

Committee on Industry, Research and Energy
Committee on Culture and Education
The Chairs

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CONFIDENTIAL

Antonio TAJANI
Chair
Conference of Committee Chairs
European Parliament

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Brussels, 01/10/2019

Dear Mr TAJANI,

The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the Committee on Culture and Education, in accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, held a public hearing on Monday 30 September 2019 with Ms Gabriel, Commissioner-designate for Innovation and Youth.

On 27 September the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the Committee on Culture and Education, pursuant to Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure and Article 2 of Annex VII thereto, received the letter by the JURI Committee regarding the scrutiny of the declaration of financial interests of Ms Gabriel.

Prior to the hearing, Parliament had sent the Commissioner-designate a list of written questions. Our committees noted that Ms Gabriel answered those questions and dealt with the priorities outlined satisfactorily.

Ms Gabriel opened the hearing by making a statement in which she referred to the following:

- The need to develop a new partnership with the Parliament and to work for a more inclusive Europe that leaves nobody behind and puts people at the centre of policy-making. She stressed that gender equality should be mainstreamed through policy-making;

- The fundamentally novel portfolio assigned to her, which at last brings together the three parts of the knowledge triangle – research, education and innovation. She highlighted in this respect the need to foster close synergies and develop a Europe of talents and hearts;
- The fact that research, education, youth, culture and sport policies and programmes are close to citizens, combining economic and societal value. She also underlined the need to involve citizens and regions in policy-making and policy delivery;
- The need to preserve and further develop the EU's world-leading role in science and she highlighted, in this regard, the central role of the European Research Council. She argued for continuing to keep Horizon Europe open to third country talents;
- The vital importance of a strong European Innovation Council to ensure that innovative SMEs and start-ups remain and innovate in Europe;
- The centrality of the external dimension of research, education, innovation, culture and youth in furthering the EU's enhanced global role, including through science diplomacy;
- The fact that culture and cultural heritage underpin the essence of European values and are a key building block of cohesive societies;
- The need to press for a budget that supports the considerable policy ambitions of her portfolio and a pledge to be a tenacious and tireless ally of the Parliament in the budget negotiations;
- The need to think outside the box, shifting away from established silos and patterns of working to take the opportunities of the new portfolio.

The introductory statement of Ms Gabriel was followed by a first round of 7 questions from representatives of each political group and a second round of 18 questions by other Members, including also a representative from the non-attached Members.

ITRE evaluation

With regard to issues falling within the remit of the ITRE Committee, Ms Gabriel gave the following responses and made the following specific commitments:

- To strongly support the budgetary ambitions of the Parliament for Horizon Europe (120 billion EUR in 2018 prices);
- To engage in an intensive dialogue and exchange with the Parliament on the strategic planning of Horizon Europe. In this regard, she stressed that no decision will be taken without the Parliament being given the opportunity to give its input, including on Partnerships and Missions, notably through monthly meetings. In this context the Commissioner-designate committed to ensure that on each Mission Board there will be a representative whose job will be specifically to liaise with the Parliament;
- To strengthen the link between research and innovation, so as to improve also European exploitation of research results and commercialisation. To ensure that, while respecting the principle of excellence, the benefits of Horizon Europe are distributed across all

European regions, and that energy-intensive regions and coal areas are duly supported in their transition towards a low-carbon economy;

- To further support SMEs, including start-ups, through Horizon Europe instruments, such as the European Innovation Council (EIC), as well as synergies with other programmes, such as Invest EU and the EU Structural Funds. In this regard, the regional dimension will be key for enhancing European innovation capacity. In this context, the Commissioner-designate supported the creation of a one-stop shop for SMEs within the EIC and to enhance links between the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the EIC;
- To commit to achieving the climate mainstreaming target of at least 35% under the Framework Programme (FP). She is open to revising the methodology used for monitoring the contribution of the FP to tackle climate change. Measures are still required to increase the contributions of the bottom-up parts of the Programme to the climate spending target;
- To support investment in Space within Horizon Europe and to maintain close cooperation with the Commissioner responsible for Space in particular to uptake space research in downstream activities;
- To promote the cultural and creative sectors, including through synergies between Horizon Europe and the Creative Europe Programme;
- To liaise closely with the Commissioner responsible for internal market and Executive Vice-President responsible for “Europe fit for the digital age” to ensure that research and innovation are fully embedded in the future European industrial strategy. In addition, she stressed the importance of fostering the Union’s strategic autonomy in key technologies;
- To publish in the second half of 2020 a Communication to revitalize the European Research Area, including initiatives to address brain drain in Europe. The brain drain issue will be addressed notably through the pilot scheme under Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions to extend grants to return to the country of origin and monitor closely the evolution of researchers’ salaries. Based on the results of this monitoring, further measures could be proposed. The monitoring mechanism of Horizon Europe will also assess the efficiency of widening instruments and promote if necessary further adjustments to increase participation from low-performing RDI countries and regions;
- To dedicate particular attention to Social Sciences and Humanities;
- To ensure compliance with international law and respect of human rights in granting EU funds for Research and Innovation;
- When asked during her hearing whether the recast proposal for the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) could be withdrawn, she did not want to pre-empt the decision but she mentioned the possibility for the next College to decide which files could be withdrawn as part of its political programming exercise.

CULT evaluation

The Committee on Culture and Education considered the Commissioner-designate to have very good subject knowledge and a passion for the portfolio assigned to her. Both audiovisual policy and the MEDIA sub-programme within Creative Europe have culture at their heart and culture is

not a market-driven policy area. Ms Gabriel has previous experience in overseeing audiovisual policy and the MEDIA sub-programme. As such, the CULT Committee strongly believes that these parts of the proposed portfolio of the Commissioner-designate for the Internal Market should be transferred to the portfolio of Ms Gabriel. This will ensure effective programme delivery and more consistency in cultural policy.

With regard to issues falling within the remit of the CULT Committee, Ms Gabriel gave the following responses and made the following specific commitments:

- To deliver the European Education Area by 2025, through, for example, the European Student Card and the European Universities initiative. She highlighted the steps already taken, supporting for example language learning throughout education, but did not set out clear next steps for delivering the EEA;
- To take forward work on digital skills and media literacy, notably through an upgrade of the Digital Education Action Plan and through the existing Safer Internet programme;
- To promote synergies between education and research, including through an education and research area. She did not, however, detail links between education and employment;
- To push for fresh approaches (e.g. the e-school initiative) and better use of existing funds to promote the integration of Romani children into education and to use existing tools, including the European Semester, to exert pressure on Member States;
- To fight for a tripling of the Erasmus+ budget, including vis-à-vis national Finance Ministers. She did not detail how it might impact on other MFF programmes;
- To deliver a greener and more inclusive Erasmus + programme - through greater access for small-scale organisations and marginalised groups, use of non-formal learning settings, and further development of the apprenticeship dimension. She did not, however, provide specific details on how inclusion would be achieved;
- To work towards greater synergies between the Structural Funds and Horizon Europe and Creative Europe, although she did not clearly address how to achieve this joined-up approach;
- To secure the budgetary increase in the Creative Europe programme proposed by the Commission. However, she did not go further in backing the Parliament's demand for a doubling of the budget;
- To drive forward work on European Cultural Heritage, through the informal expert group, digital tools and greater visibility of cultural policy activities. Nevertheless, Ms Gabriel did not explain how a long-term legacy will be achieved;
- To develop a genuine European strategy for the cultural and creative sectors and a new Knowledge and Innovation Community in this area;
- To follow up closely on implementation of the Copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive. She also voiced her opinion that the E-Commerce Directive should be revised;
- To deliver on the key priorities in EU sport policy (integrity, health, economy etc) and to work to unblock ratification of the Convention on Manipulation of Sports Competitions, which is a long-standing Parliament demand. She also highlighted the role of sport in promoting integration, social inclusion and enhancing access for people with disabilities;

- To engage positively with young people, notably through the Solidarity Corps. The CULT Committee particularly welcomes her desire not simply to give them a voice, but to listen to that voice and looks forward to effective mechanisms for achieving this;
- To work closely and in a joined-up way with the relevant Vice-President and the other Commissioners with overlapping portfolios, especially those charged with digital policy;
- To ensure effective dialogue with and scrutiny by the CULT Committee. However – and of critical importance in the context of the ongoing MFF programme negotiations – Ms Gabriel was non-committal on the Parliament's role over the seven-year period and did not provide adequate assurances that the Parliament would play a proper role as legislator in determining ongoing policy and budgetary choices beyond the adoption of the programme legislation. The CULT Committee will continue to press hard for this in trilogue negotiations.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which she added that the hearing should be seen as the beginning of a close partnership with the Parliament. She stressed that the portfolio, irrespective of its title, should be understood broadly.

On the basis of the responses to the Members present at the hearing, as well as the discussion among our committees' coordinators, who met in camera after the hearing under our chairmanship, we hereby give the following assessment:

The Commissioner-designate communicated her plans for the policy areas in her portfolio, namely education, research, innovation, youth, culture and sport, in a clear and detailed manner. She demonstrated that her ideas are coherent and that she has clear objectives on how her portfolio will contribute to the development of the European project. She has extensive experience both as an MEP and as a Commissioner and has direct experience of managing some programmes and policy areas within the portfolio assigned to her. She also identified important links and synergies across the various policy areas within her portfolio.

The Commissioner-designate showed a clear commitment to the European project and to key values such as diversity and inclusion. On the whole, she demonstrated a positive attitude to engaging with the European Parliament, notably giving whole-hearted support to the incoming Commission's commitment to supporting an enhanced right of initiative for the Parliament.

Throughout the hearing, the Commissioner-designate was able to answer Members' questions confidently and, in general, showed a very good grasp of the different policy areas and a command of the detail. On occasions, her replies focused on headline policy priorities and lacked some detail or else specific commitments in terms of translating those headline priorities into tangible policies.

The Committee on Industry, Energy and Research and the Committee on Culture and Education also consider that the title of the portfolio must reflect clearly and unambiguously its key components, particularly research, education and culture.

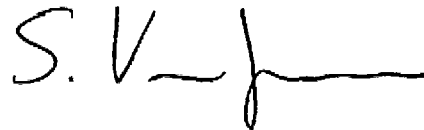
In accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure and Article 4 of Annex VII thereto, the ITRE/CULT coordinators unanimously decided that the Commissioner-designate, Ms Gabriel, is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to her.

We would be grateful if you could bring this assessment to the attention of the Conference of Presidents.

Yours sincerely,



Adina Ioana Vălean
ITRE Chair



Sabine Verheyen
CULT Chair