



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009–2014

---

*Committee on Foreign Affairs*

---

Wednesday, 6 January 2010

## **NOTICE TO MEMBERS**

**Subject:** Hearing with Baroness Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Please find enclosed the written answers sent by Baroness Ashton.

The Secretariat

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

**Catherine ASHTON**

**(High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and  
Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission)**

**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?**

I am a committed European with a track record of support for the European Union and a strong belief in the value of an effective EU where we work and act together to face common challenges.

I have practical experience of European politics and negotiation both at the intergovernmental level and as Trade Commissioner. As Leader of the House of Lords, I steered the Lisbon Treaty through that House. My work as a UK Justice Minister in the Justice and Home Affairs Council included chairing that Council during the United Kingdom Presidency in 2005. As Trade Commissioner, I have built a strong relationship with strategic partners such as the US and China. This included chairing the EU-China High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue together with Vice Premier Wang Qishan. I believe in cooperation at the global level to address global issues, and I have advocated EU leadership both in the G20 and in the WTO. I have initialled a ground-breaking trade agreement with South Korea; have advanced our partnerships with ACP countries, and have solved difficult trade disputes, such as the one on beef with the US.

I set great store by the principle of independence of Commissioners, as set out in the Treaties. It is a central part of how the Commission works and how it is able to discharge its duties. This independence allows us to listen to, and learn from, different views and voices and then act in the common European interest. It is this strength that lets the Commission play its role as an "honest broker" for the European Union. Maintaining this tradition of independence is extremely important.

I would avoid any position or situation which could put in question my independence or

impartiality, and will comply with the ethical standards and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners.

As you are aware I am a life peer. I am not able to renounce my title of 'Baroness' as it is given to me for life. By virtue of my title, I have a place in the UK House of Lords. For the term of my mandate as Commissioner I have taken leave of absence from the Lords and have taken the necessary steps to ensure that there is no conflict between my status as Baroness and my duties as Commissioner. This means that, although I retain my title, I would not attend the House of Lords, nor take part in votes, give speeches there, or draw any allowances during the period of my mandate.

## **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?**

Since October 2008, I have worked closely with my fellow Commissioners. I strongly believe in the principle of collegiality and in a joined-up approach. We need to tackle horizontal issues as a team. I am ready to carry out my responsibilities in full cooperation and coordination with the other members of the Commission.

The Commission also has an important responsibility for communication. I don't think this is simply a case of selling EU policies to the public. It is a process of dialogue and debate, in which the European institutions involve and consult European citizens. In addition to explaining EU affairs to people, we need to listen to their concerns and feed their views back into our policy-making. This can happen directly or through the channel of the European Parliament. As Commissioner I would support the Commission's goal of creating a lively public debate on the EU's aims and policies – not least in the country that I know best.

I would fully respect and implement the principle according to which each Commissioner takes political responsibility for actions in his/her field of competence, without prejudice to the principle of Commission collegiality.

I have a track record of reaching out to the European Parliament, both during my work with the Lisbon Treaty and during my work as Trade Commissioner. I believe it is of fundamental political importance to the effectiveness and legitimacy of the European Union that Commissioners and the entire College are accountable to the European Parliament. The European Parliament is the only directly elected European institution, and enjoys full democratic legitimacy as the representative body of the citizens of the Union. The Commission and the Parliament must both explain EU policy to our citizens and assure them that we are working in their interest.

### **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?**

The European Parliament has played, and continues to play, a central role in the development of the European Union, offering a strong vision of the role of the EU in European life and bringing the Union closer to its citizens. The advances of the Lisbon Treaty will help to consolidate this role.

I would fully respect and implement the Commission's commitments under the Framework Agreement.

In practical terms, the European Parliament needs to be able to exercise its democratic oversight effectively. This means making sure that it has the full and timely information it needs to exercise that control. The Commission needs to ensure comparable treatment in its relations with the different institutions.

I am committed to keeping the Parliament fully informed in the area of foreign policy. The Lisbon Treaty is clear that I must keep you informed and that I will consult you on the basic choices we face on the Common Foreign and Security Policy. I believe this should include providing the Parliament with information on ongoing negotiations as well as on key issues/events and key relationships. We should find a solution to the issue of access to information.

Close cooperation with the European Parliament would also mean participating regularly in Plenary sessions and making myself available in order to explain and report on what the European Union is doing and why in the Committees.

I want a special relationship with the European Parliament and want it to be a partner in the European policy-making process. I believe I have a serious duty to listen carefully to Parliament's concerns and take real account of Parliament's views.

**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 European Union should be a responsible and reliable international partner in a fast changing world. The last year has shown us that we must cooperate and communicate with our partners in order to overcome economic and social difficulties. EU citizens want to see Europe be more active on the international scene. The Lisbon Treaty gives us the opportunity to make our voice stronger and more unified. My major goal in the coming years will be to strengthen the European Union's role as a coherent, capable and strategic global actor. In order to ensure this, I will work closely with the other Commissioners dealing with external relations.

My first priority will be to build the European External Action Service as an efficient and coherent service that will be the pride of the Union and the envy of the rest of the world. I will

draw on the talent that already exists in the European Commission and the Council Secretariat, and welcome new colleagues from our 27 Member States to join as well. We need a balanced service that adds value for all of the citizens of the European Union, and that can represent them to the outside world.

Second, the European Union must pull its weight in areas of crisis and conflict, including in the Middle East, the Balkans, Iran, Afghanistan and Africa. I intend to look closely at all our operations and to make sure we are efficient and effective in our use of resources, and that we are joined-up in our approach. My objective is to enhance efficient cooperation and use of the different EU's crisis management tools. We are already playing an important role in the Southern Caucasus. We can act jointly with the US in the Middle East, building on the Quartet activity. In Africa, the Union is already involved in many actions. For example, the Atalanta operation is perceived as a success story on which we can build a more comprehensive policy. The Afghan conflict has to be solved and the Union is committed, both with its military force but also by training police and building health and agricultural infrastructure.

Third, I will seek to reinforce our strong cooperation with strategic partners such as the United States, China, Russia, India, Brazil and Japan. Of course, we may have differences with these countries, but we can also increase our cooperation in order to solve the many challenges we all face. We would also continue to build on the neighbourhood policy which we developed with our close southern and eastern partners. This approach does not mean that we are forgetting other partners in Latin America, Asia or Africa - the European Union has already developed a network of bilateral relations and agreements with countries across the world. We can use this network and our involvement in the multilateral system to promote our values and interests.

**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?**

I would prepare detailed proposals for the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), so that the Council can take a decision by the end of April. In close cooperation with the competent Commissioners, I intend to produce a package that will include not only a draft Decision on the establishment of the EEAS but also the required amendments to the Financial Regulation and the Staff Regulations, as well as a draft amending budget for 2010, including amendments related to the setting up of the EEAS.

I would involve the European Parliament closely in this process, including in the course of the preparation of the proposals and look forward to consultation with the Parliament on the draft decision.

As a Vice-President of the Commission, I will contribute to the preparation of the new Financial Framework. As part of this exercise, I will draw the lessons from the recent mid-term review of the financing instruments for external relations, as the current instruments expire in 2013.

The Union is engaged in a number of bilateral and multilateral negotiations with countries such as Ukraine, Russia, China, Thailand that I hope can be concluded as soon as possible. In Latin America, my objective is to sign at sub-regional level. I would also engage in a dialogue with the European Parliament on potential future initiatives with partners and the development of relations with strategic partners.

My approach would not only be geographical but I would also address key "horizontal" issues. As the Lisbon Treaty reinforces the commitments of the European Union to human rights, my objective is to build on our basic values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. I also want to strengthen the early warning and crisis prevention capacities of the European Union by drawing on the expertise of NGOs, and use all the instruments available to strengthen the engagement of the European Union in countering chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear proliferation.

I intend to launch a review of external policy and of external action instruments in key areas. I intend to use such review to identify additional specific legislative and non legislative initiatives which will be required for the Union to achieve its objectives.