

COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

ASSOCIATED COMMITTEE:
COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

INVITED COMMITTEES:
COMMITTEE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY
COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS

HEARING OF DUBRAVKA ŠUICA

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE

(Democracy and Demography)

THURSDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2019

BRUSSELS

1-002-0000

PRESIDENZA DELL'ON. ANTONIO TAJANI*Presidente della commissione per gli affari costituzionali**(L'audizione è aperta alle 18.36)*

1-003-0000

Presidente. – Buonasera a tutti. Voglio innanzitutto ringraziare i deputati della commissione AFCO che ho l'onore di presiedere. Do il benvenuto anche ai parlamentari componenti della commissione associata EMPL e vi ricordo che le commissioni REGI, JURI e FEMM sono state anch'esse invitate a questa audizione.

Do subito il benvenuto a Dubravka Šuica, vicepresidente designata della Commissione europea per la demografia e la democrazia. Ricordo che Dubravka è una nostra collega da molti anni e a me fa sempre piacere quando un commissario designato viene dalle fila del Parlamento europeo. Questo ci permetterà, se le cose andranno in maniera positiva, di avere ancora di più rapporti positivi con la Commissione europea.

Conformemente alle linee guida per l'approvazione della Commissione europea e il monitoraggio degli impegni assunti durante le audizioni, vi ricordo che lo scopo dell'audizione è quello di valutare le competenze generali, l'impegno europeo e l'indipendenza personale della vicepresidente designata, nonché la sua conoscenza del futuro portafoglio e le sue capacità di comunicazione.

Vi ricordo che è prevista la trasmissione audiovisiva in diretta delle audizioni sul sito del Parlamento, dove sarà anche possibile accedere alla loro registrazione.

Vi ricordo, altresì, che la commissione JURI, dopo aver esaminato la dichiarazione di interessi finanziari della vicepresidente designata, non ha sollevato alcuna obiezione allo svolgimento della presente audizione.

La vicepresidente designata sarà invitata a formulare una dichiarazione orale di apertura, di durata non superiore ai 15 minuti. Nel corso dell'audizione saranno possibili 25 domande suddivise in blocchi di 5 minuti ciascuno; una domanda aggiuntiva può essere posta immediatamente dopo la risposta della vicepresidente durante il tempo destinato a tal fine. I blocchi di 5 minuti saranno composti in questa maniera: un minuto per la domanda da parte di un deputato, due minuti per la risposta della vicepresidente designata, con la possibilità di una domanda aggiuntiva da parte dello stesso deputato per non più di un minuto, e una risposta di non più di un minuto da parte della vicepresidente designata. Al termine della sessione di domande e risposte, la vicepresidente designata avrà la facoltà di formulare una dichiarazione finale di non più di cinque minuti.

Vi ricordo altresì che il curriculum vitae della vicepresidente designata e le sue risposte alle domande scritte sono stati distribuiti a tutti i deputati e pubblicati sul sito del Parlamento.

L'audizione durerà tre ore, vale a dire fino alle ore 21.30.

Va rilevato che, nelle sue risposte scritte, la vicepresidente designata ha indicato di voler intavolare una discussione con il Parlamento e il Consiglio su concetto, strutture e calendario e portata della conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa, sulla base di un *concept paper* che intende presentare come punto di partenza della sua stessa discussione.

Io esprimo l'augurio che la vicepresidente designata possa anticipare alcune delle sue prime riflessioni su tali questioni già nel corso della presente audizione, perché per questa commissione parlamentare la conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa ha una importanza fondamentale. Voglio ricordare alla vicepresidente che è già stato oggetto di un dibattito da parte di questa commissione e che la stragrande maggioranza dei deputati ha affermato che il Parlamento europeo dovrebbe essere protagonista e che la nostra commissione dovrebbe essere rappresentata in modo adeguato e rivestire un ruolo attivo nel presentare proposte, anche sulla base del lavoro svolto nella precedente legislatura.

Tutti i deputati hanno sottolineato l'importanza del coinvolgimento attivo dei cittadini, della società civile, dei parlamenti nazionali e di altri soggetti interessati alla conferenza. I deputati hanno anche evocato la necessità di provvedere a riformare sia le istituzioni, sia le politiche dell'Unione, per renderla più democratica ed efficace per venire incontro pienamente alle attese dei cittadini. I deputati hanno anche concordato nel ritenere che, similmente a quanto accade nella maggior parte dei parlamenti nazionali, il Parlamento europeo dovrebbe avere il diritto di iniziativa.

Tra l'altro, i deputati hanno accennato al ruolo del Consiglio come Camera alta, alla separazione dei poteri, alla procedura di cui all'articolo 7 del trattato sull'uso generalizzato del voto a maggioranza qualificata in Consiglio e della procedura legislativa ordinaria, al sistema degli *Spitzenkandidaten*, alle liste transnazionali, ai partiti politici europei, al registro sulla trasparenza, al proposto organico etico indipendente e all'articolo 50 del trattato come argomenti da affrontare nella conferenza. So bene che questi argomenti non sono tutti di competenza della vicepresidente.

I deputati hanno anche menzionato la necessità di considerare riforme, tra l'altro nel campo del cambiamento climatico, della governance economica e delle politiche sociali. Da ultimo, ma non per questo meno rilevante, i deputati hanno ritenuto che l'esito e il seguito della conferenza, che potrebbe aprire la modifica dei trattati, sono di particolare importanza.

Quindi, signora vicepresidente, io mi auguro che, come ha approfondito nelle sue risposte scritte, il tema della conferenza possa, anche nel suo intervento iniziale, sostenere attivamente gli sforzi del Parlamento europeo che puntano ad avere diritto d'iniziativa, potere d'inchiesta e quindi anche ad essere protagonista della conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa. Io presenterò ai miei colleghi coordinatori dei gruppi una proposta di lettera da inviare al Presidente Sassoli, proprio perché il Parlamento possa essere protagonista.

Signora vicepresidente designata, la invito tra l'altro ad affrontare anche nelle sue osservazioni la nuova strategia sui diritti dei minori, una questione che sta a cuore alla vicepresidente del Parlamento europeo Ewa Kopacz, coordinatrice del Parlamento per i diritti dei minori. La commissione vorrebbe sapere come la vicepresidente designata intende implementare tale strategia e affrontare i gravi problemi, come lo sfruttamento della povertà infantile, la violenza e la sicurezza online.

Quindi, sottolineata l'importanza di questi due argomenti, do subito la parola a Dubravka Šuica, vicepresidente designata per la democrazia e la demografia. Le ricordo che ha 15 minuti di tempo per la sua dichiarazione di apertura. A lei la parola.

1-004-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Dear Chair, honourable Members, dear colleagues, I'm delighted to be here, both as a colleague and as Vice-President-designate for Democracy and Demography. The European Parliament feels like home for me. Six years ago I was elected as a Member of the European Parliament in the first Croatian delegation following our accession in

2013 and was honoured to be re-elected in both 2014 and 2019, so this is my third consecutive term, but this time I'm on this side of the House.

It is a privilege to be here today and it is even more of an honour to seek your confidence for a portfolio which touches so many of the issues that we have discussed and worked on together in the last six years. In that time, many of the debates we have had in this House focused on the following questions: how to give people a greater say in their future and ensure they can shape their Union; how to build trust and confidence with those who feel disconnected and disaffected; and how to support those who are most affected by the many different changes and transitions our Union is undergoing. So these three questions are key for our citizens.

As someone who has worked as a municipal representative, as a local councillor, as a mayor of my hometown Dubrovnik and as Member of the Croatian and European Parliaments, I have seen and heard some of the frustrations that lie behind these questions. Ultimately, it comes down to a feeling of a loss of control – a change that people feel they have no way of stopping, shaping or affecting, and a sense that their communities, careers and lifestyles are all being transformed at a rate quicker than they can follow. This leads to a loss of trust in the people and institutions who are there to serve and support them. The truth is that we need to better understand and address the underlying reasons behind this. And for me, this is as much about addressing a democratic deficit as it is about addressing a demographic deficit.

Over the next few years we will talk a lot about the climate and digital transitions, but I also believe that we need to talk more and more about one of Europe's deepest-lying transformations, which is demographic change. This is an issue which is changing the face of many parts of Europe and affecting millions of Europeans, bringing along challenges but also many opportunities.

Demographic change is defining the landscape of our politics, our democracy and our communities. Those who feel left behind by progress and transition are the ones most likely to become dissatisfied. We need to give Europeans a greater voice, a chance to regain the ability to shape the community, the society, the Union they live in.

This is why I'm such a strong supporter of the idea of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This idea was put forward by the President-elect and it is why I'm delighted to be entrusted with leading the Commission's work on it. This conference should bring together citizens of all ages from across our Union with a significant role for young people, as well as civil society and European institutions as equal partners. We need a wide debate, clear objectives and tangible follow-up on what is agreed. This is an idea that has long been discussed in this House, especially in this committee, and I believe there is now the will and the momentum for us all to work together to make this a success.

Nothing shows this better than the record high number of votes in the last European elections in which more than half of European citizens had their say. This shows there is a clear appetite from Europeans for wanting to shape the future of the Union. European democracy is far more than voting only once in five years. The conference is about making European democracy a living concept beyond the European elections. It is about us all listening to one another and agreeing on what we should focus on and how ambitious we should be.

Dear colleagues, there is no time to waste. The President-elect has set an ambitious timetable by announcing that the conference will start in 2020 and it will run for two years. This is why, if confirmed by you, I will work with this House, with the Council and all others involved to agree on the concept, structure, format, timing and scope of the conference. I will put forward my ideas

very early in my mandate and I want to stress the importance of working together with you, Members from across this House, representing people from across the Union to make this a success. We want to make this conference a success.

We will no doubt dive into details in the next hours but let me share with you three principles that must underpin our approach. First principle: we need to reach out to all Europeans. If confirmed, my aim would be to make sure that Europeans have a real say on how their Union is run and what it delivers on. We need to engage with Europeans across our Union, to listen to their hopes, expectations and their concerns, which are related to their realities: those linked to climate, economy, digital development, global transformation, demographic changes. The President-elect has tasked me with finding ways to make participation in person or online and make it as easy and accessible as possible. I will make this an absolute priority. This is the first idea.

My second idea is that we must work together. The Conference on the Future of Europe cannot be run by one person, by one party, by one institution or even by a part of Europe. It must be a team effort. Nowhere is this truer than in the Commission itself. I will work closely with the Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight and with the Vice-President for Values and Transparency, as well as with all other colleagues to make this a success.

This will be particularly important in the first phase where common ground will be needed when it comes to finding a way for the *Spitzenkandidaten* system and discussing the idea of transnational lists. This will be in the first part of our mandate. Within the Commission this work will be led by Vice-President Jourová, but we will, of course, work hand in hand on all matters related to the conference.

Strengthening Europe's democracy cannot be done without the most important body, which is the European Parliament, the body which has active participation of our citizens. I'm fully committed to work with you and the Council in all stages of the conference.

My third idea is that this conference must lead to results. Listening to citizens is essential, but is not an end in itself. Real understanding means taking real action. We need to make sure that whatever is agreed is enacted. This is always the problem in Europe so what we agreed we have to implement. This was an explicit commitment of the President-elect in her political guidelines and I will work with all my colleagues within the Commission, as well as with this House, and with all committees – there are five committees here, but with all committees who are interested – and all other institutions to make sure we follow up on what is agreed.

Dear Members, a meaningful and successful conference on the future of Europe is an important tool in building trust and participation in our democracy. But as I said earlier, the key to strengthening our democracy also lies in showing and understanding what is the reason behind it. I believe one of the least-tackled issues is demographic change. I have seen this first hand in the Member State I know best, with a prolonged period of declining population having a real impact across the country. For some parts of Europe, it is true that this is an issue that feels somehow distant or abstract. But for others, including in large parts of central and eastern Europe, but also in rural areas across all our Union, this is a very real and tangible concern. It is real and tangible for older people who rely on local services, seeing post offices, libraries, hospitals close or seeing local buses become less frequent. This is the situation in rural areas. It is a real and tangible concern for parents who see their children have to move away to find opportunities to work or study and it is a real and tangible concern for those bringing up children in poverty or trying to balance work and life responsibilities.

Of course, it is overwhelmingly good news that we are living longer and healthier lives. But this also comes with its own set of challenges, be it related to the economy, or pensions, health care, the social fabric of our societies. We need to understand this much better than we do. This is why I will undertake an extensive mapping exercise to look at where the problems lie and how best to support those regions most in need – how to help them to implement reforms and how to attract investments.

If confirmed by the European Parliament, by you, I will look at every aspect of demographic change and how it impacts the different groups affected. Allow me to give you a few concrete examples of what I believe we must work on together. First, I want to look at the issue of ageing, one of our biggest society challenges. This affects our working lives, our social protection systems, our health system and our pensions. It also brings many new opportunities. We need to ensure that we are passing knowledge down through generations and helping people become more active and more involved in society.

I will put forward a Green Paper on ageing to assess what can and needs to be done, notably to foster active ageing and look at whether our social protection systems are fit for an older population. This will be done in close cooperation with this House, and of course with Member States, who have the competencies in most of these areas.

Second, I want to focus on rural areas, which are often the most deeply affected by declining population, lack of opportunities leading to a brain drain, a severe shortage in frontline services, and higher risk of poverty. I will also coordinate the work on the long-term vision for rural areas in close consultation with local and regional authorities. We need to enable them to make the most of their potential and support them in facing up to their own unique set of issues. I will focus on the issue of the brain drain, supporting the regions most affected, notably through the Youth Guarantee.

Thirdly, and as a part of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, I will coordinate the work on better reconciling work and family life.

Last, but certainly by no means least – and this is how I reply to your question, honourable Chair, on children and later on I can elaborate more – I will lead the work on investing in our children. This has been a priority for me throughout my career in politics. There is no more important investment we can make than in our children; we call it investment. I will coordinate the work on a new child guarantee and present a comprehensive strategy for the rights of the child.

Honourable Members, we will have time to discuss all of this in great detail and I welcome all of your questions. Allow me to finish on a personal note. As someone who witnessed a country gain its independence, its democratic strength and the transition towards our Union, it is with great responsibility and humility that I accept the task I have been given. The very fact that we can have a conference on the future of Europe or that we can find European solutions to changes that affect us all, is because of the sacrifice of those before us, who are building our Union.

If confirmed, I will be determined and honoured to be able to honour that legacy with you all over the next five years. Thank you very much and I look forward to your questions.

(Applause)

1-005-0000

Presidente. – Grazie signora vicepresidente, grazie anche per aver ribadito l'impegno che a noi sta particolarmente a cuore per la conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa e per aver ribadito il ruolo

importante che dovrà avere questo Parlamento, che non potrà essere il ruolo di un fiancheggiatore, ma vuole essere il ruolo di un protagonista.

1-006-0000

Danuta Maria Hübner (PPE). – Vice-President-designate, I would like to thank you very much for your comprehensive introduction to our debate. You're here with colleagues from different committees of the European Parliament, but there is also the lead committee, which is the Constitutional Affairs Committee. You know that this is a committee which has, in recent years, had reflection on the future of Europe very high on its political agenda, and I think it will continue to stay there. Your future work will be, therefore, extremely important for us in AFCO. My question to you is about 'how': how do you see this cooperation with us individual MEPs, but also with the European Parliament as an institution, with AFCO as a committee? How do you see our involvement at all the stages of this political process leading to this flagship project that will come immediately at the beginning of your potential term? Because I believe that the process of preparation of this debate and of this conference can have, itself, a huge added value, with a big impact on the outcome and then also on the implementation of the conference.

1-007-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you, Ms Hübner. This was a very interesting question and I thank you for putting it immediately because as you will see from my introductory speech the Conference on the Future of Europe is going to be the main part of my portfolio.

I tried to follow closely what you were doing on this in the AFCO Committee, but we were all of us included in this through other committees and plenary sessions. I followed the reports from Mr Brok and Ms Bresso, and then there was Mr Verhofstadt's report, the last one. So I saw what you were doing in this field.

Without you and without Parliament I cannot start this this conference. So I will come to this committee and we will agree on the scope and timing, as I said in my content. In terms of topics, I think we have to stick to these six pillars which are embedded in the political guidelines of the President-elect: a European Union New Deal; climate; digitalisation; an economy that works for people; a stronger Europe in the world and European way of life. Then this one: a new push for European democracy. I think that this should be the scope of our topics, but I won't decide this. I would come here and it will be my first task within the first 100 days. So I'll come to you and we'll see how to go on. We have to do it in cooperation with the Council, of course, but I think you will be the first one involved

1-008-0000

Danuta Maria Hübner (PPE). – Very briefly on the follow-up. I see on your CV you have mainly been a local politician and I appreciate that very much. My question to you is, as a local politician, would you see also the possibility of including the local communities, local authorities – and maybe not only authorities, but the people from below – coming and participating with us in the debate, and then taking the agreement, the outcome of the conference, back home as their own responsibility and taking ownership?

1-009-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – This cannot be imagined without local and regional authorities. So, definitely, as I said in my introductory speech, I was serving on many different local levels. Without local and regional authorities this can't be imagined. So we will include everyone. This was my first idea. We have to contact everyone – NGOs, local and regional authorities, national parliaments. But local and regional authorities will be the most important because this is the easiest way to reach the citizens, and we want to reach any citizen who is interested in our common future.

1-010-0000

Domènec Ruiz Devesa (S&D). – Señor presidente, señora Dubravka Šuica, vicepresidenta propuesta. Los diputados del Grupo S&D pensamos que la Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa es una gran oportunidad para plantear las reformas institucionales a las que debemos encaminarnos en los próximos años, de modo que nuestra Unión pueda desplegar nuevas políticas, como las que usted ha mencionado, frente a los grandes retos transnacionales y así tomar sus decisiones de manera más ágil y democrática.

La presidenta electa ha declarado que estaría dispuesta a dar seguimiento a los acuerdos alcanzados por esta Conferencia, incluyendo propuestas legislativas y reforma de los Tratados. Pero la señora Von der Leyen tiene, asimismo, un programa político, compuesto de seis líneas que incluyen el Pacto Verde, la profundización de la unión económica y monetaria, el pilar social, seguridad, migraciones, política exterior europea y un nuevo impulso a la democracia.

En nuestra opinión, sin avances legislativos o sin una reforma de los Tratados, va a ser muy difícil llevar a cabo este programa político que también es el suyo. ¿Comparte usted esta opinión? Lo digo porque en sus respuestas escritas, en la página 6, al referirse a la posibilidad de la reforma de los Tratados, añade que esta se hará en caso de que sea necesaria.

1-011-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – As you might have noticed, I'm following the political guidelines of the President-elect and, of course, this will be possible. But let's first go to the rural areas, let's first go to the mountains, let's go to the remote areas, let's go to the capitals and let's go to the citizens. And after a two-year period – this is how we think this future Europe will work – we'll see what our citizens say. If there is a need to change the Treaty, I will be open for further debate – not only me, but all of you. I saw that this was an idea in this committee and it is very important for Parliament to be stronger, to be more powerful, and since I'm one of you, I would be in favour of this. But you know that the Commission will be working in a collegiate way – we will be a team. So if we have a unanimous approach I will be in favour of this but let's first talk to the citizens and see if this Treaty is enough – if we have used all the possibilities it offers us. If not, then we have to start debating the changes.

1-012-0000

Domènec Ruiz Devesa (S&D). – En cualquier caso, le recuerdo que este Parlamento, que representa a los ciudadanos, ya ha aprobado tres informes bastante importantes sobre avances en la integración dentro del Tratado: el informe de los diputados Bresso y Brok, en cierto modo el informe de la diputada Pervenche Berès, y los informes de los diputados Verhofstadt y Ramón Jáuregui sobre reformas más avanzadas en el marco del Tratado. ¿Comparte usted estos informes? Incluso a nivel personal, más allá de que sea —como dice usted— importante consultar a los ciudadanos en el marco de la Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa.

1-013-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Of course, I agree with these reports. I was in favour of them during plenary sessions, and I even took part in debates and, of course, I share the content of these reports. But as I said, let's see little by little, in small steps, in two years' time. I think there is enough time to start debate on this, but I share this opinion because I think this House, you are people who are directly elected. You represent citizens. I think this House has the greatest say in among all the European institutions, so let's work together on it. I will come to you again. We will continue this discussion and I'm in favour.

1-014-0000

Chair. – If I remember well you voted in favour of this report. This is important for us.

1-015-0000

Pascal Durand (Renew). – Madame la vice-présidente putative, vous nous avez expliqué que la conférence pour le futur de l'Europe était quelque chose de très important et qu'il fallait redynamiser la démocratie européenne et, finalement, travailler un peu mieux avec les citoyens.

Déjà, un premier élément: vous nous avez dit qu'en novembre vous alliez arriver avec des propositions. Je me permets de vous dire que, peut-être, un changement de méthode serait le bienvenu et que vous écoutiez, au mois de novembre, quand vous prendrez votre poste, les propositions que le Parlement européen – et cette commission en particulier – sera en mesure de faire sur cette conférence de l'Europe. Car nous avons, nous aussi, en tant que représentants des citoyens, le droit d'avoir des idées et nous vous les proposerons, de même qu'au Conseil d'ailleurs.

Mais, plus clairement, vous avez parlé du fait d'associer les citoyens. Les citoyens, ça fait des années que nous les avons associés, y compris à travers les initiatives citoyennes ou autres. Pourrions-nous imaginer, et êtes-vous prête à imaginer, le fait que l'association des citoyens aille jusqu'à leur permettre de décider et de voter, et non pas d'être simplement entendus par des décisionnaires qui, ensuite, dans un cadre interinstitutionnel, prendront les bonnes décisions pour eux? Est-ce que, typiquement, s'il y avait un collègue de citoyens dans cette conférence de l'Europe, il aurait le même pouvoir délibératif que celui qu'auraient les institutions?

1-016-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Let me first congratulate Pascal Durand. Happy Birthday!

Let's be completely frank and open. All of you know that we don't start from scratch. We are not starting from zero. We already had different initiatives and different tools and elements. Imagine there are 1 800 citizens' dialogues, including 200 000 citizens who took part in these dialogues. And in 635 places. So the citizens' dialogue was already there. But we have to amplify our activities.

Your question was about citizens. We have also the European Citizens' Initiative. So far as I can recollect, we have had four successful citizens' initiatives. One was 'the right to water'. Then there was 'stop glyphosate'. So we have instruments but we have to amplify our activities – not just us but also citizens.

So we have listened to the citizens. There is always a clash between representative and direct democracy, but of course I think they have their say through this Citizens' Initiative – but, of course, we can go on and improve it. Why not? Because, as I said, if half of Europe's citizens took part in these European elections that means there was a big increase – I mean in comparison to some years before – which means that we have to take this into consideration. That is the reason why we will go there, why we talk to citizens and listen to their concerns and also to their expectations, and that's it. I will listen to you, of course, first. I have exceeded my time but perhaps I can answer later on.

1-017-0000

Président. – Bon anniversaire au nom de toute la commission. Vous avez la parole.

1-018-0000

Pascal Durand (Renew). – Justement, je vais rebondir puisque vous parliez, Madame la vice-présidente, du vieillissement de la population en Europe. Vous venez donc de l'illustrer, je vous en remercie.

Plus sérieusement, et là j'aborde le côté démographique, tout en essayant de donner un caractère politique à cette question: vous avez parlé du vieillissement de la population, etc. Il y a, en ce

moment, des vents mauvais qui soufflent sur l'Europe, et notamment une théorie qui met en scène un risque de «grand remplacement» de la population européenne d'origine, dite chrétienne, de valeur historique, qui serait celle de notre Union.

J'aimerais donc vraiment que vous puissiez, puisque nous sommes directement dans votre portefeuille «démographie», nous donner votre sentiment à l'égard de cette théorie et à l'égard de ce risque de «remplacement» de ce que nous connaissons comme valeurs européennes actuelles.

1-019-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I would like to reply immediately. I do not believe in this theory, but it is the truth that we are now living six years longer, and 20 years ago we were living six years less. Ageing is a very important issue, and we have to take care of this. We can talk about this later.

The birth rate is declining, but now I have to introduce the topic of migration. Legal migration is okay. Without legal migrants, our labour market in 2070 will, at this rate, be missing 25% of working people. So we must have a long-term vision and see together how we must go on. This is why this portfolio is here – demography and democracy are very important. There is a very strong link between those two terms, but I will explain this later since my time is over.

1-020-0000

Damian Boeselager (Verts/ALE). – As you said, the last European elections saw the highest voter turnout in 20 years, with strong support for pro-European parties and a lot of engagement especially by young people, who are asking us for real change. You may be tasked with bringing about part of this change by the Conference, at least from the Commission side, so allow me to ask you again about the details. How would you ensure that a) citizens and national parliamentarians participate meaningfully, b) the mistakes and failed attempts of the past are not repeated, and c) that there are actually concrete consequences, including potential treaty changes already mentioned by my colleagues?

1-021-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – As I said, I'll come to you and talk to you. But there are different concepts of how to include citizens. Some of you asked me before, how are going to select citizens? Town halls. I have the idea of the Finnish Presidency: they put all their legislative work in public libraries, but this may be a conservative approach. Or we could do it like President Macron did and have it all over France. Or we can have it online, so we can all go to the town halls. So there are different approaches for how to select – we don't select anyone, it will be completely open, and it will be completely inclusive. So we will talk to them, listen to them and then we will agree on the results. This was my third idea: if you don't have tangible results, if you don't enact what you heard, if you don't follow up then it is nothing, it will be only on paper and in theory. So let us work together on it and try to find the best solutions. Definitely, there would be an advisory board, which will be chaired by me but co-chaired by someone from this Parliament. So this is very, very important – this won't only be Commission work, this time the Commission comes not only to Parliament but the Commission comes to the ground. This message, which was sent to us with this higher turnout in the elections, this means that citizens want to have their say and they want to co-shape our European policies, which was not always the case.

1-022-0000

Damian Boeselager (Verts/ALE). – As you said, it can't be only talking and it has to have concrete results. I think the first quick question would be, what do you see the role of this advisory board to be? And second, would you personally support us in taking the output of the conference into an actual convention?

1-023-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – Someone has to chair all this, so this advisory board will be chairing this conference. It's a conference, but in fact it will last two years, it will be a series of conferences all over Europe. So this is what we want to do. But of course whoever is interested, whoever wants to participate and has ideas... I don't think ideas won't be acceptable to us, so we will do it together. So don't doubt that we will accept all and try to translate or transpose all these ideas into tangible policies. It is hard, I know, but let's do it because the citizens sent us messages.

1-024-0000

Gerolf Annemans (ID). – Waarde mevrouw Šuica, ik zou u drie vragen willen stellen namens de AFCO-leden van de ID-Fractie. Naar verluidt heeft mevrouw Von der Leyen bij het verdelen van de bevoegdheden van haar commissarissen het plan opgevat om daarbij gebruik te maken van een titulatuur die in de eerste plaats verwarrend is, zodat het ook min of meer onduidelijk zou blijven wat er nu achter de schermen van deze Commissie eigenlijk aan de gang is. Wat bijvoorbeeld de bevoegdheden van de Griekse commissaris betreft, is het debat nog steeds niet uitgewoed over wat er nu juist met de "Europese manier van leven" wordt bedoeld. Onduidelijkheid troef dus over een aantal bevoegdheidspakketten. Ik voorspel nu al een kakofonie en een Babylonische spraakverwarring over wie juist waarvoor bevoegd is.

Sommigen, waaronder ikzelf, verdenken mevrouw Von der Leyen zelfs ervan van die verwarring nuttig gebruik te zullen maken om de interne tegenstellingen binnen haar driepartijencoalitie weg te moffelen, want zelfs aangevuld met alle leden van de Movimento Cinque Stelle heeft die haar hier in het Europees Parlement niet meer opgeleverd dan een nipte verkiezing tot voorzitter van de Europese Commissie. Met de hakken over de sloot, zoals we dat in het Nederlands zeggen.

Neemt u mij niet kwalijk, mevrouw Šuica, maar ik vrees dat ook de toewijzing van uw bevoegdheden het slachtoffer is geworden van die halfslachtige verschijnselen. Plots krijgen we nu een commissaris voor demografie, maar met geen woord wordt gerept over één van de meest indrukwekkende ontwikkelingen op het Europese continent, namelijk een door de meerderheid van de bevolking afgewezen massa-immigratie met een ongelooflijk dominant effect op de demografische evolutie van het continent, terwijl het de Europese Unie met haar opengrenzenbeleid is die deze – wat ik noem – wilde immigratie dagelijks organiseert. Mijn vraag aan u is dus: op welke manier is er afgesproken dat uw bevoegdheidspakket inzake demografie gekoppeld zal worden aan een debat over immigratie? Mijn tweede vraag is of...

(De voorzitter onderbreekt de spreker)

1-026-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – Mr Annemans, thank you for this question. First of all, I don't want to interfere in your political observations relating to the coalition and President-elect von der Leyen. I don't know anything about this, but if you are interested in the European way of life, there is a hearing two floors below us. I don't know what they are talking about at the moment, but 'democracy and demography' – I won't say that I'm a victim of this title. I think this is very important and this is very inspiring, and I think this is a problem, as I said in my introductory speech. I was talking about brain drain. I was talking about the problems which make people dissatisfied because they have moved out from the regions, moved out from villages, from countries, from rural areas to urban areas. This is a problem and this has to do with demographic change. This is the reason why I think that democracy and demography are connected because people are left behind, people stay there in villages and, as I said, post offices, hospitals and schools close, and there are no buses anymore. As I said in my opening speech, people start blaming democracy and they don't want to take part in democratic institutions. Some of them don't take part in elections, and we want everyone to participate. This is the reason why we are organising this conference on the future of Europe. We want them to participate not just

once every five years, but on a daily basis, either online or offline. This is the explanation of my portfolio. I don't have enough time, but that's it.

1-027-0000

Gerolf Annemans (ID). – I'll keep it short. I heard a rumour that the conference will be presided over by Mr Verhofstadt. Is that true?

1-028-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – I understood that you are a member of this Committee, so I will come to this Committee. It is up to Parliament to decide who is going to be the representative, of course. It is beyond my competence. Thank you.

1-029-0000

Geert Bourgeois (ECR). – Mevrouw de kandidaat-vicevoorzitter, de Europese Unie mag nooit een superstaat worden. De Europese Unie, laten we dat niet vergeten, is opgebouwd op eenheid in verscheidenheid en op subsidiariteit. De vorige Commissie heeft het verslag-Timmermans over actieve subsidiariteit geproduceerd. Mijn vragen zijn:

- 1) Welk gevolg zult u geven aan dit verslag?
- 2) Bent u bij die oefening bereid om in beide richtingen te werken? Wanneer er toegevoegde waarde is om zaken samen te doen, komt die bevoegdheid dan naar de Europese Unie? Als dat niet zo is, gaat die dan naar de lidstaten of naar de deelstaten met wetgevende bevoegdheid?
- 3) Kunt u ermee leven of gaat u akkoord met het invoeren van een rode kaart als een meerderheid van de nationale parlementen van oordeel zou zijn dat een initiatief in strijd is met de subsidiariteit?

1-030-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you, Mr Bourgeois, for those very direct questions, and especially for the last one. I'm definitely in favour of subsidiarity, which is enshrined in our Treaty. Subsidiarity is very important. I am following Juncker's motto: 'for small things, Member States; for big issues, Europe'. We can't deal with terrorism, migration or security alone, but education, social care and culture belong at the national level. I am therefore in favour of subsidiarity, and I will keep to this.

Of course, when it comes to the social pillar, of which I am in charge, I have to take care of Member States' competences. However, when we can help, why not help by providing funding or doing things that can help, especially in Central and Eastern Europe and in the less developed countries?

When it comes to the 'red card', firstly we have the 'yellow card'. The 'yellow card' has been used three or four times so far. This means that we have to use all the possibilities, from the 'green card' up to the 'red card'. I can't tell you, but why don't we discuss this within the scope of a conference on the future of Europe? If this will be the conclusion, I would not oppose it. We are completely open and completely inclusive. This is the spirit of the new College and the new Commission.

1-031-0000

Geert Bourgeois (ECR). – Dank u wel voor uw antwoord. Een aantal van de domeinen die u opgesomd hebt, zijn inderdaad lidstatelijke bevoegdheden. Denk aan kinderen, aan jeugd, aan stadsplanning, enzovoort. Dat zijn bevoegdheden die bij de lidstaten horen. Ik ben blij met uw antwoord dat dit het voorwerp van discussie zal zijn in de Conferentie. Bent u bereid om ook het evenredigheidsbeginsel bij die oefening op te nemen?

1-032-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – The principle of subsidiarity, but also proportionality, is already included. So we have always to have this in mind and take this into account. Of course, I think proportionality is also very important and we don't have to make any extra burden on anyone, especially not on local and regional authorities.

You know, I was the mayor of a small town but a popular one, and I know what it means to work in local and regional authorities and I'm sure that the competences should be there and we definitely have to adhere to proportionality as well as to subsidiarity.

1-033-0000

Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL). – Herr Vorsitzender, Frau Šuica! Vieles ist schon gesagt, und offensichtlich ist die Konferenz zur Zukunft Europas jetzt das neue Zaubermittel, um die Politik und die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse zu demokratisieren.

Demokratie ist aber immer konkret, und Demokratie muss meines Erachtens auch immer inklusiv sein. Sie haben viel gesagt über die Situation in ländlichen Räumen. Sie haben viel über die Herausforderungen gesprochen, die sich mit aus den geographischen Entwicklungen in den Gesellschaften ergeben.

Ich komme aber auf diese Zukunftskonferenz ganz konkret zu: Gestehen Sie uns als Europäischem Parlament und den Volksvertreterinnen und Volksvertretern die maßgebliche Rolle bei der Zielbestimmung, bei der Gestaltung, bei der Auswahl der Methoden, der Instrumente und der Einbeziehung der Zivilgesellschaft zu? Und dann im Zusammenwirken mit dem Rat, mit den nationalen Parlamenten, denn ich glaube, das ist die Frage. Wir müssen von Anfang an diesen inklusiven Ansatz für die Zukunftskonferenz finden.

1-034-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – This was really interesting and I already said something but not all, because two minutes is not enough. So, everyone will be included, everyone will be included. I said listening among us is very important. We have to listen to each other and then to see what to do with this. So national parliaments will be included, of course, definitely. This is the reason why I answered Mr Bourgeois that we have to use all tools we have until now.

So, national parliaments, of course, then NGOs. You know what? The other day I received a letter, which had a hundred signatures, a hundred different NGOs who want to be included, they are interested. I met some of them a few days ago, so they will be included. Civil society is also very important and I won't abstain from this. Be assured that I will incorporate all of them but together with you, since we will be co-chairing this so I won't do anything without coming again and talking to you, agreeing, as I said, on the concept, on the scope, on the timing, we will do everything together.

This might not sound very popular but I remember when we were a little bit angry when we couldn't reach some Commissioners. This time I'm one of you, okay?

1-035-0000

Chair. – It is important to have more Commissioners coming from the European Parliament.

1-036-0000

Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL). – Da können wir ja noch gleich anknüpfen. Ganz konkret: In der gegenwärtigen zugespitzten Situation um den Brexit müssen wir sozusagen auf BürgerInneninteressen, auf ihre Rechte Einfluss nehmen. Und im Hinblick auf die Zukunft Europas: Welchen Mechanismus werden Sie nach dem Brexit anwenden, um weiterhin mit den 1,8 Millionen Bürgerinnen und Bürgern im Norden Irlands zusammenzuarbeiten, die einen Anspruch auf die irische Staatsbürgerschaft und damit die Unionsbürgerschaft haben, um sicherzustellen, dass auch diese Bürgerinnen und Bürger einen Weg zurück zur EU-Mitgliedschaft finden?

1-037-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – These are completely different questions, but let's talk about citizenship. As you know, with all withdrawal agreements and Parliament resolutions from this term and the last, we have always put citizens at the heart. Citizenship was the first item on our agenda. In the last recommendation from this Commission, they sent a letter to all 27 Member States telling them to be generous in the event of no deal. I still hope that there will be a deal.

Citizenship is very important, especially when we talk about Ireland and Northern Ireland, and we have to take this into consideration. Of course, generosity won't be enough. We will have to do more for those people – both for UK citizens here in Europe, and for us Europeans in the UK.

1-038-0000

Chair. – Thank you for this point, because for the European Parliament, for this Committee, the rights of European citizens living in the UK and for British citizens living in Europe is the most important point.

1-039-0000

Vladimír Bilčík (PPE). – I think we are all asking a variation on a very similar question, namely what is this conference on the future of Europe going to look like? What is it going to be about? And I'm basically going to do the same, but I'll push you particularly on one issue you haven't touched on explicitly. You've talked about the relationship with the Parliament, and of course the role of the Commission, you've mentioned the Advisory Board, but I think we need to reach out to the Member States. We really need to get inside the Member States, and I'm very happy to read your commitment that in the first half of your mandate you plan to visit all Member States. I'm wondering whether you will require the same kind of commitment from the rest of the members of the European Commission, and indeed, what are your thoughts about how we should engage in the Member States? Because indeed we had a higher turnout in the recent European elections, but it also varied very much across the Member States: we have some with very high numbers and some, including my own country, with a very low numbers of citizens turning out to vote.

1-040-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I forgot to say this is one of the key political priorities and political guidelines of our president-elect. We have to visit each Member State in the first part of our mandate. This is valid for all Commissioners. For me, maybe more than once. Which means we will be visiting Member States and we will be talking to them and we will be listening to them. Visiting Member States doesn't mean only visiting parliaments and having conversations with parliamentarians, but also going out of the capitals. Because citizens' dialogues were held, as I told you, 1,800 times, but they were almost all held in capitals or in big cities or in metropolitan areas. I think we have to go to rural areas to reach every citizen. This will be different, maybe. I don't say that the current Commission hasn't done this, but maybe we have to highlight this, we have to amplify this activity and we have to see what are the concerns of our citizens. This will be my job... if confirmed, of course.

1-041-0000

Vladimír Bilčík (PPE). – Thank you. Let me pick up on that. I'm glad to hear that this is not going to be a Brussels-based exercise because we need to reach out, but I think we need to reach out also beyond the EU's borders. Indeed, your mission statement reads, I cite: 'Europeans must have their say on how their union is run and what it delivers on'. My question is: how do you plan to engage the Europeans from candidate countries in a proposed conference on the future of Europe so they too get their proper say on their future union. In the next five years, maybe we will have a union of a few Member States, but maybe we'll have a union of more Member States, and in the past, when we had the Convention on the Future of Europe, there was a lot of space for the accession countries. My question is: how do you plan to involve those negotiating on the terms of their membership? They should have their say on their future union as well.

1-042-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is very interesting, Mr Bilčík. You might know that I'm in favour of enlargement, since I come from the country which is very interested in enlargement, but for this exercise, they will have different conferences within a different framework. They won't be included in this because first we have to settle our future. Although this might seem arrogant from me, from the country which joined the last, but we will not include them in this conference because this is a conference on the future of Europe. You know that we received all 27 heads of state and prime ministers in the plenary in Strasbourg and we were debating the future of Europe, but only them, so this will be only for 27 states or 28 – we will see on 31 October – then we will talk with candidate countries in different formats.

1-043-0000

Richard Corbett (S&D). – Madam candidate, in trying to engender a widespread public debate on the future of Europe, we will inevitably come across the problem of certain politicians who deliberately mislead and give fake news and, sometimes, outright lies about how the European Union operates, what it actually does and how it works. We faced this challenge, for instance, in the British referendum on Brexit three years ago, and it continues to dominate the debate today. What would you do within your remit to improve information public knowledge about the functioning of the European Union ahead of this important conference and, indeed, ahead of all the work that we do at European level?

1-044-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – It's hard to prevent someone from talking since we are open societies and everyone can talk, you know. Of course, we are not in favour of spreading disinformation. Nobody's in favour of that and I'm against disinformation, but it's hard. There are different types of politicians and they are trying to persuade citizens to vote for them, so it's very, very hard to do something which will prevent them from talking. But there is a problem in actual situations where some politicians, when they come home, they say, 'Brussels is guilty. We had to do this and that.' When they are in Brussels then they say, 'oh, everything is nice'. This is another problem because they have a different attitude when they are at home and a different attitude when they are in Europe and then they are spreading this bad news about the European Union. We try to be open, honest and frank and talk to people, but I don't know of any instruments which can offer protection. I want to mention some of your fellow citizens – several colleagues who are trying to persuade people, and people start believing – this is populism and they are doing that, but I don't want to interfere now in the political debate, so let me stop here.

1-045-0000

Richard Corbett (S&D). – Why stop there? I'm tempted to ask you – how would you deal with it if it were, for instance, the Prime Minister of a Member State who is a prime source of fake news and misinformation about the European Union? How do you recommend dealing with that?

1-046-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is what I was saying, that some prime ministers of Member States do this. I know that they do it, but they are free people, and they can say whatever they want until citizens believe them. I said we want to change. I agree with you, lying is not okay. I think that it's hard to stop them because they have different channels: nowadays you have social media, everything is open, they can say whatever they want and it is up to the citizens whether or not to believe them. It will be hard to stop them. But I think with our Conference of Europe we can talk about this, we can see. This is the reason why we want to approach citizens. This is one of the reasons why this Conference on the Future of Europe is established or will be established. This is one of the reasons. I repeat, this was President Macron's idea, but all of us accepted this because I think this is good. We have to talk, because they think we live here in the Brussels bubble and we don't spread on the ground what the truth is. So we have to talk to them, to meet them in person, or if not in person then online.

1-047-0000

Chrysoula Zacharopoulou (Renew). – Madame la commissaire désignée, s’interroger sur la transition démographique, c’est bien sûr regarder la question du vieillissement, mais c’est également aborder la question de la natalité.

Aujourd’hui, dans certains États membres, des politiques natalistes prévoient des aides financières à la maternité, à condition que soit respecté un schéma familial traditionnel. Ces politiques non seulement ignorent la réalité des familles modernes dans leur diversité, mais, en plus, elles discriminent, stigmatisent, culpabilisent les femmes dans leur désir ou non d’avoir un enfant. La démographie ne doit être ni détournée, ni manipulée à des fins discriminatoires et idéologiques. Et j’espère que le titre de votre portefeuille ne le sous-entend pas.

Quel est votre regard sur ces politiques natalistes archaïques et comment comptez-vous, Madame la commissaire désignée, concilier la transition démographique avec les familles d’aujourd’hui dans toute leur diversité?

1-048-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – I’m sure that this portfolio won’t be misused for what you said. There is no way to do it, as I said at the beginning what our ideas are. We were not talking about birth rates at all. We won’t do anything on this. Family policy is important, of course, but it depends on the definition of family. We won’t go so far, but I think balancing work and family is very important and this is also part of my portfolio. If you have listened carefully, in my portfolio, you have child protection, then you have work-life balance and then you have aging, so everyone is included, and all this together with rural areas, so everyone is included and it has nothing to do with conservative definitions of demography. Maybe I can add – whatever I will be doing, it will be done on the basis of mapping, as I said at the beginning, which means that I will use Eurostat data and on this data, everything will be evidence based. So we won’t start this procedure and we won’t start enacting any legislation without having concrete data, which will be obtained by Eurostat.

1-049-0000

Chrysoula Zacharopoulou (Renew). – Merci, Madame la commissaire. Je suis contente de vous entendre nous parler d’une nouvelle définition de la famille parce que, en tant que députée européenne, vous vous étiez régulièrement opposée au droit des femmes, en particulier au droit à la santé sexuelle et reproductive, ainsi qu’aux droits des personnes LGBTI.

En tant que commissaire à la démographie, vous devrez travailler avec vos collègues, les commissaires à la santé et à l’égalité, qui se sont toutes deux engagées pour les droits sexuels et reproductifs et pour les droits des personnes LGBTI.

Ma question est donc la suivante: si vous êtes confirmée, comment allez-vous travailler ensemble et porter une vision commune?

1-050-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Of course, I will be communicating and cooperating with all my colleagues, especially with my colleague who is in charge of equality, with Ms Dalli, so we will definitely communicate. But, as I said, the spirit of this College is collegiality so we will do it unanimously and I’m sure that we won’t pause anything which is progressive. We will be progressive enough in order to protect everyone. Non-discrimination is one of the elements enshrined in our Treaties, so don’t doubt on this.

If you are referring to some of my previous votes, there was always some other problem. It was nothing against gender, nothing against gender rights, it was always budgetary resources or something which we couldn’t accept at the moment, nothing to do with gender and gender rights.

I was always in favour. Being a woman, having a daughter, having two grand-daughters, how can I be against anything which is in accordance with gender rights?

When you talk about LGBT, this is also discrimination, nowadays, if someone goes against. So, I think this has nothing to do with my personal beliefs, so it will be a collegiate spirit within the Commission.

1-051-0000

Tomáš Zdechovský (PPE). – Pane předsedající, vážená paní komisařko, v roce 2017 devatenáct procent naší populace bylo starších 65 let. Moje otázka je, protože ve vaší agendě je právě otázka stárnutí a otázka seniorů, jakým způsobem se budete snažit tuto skupinu lidí více zapojit do aktivního života? Protože řada lidí pocituje v tomto věku mnoho bariér, které brání jejich plnohodnotnému zapojení do normálního běžného života.

A zda budete iniciovat jednání s členskými státy? Protože to zřejmě není kompetence Evropské unie, aby se touto otázkou dále zabývala a snažila se zlepšit postavení seniorů ve společnosti.

1-052-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – As I said at the beginning, we live longer and healthier lives nowadays. This is an opportunity. We have to celebrate it, but at the same time, it can be a challenge for society. As I said, 6 more years in the last 20 years, which means it can be – I don't want to say 'burden' – but it can be a problem with regard to pensions, healthcare and health systems, so we have to find a way to incorporate these people into society. There is the silver economy which can engage these people. They have been in the labour market. Why not. Then there is long-term care. So there are many, many different institutes which we can develop together and try to make them feel active and this is the idea which is done under DG EMPL and within the Employment Committee.

1-053-0000

Tomáš Zdechovský (PPE). – My second question is about something you have in your portfolio, taking care of children and children's rights. How do you see the situation in Europe, specifically in some countries where children are taken from citizens and given to foster parents? I am talking about the huge scandal of the Barnevernet in Norway. There are many really scandalous cases that the European Court for Human Rights has criticised. There are many things that are totally unacceptable that we have to discuss with our Norwegian friends and partners.

1-054-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – I don't know this case but when you're asking about my portfolio and the protection of children, this is very important: children, the work-life balance and the ageing population. This is a circle which is enclosed so I will take care of them.

I want to remind all of you and I want to thank you for the initiative of the child guarantee. I will work on the child guarantee together with Commissioner Schmit. This is a very important instrument and we will take care of children in poverty. Isn't it a disaster that nowadays one in four European children live in poverty? So we have to take care of vulnerable children and see how to develop this.

1-055-0000

Miapetra Kumpula-Natri (S&D). – Many good ideas touched already on the conference and the cooperation of AFCO, EPP and you as a possible Commissioner. I want to turn to the democracy which is not only voting but also inclusiveness in the society. Everyone must have the right and possibility to live and participate in a society, regardless of where they come from, what their gender is, what they believe in, or who they are in love with.

Unfortunately, today, one of the key challenges is that too many citizens feel that they are pushed aside. This feeds populist movements which gain their momentum from confrontation at the cost of minorities and even rights of the women. Sometimes I fear that the clock is ticking backwards in Europe.

One key element in your portfolio is to ensure that those who feel left behind could be brought back again and that everyone can feel safe and accepted in Europe. An article in the book you had in your hand, Article 2 states that the 'Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities'. Can you elaborate on your thoughts about how to include minorities better in our society and in democracy?

1-056-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – This is very important. The goal of my portfolio and of the political guidelines of the new Commission is inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is the keyword for us, so this is why we want to encompass everyone. When I was talking about NGOs and about citizens, I was also thinking about minorities.

Minorities are very important in every society, and I always think of their inclusion, so there is no way that they will be excluded. You were talking about those who are left behind, but when I talk about those who are left behind, I mean people who are living in rural areas or in some parts of the EU where we have big emigration processes and people are moving away due to brain drain, with only older people being left there. They feel left behind, and they no longer want to participate.

You said that democracy is not only voting, but also participation. This is just what you asked. This is inclusiveness: if you participate, you are included. Rest assured that we will take care of minorities regardless of their ethnic origins or anything else. Everything is included. Article 2 of the Charter says this, so this Commission definitely has to stick to it, but it is also my personal belief – not only Treaty.

1-057-0000

Miapetra Kumpula-Natri (S&D). – The initiative on the conference of the future of Europe is based on the idea that Europeans must have a say and be included. A very concrete question also: do you promise that in inviting NGOs, social partners, civil society and youth organisations, you will not exclude people working for sexual minorities or people working for other minorities or sexual-reproductive rights? I also had a look at your votes during the previous term and even your own initiative about the right to the abortion, and so I would love to hear in front of this committee once again, your action as a Commissioner, if you are elected, on these topics.

1-058-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – I would like to refer firstly to my voting and my own-initiative report. It was only one implementation report, if you remember, after one year. There was always a problem with budgetary resources, and this was the reason for not accepting it. Then I had my own alternative resolution, but it had nothing to do with my standpoint on minorities or on any part of any society. You asked me to promise – and someone told me during my preparations not to promise too much – but I'm promising this because it goes along with my personal beliefs. Rest assured on this.

1-059-0000

Daniel Freund (Verts/ALE). – When I think about the future of Europe, I think of Jean Monnet, I think of Altiero Spinelli or Ursula Hirschmann or Louise Weiss and what they thought about the future of Europe. I think about a European federal republic. I think of truly European elections and transnational lists. I think about the rule of law that protects citizens and all their possibilities – the same rights for male and female, whether straight or gay. And I think of institutions that are

transparent and free of corruption. And I think Ursula von der Leyen wants to build the future of Europe on these same values.

But you in the past few years have repeatedly voted against some of these values. You voted against the article 7 procedure for Hungary, you voted against transnational lists, you voted against more transparency in the Council, and against stronger lobby rules to give just a few examples. So I would like to ask you how you will bring this past voting record into line with the mission that has now been given to you by President-elect von der Leyen and how you will credibly defend and build a future Europe based on these values. If you could today change your vote on some of these issues, would you change your vote?

1-060-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I believe in the rule of law, first of all. If I may explain one only example, which was Article 7 – because maybe this would be the easiest way to explain this. Of course I believe in the rule of law. This Sargentini report was initiated by Parliament and when we were talking about Poland, it was initiated by the Commission. I still think that the Commission is a neutral arbiter and this was the reason why my delegation voted against, if you want me to be clear on this. But, I share your concern that there are severe breaches of rule of law there. But now, as far as I know, this is in the Court of Justice but I also know that this subject is stuck in the Council. So, believe me, I believe in the rule of law, but there are some differences living in the country, I know well, which shares a border with that country and it was very hard at that time, you know. As I said to you before in a previous conversation, it was easier not to be a Member of Parliament and then come here to a hearing for the Commission. Don't worry about me – as I said, the Commission will have a spirit of collegiality and we will vote unanimously and don't have any doubts about my attitude towards the rule of law and towards transparency.

1-061-0000

Daniel Freund (Verts/ALE). – I want to follow up on the role that you are seeking to play in this Conference on the Future of Europe. So in the last five years we've already talked about that, we've had a number of reports here in the Parliament. We've had the five presidents' report, you yourself have spoken about the numerous dialogues with citizens that the European Commission has already had. I hear of 200,000 citizens that have been directly involved. All heads of state have outlined their vision in this House. So I wonder a bit, given the enormous challenges that Europe is facing from climate change, or from very large corporations not paying any taxes on our continent, how we deal with digitalisation, how do we defend Europe's role in a world between China and the United States... do you think now is the time to embark on a two-year listening exercise as you call it, or is it not time now to act? And if it is time to act, you say you want to first take those opportunities within the Treaties and not immediately go into treaty change. So could you name just three, the three most important elements? What do you think really brings Europe forward, European democracy now, that we can do within the Treaties. Your own personal opinion please, not the Commission line – what do you think is the most important thing now?

1-062-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – If you ask me directly, I'll answer directly. Climate change is a very important issue, and Mr Timmermans' portfolio is one of the most important ones at the moment. This is how I see Europe and the future of Europe. But, of course, digital is also very, very important. We have to start with this, but I don't see that we have to change the treaty in order to act. We can act at the moment without changing the treaty.

But as I said, I am in favour if the debates show. I don't want to impose anything, and I'm sure that the President-elect also won't be in a position to propose an immediate change of the Treaty. We will do it if the citizens ask for it. Of course, you are direct representatives of the citizens. We are the voice of the citizens, but let's first listen to them and see what they say. But climate and digital

issues are very, very important, and we can do a lot at this moment with the current architecture and the current Treaty.

1-063-0000

France Jamet (ID). – Monsieur le président, Madame la commissaire candidate, nous allons donc parler ce soir de démocratie et de démographie.

Alors, que dire du fonctionnement même de cette institution, qui dépossède le peuple souverain de la capacité à décider de son destin à travers un fédéralisme grandissant imposé par la technocratie bruxelloise? J'en veux pour preuve les mesures de rétorsion prises à l'encontre de la Hongrie et de la Pologne, lorsque les citoyens hongrois et polonais ont prétendu refuser l'immigration imposée par l'Union européenne, aujourd'hui totalement hors de contrôle.

Alors, voici ma première question, Madame la commissaire candidate. Selon moi, la démocratie n'a de sens qu'à l'échelle d'une nation et d'un peuple: laisserez-vous donc enfin aux peuples le droit de disposer d'eux-mêmes?

La deuxième question, effectivement, concerne la démographie et le vieillissement avéré du continent. Pourquoi alors ne pas engager une véritable politique nataliste, fondée sur la défense de la famille, plutôt que de soutenir une politique immigrationniste?

1-064-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – I said at the beginning there is always a clash between representative and direct democracy. So you said you want people to decide, well people decide by electing us or you, and then you are there are voice. So they have their voice. They have their say. But we realise that this is not enough so we want to listen to them. This is the reason why I don't think we can rely on only once in five years or only once in four years when we talk about national and or regional or local.

And then you asked me about aging and demography and birth rate. I don't see any problems there, but when you talk about migration and immigration, when we talk about this, everything legal is acceptable. I mean legal migration we accept. I understand that you were referring to some countries which didn't allow access – and if I may tell you, the country I know best is surrounded by a fence. All the countries except us don't let people come, regardless of whether they are regular or irregular, and regardless of whether they are legal or illegal. So I understand the point, but let's see if we can talk about this also within the scope of this conference. This can be also one of our thematic banners.

1-065-0000

France Jamet (ID). – Si je peux me permettre, effectivement, nous parlons depuis tout à l'heure de grands débats et vous voulez remettre les citoyens au centre du débat. Je vous rappelle quand même que lorsque les Irlandais ont voté non, on leur a demandé de revoter; quand les Suisses ont fait une votation sur l'immigration, on leur a tordu le bras; quand l'Islande décide de ne pas entrer dans l'Union européenne, on prépare des mesures de rétorsion. C'est quand même une curieuse perception de la démocratie.

Le vrai fond de la question, c'est de savoir à partir de quel moment, une fois qu'on aura entendu effectivement les peuples, on respectera leur avis, leur liberté? Et puis, tout simplement, quand respecterons-nous, dans cette institution, la démocratie?

1-066-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – You will understand that I cannot agree with everyone this evening, so I cannot agree with you on this point – because they have you and they have reacted through your voters, not only your voters, but half a million inhabitants in the European

Union. You are their representative. You are not a representative only of your constituency. We represent all people, regardless of where we were elected, so you represent each European citizen who is above 18 years old or 16, regardless of your electoral laws.

1-067-0000

Helmut Geuking (ECR). – Frau Šuica! Vielen Dank für Ihre bisherigen Ausführungen. Wie wir denen entnehmen konnten, arbeiten Sie mit Eurostat an der Erforschung des demografischen Wandels.

Wir glauben jedoch, dass mehr Daten benötigt werden, um die Herausforderung dieses demografischen Wandels im Einklang mit der Subsidiarität zu bringen. Sollten dazu nicht alle erforderlichen Statistiken über Familie und Haushalt, Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie und Kinderbetreuung erstellt werden? Mehr Daten würden dann wahrscheinlich auch aufzeigen, dass europaweit immer mehr Menschen um ihre Lebensleistung betrogen werden. Sie ziehen Kinder groß und sichern unseren gesellschaftlichen Fortbestand und landen später in der Altersarmut. Junge Menschen entscheiden sich da doch bewusst auch gegen Familie.

Welche Lösungsansätze bieten Sie an, um dem europaweiten demografischen Wandel zu begegnen, die Altersarmut zu bekämpfen und die Familien vor allen Dingen zu stärken? Das würde uns sehr interessieren.

1-068-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – As I said, everything I will do on demography will be based on Eurostat data. So first, I'll see what data we have. What we don't have, we will get it now and we will use mapping and see what Europe looks like. And then, on this data, we will start our work. I have a duty, according to the mission letter, in the first six months to do mapping and see what to do. This will be my first report, in my first six months. According to my contact with them, Eurostat has very, very good data and they even change approach on how they do this. So I'm sure that a new framework regulation on social statistics will allow us to further elaborate then to see what the information base is. That's it on Eurostat and data. With regard to what you asked me about fighting poverty, as I already said, aging is very important and work-life balance is very important and through the European Semester, we'll see what is done within Member States. I can't do it on my own at European level because it is within the competence of the Member States. They have competence in this area and we can always help and show them through the European Semester what they have to do, either through recommendations or through some other tools.

1-069-0000

Helmut Geuking (ECR). – Entschuldigen Sie, das ist für mich ein wenig zu wenig. Also ich finde schon, Europa sollte natürlich die Rahmenbedingungen entsprechend schaffen und ist da auch in der Verpflichtung und Verantwortung.

Daher frage ich mal ganz konkret: Würden Sie ein zusätzliches europaweites Kinderkostengeld und ein Erziehungsgeld befürworten, wie es z. B. unsere Familienpartei Deutschlands in Deutschland fordert? Würden Sie dem demografischen Wandel damit direkt begegnen? Würden Sie Rahmenbedingungen schaffen für die Menschen – wie Sie vorhin selbst sagten: 25 % Kinderarmut, ein Viertel der Kinder leben in Armut – für Chancengleichheit, für Bildungsinnovation usw.?

Für Ihre Arbeiten benötigen Sie objektive Instrumente. Dafür bietet uns Eurostat auch viel zu wenig. Welche neutralen objektiven Quellen möchten Sie neben den Eurostat-Erhebungen zur Beurteilung der Situation von Familien überhaupt heranziehen?

Wir glauben nicht, dass Eurostat ausreichend ist, um Ihnen genügend Informationen zu geben. Daher ganz konkret: Welche Quellen und objektiven Quellen außerhalb von Eurostat kennen Sie und würden Sie heranziehen?

1-070-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – First of all, if you remember, we have the European Social Pillar. The European Social Pillar is very important. As I already told you, what is the competence of the Member State is the competence, but we have to establish minimum standards and this is what we are doing. So the Social Pillar, with its 20 different activities can help. This also includes work-life balance. This is also longer life and lifelong care. This is also lifelong learning. So we will use all the tools which are at our disposal through the European Social Pillar, which we adopted here in Parliament in 2017.

1-071-0000

Kinga Gál (PPE). – Ms Šuica, as you mentioned in your introductory remarks – very well done, by the way – demographical challenges have to be addressed. I know that in your home country, Croatia, you participated in the monitoring and implementation of national policies in areas related to the protection of families. Do you consider that developing family-friendly policies could become a solution to overcome demographic challenges?

1-072-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – Kinga, thank you for this question. As you know, if we know that the workforce in Europe is shrinking – and we already said something on that – then if you stay like this the workforce projected for 2070 will be ten percent less than now, if you stay like this with the same birth rate and everything the same. So the ratio between people of a working age and people who are at pension will deteriorate. So we have to do something. I'm sure that family-friendly policies will also have a place and this family-friendly policy will play a role in this context. When I talk about work-life balance this means also family friendly policy. Work-life balance is about this.

So we have to find better working hours, better infrastructure for mothers and fathers, regardless to make families and women work if they have infrastructure and they have kindergartens. So this is a closed circle – and why not care for families and have a family-friendly policy? So I'm in favour. This is one of the key pillars of the European Social Pillar.

1-073-0000

Kinga Gál (PPE). – Will you want to raise the family-friendly trial centered good practices of Member States to an EU level if they prove to work?

1-074-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – What I forgot to say is that there is of course funding for the European Social Fund. Until now, EUR 2.2 billion has been spent on family-friendly policies, including lifelong care. Of course, I am in favour of women being in the labour market and having infrastructure for their children.

1-075-0000

Maite Pagazaurtundúa (Renew). – Señor presidente. Una de democracia: la democracia se construye en algo material. El Estado de Derecho democrático se basa en la división de poderes, en la ley como regla de juego, en el principio de que el pluralismo político y la libertad de conciencia son los pilares que nos protegen de los Estados identitarios y autoritarios.

Precisamente por eso la Unión Europea creó el artículo 2 y el artículo 7; porque si hay un riesgo claro de que un Estado se pueda convertir en un Estado identitario o iliberal tenemos que actuar para protegernos. Por eso tenemos el artículo 7, que es un artículo de defensa del Estado de Derecho democrático en situación de riesgo. En Hungría, lamentablemente el riesgo de un Estado

de Derecho, liberal, identitario y ultranacionalista es una realidad. ¿Qué puede decirnos al respecto?

1-076-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is a very important question and I'm sure that we have to debate this, but there is no debate on the articles which are enshrined in the Treaty, which means we have to stick to these articles. So for me, it is very important to take care about the rule of law. And as I said, in one of these countries, not to mention it, there was a serious breach of the rule of law and I share the same concern as you share, but I think that we have to talk about this and this is now stuck, as I said, in the Council. Let's see what the Council says, but this is one of the reasons we have to start talking about qualified voting majorities.

1-077-0000

Maite Pagazaurtundúa (Renew). – La segunda pregunta es sobre demografía. Yo tengo un compromiso con la Europa despoblada y con la España despoblada. Uno de los mejores alcaldes que conozco es el alcalde de Tamarón, en Burgos. En invierno tiene treinta y ocho habitantes. Y uno de los mejores empresarios del vino que conozco vive en una zona muy rural e intenta vender en el extranjero su exquisito vino. ¿Sabe lo que dicen estos y otros amigos que tengo en otros lugares de la Europa despoblada? Que necesitan internet, que necesitan estar en el siglo XXI. Si no, en Tamarón en invierno no habrá treinta y ocho habitantes, habrá cero. Y para eso no hace falta que tengan ustedes demasiados datos. ¿Van a poder tener en el mundo rural internet, como el resto de nosotros, para poder desarrollar ese mundo?

1-078-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I'm completely aware of this fact. There are many regions which don't have internet. I remember one State of the Union report from Mr Juncker when he said that every village would have Wi-Fi. You might remember the same. I think this should be our goal. It is not easy. At this moment, you know there is a concept, 'Wi-Fi for all', so it is getting better and better, but I know that at the moment there are regions without this. Without this infrastructure, they will leave the region, I know. This is the reason why we have to go. This is the reason why won't go only to capitals. We will go to rural areas, we will talk to them. We have to establish infrastructure. This is the reason why I said schools close, post offices close, buses come more and more seldom. This is the reason why we have to establish infrastructure, but once we establish infrastructure, then there are no jobs, so this should be done simultaneously.

There is one city in Croatia – Vukovar – which was completely rebuilt after the war. All the houses were established, Wi-Fi came, everything came, but we have to find jobs for these people. This is a very complex exercise, so the Commissioner for Cohesion will be very important and we will have to collaborate. I can't do anything alone, so everything should be done in collaboration. I understand the problem because I know many regions like the region you mentioned in Spain. There are many regions like that all over Europe. But the task from my mission letter was to carry out mapping within the first six months. This is the reason why I said this, okay, but we can start work immediately.

1-079-0000

Martin Sonneborn (NI). – Herr Vorsitzender, Frau Šuica! Trotz aller gelegentlichen unintensiven Bemühungen ist es der EU in den vergangenen 20 Jahren nicht gelungen, den Armutssockel von knapp 25 % zu senken. Nach Angaben von Eurostat leben über 100 Millionen EU-Bürger in Armut oder sind von ihr bedroht. Sie hingegen sind ein Beispiel, das den Europäern Hoffnung geben kann – Zwinkersmiley.

Vor rund 20 Jahren waren Sie Lehrerin mit einem klapprigen Renault und einer 60-Quadratmeter-Wohnung in einer Hochhaussiedlung. Dann wechselten Sie in die Politik. Heute beläuft sich Ihr geschätztes Vermögen auf über fünf Millionen Euro, eine Villa, zwei Häuser, zwei

Wohnungen, ein Landhaus, eine Zwölf-Meter-Jacht und drei Autos. Würden Sie Ihr Patentrezept mit uns Europäern teilen?

1-080-0000

Chair. – Our job is not to talk about money or the past. There is a decision of the JURI Committee. We don't have a conflict of interest. Please, the question must be on the content of the hearing. We need to know if everybody is free, but this is not a question on the content of the evening.

1-081-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – I can answer. I don't mind answering. Why not. We are open. What was your last sentence?

1-082-0000

Martin Sonneborn (NI). – Ich habe gefragt, ob Sie Ihr Patentrezept mit uns Europäern teilen würden.

1-083-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – *Danke schön, Mr Sonneborn, für diese Frage aber ich spreche Englisch jetzt.* First of all, you are not talking about facts. These are not facts. You are inspired by some articles which were not true. I will do all my best to make this portfolio a success story, as I said in my introductory speech. But when you talk about me and 20 years ago, this is not true. This is not true. I won't now go into details because it is not up to this House. I mean it will be under the respect of this House if I talk with you. I lived here, I lived there. Twenty years ago, I lived in my family house in Dubrovnik with my husband, who is a sea captain, who used to sail aboard cargo ships, bulk ships, container ships and recently on cruise ships, and he was earning a decent salary. If you wish to know, my declaration of interests has always been transparent, open and in line with the rules of the institution where I used to work, be it Mayor of the City of Dubrovnik, be it Member of the Croatian Parliament, be it Member of the European Parliament.

My declaration of interests and whatever you want to ask was clear, transparent, legal and in line with the rules and a reflection of our family's sacrifice. You can't imagine what it means to be sea captain and to sail worldwide on all these types of ships, but I don't need anyone's emotions here. Everything is correct, true and according to the law. I will do all my best to fulfil my duties, my activities in the mission letter and to help European citizens and those in need and those in poverty and those left behind to live decent lives. I think five years will be enough to help them.

1-084-0000

Martin Sonneborn (NI). – Ich habe eine Nachfrage: War es ein Renault 4 oder ein Renault 9?

1-085-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – You know what this was about.

1-086-0000

Raphaël Glucksmann (S&D). – Bonsoir, Madame. L'avantage, c'est que vous avez été députée européenne. Comme mon collègue Freund, j'ai donc pu me pencher sur votre passé dans cette maison. Et vos votes posent question. Votre opposition au rapport Sargentini, qui ouvrait la voie à l'article 7 sur la Hongrie, pose beaucoup de questions eu égard au fait que vous serez chargée de la question de la démocratisation des institutions européennes.

Aujourd'hui, en répondant à la question de Daniel Freund, vous parlez de la Commission européenne comme d'un arbitre neutre. Pensez-vous vraiment que la Commission puisse être neutre sur les principes fondamentaux de l'Union européenne?

Que pouvez-vous nous promettre – puisqu'il s'agit quand même de définir des actions concrètes – sur votre capacité à œuvrer pour un article 7 qui soit efficace, puisque l'enjeu, aujourd'hui, c'est

que nos principes ne soient plus bafoués et que lorsque la Commission propose quelque chose, ce soit suivi d'effets? Donc comment pouvez-vous vous engager là-dessus, alors que vous avez apparemment peu changé d'avis sur l'article 7 et le rapport Sargentini?

1-087-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – You might not have understood what I said. I said I believe in the rule of law and I said I believe in the Commission as a neutral arbiter. If confirmed, then of course I will follow everything which we will decide collegiately, so don't be afraid, don't doubt in my votes, don't doubt in my beliefs. Article 7 is important, but let's see what the Council will say and what the Court of Justice will say. This is it at the moment, but once it will be on the agenda of the Commission, rest assured that I will be within the line of the Commission. Don't worry about this.

1-088-0000

Raphaël Glucksmann (S&D). – Comme je me résous à être responsable d'une forme de suivi sur d'autres questions, je voudrais reprendre la question de mon collègue Durand, de Renew, sur les théories du remplacement.

Pouvez-vous clairement condamner les leaders politiques, en particulier le gouvernement hongrois et son chef, lorsqu'ils parlent d'un remplacement de la population européenne par les populations d'origine migratoire?

Deuxième question – qui est aussi une forme de suivi, parce que la réponse n'était pas claire: quelle est votre position exacte sur le droit à l'avortement et sur le planning familial?

1-089-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I won't condemn anyone because I won't be in a position to condemn anyone, but of course, as I said, I will act in accordance with the political guidelines and with the spirit of the Commission, so don't worry about this.

We were talking about migration. I'm always, as I said, for legal migration. Illegal and irregular are not acceptable. Of course we have to work on the Asylum Directive and everything, so I won't have enough time to tell you.

Talking about abortion, I think that someone's private beliefs are not relevant for his job. But let me tell you that abortion is under the competence of each Member State. It's not our competence. My private belief is not important and it is not relevant for the job I will be doing. This is what I want to tell you. In my Member State, if you are interested, abortion is legal. If you are interested, I was the chief advocator in my country for ratifying the Istanbul Convention. This is the reason I lost some Conservative votes, but I risked it because I was always against violence, against violence against women, and I wanted to advocate it in my country and I was for ratification here in this Parliament. So, you don't have any reason to doubt in my future activities.

1-090-0000

Александър Александров Йорданов (PPE). – Г-н Председател, уважаема г-жо Шуйца, моят въпрос е в контекста на идеята за Конференция за бъдещето на Европа. Той частично бе засегнат от колегата Корбет.

Има европейски държави и лидери в тях, които оправдават собствените си неуспехи в управлението с решения, които са взети или не са взети, както те обичат да казват, в Брюксел. Въпросът ми е как планирате да преодолеете феномена на „хвърляне или прехвърляне на вина“ върху Брюксел, възможно ли са конкретни мерки, които да ограничат тенденцията национални политици да си приписват заслугата за всички положителни постижения на Европейския съюз, от една страна, а, от

друга, да критикуват и да обвиняват Европейската комисия и дори Европейския парламент едва ли не за всички проблеми, които възникват в техните държави? Благодаря.

1-091-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – If I remember well, there was an informal meeting of the EU27 leaders in Sibiu in May this year. At that meeting, there was a debate on how leaders behave at home and how they behave when they are in Brussels.

I'm against those who blame Brussels for lack of their abilities and for their wrong-doings. They are blaming Brussels when they come home, and when they are in Brussels they are asking for funding. So funding is okay and European policy is not okay. I'm against this, I must tell you. I'm completely pro-European and I cannot accept such behaviour.

There was a big debate on this among them, and it was public. I think that each politician has to be completely open and honest and tell citizens what European policies are about. This is my standpoint.

1-092-0000

Александър Александров Йорданов (PPE). – Благодаря, г-жо Шуйца. Аз по-скоро ще изразя мнение, отколкото въпрос. Мнение в смисъл че нашият Съюз ще има бъдеще, когато гражданите поемат наистина своята отговорност и не избират за национални лидери популисти. И си мисля, че ако това не стане, бъдещето в момента ни го демонстрират някои политици във Великобритания. Благодаря Ви.

1-093-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – May I switch to my mother tongue because you haven't heard me speaking Croatian and since we were talking about diversity, let's answer this question in my mother tongue, Croatian, which is the 24th language of the European Union. There are no Croats who are going to ask me questions, so I want to talk to you in Croatian.

Hvala Vam lijepa na ovom pitanju. Razumijem potpuno o čemu govorite i slažem se da bi nas takva politika mogla dovesti do toga da se dogodi scenarij koji se dogodio, koji se događa, u Velikoj Britaniji. Ja se još uvijek nadam da se tamo možda nešto drugačije dogodi.

U svakom slučaju, populističke izjave i način na koji se pokušava udvarati biračima da bi se stekli neki mali politički poeni ne idu u prilog našoj Uniji i našoj politici, koju smatram da svi mi koji sjedimo u ovom Domu zagovaramo.

1-095-0000

Eugenia Rodríguez Palop (GUE/NGL). – Señora Šuica, en Europa hay mujeres a las que les gustaría tener hijos pero no pueden. Afrontan dificultades económicas, problemas para conciliar y obstáculos para acceder a las técnicas de reproducción asistida. En Europa hay también mujeres que no quieren tener hijos y se ven obligadas a tenerlos porque en la práctica no pueden acceder a métodos anticonceptivos o se les impide interrumpir su embarazo.

Dado que las mujeres tenemos derecho a decidir sobre nuestra maternidad y somos un elemento clave en cualquier política demográfica, ¿cómo se asegurará de que los servicios de salud respondan a los derechos de las mujeres que tienen dificultades para tener hijos y a los de las que no los quieren tener y son obligadas a tenerlos?

Y, en relación con la infancia, ¿qué les parecen las intervenciones quirúrgicas de normalización genital que sufren los niños intersexuales en muchos Estados de la Unión, pese a que no son necesarias desde el punto de vista médico? ¿Cómo va a protegerles y a defender sus derechos?

1-096-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – First of all, it's not within my competence, but that of the Commissioner for Health and of the Commissioner for Equality. I will collaborate with both of them very closely and try to see what the best solutions are for this issue. We have to protect everyone. There is no discrimination, so we have to protect all the citizens of this Union and try to help them, including through healthcare, as regards genital mutilation and other difficulties. We will work together and find some answers to these questions, but I cannot give a specific response to your question now, because we are just about to start working together.

1-097-0000

Eugenia Rodríguez Palop (GUE/NGL). – Esta es una cuestión que tiene que ver con demografía, por eso le preguntaba. Las tendencias demográficas en Europa han suscitado cierta preocupación. Algunos temen que la emigración, la fertilidad por debajo del reemplazo y el envejecimiento de la población conduzcan a naciones más pequeñas, más viejas, con niveles de vida más bajos. Como posible solución, ciertos políticos ultraconservadores, de derecha o de extrema derecha, tienen la intención de aumentar las tasas de natalidad europeas nativas apostando únicamente por la familia heteropatriarcal.

Este enfoque antielección y antigénero es discriminatorio y muchas veces también xenófobo y homófobo y no se ajusta en absoluto a los Tratados y valores de la Unión Europea. ¿Cuál es su posición en relación con este tipo de enfoque? En concreto, ¿apoya usted las políticas demográficas que defendió la extrema derecha en el Congreso Internacional sobre Demografía, que tuvo lugar recientemente en Budapest?

1-098-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – First of all, I won't be politically affiliated here – I won't tell you if I support far right or far left, you know? I look at this from a different point of view. I think that family should or could or must be defined in a much broader way. I don't see family only in the traditional way. Of course, a traditional family, okay, but it's not the only family type. As I said, the definition of family is within the competence of Member States, but this is within the competence of all of us, so I don't mind defining family in different and much more progressive and liberal ways. I don't have any problems with this, so we can work together on this. I was deeply engaged in these issues. At the moment, I'm still engaged in them, but I don't think if am going to continue, I am a vice-president of EPP Women and we are dealing with these issues too, so we are more progressive than you might think.

1-099-0000

Brando Benifei (S&D). – Grazie Presidente. Buonasera onorevole Šuica. La mia domanda verte sulla necessità di rafforzare la dimensione sociale dell'azione europea. Le voglio chiedere: si impegna a includere nel dibattito sul futuro dell'Europa, nella conferenza, una discussione su come elaborare nuovi diritti sociali, esigibili, superando l'attuale sistema di semplice coordinamento delle politiche nazionali in campo sociale?

È necessario in questo senso elevare il profilo costituzionale del pilastro europeo dei diritti sociali per trasformarlo in una vera e propria carta sociale vincolante nell'Unione europea. Lei intende sostenere questo obiettivo? Come vede il legame fra questo tema del pilastro e la demografia, che è nel titolo del suo incarico? Come intende il tema delle sfide demografiche?

Il pilastro, inoltre, stabilisce fra i suoi principi cardine l'assistenza all'infanzia. Lei ha parlato già della garanzia per i bambini. Noi abbiamo bisogno di un nuovo strumento legale e di un finanziamento almeno pari a 6 miliardi di euro di risorse fresche. Lei intende sostenere questo minimo finanziamento adeguato?

1-100-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – You asked me about the binding instrument, but I think the European social pillar is binding, but it hasn't been implemented, so we have to enact it, and one of my activities would be to take care of implementing the actual European social pillar. This is how I understood my mission.

Then you asked me about child guarantee and about the protection of children. This is the decision of this Parliament, if you remember, the European Social Fund Plus. This Parliament asked for EUR 5.9 million to be incorporated into the next Multiannual Financial Framework for child protection and for child guarantee. I would be in favour of this. I will ask for more, if possible, but let's ask Commissioner Hahn what he thinks about it. But this was the decision of this Parliament, so don't worry about this. I will always take into consideration the decisions of the Parliament and of all of you because I'm still here.

1-101-0000

Brando Benifei (S&D). – Sì. Grazie per questa risposta. Ovviamente lo so perché sono uno dei relatori ombra del Fondo sociale europeo e sono felice di questa sottolineatura sulle risorse.

Lei avrà un portafoglio di competenze molto ampio, si occuperà di cittadinanza europea, di come rafforzare la nostra democrazia. Sul tema dei diritti sono stati sollevati dubbi, anche in questa audizione, circa il suo posizionamento e vorrei quindi chiederle ancora alcuni chiarimenti specifici. Intende impegnarsi sul terreno dell'uguaglianza di genere, in particolare sul tema della disparità salariale di genere? E in che modo concretamente? Concorda che la conciliazione fra vita privata e vita lavorativa va oltre la sfera meramente familiare? Inoltre voglio chiederle se si batterà per i diritti delle persone LGBTQI, in particolare rispetto alla discriminazione in società e nei luoghi di lavoro. Grazie.

1-102-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for this additional question. During my work in this Parliament – and still – I used to be the Vice-President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and I was also in the ENVI and FEMM Committees. I was in charge of gender mainstreaming for the Committee on Foreign Affairs so I was deeply involved in this. In this Commission, as you see from the political guidelines, everything is gender mainstreamed so don't worry about this. I will of course always take care about this.

Let me talk about the gender gap. You know the fact that there are 15% more women who graduate from universities than men, but there are 16% less women on the labour market. There are some discrepancies so we definitely have to deal with it. When you talk about a wage gap, there is also still a big discrepancy still between women and men, so I will definitely take care about this. This is one of my duties but, again, together with the Commissioner for Equality and together with other Commissioners who will be in charge, the Vice-Presidents.

The European Semester is a very important tool. Although some might not know this, through the European Semester we can somehow direct all this and we can see what's going on every six months. So this is a very important tool. Talking about LGBT, there is no reason to discriminate against anyone. Non-discrimination is for me one of the rules, so it's OK from my side.

1-103-0000

Alice Kuhnke (Verts/ALE). – I fördraget står det, som vi alla vet, att medlemsstaterna ska kännetecknas av mångfald, icke-diskriminering, tolerans, rättvisa, solidaritet och principen om jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män. Som EU-parlamentariker har du arbetat och röstat mot kvinnors rättigheter och mot arbetet för sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa. Det har du gjort, oavsett vad du nu skyller på.

Att koppla demografiska utmaningar till kvinnors rätt att bestämma över sin egen kropp är en hörnsten i ett globalt abortmotstånd. I en jämställd demokrati är säkra och legala aborter en mänsklig rättighet, inte en fråga om demografi. Kan du lova att du kommer att främja och arbeta för kvinnors rätt till beslut över sin egen kropp och sin egen sexualitet?

1-104-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I know you were a Minister for this in charge of the Swedish Government and you were dealing with these affairs. Let me first clarify this voting, because for the whole evening I have heard I was against women's rights.

If you're referring maybe to Ms Zuber's and Ms Estrella's reports, both of these reports were – if I remember well, it was my first year here in Parliament – in 2013 or 2014. I don't remember well, but it was my first term, which lasted only one year because we joined the Union in 2013. And yes, I was against, but not because I was against gender rights, women's rights and gender equality, but because there was always something within these reports which had nothing to do with equality and gender and women's rights.

Both of these reports – Estrella and Zuber – if some of you remember, were not adopted in the plenary of the European Parliament, because they were asking for extra budgetary resources and it was still the time of crisis and there wasn't consensus within the Parliament to vote in favour. So this was one of the reasons why I voted against.

Also, for one of these – I don't remember, either Zuber or Estrella – there was an alternative resolution from my political group, I remember at that time. So you know, as I said at the beginning, it's better to come from a regional or from a national parliament and not to come from the European Parliament once you are here. You are a politician. This is the reason why I'm trying to avoid political answers because I'm going to be neutral within the European Commission. And this is the reason why I'm trying to clarify this voting or vote record.

1-105-0000

Alice Kuhnke (Verts/ALE). – Fru Šuica, jag hör på ditt svar att du prioriterade annat framför rättigheterna för sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa. Därför vill jag fråga dig igen: Kommer du i enlighet med fördraget att främja och försvara rättigheter för alla? Kommer du att främja och försvara hbtq-personers rättigheter? Kommer du att främja och försvara minoriteters rättigheter, som människor på flykt? Kommer du att försvara judars rättigheter och muslimers rättigheter? Och kommer du att försvara kvinnors rätt till beslut om sin egen kropp och sin sexualitet?

1-106-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – The Union I will promote is a Union of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women prevail. I will stick to Article 2 and I will always keep to this, so don't be afraid, don't doubt my beliefs and my convictions and my future activities within the College.

1-107-0000

Yana Toom (Renew). – I know that this is not your portfolio but frankly speaking, I still have no clarity about how it will work. Several times you mentioned a bill of social rights as a universal tool to solve this and that problem, but you also said that this is in the hands of Member States due to our beloved subsidiarity, which is true. And then, answering one of the questions, you said that the good way to show Member States how to act is country-specific recommendations.

But the problem is that, here in this room, out of 18 speakers maybe only three Members of the Employment Committee know that from 2012 to 2018 there was a significant decrease in

implementation of these recommendations in Member States. The decrease was from 72% to 39% and it was not implementing the whole recommendation, it was at least some progress. So in the previous year we had at least some progress in 39% of recommendations. So, what is your plan to make Member States fulfil these recommendations? Otherwise we will end up in five years' time speaking about 18% of some progress like a good tool to solve problems which you are responsible for.

1-108-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I can understand your question. Thank you for this, as this is a real problem. If Member States don't listen to recommendations, then what is the European semester? This is a good question. You said it's not my portfolio, but it is also one of my duties, because we will have to work together. I'm sure that we have to somehow empower the Commission in relation to Member States in order to ensure that they stick to recommendations.

I'm sure that we will have to work on it, and that we will have to make Member States act in accordance with recommendations, because if they don't then there is no need for the European semester. This is perhaps a question for the President-elect or Mr Dombrovskis, who is now in charge of this.

I understand, and I will do my best in order to help, because this is very important. This is maybe the only tool with which the European Union can act and can make Member States react to recommendations. Not only in this field, but in many fields as we already know. Otherwise, we go to the Court. Once you go to the Court, before you pay or if you don't pay, then there are long procedures. This is not in the interest of any Member State. It is neither in the interest of the Member States, nor in the interest of the European Commission.

1-109-0000

Yana Toom (Renew). – I am a former journalist and believe a little in quotes. Five minutes ago you said to my colleague, Brando Benifei, that the European Pillar of Social Rights is binding for Member States. Now you say vice-versa. This is not binding – we all know it – but my question is not about that.

Did I hear correctly that you said that abortion is the competence of Member States? Does this mean that, as a Member of the European Commission, you have a plan to tolerate Member States which are going to ban abortion?

1-110-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – I haven't said this. I said that I wanted to explain what is the situation with abortion. Abortion is, as I said, in the competence of Member States. There are laws. In my home country it is legal, in some other countries it is not legal, but according to the spirit of College and to the spirit of the new Commission, I will act in that direction. So that's it.

Regarding the Social Pillar. I know what is the position of the European Social Pillar, but I wanted to say that 'binding' was for me in quotation marks. I wanted to say that it would be nice if Member States abide by the European Social Pillar because it is good with these 20 activities. This was my idea. Sorry if I was misunderstood, I didn't want to say the opposite.

1-111-0000

Esteban González Pons (PPE). – Señora comisaria propuesta, soy miembro de la Comisión de Asuntos Jurídicos y quiero contarles a mis colegas que su expediente pasó sin ninguna discusión. Cuando la Comisión de Asuntos Jurídicos distinguió entre los comisarios que podrían tener problemas de conflicto de intereses y los que no, usted estuvo todo el tiempo en el grupo de los comisarios que no tenían conflicto de intereses.

He visto su currículum y sé que tiene experiencia, pero además lo sé porque he trabajado con usted. He estado con usted y he votado con usted. La señora Šuica no vota sola, vota con el Grupo del Partido Popular, y cada vez que se le reprochan sus votos anteriores se le están reprochando sus votos anteriores a todo el Grupo del Partido Popular, porque ella vota lo mismo que votamos los del Grupo del Partido Popular.

Yo no creo en un Parlamento en el que todos votan lo mismo. No creo en ese Parlamento. Y no creo en un Parlamento en el que se censura a sus miembros por lo que han votado. Creo en un Parlamento en el que todo el mundo tiene libertad para votar. Y sí les digo: lo que haya votado la comisaria propuesta es lo mismo que hemos votado los miembros del grupo mayoritario de esta Cámara.

Si no se puede votar a una comisaria porque ha seguido una línea de voto en el pasado, no podría haber ningún comisario del Grupo del Partido Popular, que comparte todos los votos con la candidata.

Usted ha explicado la Convención sobre el Futuro de Europa y se ha comprometido con el Parlamento. Me gustaría saber si ha sido solo porque hoy celebramos la audiencia y si, cada vez que le pidamos que venga a esta comisión, usted va a venir. Quisiera saber también qué tiene que decirnos sobre el derecho de iniciativa del Parlamento.

1-112-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is what I was just about to say. I was thinking that if I weren't a Member of this Parliament, it would be hard for me to cope with all this because it would be very complex to cope with this portfolio if I hadn't been following what all of us had been doing here in Parliament. Now I see that being a Member of Parliament is this advantage in fact. So thank you for this support but okay, sometimes there was a free vote, I was deciding by myself, it's okay. Sometimes I was following the group. Thank you for this, but regarding the right of initiative, I saw that this Committee, the Committee for Constitutional Affairs was dealing with the right of initiative for many, many years and it is enshrined in all of your reports. This is what I saw. But we still have some initiative under the actual still valid Lisbon Treaty. But as it is said in our political guidelines – or Madam President, if she is willing, I'm willing, too, we will be willing together to change this and to give the right of initiative if necessary. I am not the most important person tonight when it comes to promising this, but I won't be against since I come from Parliament, and I want to empower Parliament and I know that this is very important for all of us and for all of you. So I will come here and talk to you and we'll see how the situation evolves.

1-113-0000

Esteban González Pons (PPE). – Let me mention a report – the González Pons report, about the *Spitzenkandidat* system. I mention it as I was responsible for the report, but also as a Member of the EPP. Are we going to talk about the *Spitzenkandidat* system? Do you have something to tell us about it, or can we just say that it's finished and that my report is going to be forgotten?

1-114-0000

Dubravka Šuica, *Commissioner-designate*. – Dear Esteban, it hasn't been finished; it won't be forgotten. In my mission letter and in many other mission letters, we are obliged to put this on the agenda and come to you, and it has to be finished. It will be the first topic on the conference on the future of Europe: the *Spitzenkandidaten* system and transnational lists. By the end of summer 2020 we will have to finish this debate and see how to go on. What is the reason for this? Because we want to make European citizens aware of this fact; otherwise, they are faced with this a few months before elections and they don't know what to do. So the *Spitzenkandidaten* system has to be improved. This time it failed, but I'm looking forward to this. I think this is good. European citizens have to know whom they are voting for, and I think the power of European political parties will be the very important. European political parties will have their say then – more than

they do at this moment. So I'm in favour of this, but let's wait till the beginning of this College, and then in six, seven or eight months, by the end of summer, as Madam President-elect promised, we will, I think, enact this. That's it from my side. Thank you very much.

1-115-0000

Presidente. – Grazie, onorevole González Pons. Era l'ultimo parlamentare che era previsto per rivolgere le domande. Ora la vicepresidente designata ha cinque minuti di tempo per fare le sue ultime osservazioni.

1-116-0000

Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate. – Honourable Chair, dear Members. I prepared a speech but I don't think I will read it at this moment because I think it's better to talk to you for another five minutes, because this debate was very, very good for me. It was an inspiring, very inspiring debate, and intensive for me, but it was also valuable because I saw all the diversity of this House, all the diversity of your opinions, and I think this will be very helpful for my future work if, of course, confirmed by you for my next position.

I will do my best in this portfolio and I will try to make this demography and democracy portfolio closer to people, to show them what is the link. But for me the most important part is children, work and life balance and ageing. This means the whole life is in it, which means the citizen is in the centre. I think this will be very, very important because we have always to think about citizens and this is what I will advocate during my next five year term – again, if you support me. So thank you for this.

As I said at the beginning, I was a member of different committees. I was trying to cope with this during my preparations because I spent some few weeks as when I realised that I would be in charge of this portfolio I started learning hard the things which I hadn't known. So you have to understand that it wasn't my direct interest. I was dealing with foreign affairs and things maybe closer to the Greens and the ENVI Committee with the plastics strategy, and that's it.

But of course I was always following what was going on. I was following what was going on in plenary.

I will try use three tools in developing my portfolio, which would be consolidation, cooperation and communication – maybe the 'three Cs'.

Maybe I can end with the 'three Cs': consolidation to see what the actual legislation is on the table, then cooperation with all of you. As I said – be it academia, or be it business, be it NGOs, the EU, Council and local authorities, I haven't told you during my replies that I have been serving for 10 years in the Council of Europe. I was Vice-President of Congress for local and regional authorities. This was my position, which derived from my position being Mayor of Dubrovnik. So I was 10 years involved in local and regional matters. I will include everyone, and this is cooperation.

Then communication. Without communicating this to citizens and to people, to the media, to the public, it will stay in the Brussels bubble. And all of us don't want only the Brussels bubble, we want to be outside and then, as I said, we want to stretch to remote regions.

If I maybe look a little bit more at my notes, what they wanted to tell you at the end is that I come from the country. I come from the country and I was witnessing myself how this country gained its democracy and how this country gained its independence and how this country became a member of the European Union.

This was a process that lasted for 30 years – almost 30 years. Now we are in this European family and we are more than happy that we are here, so this is the reason why I will be advocating this also to candidate countries, and for those who asked me about candidate countries, I'm trying to help them to prepare. I hope that everyone would like to be in this prestigious club. I'm really sorry for those who don't see this. Maybe they will see it but it will be too late. But at the moment I think this is very important.

I want to thank you for this debate. I look forward to your evaluation. Thank you once again. I am your colleague, and I will be your colleague if I am going to be Vice-President of the Commission, or if I stay with you here in Parliament.

(Applause)

1-117-0000

Presidente. – Io ringrazio la vicepresidente designata per le sue risposte, per l'impegno soprattutto per quanto riguarda la conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa. Ringrazio tutti i parlamentari che hanno partecipato a questa audizione. Naturalmente ringrazio anche gli interpreti che ci hanno permesso, anche al sottoscritto, di poter parlare nella propria lingua materna.

Vi ricordo che la riunione dei coordinatori per la valutazione dell'audizione avrà luogo alle ore 22.30 a porte chiuse. Ricordo che, in base alle linee guida per l'approvazione della Commissione europea e il monitoraggio degli impegni assunti durante le audizioni, di cui all'allegato VII del regolamento del Parlamento, lo scopo dell'audizione è quello di valutare le competenze generali, l'impegno europeo e l'indipendenza personale dei commissari designati, quindi della vicepresidente designata, nonché la sua conoscenza del futuro portafoglio e le sue capacità di comunicazione.

(L'audizione è tolta alle 21.15)