ministers committed in a declaration that they would come up with national strategies to fight against anti-Semitism. We discussed security matters in a working group this year with ministers and with the relevant partners – because they committed themselves to increase the budgets to protect the premises of Jews, be it synagogues or schools, and so on. A lot has been done, but a lot remains to be done, and anti-Semitism is on the rise. Here, we have to join forces and be absolutely clear in one message – that this is absolutely unacceptable.

1-073-0000

**Ramona Strugariu (Renew).** – Media freedom, pluralism and freedom of expression are founding pillars of any democracy, and yet they are under attack now here in Europe. Now, as we speak, investigative journalists in Bulgaria are facing tremendous pressure because of their investigations. And now, as we speak, this space for freedom of speech is shrinking in our countries. What concrete measures will you take to prevent attacks against journalists and ensure their safety? Will you propose EU-wide anti-SLAPP legislation? Because it is highly needed. And will you commit to a permanent fund for investigative journalists and for media freedom within the first year of your mandate?

1-074-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – In the first year of my mandate, I will work intensively on the proper designing of the funding programme which is under the Creative Europe programme and is intended to support independent journalism. There is

EUR 61 million for seven years, so we have to make the most use of this money, to come up with systematic measures which will cover all the Member States to protect better – not only in situations when systems in the Member States are endangering journalists, but also individual threats to individual journalists. So we will look at the best possible use of this funding.

We are considering, in relation to SLAPP cases to do proper mapping first – because there are many variations of abuse of the legal system against journalists. I want to understand the features of the problems.

We will look into the possibility of updating the law. I see some possibilities in international private law, but it may not be the only possibility.

I will look into the possibility of creating a system of legal aid or some form of helpline for journalists under threat – because the situation is very alarming. Every evening, I get emails from the Committee to Protect Journalists association – horrible stories. I always look first to see whether they are from Europe. They are usually from outside Europe, but there are also European cases and I think that we have to do much more. Of course, Media Pluralism Monitoring will be a useful tool. We will have another edition in mid-2020 and it will give us better mapping of the situation in the Member States and maybe some inspiration for what we can do at European level.

1-075-0000

**Ramona Strugariu (Renew).** – Your answer actually relates to my follow-up questions, because you know that in many of these cases the threatening and intimidation of journalists comes from the authorities themselves. How will you ensure the protection of journalists in such cases if you cannot rely on national authorities? Isn't it high time for a rapid-response mechanism at EU level for such cases?

1-076-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – The attacks from which side?

1-077-0000

**Ramona Strugariu (Renew).** – I said that when they are threatened you cannot rely on the national authorities because the threats and the pressure are coming from the national authorities which they are investigating.

1-078-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – This is a very difficult question and I will not pretend that the European Union is equipped with strong legislative or executive power in these cases. I am very concerned when I hear some politicians verbally attacking journalists because they don't like what the journalists write.

I think that journalists are here to make life uncomfortable for us as politicians, but from what I hear in some Member States, there are open verbal attacks 'authorising' violence, which then appears in the online world, or even in the real world.

The EU – the Commission – is not equipped with strong competences on this but, as I said before, I will look into the possibility of more efficient funding to help the people in need, the journalists under threat, through systemic and structural methods.

There was an interesting outcome from the conference on investigative journalism in Hamburg recently, where they said the following: there is a need for more cross-border European cooperation between journalists and between associations, and there should be more solidarity among journalists. This is something that the European Union cannot guarantee, but this too could be a way forward.

1-079-0000

**Rupert Lowe (NI).** – I keep hearing that the most important EU value is that it is a rules-based organisation. The EU has, for example, committed to respect the principles of the UN Charter. UN resolutions are very clear that no state may use economic, political or any other type of measure to coerce another state in order to obtain from it the subordination of its sovereign rights. The Brexit Steering Committee's rejection of Boris's offer and Leo Varadkar implying that the backstop must include Northern Ireland within the Customs Union, without input from Stormont, is not just subordinating UK authority to the EU; it is taxation without representation. Is that now an EU value? Or perhaps you could forgive me for concluding that the EU values don't matter when punishing the Brits? Is Northern Ireland the price to pay for us leaving the club?

1-080-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I will reply in the following way. EU values matter always; that's the first thing. The EU acts according to EU law and according to primary and secondary law, and the Commission is the guardian of the Treaty.

So, these are the principals which we use in working on all negotiations. The negotiations on Brexit are very difficult, they are now in a very difficult stage. I am not going to comment on this, but I wanted to tell you that the EU always matters and there is never a case – at least I don't remember such a case when EU values would be abused – against some Member State, or would even punish some Member State, which you mentioned. I strongly disagree with this.

1-081-0000

**Rupert Lowe (NI).** – That's all very interesting, but you speak in platitudes. Surely EU values are judged by what the hands are doing, not by what the mouth is saying. After all, the Treaties also say the EU contributes to the strict observance of international law. Let me be more specific. Under the international law the EU will not have rights to fish in British waters after Brexit unless there is a deal, and whether there's a deal or not, the EU cannot discriminate between WTO members. So if there's no deal, what will the EU do to uphold international law so that Dutch fishermen don't steal fish in British waters and French fishermen don't blockade Calais?

1-082-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I would refer this question to my colleague Michel Barnier, who is the negotiator and who knows all the aspects of no-deal and deal and whatever deal.

1-083-0000

**Elena Yoncheva (S&D).** – Commissioner, in recent years whistleblowers were a crucial resource of revealing scandals such as the LuxLeaks, Panama, the Paradise Papers and Cambridge Analytica. Those whistleblowers discovered illegal practices such as data-protection, fraud, corruption, tax evasion, lack of protection of food safety and public health and reported those acts. The recently-adopted European Directive for whistleblower-protection allows them to report directly to the press under certain conditions. What will be your guide as to Member States regarding the implementation of the Directive? How will you ensure that during the implementation, Member States don't impose overly-restrictive procedures making public disclosures impossible for whistleblowers? How will you safeguard the right to freedom of expression for whistleblowers?

1-084-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Unfortunately, I didn't hear today the debate at the Justice Council, and I guess there was some because the Whistleblowers Directive was adopted after the negotiations. So I will have to refresh my knowledge about how the Member States are getting ready to implement this Directive in full into their national systems. But I predict they will take it very seriously, because the Whistleblowers Directive imposes very

concrete obligations on the Member States and on the institutions. There is the obligation to open the internal channel, which would be the closest for the whistleblower who wants to announce some wrongdoing in the workplace. This is not about journalists, this is about the people who are confronted with something wrong at work and they want to announce it. These are courageous people – they deserve the protection. That’s why we carefully prepared first the internal channel within the institution, then if this is not a reliable, safe or well-working one, then they should use the external channel, which must be prepared by the state. This is the obligation of the state: to create the trustworthy, safe channel for obtaining the information from the whistleblowers and then, as a last resort, to go to the media. And I believe that the system will radically increase the protection of the courageous people, of the whistleblowers who simply cannot close their eyes when something wrong is happening – some horrible crime against the environment or tax evasion or something like that. I had the privileged to meet some of the whistleblowers of the big cases, and I admire their courage. I think it is absolutely clear that they deserve better protection. So I do believe that the Member States will do their job properly and in due time.

1-085-0000

**Elena Yoncheva (S&D).** – Different actors such as journalists, individuals, NGOs and politicians can play an active role as whistleblowers. How will you make sure that the legislation protects all actors effectively? We will commit to promote programmes providing financial help to those facing potential legal fees when publishing their findings.

1-086-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I plan to look very closely into how we will design the part of the Creative Europe programme which is about protecting independent journalism and also the Values and Citizenship Programme, which is about protecting the values and the active society. And the way we design the programmes will be a very important factor for the efficiency of using this money, and I want this money to be used on the things which we need. If we need more protection for journalists and for the people who are threatened by different circles or by those who are really threatening them also online, we have to think in a smart way about the possible legal aid but also about the possibility of physical protection, and this could be done also by means of EU money. And I will engage with the Member States with a proposal on some co-financing, because this is not only the EU matter – this should be also a strong obligation for the Member States to protect the journalists better. So I hope it will work.

1-087-0000

**Vladimír Bilčík (PPE).** – We have already mentioned here the latest Eurobarometer survey, which does show that indeed the people across Europe feel very low levels of satisfaction with the way we fight disinformation in the media in Europe, and I think we all share the view that this information poses is not only a problem to our information security but also to our very democratic system. Would you therefore agree with me that we just don’t need broad-based crisis management tools in pre-election times to fight disinformation, but we need specific and targeted concrete steps to increase digital literacy and also day-to-day society resilience? And if so, which ones would you propose? And moreover, let me push you a bit more on the concrete measures which you propose to protect journalists in the EU so that targeted assassinations of investigative journalists such as Dafne Galizia and Ján Kuciak are prevented. Which ones did you have in mind – both the financial ones and the legal ones?

1-088-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I will start with your second question. Besides all the things which I already mentioned here – that we should use the funding for systemic kind of support and protection, together with the Member States – I would also like to encourage the journalists themselves to find a helping hand in case of some horrible threat, some horribly violent messages which appeared in their mailbox. They should not hesitate to ask the police to look into the case, because I think that in the situation when people are

threatened in this way, with this intensity, it's the core function of the state to provide protection.

This will be also part of my engagement – that I will speak to the associations which work for journalists and with journalists to use better the protection, and it's the obligation of the state to guarantee it. I think that there is still space to use.

On the first question, well indeed we should not be hysterical about disinformation. We should do what we have to do now. We have the code of practice with the platforms. I ask them to come with the report, from before the European elections, over October, so mid-October, I think next week I will get the first assessment from the platforms. We will analyse the results and we will come next year with the proposal to upgrade the action plan on disinformation in case of need. If not, we will continue what we are already doing.

But to imagine that we will only impose the obligation on the platforms to do something about it is naive. It will not make the magic, it will not change the situation. We have to focus on long-term measures, on the media and digital literacy. We have to start with young people. We have to also engage with the seniors who fear – in many countries we have seniors in some kind of stress and that's why they are the target. This is the long-term measure which we have to focus more on.

1-089-0000

**Vladimír Bilčík (PPE).** – Vo svojom minulom mandáte komisárky pre spravodlivosť, ktorý momentálne končíte, ste preukázali svoju integritu a zostali nezávislou vo vzťahu k jednotlivým členským štátom, s ktorými ste zaobchádzali férovo. Domnievam sa však, že práve táto nezávislosť bude ešte dôležitejšia vo vašom budúcom mandáte, ak bude potvrdený, pretože budete v pozícii podpredsedníčky pre európske hodnoty, ako aj transparentnosť. Očakávame preto, že budete aktívna, keď budú v ktoromkoľvek členskom štáte ohrozené hodnoty právneho štátu, bez toho, aby ste sa pozerali doprava, doľava, na nejaké osobné alebo politické preferencie, a rád by som naozaj tu a teraz počul váš záväzok, že to tak bude. Okrem toho som si vo vašej písomnej odpovedi s potešením prečítal, že ste pripravená úzko spolupracovať s Európskym parlamentom, ktorý považujete za silného partnera. Preto vás chcem vyzvať, či by ste odmietli názory českého premiéra, ktorý svojho času povedal, že v tomto parlamente sa vedú, citujem, „*ty samé nesmyslné rozpravy, jaké známe z českého parlamentu*“. Ďakujem.

1-090-0000

**Věra Jourová, designovaná komisařka.** – Já odpovím česky. Samozřejmě jsem velmi dobře rozuměla. V mé generaci velmi dobře rozumíme *slovenčině*. Děkuji za otázku, pane Bilčíku.

Dvě odpovědi: Já jsem připravena pokračovat v tom, jak jsem přistupovala k věcem nyní, to znamená nezávisle a nestranně, měřit všem stejným metrem. Já si myslím, že to je naprosto potřeba nejenom v oblasti právního státu a hodnot. Takže k tomu se tady veřejně zavazují, že takto budu konat i nadále.

Co se týče názorů, že parlamenty jsou místem, kde se mluví zbytečně, abych to parafrázovala možná trochu jemněji, tak s tím samozřejmě nesouhlasím, ať to je o Evropském parlamentu nebo o národních parlamentech. Já si myslím, že parlamenty jsou velmi významnou součástí evropské demokracie a diskuse v parlamentech je naprosto potřeba.

1-091-0000

**Clare Daly (GUE/NGL).** – Thank you Chair, could I put on the record, first, that it's the duty of everybody who believes in human rights to defend the Good Friday Agreement so that all of us on both sides of the Irish border can continue to live our lives in peace.

That said, I think in an overall sense there is a big disconnect between the citizens of Europe and its institutions. One of the ways of addressing this is ethics – and I wasn't entirely satisfied with your response to my colleague in relation to the need to create an independent ethics body. This is something that we feel incredibly strongly about.

In your answer, you talked about it being an advisory body just at the beginning, start working – that's a little bit woolly.

In your written answer, you said you would treat ethics as a moral imperative.

What I want to know is: are you committing here publicly to the establishment of an independent ethics body, which I think is key for transparency?

1-092-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you very much, Ms Daly, for your question giving me the opportunity to say what I wanted to say about the independent ethics body because I did not have enough time. It was my mistake. I said that it might be one of the options, that it might be the advisory body which would be set up by independent trustworthy people high credibility, not the sitting members of none of the institutions, but external people who would look into the concrete cases in a fast way because speed is also of the essence: when some case bursts out it is necessary that there is a quick reaction of the institutions. I spoke about this as one of the possible options.

The other option could be that the institutions will agree on the ethics body, which will have stronger competences. But to be honest, I went through some previous cases when there were such attempts to establish such a body, and there was never strong enough appetite by the institutions, which have their own codes of conduct and staff regulations, to have something extra which is outside their reach. I don't want to predict here anything.

This is a new thing for me. I want to engage in dialogue with the institutions, I want to look at previous or past proposals, and I want to find the best possible model for an independent ethics body which will be a very strong agent or institute to go and create with us the European political culture, because this is about political culture as well. So I don't want to close any door. I just want to say let's look into it together, because it will be not only about the Commission. It will be again one of the topics for a very, very intensive interinstitutional dialogue.

1-093-0000

**Clare Daly (GUE/NGL).** – I think what you're saying is that you're committed to the body but you're not sure what form it will take. I hope you're saying that.

My second question is that your portfolio has responsibility for defending European democracy from foreign interference, but also for supporting independent journalists through cross-border projects.

Now we know there are strong protections in Europe, but these can be undermined if foreign powers can whisk journalists and publishers out of Europe to jails thousands of miles away.

We know in 2010, for example, the not-for-profit publisher, WikiLeaks, did some brilliant, award-winning investigative journalism about US crimes in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. And now WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, is in prison in Britain, facing extradition to the US on a bill of indictment that seeks to criminalise the very journalistic sources at the heart of this.



So what I want to know is: what will you do to support European democracy and civil society from attacks on freedom of the press by foreign parties, like the US and, in particular, to protect journalists in Europe from extradition for political persecution?

1-094-0000

**Věra Jourová**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I am afraid that extradition is a remit of the Member State concerned and I will not engage on concrete individual cases because this is where the line is.

I'm just referring to Mr Assange's case where we were waiting for the decision of the British courts, and this is for the Commission also a very clear task to be aware of the limits of own competences.

As for protection against abusive litigation, I spoke about it before. We will look into the concrete case system, map the situation and it might be that we will analyse also the cases when journalists face some very unpleasant procedures outside Europe. But I have to do a proper mapping of the whole situation. I know now the Maltese case, but I need to know more.

1-095-0000

**Sylwia Spurek (S&D)**. – The EU treaties ensure dialogue between the Commission and NGOs and civil society. You are entrusted to lead the dialogue with churches and philosophical and non-confessional organisations, as stated in your mission letter.

In that letter, however, only the part about the churches is highlighted in bold. Is there favouritism towards churches, as against philosophical and non-confessional organisations?

My second question concerns the fact that you will also be responsible for the European Citizens' Initiative. So far, the Commission has admitted accepting initiatives although they were against EU values, women's rights, LGBTI rights, etc. What concrete measures will you take to ensure that the Commission will reject citizens' initiatives of this kind?

1-096-0000

**Věra Jourová**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I am entrusted with engaging in dialogue with churches and philosophical and non-confessional groups as well. There is no privileged approach to churches.

This will be a new area for me – although only in part because I had two significant relevant experiences in my last term of office. The first, I think, was in 2016 when we had a colloquium on fundamental rights and we invited representatives of all the churches. The dialogue and our debate was very interesting and encouraging. They showed that they can speak to each other and they can agree on the way forward on values-related topics. So it was an important and useful event.

The second experience was when I was promoting the Istanbul Convention in the Member States, because I was working on the EU's accession to the Convention and I also wanted to present the Convention in the Member States. I was confronted with very strong opposition from the Orthodox Church, from the Catholic Church, especially in the east of Europe. Again, it was not an easy debate but it was useful for me to listen to the objections, to start to understand why there is such fear, and to bring forward arguments. Dialogue is important.

That's why I am glad that there is provision in the Treaty for dialogue with churches and philosophical and non-confessional groups. I will be happy to do that. It's envisaged twice a year. I am still thinking about the arrangements and method, but I will be happy to engage in this dialogue.

On EU action on body-related matters, I think that these are matters which do not fall under the EU remit. We have already rejected some of the initiatives, but I will have to look at it. I remember when the European Parliament had a debate about the abortion law in Poland, I was sitting there and I had to say that I cannot work on this actively because the EU doesn't have competence for these cases.

1-097-0000

**Sylwia Spurek (S&D).** – Actually, I was asking about the European Citizens' Initiative, so could you elaborate more on that?

In your answers to Parliament, you mentioned your work against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, and for me, as a former Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights in Poland, these are very important issues. I would like to ask you how you are going to prevent, for example, xenophobic, anti-democratic and anti-minority forces from promoting their agenda, undermining the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union.

1-098-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – First a clarification: whenever we receive a citizens' initiative that doesn't fall under the remit of the EU, then we do not deal with it. That was more a legal comment than a political one.

Our measures against racism and xenophobia cover an extremely large number of things. We have the Framework Decision against Racism and Xenophobia, which, as I said before, focuses very much on monitoring how the Member States are implementing the EU legislation through their respective legal orders. We are running a lot of projects supporting civil society, which work with and for minorities. We are also running a lot of important programmes funded by the European Social Fund to help people in social distress, and that includes help for some minorities.

And we are campaigning. I myself launched a campaign to protect and support the rights of LGBTI people. It was a very useful campaign, I believe.

So, there are many, many things and we have to continue doing that.

1-099-0000

**Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield (Verts/ALE).** – Madame Jourová, cela a beaucoup été dit: votre portefeuille va être déterminant dans les années qui viennent. Nous sommes dans une époque particulière où la démocratie européenne est parfois en danger.

Pour une démocratie vivante, tout est lié: liberté d'expression, droit d'information des citoyens, presse indépendante, financement des partis politiques et donc des campagnes politiques claires et transparentes. Nous avons déjà beaucoup parlé pendant cette audition des risques de la désinformation et des risques de l'interférence électorale.

Je voudrais néanmoins être plus spécifique: comment peut-on encadrer plus strictement les puissances privées, qui ont parfois des intérêts très forts dans les processus électoraux, telles que certaines multinationales, et ce où qu'elles soient situées, tout en garantissant toujours la liberté d'expression?

Pensez-vous que les plateformes doivent contrôler elles-mêmes leur contenu, voire opérer des censures ou mettre en place des algorithmes qui bloquent automatiquement les contenus? Ou, au contraire, garantirez-vous que sur les réseaux sociaux des comptes ne puissent être fermés ou des contenus supprimés qu'en cas d'activités illégales et après décision judiciaire?

1-100-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Very briefly, we want the platforms to cooperate on removing content that is illegal, which is prohibited by the law, and here we are talking

about child pornography, about terrorism, and about hate speech which criminal law prohibits in all the Member States.

We rely on the platforms in the case of hate speech, which is the most sensitive thing – rightly so, some may say, as there might be a contradiction with freedom of speech. We want them to assess cases of hate speech, and in a case of doubt as to whether something constitutes hate speech, which is prohibited by the law, they have to leave it there. By contrast, in Germany the law now requires that in cases of doubt they remove it, because they are under sanction. I am not criticising Germany for having this law, I just want you to see the distinction between a voluntary action and an action under the law.

We will look into how this works. The Digital Services Act will be proposed very soon, under the remit of Margrethe Vestager. We will definitely also look at how the algorithms are working, and we will want more transparency on this because we need to have a chance to understand the construction of algorithms – how they work and why, because there may be a breach of fundamental rights here. The result could be very harmful.

There are other things we want to look at, and I believe Europe will achieve good results because, if I may say one sentence more, I think that, in the digital sphere, Europe has good instincts with regard to harmful content. When you compare us with the USA, I think we are doing much better on data protection and on the fight against illegal content.

1-101-0000

**Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield (Verts/ALE).** – Merci pour cette première réponse. Nous y reviendrons certainement et nous vous reposerons des questions mais vous avez apporté quelques précisions. Pas suffisamment à mon goût, mais cela viendra.

Ma deuxième question sera sur un tout autre sujet, à savoir la Hongrie. Depuis le début de cette audition, nous avons déjà évoqué la situation dans un certain nombre de pays, notamment la Hongrie. J'ai l'honneur et surtout la très grande responsabilité d'être rapporteure pour le Parlement. La présidence finlandaise a montré et montre une très grande détermination sur ce sujet et elle peut en être félicitée.

Vous avez répondu à mes collègues Anna Júlia Donáth et Terry Reintke que vous considériez qu'il n'était pas normal que le Parlement ne soit pas suffisamment impliqué. Vous avez rappelé son rôle essentiel dans le déclenchement de l'article 7, mais vous n'avez là non plus pas été assez précise à mon goût. Je vais donc vous poser une question directe, la même que je pose à un certain nombre de mes interlocuteurs sur le sujet et que d'autres membres du Parlement à mes côtés posent: seriez-vous en faveur d'une audition du Parlement auprès du Conseil sur ce sujet? Et puis, pour aller plus loin et de manière plus générale, dans tout le cadre de cette procédure de l'article 7, le fait que le Parlement ait été un peu écarté peut apparaître comme une manière de minimiser son rôle. Dans le cadre plus général d'un mécanisme qui va être mis en place pour l'état de droit dans l'Union européenne, donnerez-vous son entière place au Parlement, qui est le représentant des citoyens?

1-102-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I will repeat what I said before. I think that, in the case of Hungary, it was the European Parliament which triggered the Article 7 process. So, the full engagement and participation of the European Parliament is needed. It is logical and I think it is very appropriate.

On the annual review of the rule of law – because this too is partly the result of what the European Parliament did and what we achieved through the recommendation on the comprehensive assessment and comprehensive tool – we will try to find the best way of

getting the strongest possible engagement by Parliament in designing the assessment and running the annual report as a method. We don't want to do it behind closed doors. This is obviously shared work to be done not only by the European Parliament but also by the Member States. I am committed to having the most intensive cooperation possible.

1-103-0000

**Catherine Bearder (Renew).** – Thank you for your fulsome answers – we are nearly at the end – and we have heard some of your plans on the transparency of the legislative cycle, but I'm keen to hear how quickly you intend opening up and allowing scrutiny of trilogues. As you'll have gathered, we put great importance on transparency in this House as we develop and amend legislation.

You will also be in charge of better EU law-making as part of your portfolio, but however good the laws are, if they are not upheld, they are worth little and lose credibility in the eyes of citizens. When these laws are ignored and broken or pathetic fines are imposed, it leaves our Union undermined, outrages citizens and devalues all the values that we – and you – hold dear. Good laws, with our transparency, goes hand-in-hand with good enforcement. What steps would you envisage to make the enforcement of EU law more transparent and more effective? Would you consider publishing this progress in your annual report on enforcement?

1-104-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – First, on transparency, I would like to come with initial proposals to Parliament and the Council already this year. So this should be started as soon as possible.

By the way, this is one of my key tasks, so I should start working on it immediately – and having some partial results maybe over the next half of the year. I don't see the need or the reason for waiting because this is an ongoing process. Speaking about the transparency of the legislative procedure, we need it now. We need to improve it now. So I will be quick.

On better lawmaking, you know that the Commission will have the principle 'One in, one out' and that the implementation is absolutely crucial. I just want to say that we will have to be courageous and look into the laws and the European directives which do not fulfil their original purpose and be brave and change them.

This is what I tried in Consumer Policy – to get rid of the old stuff from the 1980s, the stuff which is imposing enormous burdens on SMEs and so on.

We will have to do more on this and to publish the report on implementation, I see this as a very possible solution.

1-105-0000

**Catherine Bearder (Renew).** – Thank you for your reply, but in terms of enforcement, we don't have a good record, do we? I need only to cite Volkswagen, Malta's continued shooting of migratory birds, destruction of protected forests and polluting of watercourses. Of course, environmental crimes are often seen as victimless but we all lose. And the citizens watch when we make legislation and then Member countries carry on.

Of course, it's the Member States and their governments who must understand that we look to our Commission, including you when you are confirmed, to be standing firm up to them when the laws are broken, whatever that law is. Can you confirm your commitment to this law enforcement and to working with the Member States?

1-106-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Yes I can. I agree that we should be as transparent as possible also on this – at least I was in my current portfolio. I never hesitated to name and shame. It didn't increase my popularity in Member States, but it was needed. So I guess this

will be also the practice of the new Commission and I will be the actor who will be pushing for as much transparency as possible, also on the implementation.

1-107-0000

**Loránt Vincze (PPE).** – It is difficult, with the last question, to put anything new on the table, but let's try.

Commissioner-designate, you will be responsible for improving the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). The legal instrument has been in place for seven years now, but it is not effective. Out of 70 initial citizens' initiatives, only six managed to collect more than one million signatures. We know that the new regulation will enter into force next year, making use of the ECI simpler and easier for citizens. However, experience shows, as you noted today, that the main challenges for citizens' initiatives were not only the procedural ones and the legal requirements but also the reluctance of the Commission to turn initiatives into legislation.

So far, none of the four registered initiatives has resulted in a new EU legal act. Basically, citizens were given a tool in the Lisbon Treaty that has not even once been fully implemented by the Commission. So, what will you do to ensure that the ECI is more than a symbolic statement towards participative democracy?

1-108-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I am happy that you have asked about this because, when I saw in my mission letter that I was to have responsibility for the Citizens' Initiative, I started immediately to think about how to turn this more or less formal procedure into something more vivid, more practical for people, and more promising in terms of two-way communication.

Your figures are right: not many initiatives were registered for follow-up action. I don't agree that there was a reluctance by the Commission to take on board the proposals, but I would say that the procedure was rather slow and also rather legalistic, including with regard to communication with organisers.

I would like to change this. I will use the best of, or take the most from, the new legislative version of the Citizens' Initiative, which will come into force on 1 January. We have to speed up communication here: we have to speed up the electronic system for communicating with the organisers, and consider some helplines and some active support, so that people who want to bring forward an initiative know what we want them to do in order to fulfil the legal obligations.

I promise I will do my best to change this.

1-109-0000

**Loránt Vincze (PPE).** – To complement a previous question: today, in some Member States of the European Union, there are laws in place to protect autochthonous, national and linguistic minorities, but they are not all implemented, or they are implemented only partially. Do you foresee that the rule-of-law mechanism and monitoring will affect the application of existing legislation, in the field of minority rights specifically?

1-110-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – I see this more in terms of the assessment we will make, and possible action we will take, through the fundamental rights agenda.

I said that we will be updating the strategy for implementing the Charter, and that will also mean that we will look again at how we promote fundamental rights in European legislation, and also how European legislation is implemented at Member State level.

So, this is more about the strength of fundamental rights, and we will be looking into the rights of minorities, including linguistic ones.

1-111-0000

**Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D), Chair LIBE.** – Well, that was quite a round, 25 questions. They have all been said and answered, as we have just seen and heard. This hearing is coming to its final part, which includes a final say – as in a fair trial – for our Commissioner-designate, Vice-President-designate Věra Jourová.

The floor is yours to make your closing statement before we put an end to this hearing. Me and Co-Chair Antonio Tajani will be announcing the way forward as to the coordinators meeting for the assessment and evaluation. The floor is yours, Ms Jourová.

1-112-0000

**Věra Jourová, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you very much for this debate. I think that I can say now already there's a very fresh experience that the hearing confirmed two things to me. First, that all the committees present here today can rely on parliamentarians with dedication and knowledge who will be working hard for the next five years on the many issues we've talked about. It's a good feeling for me. I will have strong allies this House.

The second, the President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, was spot-on in creating a role with my job description. This job is going to be new. It didn't exist five years ago or before that. It draws lessons from the challenges we face, the new threats to our democracy. We are seeing old threats amplified by new means and technology. We are seeing challenges to the mere foundations the Union is built on – the rule of law, fundamental rights. We are seeing the need to change the decision-making set-up so that we can be more transparent and easier to understand by the citizens.

We have a task to equip ourselves well in light of the 2024 elections. There is a lot at stake, and we should dare if we care. History is not finished, contrary to what Fukuyama has argued. In fact, if anything, history is even speeding up. My role, if confirmed by you, would be to coordinate the Commission's work on these matters. My role will be to look with a magnifying glass on everything the next Commission does to ensure that our values and the rule of law are upheld, that fundamental rights are part of the policy design in all areas of our work and also that our democracy is growing stronger and more resilient against modern threats.

I would also work very closely with colleagues, in particular the Justice Commissioner, and use my horizontal role to break silos and bring under one roof all relevant policies. I was entrusted by the President-elect with bringing to life some new ideas, like the new annual rule of law mechanism or the European democracy action plan. I see my role as being a strong advocate of the people. I want to make their individual and collective voices heard, not ignored. I want to see their rights respected, not trampled. I want to fight for people's trust in Europe by improving the way we select EU leaders and by setting high transparency and ethical standards for all institutions.

Honourable Members, one thing is clear to me: I will not be able to do this job alone. All steps will require determination, creativity and cross-party support. If confirmed, I want to work closely with all of you in the coming years, and I hope I can count on your support, scrutiny and ideas.

1-113-0000

**Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Chair LIBE.** – We thank you dearly, Vice-President-designate Věra Jourová. We thank all of the Members that have taken part in this discussion. Thank you all for the preparation and the expression of the questions we've heard so far.

Now we're coming to the end and it's time for the concluding remarks. Let me just say that you have seen that the name of your portfolio – Values and Transparency – is challenging for all of us because both of them are classic to the European process, to the European build-up, but precisely for being so they are subject to new challenges which pose new threats which require new capacities. The digital age, which is also the digital era, which is also the name of an important Vice-Presidency of this very Commission, is meant to pose new challenges to the way we have lived democracy and political participation and citizenship so far. As to freedom of expression, which is surely a most fundamental right of every European citizen, it is enhanced by the digital Europe but also poses new challenges and threats because of the spread of intoxication, manipulation and disinformation through the social media, which leads to a distortion of the democratic process and due process of law and the very consistency of the rule of law itself.

So it is most challenging, this portfolio, where you are to coordinate some other relevant areas of the Commission-to-be. You have shown that you do care. We know about you. We have learnt to know about you, because many of us who have renewed their mandate within this House have got to know you through the past five years. We have seen you at work and we surely will keep an eye as to the way forward, because it is only obvious that this new structure of the Commission is meant to pose challenges not only for the European Parliament, but to the Commission itself – as to how to relate to each other and coordinate with each other. Vice-Presidents are dealing with areas that touch upon each other and are to coordinate some other portfolios by other Commissioners, so that the whole of the work really does make sense.

We thank you. We thank you for your endeavour, we thank you for the effort and the energy you have put over the past two and a half hours.

Now I pass the floor to our Co-Chair, Mr Tajani, the Chair of the AFCO Committee, so that he can put an end to this meeting.

1-114-0000

**Antonio Tajani**, *Chair AFCO*. – First of all I want to thank all the Members of the European Parliament coming from AFCO, LIBE and JURI. I want to thank also the interpreters. I think it is thanks to your work that it is possible to talk in our mother tongue, and this is positive for everybody. This is also defend and to protect our democracy.

As my colleague López Aguilar said, we need to strengthen the freedom of the press. I remember the name of Daphne Caruana Galizia, and all the other journalists killed. I remember during the Christmas holidays one year ago the murder of two journalists in Strasbourg. It is important. We need to protect the freedom of the press. I say this not because I am a journalist but because I think the freedom of the press is a key point for our democracy, for our transparency. For this we need your engagement, not only your formal engagement but also your practical engagement in this Parliament. We will work with you on this.

Finally, the meeting between the coordinators of AFCO and LIBE will be at 6.30 p.m. after the short press point and statement. Tomorrow morning we will sign the letter.

1-115-0000

*(The hearing closed at 17.39)*