

ANSWERS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER - DESIGNATE
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(International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response)

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? Which 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 academic and professional backgrounds as well as my political career demonstrate my European dedication. As the Foreign Minister of Bulgaria, and before that as a Member of the European Parliament, one of my priorities was always to intensify the cooperation between the EU and its Member States and to serve as a strong advocate of the European cause. I am convinced that a strong and consolidated EU is to the advantage of all of us. This conviction has guided my term as Foreign Minister, and I see it as the thread of my political and educational past. I have always believed that we in Europe can only be successful if we work together and cooperate.

Following the vast changes of 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain, I was greatly appreciative of the chance to have been awarded a scholarship allowing me to study in the EU. Ever since, I have always seen this as a sort of responsibility to work for the inclusion of my home country inside the European Union. Looking back at my political career I believe that there is a clear path from my time as a university student until today. Next to my studies in sociology, my time as a lecturer for European Studies and sociology has truly left an impact on me. The possibility of discussing the EU and social issues related to it with young students from all over Europe was a great inspiration for me. More than ever, it became clear to me, that the "idea of Europe" is timeless, and that we the politicians and the decision-makers, have to live up to the expectations of the younger generations.

It was a consequence of the discussions with my students that I co-founded a civil movement, which called for reforms and improvements in my home country. The link to Europe was already cemented in its name since we called for the "European Development" of Bulgaria. Ultimately, the civil movement became a political party and I ran as a candidate for the first ever elections to the European Parliament in my home country. Having been elected twice since and having served in the European Parliament has undoubtedly been one of the

highlights of my professional life so far. During my time in the Parliament I have gained valuable experience in international cooperation through my participation in missions to a number of countries, such as Egypt, Georgia and Ukraine.

Looking back, I have to say that the European cause in itself has always been my main motivation and driving force. As someone who grew up in a country where people fought for freedom and democracy for decades, I have always believed in Europe, and I have always believed that we have a common cause, which is larger than our individual ones. Together, we can make a difference. It is because of this conviction of mine that the Bulgarian Government has proposed me to become a member of the European Commission - the guardian of the Treaties. I am eager to become part of the European process and to do my share in order to ensure its success. In this light I am happy that President Barroso had entrusted me with the important portfolio of Commissioner responsible for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response. This portfolio mirrors the overall European notion of solidarity, cooperation and dialogue. It thus entirely corresponds to my vision and understanding of Europe.

I can assure that as a Commissioner, I will be solely guided by our common European interest. Thus, I shall fully comply with Article 17.3 TFEU. I have completed the Declaration of interests under the code of conduct, and I am committed to update it in case of changes. Furthermore, I shall fully respect Article 245 TFEU to ensure independence and ethic principles and all requirements included in the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. I shall avoid any position or situation which could put into question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission.

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 Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?

As a Member of the College of Commissioners I see my role as an honest advocate of the common European interest. The College is of key importance for the general direction and outlook of European policy making. It is the political heart of the Commission. Therefore, I deem it very important to constantly discuss with my colleagues in the College, all matters in an open and fair manner. We share a collective responsibility and we shall be measured on our efforts to best serve the interest of the European citizens. Therefore, I will closely follow the discussion on all issues and will interact, and where I deem necessary, try to intervene, always in the spirit of collegiality and impartiality. In my role as Commissioner responsible for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, I am determined to raise awareness on these important EU policies and will do my best to promote them inside the College.

I believe that we can only advance and reach a more successful policy output through dialogue. This is one of the key successes of European free-thinking, and I am convinced that the new College will be a strong example for this. I am looking forward to closely working together with the new Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Together with her and the Commissioners responsible for Development and Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, I am committed to fostering the European interest throughout the world. I will also closely cooperate with the Commissioner responsible for Home Affairs responsible for crisis response inside the Union, as well as with other Members

of the Commission responsible for the many crisis response instruments managed by the Commission. While the interaction between our portfolios still has to be clearly defined, I am convinced that guided by the spirit of collegiality, we will ensure an optimal representation of the EU on the world stage and the effective delivery of EU support in times of crisis.

Through my experience in the Parliament I know first hand how the Parliament and Commission can best work together. I am eager to implement this and get to work. My experience in the Council of Foreign Ministers will further help me to facilitate the cooperation with the Parliament since I am consequently well versed about the specifics of the decision-making process inside the EU. In this respect, I would like to stress that the input of the Parliament is always welcome and that it shall serve as the basis of our cooperation. It goes without saying that I will take full political responsibility for the activities of the Commission services in my field of competence.

I would like to assure you that the relations between me and my future Cabinet and services will be based on loyalty, trust, transparency, a two-way information flow and mutual assistance. Under often very difficult conditions they work hard to strive for the cause of humanity. I believe that everybody in the EU acknowledges this and thus as Commissioner I shall do all I can to support them.

I am fully committed to a constructive and fruitful political dialogue between two of the key European institutions. In this light, the Parliament as the only directly elected European institution, by nature has a core weight in EU policy-making, and I will duly take this into consideration. I therefore seek a cooperation based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, and regular exchange of information. Democratic oversight by the Parliament is something that exists not only on paper, on the contrary, it is the corner stone and proof of our European democracy.

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 the Council?

If confirmed as Commissioner, transparency and cooperation with the EP will be among my priorities. I believe that one can only be a successful Commissioner when working closely together with the Parliament. After all, a close partnership will only strengthen the legitimacy, accountability and efficiency of my work. I am therefore committed to fully implement and apply the provisions of the Framework Agreement in all its aspects, in particular regarding the flow of information in order to ensure transparency and to enhance the flow of information between our two institutions and to give full effect to the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. Furthermore, one of my priorities as Commissioner will be to ensure a close contact with the public. Close cooperation with the Parliament and its members is by nature the best way to get the citizens involved and inform them about the work and benefits of the European Union.

I would like to reiterate that inter-institutional co-operation is of fundamental importance in order to ensure an optimal functioning of the EU. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty the role of the Parliament is further upgraded in this respect. I strongly welcome this since it underlines the democratic principle of the EU, ensures a better policy output by the

institutions, and furthermore underlines the fact that the Commission is accountable to the Parliament. I want to establish strong ties with the Parliament and in particular with the Committees which cover my areas of responsibility. I am therefore committed to regularly be available to attend committee meetings and hold exchanges of views to discuss how to best advance the policies under my portfolio. I am convinced that together we will reach the best outcome for those in need of our help. In this regard, I am particularly looking forward to discussing the Parliament's ideas regarding the establishment of the framework for the Union's humanitarian aid operations, and the Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, as outlined in Article 214 TFEU. Furthermore, I strongly value the Parliament's input in making the European year of Volunteering in 2011 a true success. I also look forward to discussing with the Parliament our progress on strengthening the EU disaster response capacity, as per the EP Resolution of June 2008, and on the implementation of the Civil Protection Clause in Article 196 TFEU. Additionally, in order to ensure true exchanges of views, I look forward to meeting with individual MEPs or political groups.

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?

The merger of humanitarian aid and civil protection in the new portfolio "International cooperation, humanitarian aid and crisis response" is a welcome development as it establishes a single service that offers the necessary means for the Commission to reinforce its role in the area of crisis response. While humanitarian aid brings a budget of about €800 million, strong expertise and an international network of field-based experts to the portfolio, civil protection can mobilise professional and specialised Member States' assets in case of an emergency, inside and outside the EU. The focus on disaster response is needs-based and implies full respect of the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence as an expression of EU solidarity which shall not be subordinated to other foreign policy considerations.

In addition to specific missions in the field of international cooperation my main priorities for the coming years will be:

- To create added value by using the opportunities arising from the Lisbon Treaty and the integration in one portfolio of humanitarian aid and civil protection;
- To meet emerging external challenges in crisis response;
- To increase the efficiency of EU humanitarian aid;
- To strengthen European civil protection cooperation.

The combination of the opportunities offered by the Lisbon Treaty and this new portfolio will allow the Union, the world's largest donor to further extend its leadership in the area of crisis response and humanitarian aid overseas, as well as maximising the ability of the EU to respond to crisis at home in a spirit of practical solidarity.

For the first time in Europe's history, the Lisbon Treaty recognises humanitarian aid and civil protection as self standing policies. It is therefore my intention to seize this opportunity to fully use the complementarities that exist between humanitarian aid and civil protection, and between the Commission and EU Member States to further reinforce the European response

to humanitarian crises in compliance with the corresponding provisions of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

The Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) and the Community Civil Protection mechanism are among the EU's success stories, responding to a wide range of crises, both inside and outside the EU. As far as this concerns the internal aspect I will work closely with the Commissioner for Home Affairs.

The main emerging external challenges in crisis response arise from the violation of international humanitarian law, the shrinking of the humanitarian space and, the impact of climate change. Both state and non-state actors disregard international humanitarian law with ever increasing frequency and violence. Sexual and gender-based atrocities have become a means of warfare. The disrespect of the rights of non-combatants and of humanitarian actors has meant that access to victims of conflicts has diminished, at times making it impossible for aid to reach the most vulnerable.

I will use the means at my disposal to forcefully advocate at political level in cooperation with the European Parliament the respect of international humanitarian law and to support our partners in the implementation of measures to protect victims of armed conflicts. I will also engage in a dialogue with European political and military leaders to ensure that, in situations where EU humanitarian aid actors and EU military forces work side by side, the definition of their respective roles is clear and respected in order to avoid any blurring of lines that could put into danger humanitarian work.

The increase of the frequency and intensity of natural disasters due to climate change is likely to accelerate. The international aid community is no longer in a position to effectively respond to all these disasters. Therefore, while ensuring that our disaster response is as large in scope and as effective in implementation as possible, I will use both humanitarian aid and civil protection to intensify the European Union's efforts at disaster risk reduction with a view to reinforcing in particular the resilience of vulnerable populations and the capacities of local authorities in disaster prone countries. I will therefore continue to give priority to DIPECHO programmes (Disaster preparedness ECHO) and preparedness and prevention measures. Linked to the issue of disaster risk reduction, is the key issue of what happens after a crisis has struck, and I will pay attention to the transition between humanitarian aid and development cooperation, linking relief, rehabilitation and development. In both areas I will closely work with Commissioner-designate Piebalgs to ensure that the transition takes place as smoothly as possible.

Regarding civil protection, the Stockholm Programme and recent Council conclusions define key priorities on prevention. They include the development of guidelines on risk assessment and minimum standards for disaster prevention. Work needs to continue on enhancing the availability of civil protection assistance through the development of an EU rapid response capability, as repeatedly requested by the European Parliament.

What has been achieved should be used as a stepping stone towards a further modernisation of the tools at our disposal.

Last but not least, while humanitarian aid must be solely needs-based, it also contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is a little known but important fact that in its global humanitarian needs analysis the Commission uses key indicators related to

child mortality, malnutrition, access to health care and the gender-specific human development index in order to assess needs. More efficient aid also means a larger contribution to poverty reduction and, in collaboration with our colleagues in development cooperation, a better organised reinsertion of disaster victims into an environment that permits sustainable poverty reduction and social development.

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?

2010 will be a key year in the areas of humanitarian aid and civil protection. The Commission will carry out a mid-term review of the Action on the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid which also covers civil protection outside the EU. The aim of the mid-term review will be to assess how far we have come and to identify what additional measures would need to be taken to further increase the efficiency in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Measures could include a revision of the Humanitarian Aid Regulation which dates back to 1996.

The Commission will also have to evaluate and report on the implementation of the Decision establishing the Civil Protection Mechanism and its financial instrument. These exercises could be accompanied by a Communication to the European Parliament and to the Council outlining, as appropriate, future legislative proposals.

In addition, Article 214 TFEU states that a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps shall be set up. The Commission will have to present a proposal for a regulation to be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council laying down the rules and procedures for the operation of the Corps. Taking into account that 2011 has just been designated as the "European Year of Volunteering", the timing of the proposal setting up the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps could be aligned.

I will make sure that the process leading to the preparation of the proposals is as transparent and participatory as possible.

As far as non-legislative proposals are concerned and pending the outcome of the mid-term review of the Action Plan on the European Consensus on Humanitarian aid to which the European Parliament will be associated, I will take the initiative to establish coherent sectoral policies, for instance in areas such as gender based violence, health, civil-military relations and needs assessments, to mention only a few. In the field of civil protection, guidelines on disaster prevention will be developed.

Given that the effects of the global food crisis persist, I will give priority to developing a policy on food assistance in humanitarian emergencies which will be part of a larger policy package that will also cover food security issues. Here again, I will work closely with Commissioner designate Piebalgs with a view to ensuring adequate coordination with food security activities.