



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on Culture and Education

21.12.2009

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Hearing of Androulla VASSILIOU, Commissioner-designate for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth

Please find enclosed the written answers sent by Androulla VASSILIOU.

The Secretariat

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

Androulla VASSILIOU

(Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth)

General competence, European commitment and personal independence

- 1. What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

My role as Commissioner for Health has already exposed me to issues which concern the citizens of Europe directly and has underlined the importance of promoting issues of concern to all Europeans across the Union. In this sense, the field of education, culture, multilingualism and youth is similar to the portfolio of health as it is necessary to balance the need for action together with the specificities of the context within which the Treaty allows the Union to act.

Undoubtedly, my experience as Commissioner allows me to launch directly into the substantial part of the work of my new portfolio as I have had the opportunity to follow the Commission's work in the last years but also the full historical context that has led to the new institutional framework following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and also the current socio-economic environment following the financial crisis. My participation on the Convention on the Future of Europe had already given me the opportunity to examine matters that today form part of the Lisbon Treaty and the new inter-institutional framework that will guide our work together in the next five years.

I am confident that my experience as a Member of Parliament in Cyprus, serving on both the European Affairs Committee and the Committee on Education and Culture in the course of my two terms of office have offered an invaluable exposure to the intricacies of European political affairs and equipped me with a solid understanding of issues which will now form part of my portfolio. As First Lady of Cyprus, I was also particularly involved in issues concerning education, youth and culture. For example, I set up the first Pan-Cyprian Organization for Music and Fine Arts and had a leading role in the enactment of a framework

for the rights to education and vocational training for children with special needs. Having practised law for 20 years allows me to also have a direct understanding of how to handle this diverse and delicate portfolio in the current institutional context and contribute to the Commission's role as guardian of the Treaty. Last but not least, my experience with the United Nations and its agencies has provided me with important insight on how to take European issues to the international level and vice versa.

The independence of Commissioners is set out in the Treaties and constitutes a central feature of how the Commission works and how it is able to fulfil its duties. Being fully aware of the multitude of interests that are at stake in policy-making at the European level, I undertake to fully comply with the provisions of the Treaties relating to independence of Commissioners and to take all the necessary precautions in order to avoid any possible conflict of interests in the performance of my duties. I am already aware of the sensitivity of this issue in my experience as Health Commissioner, and remain determined to comply fully with the institutional and ethical requirements inherent in the exercise of my duties. I have submitted and published the Declaration of all my financial interests or assets and hereby confirm the contents of this declaration. I wish to underline that no source of potential conflict of interests exists as regards the new policy areas conferred on me. I intend to strictly respect all requirements included in the Code of Conduct for Commissioners during my mandate, and to update and publish all relevant information.

Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament and its committees

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

Being a Member of the College of Commissioners means first of all being a member of a team. Collegiality is therefore central to how the Commission works and takes decisions. I look forward to the continuation of a productive dialogue with my fellow Commissioners on decisions taken under my remit and vice versa, as I am convinced that this makes our decision-making process stronger and more robust.

Cooperation is imperative as the College is also held collectively responsible once initiatives are adopted. However, the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission also clearly mentions that each Commissioner takes political responsibility for actions in his/her field of competence, without prejudice to the principle of Commission collegiality.

Over the past two years, I have seen first-hand the importance and the benefits of a structured dialogue with the Parliament as a whole and its committees. I will therefore endeavour to continue my efforts in the same vein and will ensure reporting and exchange of information on a regular basis. I am particularly keen to create an ongoing dialogue between the relevant Committees and the Commission in my portfolio so that we can identify common objectives to be pursued in the next five years.

I am confident that there will be no break in accountability of the Commission to the

Parliament in relation to my areas of responsibility as I will work constructively with my services towards this goal. I will strive to ensure that the relations between myself and the various Directorates-General that I am responsible for have one common goal: to promote the interests of European citizens. I will also ensure that pending issues or new initiatives are discussed with you on a regular basis so that our institutions can cooperate more effectively in the interests of our citizens.

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

As a former parliamentarian, I am particularly conscious of my responsibility towards the elected representatives of EU citizens.

During my time as Health Commissioner I experienced first hand the pivotal role of the European Parliament. I will fully respect and implement the Commission's commitments under the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission. In the interests of enhanced transparency, I will also take the necessary actions to promote dialogue and information-flow.

Wide consultation by the Commission is an obligation under the Treaties. I am very conscious of the importance that all Europeans attach to the issues that fall under this portfolio. Listening to stakeholders and the public at an early stage of policy shaping undoubtedly contributes to a more representative, more credible and more robust policy outcome, ultimately bringing Europe closer to its citizens. Against this background, I support enhanced transparency vis-à-vis the general public, such as the European Transparency Initiative launched by the outgoing Commission.

The European Parliament has played and will continue to play a central role in pushing the process of European integration forward, offering its vision to the European project and, by exercising its democratic oversight, bringing Europe closer to its citizens. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty strengthens the role of the European Parliament in the legislative process through the "ordinary legislative procedure", a principle which I personally strongly supported during my work on the Convention for the Future of Europe.

Close day to day co-operation between the Parliament and the Commission is paramount for constructive political dialogue between the two institutions. I intend to make myself available and accessible for MEPs and remain in close contact with the relevant parliamentary committees, in order to foster a climate of mutual trust, efficiency, legitimacy and open dialogue, which I believe is essential for the smooth functioning of the EU's institutional system. I intend to provide prompt and clear information, listen carefully to Parliament's concerns and take into account Parliament's views in much the same way as the Council. I have already had the opportunity to speak to MEPs about their interests in my new field of competence, and look forward to continued close collaboration in the course of the mandate.

Policy-related questions

4. What are the three main priorities you intend to pursue as part of your proposed portfolio, taking into account, where relevant, the financial, economic and social crisis and concerns related to sustainable development?

As Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth my principal concern will be to ensure that our citizens flourish in an inclusive, competitive and sustainable Union grounded in knowledge, energised by creativity and innovation, and drawing strength from its diversity. We need to build on those areas where we can make a difference in peoples' lives, bearing in mind the new possibilities that the Lisbon Treaty provides, for instance in the areas of sport, but also the current context imposed by the crisis, where education and training are vital. I intend to focus on how to use our responsibilities in education to help meet citizens' current needs, and to ensure that education and training are tailored to the economy of the future; and how to promote our culture and diversity in a modern world.

Education is clearly a top priority. In cooperation with the Parliament, I will support Member States in modernising education and training to improve the quality and relevance of education by developing new partnerships that will deliver the skills that citizens and businesses need in a world which is itself being transformed – not only by the crisis but also by technological advances and by the challenges of demographic and climate change.

Education and training are crucial to help Europe surmount the crisis in the short-term, and will be key drivers of the EU 2020 vision. We must enable people to acquire new skills, to keep learning throughout their lives, and equip them to take full advantage of new opportunities, such as opportunities in green economy. In the longer term, education and training must be geared to secure our future as a competitive and inclusive knowledge society. I intend to work very closely with the Employment Commissioner in delivering this agenda. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology points the way; we need innovative ways to learn and to create new knowledge and I will focus particularly on how the EIT can make a real difference in this respect. I will also deepen and extend the New Skills for New Jobs Initiative and work to open access for all to lifelong learning, ensuring an active and productive life.

The EU must also contribute directly to this challenge through enhancing people's mobility. Youth and Mobility will constitute another main priority. As outlined by the President in his Political Guidelines, we need an ambitious new Youth on the Move initiative to bring the benefits of learning mobility within reach of all young people. I am convinced that learning mobility is a highly effective pathway to acquiring life- and learning-skills, in a world of more complex transition between the realms of education and work. Enhanced mobility for young people will also support the development of an active sense of the European kinship that underpins the European project.

Finally, in the area of Culture, I will work towards creating an environment where creativity, innovation and cultural expression can flourish, drawing on our cultural and linguistic richness and on the proven capacity of our creative industries to spur innovation and growth. Building these concerns into the digital agenda will be amongst my goals, in close cooperation with the responsible Commissioner. Our MEDIA programme is also an important

vessel which carries European culture around the world and I intend to make use of all the opportunities it offers.

I intend to work closely with my colleagues in the Commission, for instance, the Commissioners for Employment, Digital Agenda, Research, Justice, Fundamental rights and Citizenship, and Internal Market. I am no stranger to such cooperation, having already held the post of Commissioner for 2 years in a field with a broad spectrum of competences which requires input from different angles.

5. What are the specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives you intend to put forward, and according to what timetable? What specific commitments can you make regarding in particular the committees' priorities and requests attached hereto which would fall within your portfolio? How would you personally ensure the good quality of legislative proposals?

The key to success in an area of strong subsidiarity, as I know from my time as Commissioner for Health, is cooperation. I will work closely with the Member States and the European Parliament, consulting all stakeholders and assessing economic, environmental and social impacts to ensure the quality of our proposals. Starting afresh on this portfolio alongside the new Culture Committee, we can build an ambitious programme together.

To implement my priority on raising skill levels, I will work closely with Member States to improve the quality of education and training, mapping out common approaches to the shared challenges identified in the Education & Training Strategy:

- I will make proposals to strengthen benchmarking to drive better policies on employability, mobility and multilingualism, and bring forward recommendations for policies to reduce early school leaving;
- I will seek to promote excellence and strengthen knowledge creation in higher education, in particular, building on the experience gained from the early-stage growth of the EIT and propose new forms of partnerships between enterprises and higher education, renewing the modernisation agenda for universities and capitalising on the integration of the Marie Curie actions into the Lifelong Learning family.

A global Youth on the Move initiative would provide the means for implementing my priority on learning mobility. This could be achieved in two phases:

- In 2010, through a proposal on new approaches to tackling obstacles to mobility, making people's skills and qualifications more readable and more portable, and thus better attuned to the more flexible learning and career paths of the future;
- And in 2011, through a proposal for a new Youth on the Move programme, building on the existing Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action, Marie Curie and external education programmes.

To implement my priority on making better use of the potential of culture and the creative industries I will try within the first year of the mandate:

- to respond to the Parliament's request to strengthen the visibility for citizens of our shared cultural heritage and our shared European values by proposing to award European Heritage Labels to sites that are emblematic for the integration of Europe;
- to promote a shared understanding of how to spur the potential for growth of Europe's cultural, creative and media industries including by contributing to work on the complex question of copyright protection;
- to make proposals to strengthen the European Agenda for Culture in its second phase.

Finally, in 2011 I will work closely with the Parliament to define the content of new programmes dealing with Culture and Media and make proposals on how to implement the new provisions of the Lisbon Treaty in the area of sport and on the participation of young people in the democratic life of Europe.

As regards multilingualism, one of my key tasks will be to promote the language professions in the context of the "Next Generation" project, to ensure continuity of the interpretation and translation services and a high quality to the users of these services. I will also ensure that the necessary actions required to welcome new EU official languages, in case of potential enlargements, are duly prepared, at the right time.