

Committee on Development
The Chair

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Antonio Tajani
Chair
Conference of Committee Chairs
European Parliament

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[EXPO-COM-DEVE D (2019)35103]

Subject: DEVE hearing of Commissioner-designate for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič

Dear Mr Tajani,

The Committee on Development, in accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, held a public hearing on Wednesday 2 October with Janez Lenarčič, Commissioner-designate, who, subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure, will be responsible for Crisis Management.

On 27 September 2019 the DEVE Committee, pursuant to Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure and Article 2 of Annex VII thereto, received the letter by the JURI Committee regarding the scrutiny of the declaration of financial interests of Mr Lenarčič.

Prior to the hearing, Parliament had sent the Commissioner-designate a list of written questions. My committee noted that Mr Lenarčič answered those questions, and dealt with the priorities outlined, satisfactorily.

The course of the hearing

Mr Lenarčič opened the hearing by making a statement in which he referred to:

- The overwhelming public support for EU action in the fields of humanitarian aid and civil protection and his willingness to advance and strengthen EU capacities in these areas in close cooperation with the European Parliament;
- The growing risks, costs and needs in Europe and globally due to the increasing number and impact of natural disasters, climate change and forced displacements;
- The necessity and his commitment to adhere strictly to the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and to defend international humanitarian law;

- The imperative to scale-up and to mainstream prevention, preparedness and resilience to disasters, and to better integrate the long-term development perspective into the humanitarian response from the outset.

The introductory statement of Mr Lenarčič was followed by a first round of 7 questions from representatives of each political group and a second round of 17 questions by Members.

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

- The disappearance of the words “humanitarian aid” from the title of the portfolio, and the criteria for humanitarian aid intervention;
- The defence of the principles of humanitarian aid, in particular, the needs-based approach to assistance and impartiality and independence.
- The defence of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights, the type of measures that could be applied to violators, and the responsibility of EU Member States in relation to this;
- The role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in particular local NGOs and other local actors. The need for adequate financial support for them, their full involvement in humanitarian activities, and the need to upgrade the current humanitarian aid distribution system with more transparency, efficiency and accountability in financial management;
- The role of the private sector in humanitarian aid, and the need to respect the “do not harm” principle and standards;
- The humanitarian-development nexus, and how to ensure more effective implementation;
- Cooperation with other Commissioners, and in particular the Commissioner for International Partnerships and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission;
- The provision of basic humanitarian assistance in migratory contexts, including: support for the return of Syrian refugees to their country; the establishment of humanitarian corridors; the situation in the Mediterranean, in particular in Lesbos and in Libya; and the possible recognition of the status of “climate refugees”;
- How to ensure the safety and protection of women and girls in crisis situations, including measures to prevent sexual violence against women and girls;
- The reinforcement of financial support to ensure access to education in emergency settings, in particular for vulnerable young girls;
- The promotion of preventive and mitigating measures as regards climate change and the promotion of resilience in both internal and external policies.

In his replies, Mr Lenarčič made specific commitments regarding his future action as Commissioner:

- Stated that he will pursue a principled position when it comes to returns, only supporting returns that are safe, dignified, sustainable and voluntary;
- Stated that humanitarian aid is not a migration management instrument; EU humanitarian aid will continue to be based on needs and not migratory status, including in situations of mixed migration;
- Committed to work closely with the Commissioner for International Partnerships on the humanitarian-development nexus and welcomed its extension to cover the peace component. Emphasised the need to work with other Commissioners - including those for climate, agriculture, health, environment and oceans – to address structural challenges that drive humanitarian crises and to promote resilience.
- Stated that he will defend, within the external action cluster, the specific principles of humanitarian aid and notably its independence from foreign policy objectives.
- Acknowledged the potential of mobilising the private sector in humanitarian aid, but stressed that this should not be at the expense of humanitarian principles: humanitarian aid is not, and should never become, a commercial opportunity.
- Committed to speak out publicly, also by using less visible channels, to denounce violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) when they occur and to work with organisations on the ground that have privileged access to armed combatants and can encourage respect for IHL.
- Advocated for a principled approach that respects the necessary standards regarding the export of arms so as to be consistent and not worsen humanitarian crises, whilst highlighting that it is the primary competence of Member States.
- Committed to work with the United Nations to achieve a workable definition of the phenomenon of climate-induced displacement that recognises the need for protection.
- Recognised the essential role of non-governmental organisations (NGOS) which are among the EU's most trusted and valuable partners. Stressed the importance of supporting and working with local NGOs.
- Committed to implement faithfully the EU commitments within the Grand Bargain, whilst expecting partners to fulfil theirs.
- Committed to mainstream prevention and Disaster Risk Reduction measures, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation into all policies of the EU, as well as the Green Deal for Europe and to make this a Green Deal for the planet, and an EU strategy aiming at strengthening resilience and promoting sustainable development in Small Island Developing States.
- Committed to keeping a high allocation of funds in the context of education in emergencies.

- Committed to encourage Member States to reinforce their civil protection capacities and cooperation regarding chemical, biological and radio-nuclear hazards.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which he reaffirmed that he was eager to take on the responsibilities and face the challenges of crisis management and to build on the close partnership with the European Parliament in humanitarian affairs. He also reminded Members that, with the Emergency Response Coordination Centre, the EU has a phone number and is able to respond to calls for assistance from any country in the world.

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

The Development Committee is of the opinion that during the course of his hearing, the Commissioner-designate has shown his personal aptitude and his commitment to the European project as a whole, and to the crisis response and humanitarian aid in particular. He was able to communicate his priorities clearly, and his professional qualifications make him a suitable candidate for Crisis Management.

Opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, associated with the hearing

ENVI coordinators consider that overall, Commissioner-designate Lenarčič made a very positive general impression offering a clear stance and understanding of international norms, practices and challenges in his field of competence. He also gave convincing answers with respect to the actions and strategies he intends to follow. In addition, he showed willingness to cooperate and work closely with the European Parliament and its relevant committees. In the specific policy areas related to civil protection, ENVI considers that his answers showed understanding of the UCPM, its past reforms and its future needs. ENVI also welcomes Mr Lenarčič's commitment to fully and properly implement the revamped UCPM as well as the strengthening of the ERCC in his capacity as European Emergency Response Coordinator. ENVI also salutes his intention to work with the EP to push Member States to provide the necessary assets and financing for an effective roll-out of rescEU.

Considering the increased climate change adaptation needs both inside and outside the EU, ENVI invites Mr Lenarčič to work closely with Member States as well as international partners in order to strengthen their prevention, preparedness and response plans and capabilities. ENVI also invites Mr Lenarčič to establish a strong synergy with the European Green Deal in his areas of competences given the beneficial returns with respect to the protection of biodiversity. In order to be fully effective, the UCPM and rescEU must be properly financed and resourced. ENVI invites the Commissioner-designate to ensure ambition with respect to the upcoming programme post-2020.

The general assessment of the Committee for the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of this hearing is that overall the Commissioner-designate gave a convincing impression of his aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

The general outcome of this hearing is that the Commissioner-designate gave a convincing impression of his aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

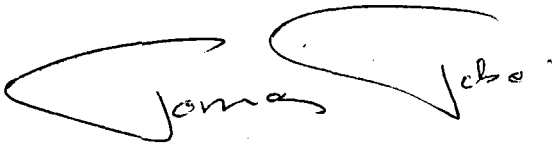
In accordance with Rule 125 of the Rules of Procedure and Article 4 of Annex VII thereto, coordinators representing a majority of two-thirds of the committee membership approved that the Commissioner-designate Janez Lenarčič, is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned.

During the evaluation meeting, the ID Group requested to include the following aspects which constitute a minority view:

The ID group did not support the candidacy of Mr Lenarčič arguing that he gave the impression that he was not prepared to deal with the “migrant problem” and that he was not aware of “Turkish threats” through Minister Süleyman Soylu to “flood Europe with migrants”. Further, the group argued that he did not appear willing to recognise the “problem of the overpopulation in Africa”.

Thank you for your follow-up on the hearing of the Commissioner-designate for Crisis Management.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tomas Tobé', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

Tomas Tobé