

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
The Chair

D(2019)34458

D 312940 02.10.2019

CONFIDENTIAL

Antonio TAJANI
Chair
Conference of Committee Chairs
PHS 08B043

Dear Mr TAJANI,

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as associated Committee, in accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, held a public hearing on Tuesday, 1 October 2019, with Ms Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner-designate, who, subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure, will be responsible for health.

The course of the hearing

Ms Kyriakides opened the hearing by making a statement in which she stressed that health is an area where the European Union should strive for more and that Europe must lead the transition to a healthy planet and a digital world. In this context, she referred to the One-Health principle and the health in all policies approach, the Green Deal and the new Farm-to-Fork strategy on sustainable food. She underlined the importance of good health and sustainable, nutritious, affordable food to be under a single policy umbrella, targeting also climate neutrality and zero pollution. More specifically, she expressed her intention to work with Parliament on protecting citizens from risks like endocrine disruptors, reducing the dependency on pesticides and promoting animal health and welfare. In addition, she committed to focus on implementing the legislative framework for medical devices and to create a European Health Data Space.

In her introductory statement, Ms Kyriakides also made a specific reference to the danger of antimicrobial resistance, both in Europe and in the world, and committed to advocate for an international agreement on the use and access to antimicrobials. Furthermore, she pointed to cancer and, in particular, the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, as a flagship priority for the next Commission.

Ms Kyriakides also committed to work with the European Parliament, Member States, stakeholders and fellow Commissioners to improve public health and secure a sustainable future for Europe.

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

During the hearing and in relation to **public health**, Members asked questions on cancer prevention and access to cancer treatment, as well as setting of and compliance with common standards for cancer screening, defining horizontal criteria for endocrine disruptors in all sectors, harmonization of rules on organ donation in the EU, and ways to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Furthermore, Members enquired about unblocking the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) file, digital health, transparency of pricing of medicines and medicines shortages, and addressing mental health at EU level.

In the area of **food safety**, several Members touched on the issue of pesticides, including the numerical objective for the reduction of pesticides in the context of the new “Farm to Fork” strategy, and the draft act on the assessment of the impact of plant protection products on honeybees. Questions were also asked in relation to GMOs, including the follow-up to the Court judgment on new breeding techniques. Furthermore, Members enquired about the legislation on food contact materials, food fraud, food waste, as well as nutrient profiles, health claims and country of origin labelling.

Some issues of horizontal nature raised by Members were the transparency of the comitology procedure, cooperation between the Commissioners and with other Agencies. In addition, other questions touched upon ways in which the role of science could be strengthened in the EU decision-making process.

In her replies, Ms Kyriakides - who showed excellent knowledge of health issues - made specific commitments regarding her future action as Commissioner and strongly stressed her commitment to the One-Health principle. First, as regards Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, the Commissioner-designate committed to addressing cancer in a holistic way, covering all stages, from prevention, diagnosis, treatment, research, cancer survivorship, to palliative care. Second, on the issue of pesticides, Ms Kyriakides committed to decreasing the dependence on pesticides, and to invest in finding low-risk alternatives. Third, the Commissioner-designate promised to build consensus, so that the HTA proposal moves forward. Fourth, in response to questions on mental health, she expressed her strong will to mainstream mental health in other EU policies. Fifth, she committed to take specific measures to address food labelling and to try to find a European approach on nutrition labelling.

However, Ms Kyriakides acknowledged the need to do more on a number of matters, and openly admitted that she had “apparently not been able to entirely convince Members” with respect to pesticides and endocrine disruptors. In relation to those issues as well as on the prevention of cancer, the Committee would expect more concrete proposals.

Overall, it should be noted that Ms Kyriakides was well prepared and made proof of her excellent communication skills. The ENVI coordinators also welcomed the fact that she committed to the principles of transparency, democratic decision-making and to carefully listen to the voice of the Parliament.

Opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development:

Overall, the Commissioner-designate Kyriakides made a positive impression. Her background as a national parliamentarian as well as her long working experience in the health sector counted in

her favour. In addition, she showed willingness to cooperate and work closely with the European Parliament.

As regards the AGRI committee's specific policy areas, the Commissioner-designate underlined several times her One-Health approach, whether human, animal or plant health is concerned. She stressed her willingness to take action on food safety, animal and plant health, animal welfare, endocrine disruptors, and the implementation of the One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance. In addition, she is ready to consider the issue of GMOs and New Breeding Techniques. Replying to numerous questions on reducing the use of pesticides, she admitted that the legislation on Plant Protection Products (PPP) is not properly implemented yet and referred, in this respect, to the recommendations of Parliament's PEST committee. She pointed out that changes in the food law and the ongoing evaluation through the REFIT exercise are steps towards improved implementation. Asked by the ENVI Chair on the protection of bee health, she committed to taking every step to persuade Member States to take actively into account EFSA's evaluation of the toxic impact of pesticides on bees. She also promised to take steps to enhance transparency in the comitology procedure on authorisation of PPP. Asked by an AGRI Member about the outbreaks of African Swine Fever (ASF) and the devastating effect in the pig sector, the Commissioner-designate pointed out that the EU has a robust legal framework in order to intervene and, as a result, the disease was contained in some areas at least. Increased biosecurity in farms and a support mechanism for national authorities with mobile incinerators are important for improving the situation. In this respect, she made a comparison with the EU support mechanism regarding outbreaks of plant pests such as Xylella.

The general assessment of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of this hearing is that, overall, the Commissioner-designate gave a convincing impression of her aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to her. Her knowledge on AGRI-related issues proved satisfactory. Moreover, she showed very good communication skills. This represents the unanimous opinion of the AGRI Members who attended the hearing.

Overall Evaluation:

On the basis of the responses of the Members present at the hearing, as well as the comments made by my committee's coordinators, who met in camera after the hearing under my chairmanship, I hereby give the following assessment:

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

During the evaluation meeting, Sylvia Limmer, on behalf of the ID coordinator, requested to include the following aspects which constitute a minority view: The criteria of the candidate's personal suitability, such as qualification, experience, general competence and engagement at EU level, are purely formal. The position of our group is determined by an analysis of the political content of the candidature of Ms Stella Kyriakides. During her hearing, we found that Ms Kyriakides did not provide specific information on issues such as food safety, pesticides ruling, the harmonisation on rules about organ donation or how should the shortage of antibiotics in the light of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) be handled. Besides the fact that we do not share Ms Kyriakides unrefracting view that the EU gives us health. It is our belief that a policy that has been proven unfit to date cannot be the solution. As a result, we cannot support and reject the candidature of Ms Stella Kyriakides as Commissioner for Health.

The ENVI coordinators welcomed the unanimous opinion of the associated Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, but noted that, while its opinion refers to a number of the AGRI committee's specific policy areas, several of the mentioned areas do not fall under its competence, and rather represent areas of interest for AGRI.

Finally, the ENVI coordinators would unanimously suggest that the title of the portfolio of Ms Kyriakides be changed to "Health and Food Safety", in order to better reflect the areas of competence of her services. I would therefore ask you to convey this specific request to the President of the European Parliament so that he can transmit it to the President-Elect of the European Commission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Pascal Canfin', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Pascal Canfin

CC: Norbert Lins, Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development