Dear Mr TAJANI,

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and, as associated Committees, the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the Committee on Transport and Tourism, in accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, held a public hearing on Tuesday 8 October 2019 with Frans Timmermans, Commissioner-designate, who, subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure, will be the Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal.

Prior to the hearing, Parliament had sent the Commissioner-designate a list of written questions. My committee noted that Mr Timmermans answered those questions satisfactorily.

The course of the hearing

Mr Timmermans opened the hearing by making a statement in which he presented his vision for the European Green Deal. In particular, he stressed the need for a dedicated Just Transition Fund to support the people and communities most affected. On climate targets, he committed himself to propose a Climate Law within his first 100 days in office to enshrine in legislation the EU’s 2050 climate-neutrality objective. He also promised to put forward legislative proposals to help the EU reduce its 2030 emissions by at least 50%, or preferably by 55%. He went on to explain his views on how to finance large renovation projects, through fair financing schemes, in cooperation with EIB and InvestEU, so that the Green Deal would mean lower energy bills for citizens and the creation of local jobs, while stressing the importance also of the Just Transition mechanism. On biodiversity, he committed himself to present a robust and ambitious Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and to lead on the global stage at the next UN Conference of the Parties on Biodiversity in China in 2020. He also made reference to the Commission’s Sustainable Farm to Fork initiative and called for an ambitious project of reforestation across Europe. He stressed the need to
move towards a zero-pollution environment, to tackle environmental degradation and pollution, address air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, industrial emissions, pesticides, endocrine disrupters and microplastics. He also promised to propose a new Circular Economy Action Plan focusing on sustainable products and resource use focusing in particular on the textiles and construction sectors. On the issue of emissions from the transport sector, he stressed that he did not want a car-free Europe, but rather wanted emissions-free cars, and added that a careful mix of tools would be needed in order to cut emissions from the aviation and maritime sectors, and the road transport sector. He added that he wanted the EU to have the best transport systems in the world. The Commissioner-designate also considered that the European Climate Pact should be a cornerstone of the Green Deal and committed himself to strengthening the EU’s international climate diplomacy and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. He also considered that the EU should consider other instruments, such as a carbon border tax, to level the playing field if other countries are not as ambitious.

The introductory statement of Mr Timmermans was followed by a first round of seven questions from representatives of each political group and a second round of 18 questions by Members, including also a representative from the non-attached Members.

During the course of the hearing, Mr Timmermans as Executive Vice-President in charge of the Green Deal made specific commitments regarding his future action, which included the following:

On horizontal issues:

- He committed himself to ensure a better coherence between policy areas in the Commission, as in the past the Commission had put in place contradictory policies. He explained, in particular, that there was a clear need to address fossil fuel subsidies, as they were in contraction with climate objectives. He also committed himself to carry out his tasks as Executive Vice-President in the spirit of collegiality. He mentioned that he would closely cooperate with, amongst others, the Executive Vice-President responsible for an “Economy that works for all”, the Executive Vice-President responsible for “A Europe fit for the digital age” and the Commissioner for Economy, especially in order to help industry in their transition to a carbon neutral economy.

- He explained that, for the European Green Deal, a total of 200 billion per year would be needed from both private investment and public funding.

- On the MFF, he explained that more funding would be necessary, but stressed that this additional funding would help the EU make the transition to a carbon neutral economy. He also underlined the need to adjust the Commission’s position on the MFF.

- He also underlined that a Just Transition Fund will be necessary to address the social and economic impacts of the climate transition, especially in industrial, coal and energy-intensive regions. He added that there was nothing wrong with requiring that payments be conditional on phasing out coal. He also stressed that coal had no future and insisted that coal regions in Europe need and will get European solidarity.

- In addition, he underlined the need for a more general transition mechanism to provide concerted and targeted funding through different financial instruments, such
as the Cohesion Funds and InvestEU, which would also leverage private investments on sustainable projects and job creation.

- He said that he had talked to the President of EIB and that the Bank is prepared to spell out how investment will be provided for the transition.
- He also explained that, concerning the European Green Deal, the “One in, One out” principle would not lead to deregulation in this area, but rather to a mix of revising existing legislation and adopting new pieces of legislation.
- In addition, he stressed the need for better implementation and enforcement of EU law.

On thematic policies:

- For the 2030 targets, he acknowledged that there would not be time to have a two-step approach and that tough additional measures would be required to increase emission reduction targets from 50% to 55%. He also stressed the importance of having a thorough analysis prior to considering an increase of the reduction targets to 55%, and added that he would be very surprised if the outcome of the analysis was not a 55% reduction. He also underlined the need to agree on an EU position on the 2030 target before COP26 in Glasgow, as this will be the last COP before the official start of the Paris Agreement.
- In addition, he explained that the EU Climate Law should not only address the 2050 climate neutrality target, but should also map out the detailed trajectory to get there, and include a policy mix needed to reach that goal, which would include raising the ambition of existing legislation, putting forward new legislation, and using the flexibility of existing measures also at the level of Member States.
- On the EU’s emissions trading system (ETS), he stressed the need to extend the ETS to other sectors, such as the aviation and maritime sectors, and to have a Green Ports initiative. He also clarified that DG CLIMA would remain responsible for EU ETS although the Transport Commissioner would lead on this under his full responsibility.
- He stressed that he was not against an extension of the ETS to the road transport sector in principle, but considered that this should not substitute or weaken existing CO₂ emission standards that proved to be much more successful and straightforward.
- Generally, he did not consider that there was a need to have a carbon floor price under the ETS.
- He also considered that as a first step, the EU should encourage trading partners to share the same ambition as the EU, but should they not choose to follow this path, a carbon border tax, complying with the WTO rules, would be justified to ensure a level playing field.
- In addition, he committed himself to present a hydrogen strategy.
- He considered that there was a need for third generation biofuels as part of an energy mix for example for the aviation sector, given the negative experience encountered with first generation biofuels.
- On a possible kerosene tax, he stated that he wanted to have the possibility to at least envisage the taxation of kerosene, because he did not see the logic for a tax exemption for that energy source.
- In taxation and especially in the energy field, he stated that there would be a need to use the passerelle clause, to move from unanimity to qualified majority voting in Council.
- He committed himself to investment on large renovation projects for social housing tenants and private homeowners across the EU.
- He also committed himself to adopting a Climate Pact that will bring together initiatives and pledges from communities, companies, neighbourhoods, sharing knowledge and data, and helping and inspiring others with best practices and concrete results.
- He stated that climate related public investment should not be excluded from the calculation of the 3% budget deficit on the GDP ratio in the framework of the Stability and Growth Pact and that according to him this was under the responsibility of the Executive Vice-President responsible for an “Economy that works for all”.
- He also made a personal commitment to dedicate time and staff to encourage trading partners to increase their NDCs.

- On biodiversity, he committed himself to present a Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 prior to the CBD COP in 2020 in Kunming and called for the EU to take a leading role at the COP, as it did for the Paris Agreement. He also underlined the importance of clear targets and explained that setting benchmarks for biodiversity was not straightforward. He also stressed the clear link between climate change and biodiversity.
- He also considered that there was a need for more transparency for consumers to know whether products result in deforestation or loss of biodiversity. He also mentioned that he was considering several options such as the labelling of products, and would consider a ban on non-deforestation-free commodities, but that this would need an assessment of impact.
- On air quality, he considered that the rules were clear and committed himself to take stronger action on enforcement and launch infringement procedures as appropriate. He stressed that the car industry needed to deliver, especially through innovation.
- On plastics, he agreed that a global ban on the most damaging single-use plastics was needed and added that single use plastics should no longer be used in packaging, inter alia in view of the growing concerns on the potential negative impact of microplastics. He also explained that, in his view, reducing the use of plastics was a better solution than recycling plastics and that the EU should take care of its own waste.
- On the role of agriculture in the European Green Deal, he considered that the proposed reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was moving in the right direction, although certain adjustments would be needed. He also underlined that it was important to get farmers on board, and that the aim of the CAP should be sustainable food production. He added that there should be a discussion on the funding of the first and second pillars of the CAP and considered that there should be more room for manoeuvre for the second pillar.
- On the link between the CAP and the Farm to Fork Strategy, he explained that the Strategy will look at fertilisers' use, innovation in animal feed to decrease emissions, ways to reduce pesticide use, where animal feed is coming from, links to other goals such as stopping deforestation, and ensuring food quality.
- When asked a question on how to adjust competition rules to the agricultural sector, his answer was incomplete.
On the impact of trade agreement on farmers, he agreed that farmers needed to be protected and that the impact on farmers should be taken into account in trade negotiations, as had been successfully done in the Mercosur negotiations.

He committed himself to adopt an ambitious EU reforestation strategy to restore EU forests and create new green spaces in cities.

In addition, he committed himself to propose a new Circular Economy Action Plan focusing on sustainable products and resource use, especially in resource-intensive and high impact sectors such as textiles and construction.

He also committed himself to move towards a zero-pollution environment, to tackle environmental degradation and pollution, address air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, industrial emissions, pesticides, endocrine disrupters and microplastics.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which he stressed the urgency of the situation and the collective responsibility for adopting legislation in next five years in order to achieve the EU’s carbon neutrality objective, underlining that the EU should lead the path by being the first continent to make the transition.

Overall Evaluation:

On the basis of the responses of the Members present at the hearing, as well as the comments made by my committee's coordinators, who met in camera after the hearing under my chairmanship, I hereby give the following assessment:

Overall, the Commissioner-designate Timmermans made a positive general impression. His wide-ranging experience as a parliamentarian and Minister in the Netherlands, and as First Vice-President of the European Commission counted in his favour. In addition, he explained that he would work as part of a team within the College and stressed his openness to cooperating and working closely with the European Parliament. Furthermore, Mr Timmermans was well-prepared, made use of his excellent communication skills, and clearly demonstrated enthusiasm and vision for the portfolio attributed to him, as well as his strong will to guarantee maximum coherence among the different policy aspects covered by the Green Deal in the future Commission.

The ENVI coordinators representing a majority of two-thirds of the committee membership approved that the Executive Vice-President-designate Timmermans, is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

Opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy:

The ITRE coordinators welcome the statements made by Executive Vice-President-designate Timmermans on a European ‘Green Deal’.

The ITRE coordinators noted that Mr Timmermans specifically committed to:

- presenting a European Green Deal within 100 days to tackle climate change; he insisted that the Green Deal would only be successful if all Europeans are on board and no one is left behind;
- cooperating with other Commissioners to ensure a level playing field for the European industry vis-à-vis international competitors; he stressed that, by taking action now, Europe’s industry will be in a leading position in the development of clean technologies; he explained that the objective of the ‘one in, one out’ principle is better regulation, rather than deregulation;
- ensuring consistency of EU policies and funding under his remit with a view to achieving climate neutrality by 2050;
- a thorough analysis before proposing to raise the GHG emission reduction target to 55% by 2030, while personally believing that the analysis will show that at least 55% will be necessary; he underlined the need to agree an EU position on the 2030 target before COP26 in Glasgow;
- putting in place a Just Transition Fund equipped with additional EU funding - to be reflected in the new MFF - and directing existing funding programmes towards achieving the climate neutrality objective; he stressed that coal has no future and insisted that coal regions in Europe need and will get European solidarity; he also underlined the need to mobilise private investments;
- fostering energy efficiency by promoting large renovation and investment programmes to help those struggling to pay their energy bills, while at the same time promoting the renovation industry and the creation of jobs;
- working with national governments on phasing out fossil fuel subsidies;
- addressing the question of unanimity in the field of energy taxation with Member States;
- proposing to align the Energy Taxation Directive with the EU climate ambitions;
- promoting third generation biofuels;
- developing a strategy to promote hydrogen; he stated that natural gas is not sustainable but that it will be part of the energy transition and that natural gas infrastructure can be later used for hydrogen.

The ITRE Coordinators consider that the Executive Vice-President-designate Timmermans is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

Opinion of the Committee on Transport and Tourism:

The TRAN Committee appreciates the fact that transport is at the forefront of the EU climate policy. It welcomes the engagement of Mr Timmermans to require concrete actions from all sectors, including transport, to attain the EU’s climate objectives, and supports the objective to ensure competitiveness of the European transport sector as part of a clean, digital and modern economy. It shares Mr Timmermans' ambition to ensure a coherent approach to all policies proposed by the European Commission. The TRAN Committee also welcomes the need for a strategy that supports investments in innovation and skills to be implemented in close partnership with the industry and the Member States and targeted action in clean and smart mobility. However, the TRAN Committee finds that some of Mr Timmermans’ answers are lacking concrete targets and timetables in order to achieve emission reductions in the aviation and maritime sectors, in particular as regards the Emission Trading Scheme.
The TRAN Committee makes a positive assessment of Mr Timmermans’ general competence, knowledge of the portfolio for the European Green Deal that also encompasses transport, as well as his communication skills.

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The general outcome of this hearing is that the Commissioner-designate gave a convincing impression of his aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

However, ENVI stressed the need for the Executive Vice-President to be fully and directly responsible for the extension of the ETS to the maritime sector, and DG CLIMA should remain the competent service in the Commission, as this was the case for the current Commission.

In addition, about his reference to the extension of ETS to aviation, ENVI clarified that aviation is already covered by EU ETS and underlined its long-standing position that the revenues should be reinvested for innovation supporting the aims of the Green Deal, including clean transport.

ENVI also requested additional clarifications on his proposed adjustments to the MFF, on the relationship between CAP reform and the Farm to Fork Strategy, and more generally, on how he intends to include farmers in the Green Deal.

ENVI is looking forward to an open and constructive collaboration with the Executive Vice-President, through *inter alia* regular exchanges of views in ENVI on the Green Deal and climate change, when invited.

ENVI also requested that he ensure the effective coordination with the Commissioners under his responsibility in particular with the Energy and Agriculture Commissioners as the ENVI Committee, as associated Committee, was not fully convinced of their commitments and performances during their hearings.

Overall, the ENVI coordinators representing a majority of two-thirds of the committee membership approved that the Commissioner-designate Timmermans, is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned.

During the evaluation meeting, the ID coordinator requested to include the following aspects, which constitute a minority view:

“Mr. Timmermans gave only sickeningly ideological answers. At the basis, the attribution to the EU of a transcendent and redeeming mission and a fideistic approach to the ‘ecological transition’, as much as to push the new Commission towards positions close to those of the most fanatic and irrational environmentalism.

The ‘scientific consensus’ on the ‘fight against climate change’ is a fiction, from which descends the effect of forcing to homologation the scientific community and the public debate so as to avoid getting stained of ‘denialism’. The insisting manipulation of minors for propagandistic purposes shows that the political aim is actually ‘wretched’ (to use his own words): to foment an intergenerational clash that weakens any garrison of resistance.
against the totalitarian pretentions of the current globalist financial capitalism from family, to labour, up to the national democracies by establishing, in the name of the most diverse and urgent ‘emergencies’, a perennial state of exception which shall not admit alternative. Under the disguise of ‘sustainability’, he intends to perpetuate the current unsustainable development model: the free movement of productive factors, first source of inequality, pollution and also of those anthropogenic GHG emissions which he claims to want to zero.

For these and other reasons, the ID Group deems Mr. Timmermans blatantly unsuitable for the role.”

During the evaluation meeting, the ECR coordinator requested to include the following aspects, which constitute a minority view:

“The ECR Group cannot support Mr. Frans Timmermans for the role of Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal. Mr. Timmermans presented a far-reaching agenda on CO₂ emissions reductions for 2030 and 2050, that even went beyond the political guidelines of Ursula von der Leyen. By doing so, he disregarded Article 15 (1) of the Treaty on European Union, which states that it is the role of the European Council to “provide the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and (...) define the general political directions”. Excessively ambitious climate goals will have an significant consequence on our economies and societies, and therefore these objectives should be decided unanimously by the European Council as was the case in 2014, and not unilaterally by Mr. Timmermans on the basis of a letter signed by only eight Member States.

Mr. Timmermans also failed to elaborate a convincing plan on how he intends to ensure that other major global economies follow the EU’s climate action agenda. Regarding the future of road transport, his remarks raise concerns that this sector will be subject to double regulation, with legislation on emission performance standards and the EU ETS applying concurrently, which may incur a significant increase in costs for the sector. He also informed Parliament that he intends to address the question of Council unanimity in the field of energy taxation, which for our group, crosses a fundamental red line on taxation policy and Member State subsidiarity.

Although he admitted that more money will be required to secure just transition in all Member States, he provided no details on where this additional money will come from, and how it will target the needs of Member States most exposed by the low carbon transition. However, this did not stop him from promising to present a Climate Law within his first 100 days in office. We therefore doubt that it will include a robust impact assessment and the financial commitments necessary to make it work. Moreover, we are very concerned with his statement that financing from the Just Transition Fund should be conditional on a commitment to close coal mines. We believe this goes against the principle of just transition, which should assist with the economic and social consequences of climate policies, rather than create additional problems. This approach could potentially lead to civil unrest, and provoke political extremism in Europe. For these reasons, we cannot support Mr Timmermans.”

During the evaluation meeting, the GUE/NGL coordinator requested to include the following aspects, which constitute a minority view:

“GUE/NGL cannot support the Commissioner-designate without further commitments to follow the scientific recommendations on reduction targets for greenhouse gases, and to
firmly address the inconsistencies between climate and agricultural policies, and on ending fossil fuel subsidies.”

Yours sincerely,

Pascal Canfin

Copy:
- Adina-Ioana Vălean, Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy
- Karima Delli, Chair of the Committee on Transport and Tourism