

Committee on Regional Development
The Chair

300527 15.01.2010

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Jerzy Buzek
President
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

ACCES RESERVE

Dear Mr President,

In accordance with Rule 106 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, the Committee on Regional Development held a public hearing on Thursday 14 January 2010 with Mr Johannes Hahn, Commissioner-designate, who, subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure, will be responsible for Regional policy.

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

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

His view that the Committee on Regional Development will be an important partner for him as Commissioner in working for the regions of Europe.

The fact that in the next financial framework cohesion policy should concern the entire territory of the EU. He also stressed his rejection of proposals to renationalise any part of the policy, and also expressed the view that the current level of budget for cohesion is adequate and should be the starting point for the financial negotiations for the next programming period.

The need for a clear alignment of cohesion policy with the strategic priorities of the Union; in this sense the "earmarking" has been a success, and future policy should be built around the priorities outlined in the EU 2020 strategy. He would take measures to strengthen policy coherence and coordination with other policy areas.

The necessity to strike a better balance between procedural simplification and the improvement of financial control.

Members then asked questions on the following subjects:

- Future cohesion policy and its three objectives, cohesion policy and the EU 2020 vision;
- Budgetary allocations to future structural funds;
- Cooperation with other policy areas and views on *sectorialisation*, cohesion policy vs. transport, agriculture, research, innovation and environment policy as well as with social policies; transport infrastructure, R&D expenditures in lagging and in peripheral regions, alleviation of poverty;
- Further development of the new concept of territorial cohesion;
- Partnership principle, involvement of local authorities and regions in policy development and implementation, consideration of regional dimension;
- Importance of the urban dimension of regional policy;
- Innovative tools, financial engineering and support to small and medium sized enterprises
- Cooperation with the Committee on Regional Development;
- Views on the outermost regions, indicators used for these areas, ways of fostering their potential and compensation of extra costs;
- Support of rural areas, relationship between rural development fund and structural funds;
- Measures envisaged to undertake simplification of procedures and combating fraud and ensuring sound financial management;
- Territorial cooperation across Europe and its added value, macro-regional strategies, Baltic Sea Strategy and the Danube Strategy;
- Communicating the achievements of the policy to the citizens of Europe;
- Cohesion policy instruments and measures to overcome the economic crisis;
- Arrangements for payments in the transitional period;
- Measures to improve effectiveness and implementation of funds;
- The relationship between environmental law and cohesion policy and transport;

During the debate, Mr Hahn made specific commitments regarding his future Commission portfolio.

In particular:

- He stated that he would pursue an open door policy to members of the committee and be ready to exchange views both in formal and informal meetings, and make sure that there is maximum transparency;
- The commissioner designate declared his intention to focus strongly on the urban dimension and stressed the need for a new urban policy in the EU based on the subsidiarity and partnership principles;
- The outermost regions will continue to be given special attention under the umbrella of cohesion policy;
- He assured the members of the Committee on Regional Development that strict measures will be taken to correct irregularities and fight fraud and ensure that the public is correctly informed;
- He committed himself to discuss with the Committee about innovation and research and development and cohesion policy contributions in this area;

- He declared himself ready to explore innovative ways of supporting small and medium sized enterprises;
- He agreed that the European Social Fund should remain part of cohesion policy;
- He undertook to prepare a stable framework for territorial cohesion in the next programming period;
- He declared himself ready to improve coordination between rural development funds and structural funds in the next programming period;
- He committed himself to ensure minimum standards of publication of the list of final beneficiaries of the structural funds;
- He committed himself to involve more closely members of the civil society;
- He stated that regions will continue to need transition arrangements and he will plead for this in the next programming period.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which he reaffirmed that he was delighted to get to know the particular areas of interest of the Members of the Committee and that he was ready to cooperate with the Committee on Regional Development in the coming years.

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 after the hearing under my chairmanship, I hereby give the following assessment:

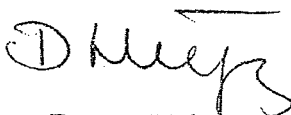
In his exchanges with the committee the Commissioner-designate demonstrated that he possesses the experience, integrity and professional capacity to assume the high responsibility of the position of Commissioner. He expressed his clear intention to the Committee on Regional Development that he would cooperate closely with the European Parliament and particularly with its Committee on Regional Development in both policy definition and execution and stressed that it was his intention to ensure that Cohesion policy continues to play a central role in achieving the Union's primary objectives throughout its territory. The Committee looks forward to the possibility to have further debate and concrete actions on the points raised during the hearing.

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

This represents the opinion of all the Members who attended the hearing.

In addition, the Greens/ALE group noted the commitment of the Commissioner-designate to provide the EP with all the documents handed over to the President of the European Commission regarding the controversy concerning his person raised in the Austrian media.

Yours sincerely,



Danuta Hübner