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Commissioner designate for Home Affairs

**Opening remarks at the European  
Parliament Hearing in the Committee  
on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home  
Affairs (LIBE)**

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European Parliament Hearing

**Strasbourg, 19 January 2010**

Mr President, dear Members of the Committee,

It's both a privilege and a great pleasure to meet you today as the Commissioner-designate for home affairs. Many of you know me from my time as an MEP in this house, or as the representative of the Swedish Presidency in numerous exciting debates in the plenary. I now look forward to an extensive and fruitful cooperation with this Committee during the coming five years.

In December, the Stockholm Programme was adopted by the European Council. This was one of the top priorities for the Swedish Presidency. Just a few days earlier, the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force, which will lead to an increased influence for the European Parliament and a more effective decision-making within important parts of home affairs.

With both the Lisbon Treaty and the Stockholm Programme in place, we now have a unique opportunity to take on issues where citizens expect the EU to act. No Member State alone can tackle the threats of organised crime, and no Member State alone can meet the challenge posed by increased global migration. These are areas where there is a true added value of cooperation in Europe.

But I am also acutely conscious that we as representatives of the EU need to tackle the problem of lack of legitimacy. Turnout has gone down in each European election and reached 43 per cent in June last year. The fact that more than half of the European electorate abstain from voting for a parliament that is gaining more and more influence our task of building trust for the EU a great challenge.

We build that trust only by listening to citizens' concerns and what they expect from the EU, and then deliver results in those areas. We must get better at engaging in a dialogue with the public and civil society, and explain what we do and why. This responsibility rests with us in this room.

The Stockholm Programme provides the guide for ensuring that citizens' concerns and aspirations are at the heart of what we do.

My priorities, which I would like to set out for you, now are drawn from that programme. The European Parliament November resolution has been a valuable contribution in working out these priorities.

My priority is to ensure that Europe's home affairs policies go hand-in-hand with our actions in standing up for and safeguarding fundamental rights. All EU cooperation must be built on our common values and these must be respected, without exception. Our citizens must be able to live in a secure and safe Europe where their freedoms and integrity are guaranteed.

Across the range of my home affairs portfolio, I want solidarity to be the watchword:

- Solidarity between the EU institutions: Commission, Member States and European Parliament in shouldering the formidable burden of building a system of immigration and asylum, based on humanism and efficiency,
- Solidarity between law enforcement authorities that will need to cooperate more closely in combating the common threats that we face,
- Solidarity within the Commission functioning in a spirit of genuine cooperation and collegiality.

**Let me now outline few policy issues a bit more concretely:**

Firstly, I intend to develop further the **common policy for immigration and asylum**.

I believe in the global approach, where we work in partnership with third countries to offer protection to those in need, promote legal migration and support development, but also to control irregular immigration.

Our asylum policy is our opportunity to stand up for and demonstrate and in the most tangible way our values of human dignity and collective solidarity. I am therefore committed to developing Europe into a single area of protection for those fleeing persecution and injustice. We must develop a common policy on temporary protection and asylum based on solidarity, predictability and shared responsibility. Europe must be able to offer protection for those most in need, in compliance with the Geneva Convention and the principle of non-refoulement.

But such a policy can only be credible and legitimate if we also deal with irregular migration efficiently. One of the greatest achievements by the European Union is the establishment of the internal market and its four freedoms. Tearing down border controls between our countries has brought us all closer and facilitated life for both private citizens and business. But the lack of internal border controls means that we need to ensure an efficient surveillance over our external borders. This includes a return policy which is humane and which works. This must be developed and implemented in cooperation with third countries.

I intend to devote particular attention to the case of unaccompanied minors. This is of course a deeply complex problem, and I intend to bring forward an action plan for dealing with it as a matter of urgency.

Secondly, I intend to establish an effective system for **legal migration**.

Most Member States have an ageing working population, and our future competitiveness rests on ensuring a dynamic and flexible labour market. Needs will vary from country to country but we will in the future need to increase labour migration to Europe.

I will therefore put priority to showing the advantages of coming to the European Union in a legal and regulated manner. But for this to work, this must be possible in practice, and labour migration must become a win-win situation. That means work under reasonable conditions, which makes a positive contribution to European society and the economy.

At the same time, we need a better integration policy, which responds to the needs of national labour markets and removes barriers to newcomers participating in all aspects of community life. An immigration code should be adopted to ensure a level of rights for legal immigrants, comparable to those of a EU citizen.

**Much more is needed to improve the coherence and effectiveness of existing policy on migration and mobility. I intend also therefore to review our legislation and policy agendas in this area.**

My third priority is the development of **an internal security strategy**, which is based on respect for fundamental rights and solidarity between Member States.

This strategy must enable us to harness all tools at our disposal to combat the common threats we face, safeguard our freedoms and protect the lives and safety of our citizens.

This means integrating law enforcement cooperation, border management and criminal justice systems.

We must demonstrate to citizens that we are serious about tackling organised crime which blights communities and ruins lives: terrorism, human trafficking, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, corruption, cyber crime and drugs.

EU agencies such as Frontex, Europol and Cefpol, each have a crucial role to play. Cooperation with Eurojust and the Fundamental Right Agency must be enhanced. I will put forward proposals for further equipping them to play that role, starting with Frontex.

Effective cooperation depends on effective exchange of information. I intend to ensure that this takes place within the framework of the highest standards of protection of personal data, which is also necessary in order to live up to the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Mr. President,

Europe must continue to be a strong partner in an increasingly globalised world. The external dimension of justice, freedom and security is crucial if we want to achieve results. We must work in partnership with our neighbours and allies.

One of my first acts as Commissioner will be the presentation, along with Viviane Reding, the commissioner-designate responsible for fundamental rights, of the action plan for delivering the Stockholm Programme. This will contain a full overview of concrete measures and initiatives needed to start implementing the programme.

Let me underline that whatever I propose as commissioner, it will be based on evidence. And it is of course equally important that whatever is adopted by Parliament and Council is implemented and evaluated effectively.

With the Lisbon Treaty finally into force, most of the areas under my responsibility will be subject to co-decision with the European Parliament. I welcome this change, as it will increase the legitimacy and accountability of European home affairs. This means that we will work tightly together during the coming five years.

As a MEP, I was involved in the Public Access to Documents Regulation. Not least for this reason, I am determined to ensure that you and the Council will have equal access to all relevant documentation for home affairs. And I will continue to campaign for greater transparency, for better regulation and for Commission proposals that are more easily accessible and understandable. Throughout the 20 years I have spent working with European issues, dialogue with citizens has always been a top priority. I know this is a commitment that I share with the members of this committee.

Mr President,

My seven years as MEP instilled in me a deep respect for the work of the Parliament and the knowledge and commitment present in this House. I am aware of your important work in defending the European values. I commit myself to work with you in close cooperation to promote a citizen's Europe, a Europe that respects and protects, where there is a balance between security and the protection of our personal freedoms. A Europe, which can tackle those issues where citizens expect us to deliver, and which contributes to fight organised crime, which guarantees a fair and humane asylum and migration policy and which also protects our external borders by working against irregular migration.

There is a lot of work to do. Aided, however, by your expertise and commitment, I am sure that we, together, will be able to make great progress to the benefit of the European citizens.