



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009–2014

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Wednesday, 6 January 2010

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Hearing with Štefan Füle, Commissioner designate for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

Please find enclosed the written answers sent by Štefan Füle.

The Secretariat

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

Štefan FÜLE

(Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy)

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 professional career as well as my academic background has been characterised by a focus on security related issues with a specific emphasis on multilateral diplomacy.

I bring with me the experience of a senior official and politician of a country which has joined (and is playing an active role in) both EU and NATO in the course of the last decade. This gives me a good insight into the challenges and constraints of the accession process as well as a deep understanding of the expectations of countries aspiring to join the EU.

I also have practical experience in oversight of peace-keeping and conflict resolution operations for example in Kosovo. I played a role in the reform of the security and defence sectors in the Czech Republic.

As Czech ambassador to NATO and first deputy Minister of Defence, I was active in the effort to strengthen the European defence pillar within NATO. In these capacities, I have worked with a number of the regions for which I will be responsible, notably the Western Balkans, as well as Eastern Europe.

My commitment to the European project and ability to conduct complex negotiations can best be demonstrated by my recent role as Czech Minister of European Affairs. I am motivated by my desire to continue to play an active role in our common project to build a united, free and prosperous Europe based on shared democratic values.

My career has been exclusively in the public sector at the service of my country and the broader international community. As such, I believe my past and current personal and professional life has instilled in me the skills, values and the capacity to perform my duties

within the Commission in the best interests of the citizens and the institutions I will serve. I am committed to fully comply with the highest ethical standards of independence and integrity, in full compliance with the Treaties and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners.

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?

Within the College, I attach importance to my collegial responsibility. I intend to contribute actively to the discussion on all items on the Commission's agenda and will form my Cabinet with this sense of collegial responsibility in mind. One area of added value I hope to bring to the collegial discussions is an understanding of the implications for our partner countries of issues on the Commission agenda. I also wish to build strong relationships with my fellow Commissioners so that they can contribute to the multifaceted aspects of both the Enlargement and Neighbourhood policy.

One key issue for me will be to ensure a seamless coordination with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission and other Commissioners, with the common aim of strengthening the role of the EU as a global player and speaking with a single coherent voice.

Given my personal involvement in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty process, I will also have a particular interest in working together with my fellow Commissioners on the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty to fully utilize the opportunities it offers to strengthen our European integration efforts.

As far as my accountability and responsibility towards Parliament is concerned, I consider myself politically responsible for the activities of my services without prejudice to the principle of collegiality. It will be an essential part of my approach to ensure that there is a two-way information flow and that I am informed in time on all important developments. It will be an important part of my role to give clear political guidance to my team.

I am committed to a constructive political dialogue with the EP and its committees based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, regular reporting and exchange of information. I have developed further my thoughts in section 3 as to how this could be achieved in practice.

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?

I consider my portfolio to be particularly political in nature. This clearly requires political support from the European Parliament. I attach the highest importance to working as closely

as possible with the EP and to ensuring an early and timely exchange of information.

In terms of how this could be done concretely, I would propose a number of specific commitments in addition to those entered into by the Commission under the Framework Agreement, which I undertake to fully respect.

First, I wish to have regular meetings with the coordinators, rapporteurs, and in a broader sense the members of all political groups in the Committee on Foreign Affairs and maintain a very close and permanent dialogue with you.

Second, I will engage in a dialogue with you concerning the negotiations which are underway. This will ensure that I am aware of your concerns and that you receive regular feed-back.

Third, from my informal contacts with some of you who are Members of the Joint Parliamentary Committees, I am sure that these are tools which we should use to the full. Such inter-parliamentary meetings have an important role to play and your active role in fostering an exchange of best practice and transferring your knowledge and experience on EU policies, legislation and governance to your counterparts in partner countries is highly beneficial.

Finally, I would also propose that we, in parallel, maintain the more formal and structured dialogue with the Committee as a whole. Ideally we should aim for in-depth discussions at least once every three months where we can explore the full range of planned and ongoing initiatives. I would also like to propose that on the adoption of any important new initiative such as the annual Enlargement package, I make a presentation of the initiative to your members.

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 perspective of joining the EU is a powerful means to encourage political and economic reform in all candidate countries. The enlargement process serves the interests of the European Union by providing an anchor of stability especially during difficult times in regions of strategic importance to the EU. It is vital that we work together with the countries and peoples involved to alleviate the impact of the financial and economic crisis and to ensure that future growth is sustainable, as well as building stable societies based firmly on democracy and the rule of law.

My main task will be to ensure that any future accessions are solidly prepared and strengthen the Union's further development. We need to pursue an enlargement process based on the commitments we have made and the conditionalities that have been set, as stated in the renewed commitment for Enlargement.

From 19 December, young people and other citizens from three partner countries (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro) can travel to the EU without

burdensome visa requirements. This will help to familiarise them with the values prevailing in the EU and facilitate contacts with their counterparts in the EU. Preparations for visa liberalisation can lead to decisive progress in areas like border management and the fight against organised crime and corruption.

Turning to my future work with particular partner countries, Croatia should be able to fulfil its goal of concluding the accession negotiations next year, provided it fulfils all the required conditions. Some of the most challenging conditions are in the fields of judicial reform and fundamental rights.

I am also committed to taking forward the accession negotiations with Turkey, in line with the Negotiating Framework. Further progress in the negotiations will require Turkey to step up efforts to meet established conditions including full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement. It is particularly important that Turkey gives concrete support to the negotiations under the auspices of the UN aimed at a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem. I will mobilise all means available to the Commission to support these negotiations.

I hope that the Member States will soon be in a position to open accession negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in line with the Commission's recommendation. Sustained efforts are however needed in order to resolve the name issue with Greece. Regarding Iceland, I will submit a comprehensive, objective and rigorous Opinion to the College in early 2010.

My priority for the potential candidates of the Western Balkans will be to further promote reform and good neighbourly relations, complete the network of Stabilisation and Association Agreements and pursue the path towards visa liberalisation (together with my colleague in charge of home affairs). I will also undertake the necessary groundwork to prepare comprehensive, objective and rigorous opinions on the applications for membership from Montenegro and Albania and respond similarly to any future request from the Council to prepare such opinions for other applicants. I am committed to using all available EU instruments to support Kosovo's progress, without prejudice to the question of its status. Finally, given the recent progress regarding the Interim Trade Agreement with Serbia, I hope that the necessary pre-conditions will be met to allow for the start of the ratification process of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement already in summer 2010 thus allowing our relations with Serbia to enter a new era.

While each country will be judged on its individual merits, it is also clear that particular consideration needs to be given to the regional aspect of our work and regional cooperation can further both political stabilisation and economic development.

Under the new Lisbon Treaty, the EU has specifically committed itself to building a special relationship with its neighbours.

My aim is to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and step up efforts to bring stability and prosperity to the neighbourhood where I will of course wish to work particularly closely with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission and the European External

Action Service.

The key will be to accompany reforms in the partner countries even more closely, with more frequent contacts at all levels.

We will intensify our relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and of the Southern Mediterranean, by working with each of them bilaterally towards closer political co-operation and deeper economic convergence with the EU. Differentiation, recognising the individual efforts of each country, is key to maintaining our partners' commitment to this policy and a real sense of joint ownership.

I am determined to draw on the rich diversity of instruments now available to support the development of more active partnerships with these countries. While the bilateral track will continue to be core of our activities, the multilateral dimension offers new opportunities to support reforms and common action. The flagship projects foreseen under both the EaP and the Union for the Mediterranean should be used to bring mutual benefits to ourselves and our partners. Our initiatives in the Black Sea Synergy and Northern Dimension frameworks can also increase the EU's contribution to cooperation in these regions.

While it is essential maintain a clear distinction between enlargement and neighbourhood policies, it is already clear that some of the same instruments can support reform in both candidate countries and the neighbourhood. We should build on this, with a cross-fertilisation of ideas between the two processes.

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?

As spelt out in some detail in response to question 3, I am looking forward to a regular dialogue with the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) on the state of play of the accession process with each country. The presentation of the Commission's annual Enlargement package, comprising a forward-looking strategy paper and progress reports for each Enlargement country, will be among the opportunities for an in-depth dialogue with Parliament.

On Enlargement, my main legislative activity will be the preparation of the Accession Treaties. If negotiations with Croatia, Iceland and others end successfully, I would present the relevant Accession Treaties to Parliament. The timing will depend mainly on both countries making the necessary progress to enable the signing of Accession Treaty with them. Parliament's consent is an essential part of this process.

On the Neighbourhood Policy, the presentation of the annual package comprising a forward-looking strategy paper and progress reports on our partner countries will be an opportunity to enhance the Commission's dialogue with Parliament. I intend to prepare, negotiate Association Agreements/deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with the Eastern Partnership partners that are ready to enter into these commitments. The European

Neighbourhood Policy action plans, which provide our working agenda for each country, will be upgraded according to developments. If Belarus engages in sustainable and irreversible democratic reforms, we should also upgrade our contractual relations with this neighbour.

Where we already have an agreement with Mediterranean ENP partners to upgrade relations, the immediate priority is to enhance their Action Plans. In parallel, I would like to complete the conclusion of the Association Agreement with Syria and conclude a framework agreement with Libya.

More generally, I intend to work with Commission colleagues to introduce other measures to enhance stability and prosperity in the EU's neighbourhood, e.g. in the fields of mobility of people and energy security.

As regards financial assistance for pre-accession and the neighbourhood Countries, I will make sure that preparations are started early for an extension of the current Instrument for Pre-Accession Aid (IPA) as well as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for the new financial perspectives. I would wish to feed into this the results of our regular evaluations of the Instruments in order to ensure a further increase in the efficiency of our aid and the good quality of the legislative proposals that subsequently emerge. More generally, I am conscious of the need to ensure that our assistance is implemented in line with the principles of sound and efficient management and look forward to a regular dialogue with you and your colleagues in the Committee on Budgetary Control on this issue.

Effective technical assistance is essential to make a success of our ambitions in the ENP countries. The ENPI should increasingly help partners to develop the capacity of their economies, as they prepare for the competitive pressures of further economic integration with the EU. Expertise from the EU is needed to build the capacity of each administration so that willingness to adopt relevant elements of the EU acquis can be translated into effective implementation, bringing national norms in line with EU standards and practices.