



European Parliament

Committee on Foreign Affairs
The Chair

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CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Antonio TAJANI
Chair
Conference of Committee Chairs

D 313239 08.10.2019

Dear Chair,

The Committee on Foreign Affairs - in accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament - held a public hearing on Monday 7 October 2019 with Mr Josep Borrell, Commissioner-designate, who - subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure - will be the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, as well as Vice-President of the Commission.

On 27 September 2019, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 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 Mr Josep Borrell.

Prior to the hearing, Parliament had sent to the Commissioner-designate a list of written questions. My committee noted that Mr Borrell answered those questions satisfactorily and made commitments of important institutional nature, notably to ensure a better link between the external aspects of internal policies, to foster more coordination, consistency and effectiveness of EU external action, to work hand in hand with Parliament at every stage of the resolutions based on Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and to seek to use the relevant passerelle clauses in the Treaties to switch from unanimity to qualified majority voting on certain decisions on Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The course of the hearing

Mr Borrell opened the hearing by making a statement where he presented his vision for his mandate as High Representative/Vice-President and referred to the geopolitical and policy areas, which he would focus on as a matter of priority, namely: (i) the Western Balkans, (ii) the Eastern Partnership, in particular Ukraine, (iii) the Southern Neighbourhood, (iv) a comprehensive strategy for Africa, (v) the need for further engagement with Asia, (vi) stepping up cooperation with Latin America and (vii) resetting Transatlantic relations. In doing so, Mr Borrell would not only valorise parliamentary diplomacy and the central role of Parliament to this effect, but he would also engage in regular policy dialogue with the European Parliament in view of its role as policy shaper.

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

During the course of the hearing, Members asked questions on the following subjects in particular:

- Dialogue and cooperation between the European External Action Service, the European Parliament and the European Commission with a view to ensuring a more effective and coherent external action of the EU,
- The EU policy stance vis-à-vis the Western Balkans, with particular reference to Kosovo,
- How the EU intends to further relations with countries from the Eastern Partnership,
- The EU policy stance vis-à-vis Russia, looking at the EU's sanctions policy, but also at Russia's violations of international law,
- The EU policy stance vis-à-vis Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua and how to support the legitimate democratic aspirations in such countries and a process of democratic transition,
- The nexus between security, stability, climate action and development in sub-Saharan Africa and the EU policy stance to this effect,
- Connectivity and EU-Asia relations,
- Maritime security and freedom of navigation according to the law of the Sea, taking into account all threats to freedom of navigation,
- Terrorism and the protection of religious minorities in the Middle East,
- The situation in the Middle East, particularly regarding Israel and Palestine,
- Arms exports, disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation,
- The role of the EU towards preservation and full implementation by all parties concerned of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme (JCPOA),
- The need to mainstream human rights across all external policies of the EU,
- How to streamline and reinforce the Common Foreign and Security Policy, looking also at the prospects for qualified majority voting and EEAS reform, including gender in foreign policy,
- The European Security and Defence Policy, how to reinforce and further develop its core structures and the EU's defence capabilities;
- Questions related to the candidate's personal independence,
- The importance of unity amongst the Member States was also stressed.

In his replies, Mr Borrell illustrated in eloquent terms his policy vision. In particular:

- On the Western Balkans, Mr Borrell stressed that engaging in reaching an agreement between Serbia and Kosovo would be his priority and announced that his first visit as High Representative/Vice-President would be to Pristina. He stressed that the status quo is not tenable. He believes that the European Union will lose credibility as a geopolitical power if it is not able to deliver real stability and security in its immediate vicinity.
- On Russia, Mr Borrell concurred with the Members that Russia poses a strategic challenge, in particular for EU Member States bordering with it.

He stressed that he would not advocate the lifting of sanctions until Russia commits to full respect of International law and, in particular, the territorial integrity of Ukraine. He stressed, however, the importance of maintaining a more sophisticated policy approach towards Russia, based on maintaining the sanctions policy, but valorising equally all five guiding principles and allowing for targeted engagement with Russia.

- On the Eastern Neighbourhood, he reaffirmed the importance of the Eastern Partnership and delivering stability and security in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The EU must support Ukraine and stability and security in the Eastern Partnerships can be achieved through the creation of a ring of democratic, resilient States. He concurred with Members about the need to step-up the fight against Russian disinformation - including through the provision of adequate resources for the EU's dedicated structures - and to protect the electoral processes.
- Mr Borrell emphasised the importance of the EU's connectivity strategy, emphasising sustainability and a rule-based approach, and using the MFF as a decisive instrument.
- On Iran, Mr Borrell underlined that the JCPOA is an example of a multilateral agreement where the EU has played a central role not just in achieving the agreement, but also in trying to preserve it. He added that Iran must go back to complying fully with the JCPOA and that Iran should not respond to the US policy of high pressure with a policy of high resistance. He insisted that during his mandate, he would ensure that the full implementation of the JCPOA remains a high priority for the EU, given its importance for regional stability. He also emphasised the importance of the EU support efforts for de-escalation in the Gulf and advocated a regional conference for security in the Middle East.
- On the Middle East, Mr Borrell pledged to uphold EU support for the two-State solution.
- On the possibility of an EU security and defence White Book, Mr Borrell acknowledged its potential for the development of a European Defence Strategy and a distinct European strategic culture and underlined the crucial role of EU Member States to this effect. Regarding Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union on the mutual defence clause, Mr Borrell concurred about the need to identify clear operational steps for its implementation and pointed to the valuable role of the European Parliament as a policy shaper, stressing that, on this issue, Parliament could seize the opportunity to identify clear practical procedural elements. Regarding EU Battle groups, Mr Borrell stressed that they remain the primary tool for the EU's military rapid response. Common funding should be increased in order to provide an incentive for future deployments, including the European Peace Facility.
- Mr Borrell considers the Sahel as one of his key priorities. Despite limited progress in recent years, the EU must continue investing and engaging in the region, addressing the policy nexus of development, security, terrorism and climate change. Failing to do so would come with a very heavy cost not only for North Africa, but for the EU too in the near future. The role of women and a process of women empowerment should also be valorised. Migration is another related area that needs

to be fully embedded in the foreign policy framework. It requires a multi-layered policy approach, engagement with origin and transit countries, but also an internal EU agreement on how to manage migration issues and asylum seeking.

- On the situation in Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, Mr Borrell endorsed the current strategy of engagement and political pressure. Closing doors will not deliver results. On Venezuela, he is in favour of individual sanctions that affect the regime, but do not worsen the living conditions of the population.
- Asked about the possibility of a Turkish invasion into Syria, Mr Borrell expressed serious concerns about the situation.
- On arms export policy, Mr Borrell pleaded for upgrading the eight criteria of the common position and for continuing the EU's policy on disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.
- On the role of women in foreign policy, Mr Borrell pledged to pursue the goal of 40% of women in management positions in the EEAS, including delegations, until the end of the term.
- On human rights, Mr Borrell stressed the importance of the systematic inclusion of the human rights clause in the agreements concluded by the EU with third countries and called on Parliament to engage in close dialogue with him on the third EU Action Plan on Human Rights (2020-2024) with a view to reinforcing human rights in the world. On the question of respect for human rights in EU external policies and agreements, Mr Borrell reaffirmed that Human Rights clauses and other monitoring mechanisms of agreements should be used to the full.
- On the possibility to allow certain decisions on European foreign and security policy to be adopted by qualified majority voting, Mr Borrell pointed to the difficulty of advocating such change and imposing it on the Member States, when unanimity continues to be applied in other EU policy areas. He also pointed to the possibilities already provided by the Treaties and pledged to use such possibilities, for example as regards decision-making on sanctions, human rights and CSDP missions and operations.
- Mr Borrell answered to questions by Members on his personal independence and said that, if requested, he would sell his shares in Iberdrola.

The Commissioner-designate made commitments of value and relevance, as regards his future action as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission with particular reference to relations with the European Parliament:

- He pointed to the importance of the democratic legitimacy provided by the European Parliament and stressed the need for a parliamentarisation of the EU foreign policy.
- He referred to Article 36 of the Treaty on European Union and pledged to consult Parliament regularly and to take Parliament's policy views into due consideration.

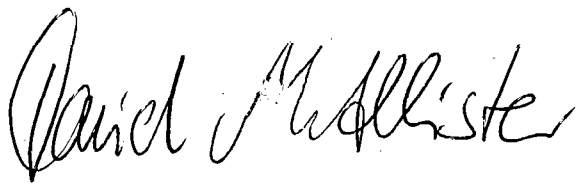
- He stated repeatedly the role of the European Parliament as a policy shaper and pledged to engage regularly in policy dialogue with the European Parliament, both in plenary and as regards regular exchanges of view with the Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. He also pledged to hold regular meetings with the Special Committee.
- He pledged equally to invite the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to participate in the Gymnichs.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which he reaffirmed as his main objective that policy coherence will be essential and he will strive for close dialogue between the European External Action Service and the Commission and for an effective coordination of the external action of the EU, which lies in his remit in compliance with Article 18 of the Treaty on European Union. Close dialogue and cooperation with the European Parliament will remain high on his agenda and he will seek to valorise the potential of parliamentary democracy brought about by Parliament through its resolutions, delegations, electoral observation and other democracy support activities.

On the basis of the responses of the Members present at the hearing, as well as the comments made by my committee's coordinators, who met in camera after the hearing, under my chairmanship, I hereby give the following assessment: that the general outcome of this hearing is that the Commissioner-designate gave a convincing impression of his aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

The coordinators representing a majority of two-thirds of the committee membership approved that the Commissioner-designate, Mr Josep Borrell, is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David McAllister". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

David McAllister