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BRUXELLES

COMMISSIONE AFFARI COSTITUZIONALI

AUDIZIONE DI MAROŠ ŠEFČOVIČ

COMMISSARIO DESIGNATO

RELAZIONI INTERISTITUZIONALI E
AMMINISTRAZIONE

1-002

PRESIDENZA DELL'ON. CARLO CASINI

1-003

Presidente. – Vogliano cominciare i nostri lavori, per favore! Prego un po' di silenzio! La nostra seduta, come voi sapete, è dedicata all'ascolto, all'incontro, al dialogo con il candidato Commissario Maroš Šefčovič.

Credo che sia già conosciuto abbastanza in questo Parlamento, perché è stato – sia pure per un breve periodo – Commissario, già membro della Commissione europea per l'educazione, la formazione, la cultura e la giovinezza.

Nel suo curriculum, che probabilmente avete potuto esaminare, comunque emerge in particolare che dell'Europa si è occupato in modo particolare, perché è stato ambasciatore nella rappresentanza permanente della Slovacchia nell'Unione europea, prima di essere membro della Commissione. È stato anche direttore generale per gli affari europei del ministero slovacco degli affari europei. Nel suo curriculum è segnalata in modo particolare la conoscenza dei problemi nei rapporti con Israele, perché in effetti è stato ambasciatore per la Slovacchia in Israele.

Come loro sanno, questo esame è previsto dal nostro regolamento e prevede che il nostro compito, il vostro compito, il nostro compito, sia quello di valutare le capacità dell'aspirante Commissario, il suo impegno europeo, le garanzie di indipendenza, la conoscenza dei compiti che l'eventuale futuro portafoglio comporterà e la sua capacità di realizzare appunto i suoi compiti.

Avete già letto le risposte scritte dell'aspirante Commissario – ha già risposto per iscritto – oggi potremo, potrete, fare numerose domande orali. L'aspirante Commissario avrà per primo la parola, per un tempo massimo di dieci minuti – lei sa già questo, vero, che ha il diritto di parlare per primo per non più di dieci minuti. Poi dopo cominceranno, per due ore e quarantacinque, le domande.

Inizieranno i rappresentanti dei vari gruppi politici, il metodo è quello ormai sperimentato in tutti gli altri incontri con gli altri aspiranti Commissari: cioè cinque minuti in totale, con un sistema di *pingpong*, un minuto

per una domanda, due minuti per la risposta del candidato, possibilità di una replica da parte dell'interrogante e un ulteriore minuto per la risposta ulteriore dell'aspirante Commissario.

Il mio compito è quello di essere rigoroso, cioè di far rispettare i tempi. Quindi cercherò di esserlo, e mi scuserete in anticipo se vi dico che in qualche caso dovrò togliere forse la parola.

È previsto poi che si possa fare una sola domanda per intervento – non più di una domanda – e quindi raccomando di rispettare questa regola! Nella replica si possono, no, non si possono argomenti ulteriori, cioè che siano idonei a proporre una seconda domanda, perché la domanda che si può fare è una sola!

A questa audizione, oltre ai membri della commissione AFKO, partecipano anche i rappresentanti, i membri di altre quattro commissioni: controllo dei bilanci, petizioni, giuridica e bilancio. Data la particolare importanza nella materia della commissione per il controllo dei bilanci, è previsto che gli interventi per questa commissione potranno essere tre, uno per le altre tre commissioni.

Prima ci saranno dunque le domande proposte da parte dei rappresentanti dei gruppi nella commissione AFKO, poi le domande dei membri della commissione, e infine, per trenta minuti, le domande dei membri, dei rappresentanti delle altre commissioni ospiti.

Comunico che la trasmissione sarà trasmessa in diretta sul sito internet del Parlamento e questa videoregistrazione sarà ancora a disposizione per un po' di tempo, ancora. Inoltre, ci sarà un resoconto integrale scritto di questi nostri lavori.

Gli interpreti pregano comunque nel proporre le domande e le risposte di non parlare troppo velocemente, perché naturalmente l'interpretazione è più difficile se si parla troppo velocemente.

Ricordo ancora che la commissione dovrà esprimere una valutazione su questo incontro e che questo avverrà domani, in una riunione della commissione che si svolgerà alle dieci e mezzo in questa medesima aula, domani mattina, preceduta da un incontro alle nove e

trenta, antimeridiane, dei coordinatori della commissione.

Mi sembra di aver detto tutto e quindi chiedo all'aspirante Commissario di introdurre il nostro dialogo in un tempo massimo di dieci minuti. Prego!

1-004

Maroš Šefčovič, *Dezignovaný člen Komisie*. – Vážení členovia Európskeho parlamentu, vážené dámy, vážení páni. Je mi ct'ou uchádzať sa o Vašu dôveru pre moju nomináciu na post komisára pre medziinštitucionálne vzťahy a administratívu.

Európskym témam sa venujem už viac ako 15 rokov a vždy som obdivoval pozitívnu transformačnú silu Európskej únie. Aj vďaka nej môžu občania Slovenska už 20 rokov po páde železnej opony voľne cestovať, pracovať, študovať v Európe bez hraničných kontrol, platiť jednotnou menou, a čo je najdôležitejšie, žiť v silne demokratickom prostredí.

Chcem Vás všetkých ubezpečiť, že si mimoriadne ctím dodržiavanie ľudských práv, odmietam diskrimináciu na akomkoľvek základe a som silným zástancom sociálnej inklúzie. Ako diplomat som mal možnosť vidieť rešpekt, uznanie, ktorému sa teší Európska únia v zahraničí, kde často slúži ako vzor pre iné regióny či krajiny, ktoré sa snažia vybudovať podobný systém spolupráce. Rozprával som sa s mnohými občanmi týchto krajín, ktorí túžia po demokracii, sociálnej spravodlivosti a prosperite tak, ako ich poznáme my v Európe. A moja pevná viera v transformačnú silu Európskej únie a vízia toho, ako ju môžeme čo najlepšie využiť v prospech našich občanov a pre posilnenie Európskej únie vo svete, je mojou hlavnou motiváciou pre prácu ako člen Európskej komisie.

Pokračovanie v angličtine.

1-005

I believe that 1 December 2009 will enter the textbooks as a new beginning for the European Union. The long, difficult and protracted discussion on the institutional arrangements is over and the Lisbon Treaty has entered into force.

I believe that we have to seize these opportunities and put the European Union on a completely new basis, where the decisions which are taken will be more comprehensible and better appreciated and understood by our citizens, where EU institutions will cooperate even better than they do now, and where the EU will become a much stronger global actor.

I would like to put this vision into practice by building a special partnership with the European Parliament, because I believe the new system definitely requires a better exchange of information, and a much higher level of mutual communication.

Therefore, as Commissioner responsible for Interinstitutional Relations, if I get your support, I promise you that to the best of my abilities I will be available and cooperate very closely with the

Conference of Presidents, with the Conference of Committee Chairs and with all the committees represented here.

I believe that the positive new environment, the positive new atmosphere, between our institutions, should be reflected in the new framework agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission, and I know that the high-level contacts have already taken place and the positive atmosphere is there. I believe that we can complete the work of this new agreement much faster than last time.

But before we get there, we have even more pressing and urgent matters on our table. The national parliaments have already been informed about the new subsidiarity check mechanisms, and I would call upon all of us to use this instrument not only as a legislative measure but as a new means of communication, as a means of getting more European topics into the national capitals and getting feedback from national capitals to all of us here in Brussels and Strasbourg. This would help us to steer a much broader and better debate in the European Union.

I would like to express my appreciation for the positive, forthcoming attitude of the European Parliament to the communication the Commission prepared on delegated acts. If I get your support I promise you that I will do my best to ensure that one of the first meetings of the new Commission has on its agenda the draft regulation on implementing acts.

I am sure that in the question-and-answer session we will take some time to discuss the new Citizens' Initiative, which is one of the major innovations the Lisbon Treaty is bringing in, as a participatory democracy measure, which again we could use as a new tool for communication with our citizens.

I see Mr Brok here, and I am sure that we will also discuss how to establish the External Action Service. I would like at this stage just to assure you that I will do my best to ensure that we create the most conducive conditions to enable the new External Action Service to benefit as much as possible from the Commission's administrative structures.

I am very glad that the committees accepted the invitation to this hearing because I can assure you already now that I will continue with the European transparency initiative, in which we already achieved a lot in the course of the last year. We got the lobbyists under control: now we can reveal and we know who is the end recipient of the financial aid, be it through Structural Funds or CAP in the Member States, and we definitely improved access for citizens to documents.

I know that we have to do better, and I can tell you in the question-and-answer session what I think about that. I would also like to tell you that I am ready to engage with the European Parliament in the discussion on how to improve the Code of Conduct of Commissioners, how to

adjust it to the new environment, how to look for the possible interinstitutional dimension of the Court.

Because of the time, I will now be very telegraphic.

On buildings policy, we know that we have big projects ahead of us. I would just like to assure you that I will be transparent, I will respect all the rules, and I will come to you with regular updates and with information, because I am fully aware that you are the budgetary authority, and in the end it will be your decision if we proceed with this project or not.

Let me use my remaining time to present to you my vision concerning the management of human resources. We have very important deadlines coming up. In 2012 we have to discuss and decide upon the new formula for salaries and pensions calculations. In 2013 I hope we will be discussing very intensively the new Financial Perspective. Until then I will respect the zero growth policy and I will continue the policy of mobilising internal reserves in the human resources of the Commission, where we have already succeeded in mobilising more than 1 000 posts.

I will pressure the DGs to be better in forward planning, and to be better in creating incentive conditions for transferring people from support functions into front-line activities. I would like to come to you, if I get your support, in one year and invite you for a very serious debate. At any rate we will have to hold this debate by 2013.

What level of ambition will the European Union have in the post-2013 period? What would we like to achieve in the future? Do we have the means for that? I would really welcome a very good debate with you and with the European Council, because this will be very crucial for the future of the European Union, and I will do my best to be well prepared for this discussion.

1-006

Monsieur le Président, honorables membres du Parlement européen, Mesdames et Messieurs, dans mes remarques préliminaires, j'ai essayé d'indiquer les priorités immédiates et les priorités à moyen terme, d'une manière télégraphique comme je l'ai déjà dit. Maintenant je suis prêt à écouter vos commentaires et à répondre à vos questions. Merci beaucoup pour votre aimable attention.

1-007

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE). – Señor Šefčovič, en nombre del Grupo del Partido Popular Europeo, le damos nuestra bienvenida a esta audiencia, a este sistema de audiencias que es un sistema ciertamente democrático, ciertamente innovador, que creo que no se da en casi ningún Parlamento de los Estados miembros. Creo, también, que ésta es una buena ocasión para que la opinión pública conozca sus opiniones sobre todos aquellos temas que se refieren a su acción futura como Comisario.

Usted ha hablado, al principio de su intervención, de su respeto por los derechos humanos y la importancia que da a la integración social. Quiero preguntarle por algo que ha surgido en los últimos días: unas declaraciones suyas que se remontan al año 2005 en las que usted decía, y cito textualmente, que consideraba «*Slovakian roma citizens as exploiters of Slovakian welfare system*» (a los ciudadanos eslovacos de etnia romaní como explotadores del sistema de bienestar eslovaco).

Usted ha dicho que no se acordaba de haberlas hecho; luego, ha negado haberlas hecho. A mí me gustaría que, en aras de la claridad, usted pudiera expresarse ante esta representación del Parlamento Europeo sobre esta cuestión, que nos parece enormemente importante.

1-008

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you very much for giving me the chance to clarify this issue right at the beginning of the hearing. As you know, I come from the country with the largest share of Roma population so I am very familiar with the plight of Roma people, with their very difficult socio-economic conditions and also with the discrimination they are unfortunately facing in my country, but also in many other European countries.

I am therefore very glad that finally we can discuss the Roma issue at European level, too. I can tell you that I am full of admiration for people like Livia Járóka because her patience, her enthusiasm, managed to bring the Roma issue here to Parliament. I saw how hard she worked creating conditions for calling the first Roma summit in Brussels.

I really admire that because it is exactly my agenda. I as the Ambassador of Slovakia worked very hard to create a special horizontal programme from the Structural Funds aimed exclusively at the Roma community in Slovakia. As far as I know, this is still a unique pioneering programme and I am sure that we will not find it anywhere else in the European Union.

I worked very hard within the Council to get the Roma issue on the table of the Council as well and I think that, thanks to my efforts, the Roma issue was included on the agenda of the European Council in December 2007, something which was also reflected in the conclusions of the European Council.

So the quote, which is five years old and which consists of six words attributed to me, was clearly taken out of context. It was part of the broader debate and it was not meant to offend anybody. If it had been raised with me then, or later on, and if I had offended anybody unintentionally, I would definitely have apologised, but it would not be honest of me to tell you that I know exactly what I said five years ago at the stagiaires' conference.

So please put on the scale my track record, the support I get from the Roma people of Slovakia who know me best and ...

(The Chair cut off the speaker after two minutes.)

I cannot see the time. It is very difficult for me to orientate myself if I cannot see the time.

1-009

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE). – Señor Presidente, yo creo que hay que darle al señor Comisario más tiempo, el tiempo que necesite, porque, evidentemente, si uno no tiene el reloj, no puede negociar, administrar su tiempo. Déle usted más tiempo, si no le importa, aunque sea del mío, porque me parece que es importante que esta cuestión quede clarificada. Y búsqúenle un reloj, porque si no, esto va a ser muy complicado.

1-010

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Yes, I was going to conclude by saying that, when balanced with my track record, there has been the support which was very clearly demonstrated by the Roma NGOs and the Roma community in Slovakia. They work with me and they know me the best. It should be put it in perspective that it is a quote which is five years old and which consists of six words which were clearly taken out of context. It was part of the broader debate and I honestly do not recall it. It was a conference for the stagiaires where I was a last-minute replacement and I did not mean to offend anybody.

It was not raised with me during the conference or after the conference but, as I said, never meant to offend anybody when I spoke on this issue. If I unintentionally offended anybody there, I really regret it.

I can assure you that this quote is not representative of my views, my philosophy, or my track record and I have never had any anti-Roma sentiments. I am prepared to work with the European Parliament, which has been the main champion of Roma issues for many years. I am ready to work with those who would like to raise awareness of the very important issue because it is absolutely clear that the Roma issue requires the utmost attention at European level.

1-011

Presidente. – Bene, grazie, ringraziamo il collega Méndez de Vigo che ha rinunciato in parte alla sua replica per poter consentire al candidato di dire tutto quello che voleva dire. Adesso vuole fa una replica? Io sono obbligato a far rispettare i tempi!

1-012

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE). – Ma io non ho rinunciato, io ho detto che il vicepresidente candidato avesse un pochino di tempo, ma non il mio!

1-013

Presidente. – Avevo capito, almeno secondo la mia traduzione, che lei era disposto a ridurre il suo tempo. Siamo sforando di molto, per la verità, i tempi.

Ad ogni modo, dato che la questione è stata oggetto di dibattito anche sui giornali, allora credo che sia giusto consentire la replica. Mi raccomando la brevità!

1-014

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE). – Señor Presidente, le agradezco al señor Šefčovič su intervención. Yo creo que este tema hay que clarificarlo definitivamente y me propongo pedirle al señor Presidente de la Comisión Europea que nos mande las actas de esa reunión para dejarlo claro. En todo caso, le agradezco su respuesta, señor Šefčovič, y le agradezco también que haya sido la primera en esta audiencia y estoy seguro, además, de que ha sido una buena introducción a la misma.

1-015

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I would just to like to thank Mr Méndez de Vigo for his question and his comment. I really hope that all this will be taken into account in just measure and due proportion. I thank him very much for the way in which he put it and commented on the question.

1-016

Ramón Jáuregui Atondo (S&D). – Quiero decir claramente, señor Šefčovič, que su declaración en favor de la integración social de las minorías y de los derechos humanos a mí me ha parecido concluyente y convincente. Lo voy a decir sin ningún tipo de matiz: concluyente y convincente. Por otra parte, como corresponde a la trayectoria personal y política de su Señoría.

Quiero preguntarle por su compromiso con el Parlamento Europeo. La Comisión va a tener la oportunidad de aplicar el procedimiento legislativo ordinario a muchas cosas, y a otras muchas, no. Mi pregunta es para saber si su papel en el Colegio de Comisarios va a ir en favor de que la mayor parte de las decisiones de la Comisión siga el procedimiento legislativo ordinario, la mal llamada codecisión, para que el Parlamento recupere la función legislativa que le corresponde a esta Cámara.

Ésta es mi pregunta: ¿Cuál va a ser su compromiso? ¿Cuál va a ser su actitud en favor de un Parlamento que desarrolle esta tarea?

1-017

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that one of the major pluses the Lisbon Treaty brought is that the European Parliament and the Council are put on an equal footing, and I am going to respect that; I am going to respect and support that.

I think, as I said in my opening remarks, I would like to take it even further. I would like to create an atmosphere of real cooperation, which would be under the umbrella of a special partnership between Parliament and the Commission. I can assure you that I will do my utmost to ensure that all the legislative proposals which are put on the table are subject to the ordinary procedure – codecision – because I think this is what Parliament has been waiting for for many years. This is what European citizens have been expecting from their legislators, and now we have the Lisbon Treaty, which we have to respect. I can assure you about my commitment to work within the college in such a way that all proposals would

respect the Treaty and would go through the ordinary legislative procedure.

1-018

Ramón Jáuregui Atondo (S&D). – Señor Šefčovič, yo ahora querría que me concretara un poco esta posición política que, obviamente, la esperaba. Pero usted sabe que, en muchos momentos, en lo que se refiere a las agencias, por ejemplo en materia económica, en materia monetaria, muchas cosas van a poderse hacer por vía ejecutiva o por vía legislativa.

Con mi pregunta quería obtener un compromiso de quien es precisamente el responsable, en el Colegio de Comisarios, de un ámbito correspondiente a una función legislativa del Parlamento, en favor de que aquello que pudiera hacerse fuera del procedimiento legislativo ordinario se haga a través de este procedimiento legislativo ordinario y, sobre todo, quería preguntarle sobre los casos de actos legislativos delegados de la Comisión.

Usted sabe que el artículo 290 del Tratado contempla lo que en otros lugares se llaman «vías ejecutivas delegadas», «vías legislativas delegadas». Mi pregunta es si usted trabajará para que esas delegaciones legislativas sean breves en el tiempo, claras y concretas en los objetivos para delimitar esa delegación legislativa.

1-019

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Of course I will. I think that in the delegated acts there are several, let us say, safety breaks, if I can put it that way. Of course in the legislative proposals there will already have to be decisions on the scope, content and duration of the delegation of power. Then, of course, if the delegated act is adopted, the European Parliament will always have the right to veto the delegated act.

Even if this were not the case, and if it saw that the Commission was misbehaving and abusing this power, the European Parliament would have the right to revoke the delegation of power. I do not believe that we would come to that because I can assure you that the Commission will try to work very closely with the European Parliament so that it will be pleased with the way in which we are using the delegating power. This is especially true in the area you mentioned – the financial area – because I think we learned our lessons from the financial sector. It is very clear that the financial sector must be under better control than before.

1-020

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – There are three items which I think are of great importance that I believe that you are responsible for but in your answers to the questions and in your first statement tonight you are silent. The first is relations between the Commission and national parliaments; the second is the interinstitutional programming – that is to say the necessity for us to achieve an agreement on a five-year programme between the Council, Commission and Parliament; and the third – and it is a question which I place special importance on – is electoral reform of Parliament in time

for 2014. I would be grateful if you could say something on these three questions.

1-021

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – When it comes to the national parliaments I think we have to seize the opportunity brought to us by the Lisbon Treaty and by this subsidiarity check mechanism. I do not want to see this as a mere legislative measure because this could be a new means of communication with the national parliaments. We will involve them in the legislative process in the European Union. We will bring more European topics to our capitals and our parliaments. Back home, they will have to discuss it. They will have to deal with it. I believe that it will steer the positive European debate.

We have to call on all of us to use this to raise awareness that the new instrument is there and that it will serve as a new means of communication between Brussels and the national capitals. When it comes to the interinstitutional programming then, yes, I am definitely for that because, if we have agreement on the programming, it would be much easier for planning. It would be much easier for budgeting and I think we will need to have a proper discussion on that.

If I remember correctly, this intention was here already a few years ago and there were concurring sounds coming from the Commission and from the European Parliament, but at that time it was a little too difficult for the Council. I think we should simply just try again. We should try to get these three institutions working together on the programming. We will see to what extent we can agree, but it would definitely be a good sign that we are working together.

If it comes to the electoral reform, I will support any measure which will increase participation in the European elections. Many of the ideas in your report are there and they would be very good for just that.

1-022

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – On the Interinstitutional Agreement, you are correct that we have tried previously to agree – and we have not. However, we are now obliged to try to agree because of the Treaty.

Secondly, on the electoral issue: I think it would possibly be a good thing to ask President Barroso to clarify the precise Commission competence on that issue in respect of your functions, because it is not clear from the instructions that he has sent to you. However, I am most grateful for your ‘in principle’ support.

1-023

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – As far as I know, the electoral reform would be within the remit of Mrs Reding, but of course we can verify and clarify this. Concerning the electoral reform, I had just ten seconds to respond to you, so now I have a little bit more.

I said that I think we really have to look for new ways to increase participation in the European elections, and

there are a lot of good ideas in your proposals. I would support transnational lists, and I would definitely support the idea of candidature in several countries. I also think that it would be better if we could squeeze the election period into two days and have it in May rather than in June – around Europe Day. I really think that this would help and would increase interest in European Parliamentary elections. But it will not be an easy task, because it is very sensitive for many Member States.

1-024

Gerald Häfner (Verts/ALE). – Herr Šefčovič! Sie bewerben sich um dieses Amt in einer außerordentlich spannenden Phase der Europäischen Union, nämlich im Jahr eins nach Lissabon. Neben der Umsetzung in Fragen der interinstitutionellen Zusammenarbeit wird eine Ihrer großen Aufgaben das Verhältnis zu den Bürgern sein. Im Lissabon-Vertrag steht als großes Versprechen die Möglichkeit der europäischen Bürgerinitiative. Uns hier im Parlament interessiert sehr, wie Sie planen, dies umzusetzen. Denn schon in dem ersten Grünbuch, das die Kommission vorgelegt hat, haben wir mit einem gewissen Entsetzen festgestellt, dass dies hinter die Vorstellungen des Parlaments zurückgeht, dass etwa da, wo das Parlament vorgeschlagen hat, ein Viertel der Mitgliedstaaten müsse sich beteiligen, ein Drittel verlangt wird, was deutlich mehr ist, und anderes mehr.

Ich habe deshalb die Frage an Sie: Können Sie uns zusagen, dass Sie gemeinsam mit dem Parlament an einer Umsetzung arbeiten, die die Frustration der Bürger nicht mehrten wird, sondern im Gegenteil, die die Bürger einladen wird, sich zu beteiligen, und ihnen die Möglichkeit gibt, Anliegen in Brüssel real zur Sprache zu bringen?

1-025

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Of course I think it definitely should be one of our major goals to try to decrease the level of frustration of our citizens and to increase their participation in European matters.

As you said, the Green Paper was issued and the consultation process will wind up very soon, by the end of January, and already now I would invite all of you to participate in our big public debate on 22 February where we will present the results of these Green Paper consultations and where we really could have a very good exchange of views on what should be in the draft regulation on the Citizens' Initiative.

Very shortly after that, I can promise you, I will press the Commission services as much as possible to ensure that we have the draft regulation on the Citizens' Initiative on the table in early spring. By this I want to say that I am sure that we can already achieve quite a lot of progress on this proposal under the Spanish Presidency. It is absolutely my ambition and there is a definite need to have this instrument in place well before the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

1-026

Gerald Häfner (Verts/ALE). – Herr Šefčovič, mich und uns hier im Parlament interessiert vor allem, was Sie über das im Grünbuch hinaus Gesagte an Vorstellungen haben, was die Folge einer solchen Bürgerinitiative sein kann. Denn wir sehen jetzt eine Vielzahl von Vorschriften, die die Bürger einhalten müssen, aber keine einzige, an die sich die Kommission zu halten hat. Wird es Anhörungen geben? Werden die Bürger einen mit Gründen versehenen schriftlichen Bescheid bekommen?

Meine zweite Frage: Haben Sie über dieses Instrument der Bürgerinitiative hinaus Vorstellungen, wie es uns gelingen kann, Europa, das als ein Europa der Regierungen und Verträge begann, mehr und mehr zu einem Europa der Bürgerinnen und Bürger zu machen?

1-027

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Of course, as I said, the Citizens' Initiative is an entirely new tool and we have to use it as well as possible and as much as possible so that citizens can communicate with European institutions.

What do I think we should do? We should put a time limit on the Citizens' Initiative. We should register when it starts. We should give it one year for collecting signatures. Then the Commission should commit itself – but of course this would be a decision of the college – that within a reasonable time we would have to respond and say what the intentions of the Commission are on the Citizens' Initiative; whether we are going to proceed with legislative proposals or not, or if we are going to amend it – because the Treaty provides that the right of initiative lies with the Commission.

I believe that the new instrument for communicating with the national parliaments would also allow better involvement of citizens in decision-making in Brussels.

1-028

Ashley Fox (ECR). – You have an impressive CV and are clearly an accomplished diplomat, but my concern is that you may not be in touch with the issues that affect my constituents.

I come across very real anger in my country about the amount of money that the European Union wastes every year, especially in maintaining two seats for this Parliament, one here and one in Brussels. So I would like to hear your personal view: are you in favour of ending this very expensive commute to Strasbourg every month and having just one seat for Parliament in Brussels?

1-029

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I am sorry that I have to disappoint you because, as a Member of the Commission on this very important question, I cannot have personal views.

I have to represent the Commission which is guardian of the Treaty and, as you know, we are now talking about

the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, in which it is very clear that the seat of Parliament is Strasbourg.

So it is very clear that we have to respect this rule, like any other rule, and here on this particular question the Commission also has to play the role of being guardian of the Treaty.

1-030

Ashley Fox (ECR). – I regard your failure to give an opinion as very feeble. Perhaps I can put the question another way: would you support a Treaty amendment to give the power to this Parliament to decide where it sat, or – in your opinion – should that power remain with the nation states?

1-031

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – It is a very good question.

(Laughter)

1-032

Ashley Fox (ECR). – That is why I asked it.

1-033

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – But, here again, my answer would be repetitive, because I really think that we have to respect what is in the Treaty and I am not going to deviate from that.

1-034

Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL). – I forlængelse af det tidligere spørgsmål må det vel være muligt at indrømme, hr. Šefčovič, at det ud fra en miljø- og klimamæssig betragtning ikke er særligt hensigtsmæssigt, at Parlamentet har to hjemsteder. Det må vel være muligt at erkende det!

Så til mit spørgsmål: Jeg ville høre, hvornår den udpegede kommissær vil fremlægge et konkret forslag til en ny vedtægt for EU-tjenestemænd, som sætter en effektiv stopper for svingdørsadfærd blandt personalet Kommissionen? Vi har haft nogle kedelige eksempler, så det ville være godt med et konkret forslag.

I forlængelse heraf vil jeg gerne vide, hvornår den udpegede kommissær vil tage initiativ til en revision af det fælles lobbyregister, og om han i den forbindelse vil gøre noget ved det problem, at en del advokatfirmaer og andre storlobbyister rent faktisk boykotter det lobbyregister, som vi har lavet, og ligefrem reklamerer på deres hjemmesider med, at de ikke videregiver oplysninger om noget som helst? Derfor dette spørgsmål, som er meget konkret, og hvor jeg håber at få konkrete svar fra den udpegede kommissær.

1-035

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – When it comes to the Staff Regulations, we have two very important deadlines. The first one of course is that we have to amend the Staff Regulations when it comes to the creation of the European External Action Service. There we have to move very fast because, if we want to have the European External Action Service up and running, by April, then, of course, we need to do very

fast work and very fast preparation. I intend to respect this deadline and do my best to meet these deadlines.

When it comes to the bigger changes, of course, we will also have a very important debate next year, because, by 2012, we have to decide a new formula on the calculation of salaries and pensions and you, as a legislator in this respect, would be fully involved in this debate. Therefore, I am looking forward to finding a solution with you on this very important matter. With regard to the lobbyists' register, I am ready to engage as soon as possible with a parliamentary group which is responsible for the registers of lobbyists, and my intention is to speed up the work so we could have the joint register as soon as possible. I think it would definitely increase transparency, and it would be much better than it is now, although I think the progress is very clear.

When it comes to the big consultancy companies or to the big law firms, I agree with you that it is not fair when they just hide behind their advocate and client privilege. We have to discuss with the bar associations in the Member States how we can overcome this obstacle, because I think that, if the law firms are lobbying, they must be registered.

1-036

Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL). – Tak! Hr. Šefčovič er en meget venlig – og medgørlig – mand. Det er jeg sådan set også! Derfor ville jeg høre, om vi ikke kunne komme lidt længere i form af nogen konkrete datoer? Selvfølgelig skal det gå så hurtigt, som muligt. Men jeg skal vel ikke forstå hr. Šefčovič på den måde, at man har tænkt sig at lave ændringer i vedtægten for EU-tjenestemænd uden samtidig at løse problemet med svingdørsadfærd? Det kan man vel ikke forestille sig! Vi har lige haft et problem fra Kommissionen, hvor én, der sad med et stort ansvarsområde, gik ud og fik arbejde i et privat firma inden for samme ansvarsområde. Derfor, hvis vedtægten for EU-tjenestemænd under alle omstændigheder skal ændres til april, så skal spørgsmålet om svingdørsadfærd vel også ændres på dette tidspunkt, ikke sandt?

Med hensyn til lobbyregisteret, så kan vi lave en aftale om, at der kommer et konkret forslag inden for lad os sige ét år, eller måske to år. Men det er forhåbentligt ikke noget, hvor vi skal vente fem år, før der kommer en ændring? Kan vi få nogen lidt mere konkrete datoer?

1-037

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I would be very happy to make a date with you and the negotiating team in early February, because I think the discussions and the work are already well advanced. We have a lot of overlapping positions. We also have some disagreements, but I think we can work on this very quickly. I believe we can have the joint register for lobbying very soon.

Concerning the problem of the revolving-door policies, I fully agree with you that the same rules apply for the Commissioners. There is a certain time limitation and

there are rules about what kind of a job you can do once you leave the Commission. So we would not abuse the information you gathered during the performance of your official duties. We have to look at how we can incorporate it in the rules which are applicable to the staff. I think this debate will be here – and it will not be in five years' time, because we have to make the changes at the latest by end of 2012.

1-038

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – How do you think we might avoid any potential confusion between the roles of the new President of the European Council and the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU? Mr Van Rompuy has acknowledged that there are overlaps between the roles of the two positions.

Would you also agree with me that the new President of the European Council should not only report to the European Parliament after European Council meetings, but should submit himself to question-and-answer sessions which he has refused to do on the grounds that he is not constitutionally accountable to Parliament?

1-039

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that, right now, we are in the process of transition. We have a completely new system in place; the Spanish Presidency was already preparing its activities under the old system because we all remember very well the tension which was here in Brussels in October and November as we waited to see if finally the Lisbon Treaty would enter into force or not. So now we are in the transition phase and I am sure that it will be gradually clarified in the full respect of the Lisbon Treaty.

So when it comes to the division of labour, I think that it would be more streamlined in future in favour of performance of duties of the President of the European Council. We will have the summit in Brussels and he would be representing the European Union in the affairs of CFSP and ESDP.

Of course, as you know very well, when it comes to the Community part of the responsibilities of the EU, then the EU will be represented by the President of the Commission.

So I believe that now we are in the transitional phase and we are already learning from the Spanish Presidency how the system operates and how we can improve it with incoming presidencies.

When it comes to the duties of the President of the European Council, it is very clear that he will come to Parliament to debrief you, to inform you about the outcome of the European Council, about the results, about the future plans. When it comes to questions and answers, I have to say that I have not thought about this so I do not have a clear answer for you right now.

1-040

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – I think that any confusion of roles – and particularly any immunity from questioning – impairs transparency, which is the thing that we all hope for in this institution. I think the ground on which Mr Van Rompuy refuses to engage in question-and-answer sessions is, in a way, wrong-headed. He says that he is not constitutionally accountable to Parliament, which is quite right – it did not appoint him and it cannot remove him. But that does not mean that he should not be responsible in the sense of answerable.

1-041

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I agree with you that we have to work in the new spirit which has been brought in by the Lisbon Treaty, and we really have to try to do better.

My ambition is for our institution to be more interlocking than inter-blocking, and definitely for us to communicate with each other much more than before.

Of course it will also help improve the quality of the relationship between the Council and the European Parliament, and between the European Council and the European Parliament, if the President of the European Council is in the Parliament more often than just for the briefing after the European Council meetings.

1-042

Paulo Rangel (PPE). – Mr Šefčovič, I will raise a very precise question on the interinstitutional agreement, concerning the relations between the Commission and the Parliament.

As you know, the new Article 225 of the Lisbon Treaty enshrines the right of Parliament to adopt, with a qualified majority, a legislative initiative. During the last term (2004-2009), Parliament adopted 15 legislative initiatives, and five of these initiatives have still had no formal response.

Are you ready to accept, in the framework of the institutional agreement, the fixing of a deadline of one year after the adoption of a legislative initiative, according to Article 225, for a legislative reaction by the Commission? Are you ready?

1-043

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you very much, Mr Rangel. I am ready to do everything which is in the Treaty. You know very well that in Article 225 there is also a second sentence, which says that after such a legislative initiative is adopted by the Parliament, it is up to the Commission to decide if it adopts it, and will submit a proposal, or if it rejects it.

I think that we have to respect the Treaty. We have to respect that the legislative initiative is one of the Commission's major instruments for being a good European institution. But what I can say to assure you is that I would pay – and I would force my colleagues to pay – the utmost attention to any legislative initiative resolution coming from the Parliament.

To be honest, my figures are a little different. According to the check I have made – because of course this is a very important issue and I was trying to verify this with my colleagues – my figures are that during the last term there were 19 proposals in the category you described and only two were not accepted by the Commission. So I think that we have quite a solid track record. With 17 initiatives from the Parliament, the Commission was working in a positive manner. I think that this shows the respect of the Commission for the European Parliament. I am sure that this respect will be even greater in the coming term because of the new special partnership we want to build together and because we have a new legislative framework to operate in.

1-044

Paulo Rangel (PPE). – We can assume, then, that you do not recognise an indirect legislative competence for Parliament, and so I will ask you this: if you reject these requests for Parliament, would you personally, here and now, make a commitment to come up with a legislative proposal in your field of responsibility, if Parliament were to request this by qualified majority? Are you open to assuming this personal commitment in your field of responsibility?

1-045

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Again I have to tell you that I will respect the Treaty.

If such a legislative initiative comes from Parliament, of course I will study it carefully. I will study it from all angles because it would be to my utmost pleasure to please the European Parliament, as we did 17 out of 19 times in the previous legislature.

However, I cannot commit to something which goes beyond the Treaty. I am sure that we will have such close cooperation that these things will be discussed and that it will not come to the stage where you propose something and we – just by not doing anything – reject it. The goal, of course, is to have a good working relationship and to advance European affairs as much as possible.

1-046

Zita Gurmai (S&D). – As Commissioner-designate responsible for human rights, could you please specify, according to your strategy, the specific measure which will ensure the realisation of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in the allocation of human resources in the European Union institutions? Are you planning on paying special attention to women and colleagues from the so-called new Member States, especially when setting up European external aid services? Are you planning on using quotas?

1-047

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Just to clarify, for the human rights aspect again it would be Mrs Reding, but I absolutely know where your question was heading. It is a question about equal opportunities. I really appreciate all the work you have done in proposing the Women's Charter and really pushing the

issue of a stronger presence of women in the European institutions.

I checked this issue and I think that the Commission has made quite a lot of progress here as well. Currently the figures are that we have 20% of senior managerial posts, 20% of middle managerial posts and 40% of AD posts occupied by women. Of course I can give you my commitment that I am not going to stop at that; we are going to continue with the incentive-based approach where women will be treated well, where we will aim at achieving equality as soon as possible.

I would like to combine this positive pressure for the services with creating the right conditions for a combination of life and work. We will be using more teleworking and more flexitime and I hope that the social infrastructure for Commission officials will allow the high participation of women on higher posts.

When it comes to the new Member States, I am very glad to report that the indicative quotas which were set when the new Member States entered the European Union have been fulfilled – but they have not been fulfilled at the middle and senior managerial level. I will really look into that, so that I could come – if I get your support – by the end of the year to report here to your Parliament and to tell you that the indicative quotas which have been given to the new Member States have been fulfilled and the commitments which the Commission gave at that time to the new Member States have been respected. I am sorry I did not have the time to answer your last question.

1-048

Zita Gurmai (S&D). – Just one small point since I have some more time. You also talked about your main goal: that the Lisbon Treaty is going to bring openness, effectiveness and, of course, more democracy to the European Union. Then you talked about your relations with the European Parliament. What will your contribution be to reflecting the EP's strengthened position in the EU, on an equal footing? Could I ask you to be more precise on that?

1-049

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – The first thing, of course, would be this institutional respect. The Lisbon Treaty clearly puts the European Parliament on an equal footing with the Council in all legislative and budgetary matters and I will use all my influence within the college to ensure that this is respected.

Furthermore, I would like to offer my regular presence at the meetings of the Conference of Presidents and of the Conference of Committee Chairs and at the meetings of your committees if you think I might be helpful in any respect.

I think it would help a lot if we could come to an agreement whereby Commission experts could attend meetings of your working groups, or even your committee, if you are discussing legislation and programming. This would be a direct contact with the

Commission and you would get direct responses to your questions or possible proposals. I am someone who prefers to have direct contact rather than relying on reports, because very often we have a meeting, we send a report, you respond to us, we respond to you, and two months go by. I would prefer to have a more direct way of communicating.

1-050

Stanimir Ilchev (ALDE). – I would like to invite you once again to elaborate on the European Citizens' Initiative from another point of view. When the initiative is undertaken, what role do you think the Commission should have prior to the start of the initiative? It might of course be a neutral or active role, but in particular what role should the Commission have in cases in which the proposal for the initiative seems not to fall within the competencies of the Union? Should the Commission judge, or just wait?

1-051

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that this touches on the very difficult question of admissibility. Here, of course, I will have to wait for the completion of the consultative process on the Green Paper, the public consultation we will have in February and the discussion within the College.

But I will not avoid your question. Let me just tell you my preliminary conclusions on this issue. I think we have to respect the fact that this is really a Citizens' Initiative. I think that, if the Commission intervenes prematurely – at too early a stage – then we are somehow interfering with this democratic process of the Citizens' Initiative. My preference would be to wait until all the aspects and attributes of the Citizens' Initiative have been dealt with, and then the Commission would decide upon that.

I would go even further, because I am sure there will be more questions on admissibility. We could have a situation in which the initiative would be admissible, but it would be very clear that the Commission would never make a proposal on it. Just let me give you one example: maternity leave. If there was a proposal, for example, for shortening it or abolishing this, does it fall within the competences of the Commission? It does. Would the Commission ever make a proposal on it? Never.

So we would be giving two signals. On the one hand we would be giving a green light, creating the impression that we were so pleased with this initiative that the Commission, once the million signatures were there, would present a proposal. Then there would be a big disappointment, because we would tell them we had no intention of doing it.

Therefore, I would really let democracy play its role and keep this as a truly democratic initiative, organised and run by the citizens.

1-052

Stanimir Ilchev (ALDE). – Where the citizens – the initiators – disagree with the attitude of the Commission,

do you believe that they have the right to approach the European Court of Justice?

1-053

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Speaking honestly, I think there are quite clear rules as to what can be brought before the Court of Justice, and I do not think anybody can sue the Commission for exercising its right of initiative.

1-054

Syed Kamall (ECR). – There has been much discussion tonight about the rights of minorities, and I wonder whether I could ask you a question about where citizens in an individual Member State find themselves in a minority position vis-à-vis the rest of the European Union.

I know there is some concern in my country, and some other Member States, about the self-amending nature of the Treaty.

So I wonder whether I could ask you about your understanding of this. Where citizens find themselves in such a minority, could you just tell me this: when a Member State, either through a Parliamentary vote or referendum, votes to reject an amendment to the Treaty, is it your understanding that this Member State effectively exercises the power of veto over the amendment to the Treaty, or not?

1-055

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I did not understand the question. Could you repeat it?

1-056

Syed Kamall (ECR). – If there is a proposed amendment to the Treaty and one Member State – either as a result of a referendum or as a result of a parliamentary vote in that Member State – decides to reject that amendment to the Treaty, but the other Member States want to go ahead, does the Member State that wants to reject the amendment effectively exercise a veto over the amendment to the Treaty? Is that your understanding?

1-057

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that all of us here are quite pleased that we have just completed one institutional debate and we have the new institutional framework now enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. I understand that you are asking about making further possible amendments.

As you know, I believe that this would now be a little bit easier because we have quite clear possibilities on how to do it within the Treaty using the two 'passerelle' procedures. So if the time comes and the need is there, we now have a way of amending the Treaty that will, I hope, be a bit speedier and less painful than it was last time.

Then of course there is a protocol to the Treaty which says that if an amendment is adopted and four-fifths of the Member States agree with the Treaty and one or two

Member States do not agree, then the European Council will have to discuss it and look for a solution to this matter. So this is what I think would happen.

And of course, as it implies, because not all the Member States may agree to the amendments, I think that it is very clear that if we do not have the support of all, we cannot complete the ratification process.

1-058

Syed Kamall (ECR). – I just want to clarify that for the sake of my constituents, because they are very concerned about this self-amending nature of the Treaty. Can you just clarify whether an individual Member State can effectively exercise a veto over an amendment or not? That is all I am asking.

1-059

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Yes, I think if we are speaking about an amendment to primary law – amendment of the Lisbon Treaty – of course the ratification process must be completed. If there is one Member State which is against that – in so far as I understand the Treaty – the amendment will not be carried.

1-060

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – Tak! Som De måske bemærkede, blev jeg en lille smule forsinket her til aften. Ud over, at det selvfølgelig er stærkt generende, så skyldes det, at vi i denne uge befinder os et andet sted, end vi normalt gør, nemlig i Strasbourg. De ved jo, at det er en fast del af traktaten, at sådan er systemet bygget op. Ikke desto mindre synes jeg, at det er væsentligt at finde ud af, hvad Kommissionens holdning er til denne situation - hvilket jeg også ved at andre medlemmer har spurgt Dem om. Vi har jo tidligere set, at det kan være en stærk drivkraft, at Kommissionen har et standpunkt i forhold til at få ændret traktaten. Derfor vil jeg gerne høre, om De i den egenskab, De vil få som kommissær for konstitutionelle anliggender, deler mit og mange borgeres synspunkt om, at det er vanvittigt og spild af tid og spild af ressourcer at flytte parlamentsvirksomheden frem og tilbage mellem Bruxelles og Strasbourg?

1-061

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you for that question, which I have answered before. I understand the great importance of financial implications in these matters but, as a Member of the Commission, which is the guardian of the Treaties, I have to respect the Treaty and I have to defend the Treaty. I can only tell you that Strasbourg is very clearly given as the seat of the European Parliament. We have just adopted this Treaty. It is brand new, fresh from the press, ratified in December. It entered into force on 1 December, so I think we have to respect it.

1-062

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – De siger, at De skal forsvare traktaten. Nuvel, det er jo en del af det opdrag, man får som kommissær. Ikke desto mindre har vi igennem de seneste par år kunnet konstatere, at Barroso - og ikke bare Barroso selv, men også mange af hans

kommissærer - har brugt megen tid på at forsvare en traktat, der endnu ikke var trådt i kraft, altså på at forsvare ændringer af et eksisterende traktatgrundlag. Det vil sige, at det at være kommissær ikke bare er at forsvare den eksisterende traktat. Det må også være at kunne forsvare ændringer i traktaten, for ellers ville det have været forbudt for Barroso og de tidligere kommissærer overhovedet at have advokeret for Lissabontraktaten, før den trådte i kraft. Og jeg tror, at selv den mest naive kan se, at det trods alt ikke er tilfældet.

Derfor kan man godt som kommissær have betragtninger om, hvordan EU-samarbejdet kan blive endnu mere effektivt. Jeg synes, det er meget nedslående, hvis De er af den opfattelse, at De ikke kan have synspunkter i forhold til forbedringer af Lissabontraktaten, fordi den nu en gang er trådt i kraft, når en tidligere Kommission godt har kunnet have betragtninger om forbedringer i forhold til Nicetraktaten, mens den var i kraft.

1-063

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – My view on the Lisbon Treaty is pretty consistent.

I was for it before, I am for it now. I worked very hard for the Lisbon Treaty to enter into force and I really believe that this is a historic moment which will put the European Union on a new track. This is exactly what we are looking for: that the European Union will be more efficient, more transparent and that decisions will be taken in a more comprehensible manner for the citizens.

I truly believe, and I always believed, that the Lisbon Treaty is a very positive development for the European Union. One of the major benefactors of the Lisbon Treaty is the European Parliament, where your powers are tremendously increased. You will be, for the first time, on an absolutely equal footing with the Council. As regards efficiency, I believe that we have a very good recipe to achieve it. We have a new framework which will allow us to be much better, efficient legislators.

1-064

György Schöpflin (PPE). – I am not going to ask you about the Roma questions in Slovakia and I am not going to ask you about the Slovak language law; rather, I would like to ask you about your concept of Europe. It was during your Moscow years that Gorbachev launched the concept of the Common European Home. My question is: this may have very well have influenced, consciously or otherwise, your understanding of European integration – your understanding of the Brussels version, that is. How do you see the difference between the two?

1-065

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – When I went to Moscow, as you rightly pointed out, Mr Gorbachev was in power and Perestroika was in full swing.

When I went there, I was struck by two things. The first one was that the atmosphere in Moscow at that time was

much more democratic than in Prague and Bratislava. When I wanted to learn about what happened in 1968, I just went to the library and got the copies of Time and Newsweek for that year, and this was the first time I saw the pictures of what happened in my country, rather than just listening to what my parents told me.

On the concept of Europe, I believe that Europe is something which is evolving, something which has enormous transformational power.

On Europe within itself and for the outside world, if you had come to me in 1987 and told me that I would be sitting here today in front of you in a hearing to be European Commissioner, I think all of us would be laughing because we would not believe that this could be possible.

But thanks to the European Union, let us look what has happened in 20 years. In 20 years we have completely transformed Europe, and this is a power that you can rarely find anywhere else. And what I think is very important for Europe is that we should maximise the potential for Europe within its borders and we should project it much better towards the outside world, because Europe is an enormously attractive place.

When, as a diplomat, I travelled around and attended different kinds of summit, I saw the admiration of our diplomatic colleagues when they saw how well we are organised, how we work together, and I spoke to the citizens who told me: you know, we wish to be in Europe because you have democracy, you have prosperity, you respect human rights. So this is my concept of Europe.

1-066

György Schöpflin (PPE). – As a matter of fact I was in Bratislava on 21 August 1968 so I can tell you stories about it. But actually I wanted to ask you in my supplementary precisely about the issue of democracy in the context of European integration.

I like the idea of transformational power. I think this is an important concept. Repeated complaints from my constituents, and indeed not just my constituents, focus on the remoteness of EU institutions from the individual in the street. What are your strategies for overcoming this? We know there is a communications strategy, but in particular how does one ensure a much more salient presence by the Commission within the Member States? Do you have views on this?

1-067

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you very much for that question. I also find this one of the major problems of Europe and of the European Union.

You are absolutely right that the European Union – Brussels – is very often perceived as something abstract, distant and difficult to comprehend. I think it is not only up to the Commission, it is up to all of us convinced Europeans to speak up more about Europe and to get more stories into the media – and not only sensational or

negative stories; there are a lot of positive stories to tell. We simply have to communicate them better.

In my current portfolio as Commissioner for Education (in the short period I was there), I was always pleading that we should work very hard to include more of the European curricula in grammar and secondary schools and also in universities, because it is very important for young people to understand how the European Union functions. So I would say: more presence, better schooling and getting positive stories across to our citizens.

1-068

Roberto Gualtieri (S&D). – Grazie presidente. Nelle sue risposte scritte lei ha correttamente sottolineato come sulla base dei trattati l'istituzione del servizio europeo per l'azione esterna non rientri direttamente nelle competenze del suo portafoglio. E tuttavia il suo ruolo, le sue responsabilità, relative ai rapporti interistituzionali e all'amministrazione, le attribuiscono lo stesso un significativo ruolo, io penso, nel processo che porterà all'istituzione di quel servizio.

Ecco, nell'ambito quindi di queste responsabilità e nell'indirizzo che lei ha espresso circa l'importanza di garantire un equilibrio interistituzionale che l'istituzione del servizio europeo di azione esterna è inevitabilmente destinato a condizionare, come pensa di assicurare un adeguato ruolo del Parlamento nel processo istitutivo del servizio e di garantire, di fare in modo che poi il ruolo del Parlamento sia garantito, soprattutto rispetto alla dimensione del bilancio, nell'ambito del servizio europeo di azione esterna, naturalmente?

1-069

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I find this an extremely important question, because as a former diplomat I can assure you that I have only one goal: for the European External Action Service to be a big success.

Because this is something that we definitely need: it was realised by the Member States, it was felt by the European institutions, that we needed more coordination, more coherence and a stronger voice abroad.

So my task will be, and I will do my best, to create the conditions whereby the European External Action Service can focus solely on its priorities, namely the promotion of European interests abroad and ensuring the stronger presence of Europe on the global stage.

What I am going to do is this: I am going to offer a service level agreement to the External Action Service for the management of human resources, be it for salaries or other financial allocations, for logistics, for informatics.

I will even offer the External Action Service our training facilities provided by the European Administrative School, because I believe that our diplomats need to have a joint training. What I would like to see is a

European External Action Service *esprit de corps* that will be perceived not just by the institutions but also by the capitals, the Member States, so that this is truly a European External Action Service. By then I am sure we will have overcome potential tensions and rivalries between national diplomacies on the one hand and the European External Action Service on the other.

As for the role of the European Parliament, you will be fully involved in the discussion on the budget amendment; you will be fully involved in the discussion on the amendment of the Staff Regulations.

I think that the role of the European Parliament will be very clear and I would like to underline that I will form a European External Action Service which will be fully accountable to the European Parliament.

1-070

Roberto Gualtieri (S&D). – Grazie, più precisamente, rispetto appunto al ruolo che il trattato attribuisce, all'articolo 336, che prevede una procedura legislativa ordinaria in materia di definizione delle regolamentazioni del personale, dello *staff*, in che misura quindi, concretamente, lei immagina il procedimento, la procedura per addivenire a questi emendamenti relativi alla regolamentazione del personale?

1-071

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think it would be the same. So first we have to present the proposal to the College. We have to discuss it with the staff unions, and we have to present the proposals which will be presented to you and to the Council and will be dealt with within the framework of ordinary procedures.

This is what I would like to do, but the time pressures are enormous. I was just asking my colleagues in the Commission how much time they usually needed for making changes to the Staff Regulations – you do not want to hear the number of months it took. Now we have, let us say, a couple of weeks, so I will have to do my best and invest all my energy into meeting the established deadlines – because I am truly convinced that we need the External Action Service up and running as soon as possible – and, of course, respecting all the legislative procedures so that the rights and prerogatives of the European Parliament are fully respected.

1-072

Indrek Tarand (Verts/ALE). – Mr Chair, I am sorry that I was late but for a new Member it is really difficult to understand when one must be in Strasbourg and when in Brussels.

Mr Šefčovič, you said that you would like to focus on a clear human resources strategy and vision, which should enable all policy areas to be based on the fundamental principles of ethics, transparency, equal opportunities and non-discrimination. My question is: what concrete measures will you take to ensure that the current disproportionate and unfair division of high-ranking positions will be divided more equally between all Member States?

My second question regards transparency. Concerning the lobby register, I would like to know if you are in favour of a compulsory lobby register or not. If yes, what will you do to get law firms and think tanks in this register, which Mr Kallas desired but could not achieve?

1-073

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Firstly, I will deal with the senior posts. I agree with you that having a nomination for only one Director-General from the new Member State is not enough. At the same time I realise that this was a very difficult, even unique, exercise, because this was the largest wave of enlargement. We have been working on this indicative quota system to fill in the officials from the new Member States.

As a first step I will try to honour the commitments we gave to the new Member States that, by the end of this transitional period of 2010, the indicative quotas which are being assigned to Member States would be respected. I have already had preliminary discussions with my human resources colleagues and we are thinking about possible target selection processes or other measures. I would also very much like to see a more representative presence of the new Member States in the senior positions in the European Commission.

When it comes to the register, here again I think we have to point out more frequently that in the end this is success. I remember very well the scepticism when we first started this initiative some time ago, that this would not work, that we would not achieve it. This voluntary approach and incentive-based approach has actually worked out quite well. The latest figures I have show that in 2003 100 companies were registered. I would be very happy to work with the European Parliament on a joint register. Sorry but I do not have more time.

1-074

Presidente. – On. Tarand, vuole intervenire ancora? Avrebbe a disposizione ancora un massimo di un minuto?

1-075

Indrek Tarand (Verts/ALE). – If I could give the Commissioner 30 more seconds to reply – only in that case.

1-076

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – As I said, I think that this voluntary approach worked quite well. Now we have to work with a team from the European Parliament, headed by Mrs Wallis, on how we are going to establish the joint register and how we can combine the advantages of both.

Unfortunately, the European Commission does not have the prize the European Parliament offers – that if you are registered you will get an access card. Even if we cannot give access cards to anybody who is registered in the lobbies register – because we are an executive organisation and this would simply not be possible – we have to combine our strengths – the European

Parliament's approach and the Commission's approach – when we have the joint register, which I think will be very transparent and very clear. It shows that great progress has been made from what we had two years or so ago to what we have now.

1-077

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – Could you please pronounce your surname for us? We have heard about four or five alternative pronunciations this afternoon and we would be grateful for clarification.

And in trying to find a political compass for you: do you describe or think of yourself as a federalist? Or perhaps you are still in the closet?

(Laughter)

1-078

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – The first question was easier Mr Duff, I have to tell you.

So my name is Maroš Šefčovič and I am not in the closet as you can see. But of course it is very difficult to tell you, because what does 'federalist' mean?

Yes, I know the position. I have read Mr Duff's articles and his books, so I know what his position on this issue is.

I think that what we have to do right now is to implement the framework we have here. I am a strong supporter of an ever closer union. Ever closer union because I think we have to have realistic goals. I think that we have to integrate at a pace which is acceptable to our citizens, which is well understood by them; which does not create anxiety among our citizens that we are moving too fast, or fears that some kind of super-entity will take over the national traditions and national identity. If you ask me where I stand, I stand on the side of an ever closer union of the European Union.

1-079

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – That is a good starting point for a thorough discussion, especially of the financial reform that we have to address over the period of this Commission and Parliament, where federal thought is going to be greatly required.

1-080

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Sorry, Mr Duff, I did not understand the question. I am sorry.

1-081

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – It was a comment and a plea.

1-082

Elmar Brok (PPE). – Herr designierter Kommissar! Ich stimme mit Ihnen überein, dass der Auswärtige Dienst zu einer *one-voice*-Politik führen muss, so wie Sie das dargestellt haben. Aber wir wissen ja, dass der Auswärtige Dienst der Versuch ist, den intergouvernementalen Teil der Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik und den Gemeinschaftsteil der Außenbeziehungen zusammenzuführen. Wie wollen Sie gewährleisten, dass der Gemeinschaftsteil

Gemeinschaftsteil bleibt, im Interesse der Kommission und im Interesse des Europäischen Parlaments einschließlich des Haushaltsrechts, des Haushaltskontrollrechts und all der damit zusammenhängenden Fragen wie auch der Gesetzgebung im Bereich zum Beispiel des *multiannual programming*, wenn dieses in einer Verwaltung zusammengefasst ist?

1-083

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think how we are going to put all the things together is very important because, of course, the External Action Service will not be there only for CFSP or ESDP matters. We would like to use this new instrument as a tool for the more coherent external action that the European Union would be undertaking abroad.

In relation to the remit of my responsibilities: how are we to organise the work at the delegations abroad, for example? (It is very clear that the staff of the delegations abroad will also be responsible for many of the Community programmes and policies.) We are already putting into the staff regulations what the chain of command would be. It will be very clear that, when it comes to Community matters, the people in the field, in our delegations will of course have to respect the positions and instructions coming from the Commission.

Concerning the higher level: I am pretty sure that the college will be very careful to ensure that Community policies and the Community method are fully respected in all areas – even in the areas covered by the European External Action Service. Because what we are looking for here is synergy; we would like to see that the Community policies and actions the EU is going to undertake in the CFSP and the ESDP are coherent and coordinated and that they will, in the end, have a much stronger impact when it comes to execution and analysis.

1-084

Elmar Brok (PPE). – Herr Kommissionskandidat, mit dieser Beantwortung kann ich nicht ganz zufrieden sein, zumal sie auf die vorherige Frage schon einmal gesagt haben, das Europäische Parlament solle bei den Fragen eingebunden werden. Eingebunden bedeutet überhaupt nichts. Das ist keine Rechtsfrage. Auch hier geht es ja darum, dass nicht bei den Botschaften, bei den Delegationen, sondern wenn es wirklich um die Entscheidungen geht, die Rechte des Europäischen Parlaments gewährleistet sind, und nicht die Synergieeffekte dazu führen oder genutzt werden, die Frage zu entparlamentarisieren und zu entkommunitarisieren. Da der Vertrag ja vorsieht, dass die Hohe Beauftragte/Vizepräsidentin der Kommission Ihren Vorschlag dem Rat zur Beschlussfassung nur nach Konsultation des Europäischen Parlaments und mit Zustimmung der Kommission zuleiten kann. Würden Sie im Falle, dass in diesem Prozess das Europäische Parlament den Vorschlag ablehnt, in der Kommission darauf hinwirken, dass die Kommission dem Vorschlag die Zustimmung verweigern würde?

1-085

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I am sorry, I probably misunderstood your first question. Of course I think that the involvement of the European Parliament in this decision-making is absolutely crucial and, honestly speaking, I cannot imagine that we would establish the European External Action Service or undertake any decision that would be contradicted by the European Parliament. It is very clear that, when we proceed with such a huge undertaking, we should have as wide a consensus as possible and I cannot imagine that an institution like the European External Action Service would function without the clear unequivocal support of the European Parliament. I can assure you that I will do everything possible to find a solution where the European Parliament is not only involved but supports the decision that is eventually taken.

1-086

Matthias Groote (S&D). – Herr Šefčovič! Geringe Wahlbeteiligung bei den Europawahlen – oft bekommen wir Parlamentarier in Bürgersprechstunden zu hören, Europa sei weit weg. Das Thema Bürgerbeteiligung, Bürgerinitiativen ist angesprochen worden. Wir hatten am vergangenen Donnerstag die Anhörung der Kollegin Kroes, bei der ich das Thema elektronische Beteiligung angesprochen habe. Für dieses Ressort ist sie zuständig. Wie wollen Sie in der Verwaltung mehr Bürgerbeteiligung durchsetzen? Haben Sie konkrete Pläne in diese Richtung? Wenn ja, welche?

1-087

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – There are, of course, several things, some of which we have already discussed.

We have the Citizens' Initiative. I believe that this new form of communication with national parliaments will open another chapter – another instrument – for communication.

We probably have to take a better look at how programmes are functioning. We have quite a few programmes running under the Europe For Citizens heading where – if I am not mistaken – there is something like EUR 200 million allocated for the financial period.

These programmes are aimed at increasing awareness of the European Union and getting citizens involved in European affairs. Let us look to see whether they are efficient enough, if they are working well and if they are delivering to us what we have been expecting from them.

Another thing I think is very important is widespread education – spreading knowledge about the European Union. Sometimes I have been very surprised to find my colleagues from administrations and from the public services of different Member States with a very vague knowledge of how the European Union functions.

It is surprising that this is happening, but sometimes I have a feeling that the first wave of really convinced Europeans, who pushed Europeans together when we

had huge landmark decisions taking place – such as the internal market, and the main wave of enlargement – are not on the political scene anymore. So sometimes we are missing these flag-bearers of the stronger, better European Union.

I think this is all a very complex issue and we have to tackle that at various levels – how to increase Europeans' awareness and how to get them involved in European affairs. I would say that I would definitely start with schools and universities.

1-088

Matthias Groote (S&D). – Konkret: Wie soll die Zusammenarbeit mit den anderen Kollegen ressortübergreifend im Kollegium aussehen? Wie gesagt, wir hatten am letzten Donnerstag die Anhörung von Frau Kroes und wir haben dort auf mehrfache Nachfrage keine Antwort auf die Frage bekommen, wie diese Sachen konkret umgesetzt werden sollen.

1-089

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think cooperation with the other Commissioners will be good. I can tell you that the team prepared intensively for these hearings, and we now hope that we can get the support of the European Parliament so that we can start working as a new Commission, as a new college.

My experience from my four months as a Commissioner is that there is a good collegial spirit within the Commission. There is very good teamwork and I believe that, once we get the chance, we will cooperate together very well.

If there are some uncertainties concerning our remits and responsibilities, I am sure they will be clarified very soon, and the first practical problems which arise will very rapidly lead to the clear solution of any possible overlaps between our responsibilities. I am sure we will work it out very soon.

1-090

József Szájer (PPE). – It looks like your hearing and your past are revolving around the number five. You mentioned that you said five words, I think, and I am sure they were five loaded words which labelled ethnic communities as being abusers of the social system. These five words the very next day elevated you into the list of anti-gypsy European politicians which was made at that time, according to the reports of the time, and it is still quoted from time to time that you were making statements which could be considered anti-gypsy.

Now, five years later, you are saying that you do not remember your words and I really deeply regret that you cannot recall such important words, because they were really loaded words and are highly relevant to your position of providing equal opportunities for all of the employees of the European Union, of the Commission. These are really important words which were said in an official conference of the Commission at that time. My question is: how could it happen that for five years you did not find the opportunity to say that you regretted this

response, despite the fact that respected Roma civil organisations in Brussels reported what you said and criticised you for it. Why only five days before your hearing did you start to qualify and apologise on this subject?

1-091

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-delegate. – Thank you very much, Mr Szájer, for this question, because I can clarify my position a second time.

As I said, they were six words, and they were quoted from the conference for stagiaires, six years ago. This was a conference organised for stagiaires, where I was a last-minute replacement. It would not be honest for me to tell you that I know exactly what I said exactly five years ago. That was a conference on the differences in social systems and migratory pressures within Europe. I completed my presentation; I took questions and answers; and at that time, nobody raised this issue with me – neither then, nor after the conference – and I learned about the negative feeling of my statement in the conference only five days ago. So I could not do anything else.

I can tell you that today I spoke with Mr Valery Nicolai, who was at the conference. He himself told me that perhaps the best thing, if he had felt offended at the time, would have been to come up to me so that we could discuss it. Because if you are trying to label me as somebody who is anti-Roma, this is totally wrong and I feel offended. I feel offended, because it goes against my track record; it goes against my beliefs; and I can prove it by the concrete actions I listed something like two hours ago.

I am ready to work very actively in putting the Roma issues on the table of the European Commission and of the European Council, as I did before. I think the support of Roma NGOs, Roma volunteers and Roma communities, which have been very offended by the way all these were described in the media, is the best proof I can have that I was working with them, I was working for them, they are supporting me and they know me much better than anybody else.

(Applause)

1-092

József Szájer (PPE). – I did not get an answer as to why you waited five years. On 21 January 2005, which was two days after the conference when you said these words – and it was an official conference of the Commission – there was already a protest.

It cannot be that an ambassador of a country just ignores, for five years, protests against his words. If I am a politician – and I am a politician – and if I hear something and am offended, I go to the press, I immediately make statements.

What is certain is that the only public information about this conference – I was not there, you were there – is that Valeriu Nicolae, then Executive Director of the

European Roma Information Office, wrote about it. If someone writes such bad things about me I immediately go to the press and tell them.

My question was: why did you not do that for five years? You did so only five days before your hearing.

I do not want to hear this now, for your term of office is no more than five years. When you end your term here as a Commissioner – and I wish you luck in this position – if you then tell us that you do not remember what you said to us at this meeting, you would not give the impression of a being good politician, so I cannot accept that answer.

1-093

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I was really not aware that I offended anybody. It was not brought to my attention. If it was I can assure you that I would have immediately got in contact with the European Roma Information Office and I am sure that by now we would be the best of friends. I am working on the same issues as they are – promotion of the Roma issue at European level. If the Roma issue is in a transversal priority position, it will not only be treated as a human rights issue but also treated complexly as an issue of socio-economic conditions and as an issue of housing and an issue of education.

I can really assure you that if I had known at the time that I had offended somebody, that the people who were there from the Information Office felt negatively about it, I would have apologised immediately. I have no problem in apologising if I say something wrong. But I truly cannot recollect what I said at the stagiaire conference five years ago.

I assure you that I have no anti-Roma feelings whatsoever because it is against my philosophy, and all my professional life I have been trying to do my best to promote their interest, be it at national or be it at European level.

(Applause)

1-094

David Martin (S&D). – I wanted to ask a different question but I cannot help but respond to Mr Szájer's point on the Roma. I have a very big Roma community in an area of Glasgow called Govanhill, and I have worked closely with them. I asked them if they had any problems with your nomination as a Commissioner. To be honest, they had never heard of you, but they contacted the European Roma Information Office, who came back with a very strong statement that they actually applaud the work that you have done in terms of social inclusion for the Roma. So I absolutely agree with you that you have zero problems with the Roma community, and I hope this will stop being raised as an issue.

My question is: local government plays a big part in implementing European policy. They sometimes do not feel as involved or as consulted as they might be. Do

you have any plans in your new role to involve local government, both in information policy and the implementation of European policies in the future?

1-095

Maroš Šefčovič, *Commissioner-designate*. – I really appreciate your comment.

On local government, as the Commissioner responsible for interinstitutional relations, I would also be responsible for closer cooperation with the Committee of the Regions.

I think we have huge potential there for better cooperation. The Committee of the Regions has also got new powers, and their position will be stronger. I have already spoken to the President of the Committee of the Regions about how we can use the new framework which the Lisbon Treaty gives us, and how we can better involve local communities in the European debate.

Firstly, I think that we have to spread information and, secondly, we probably have to create more opportunities for local representatives to come to Brussels, to the European Parliament and to the Commission, so that we can explain how things work and operate.

To be honest, I am sometimes struck, when we receive a delegation of local leaders, by the fact that they really do not have the amount of information they need to use the potential the European Union offers local government.

I think that we have to look for a creative solution in this matter, because one of the descriptions of Europe is that it is a 'Europe of the regions'. It is very clear that we have to look for ways in which we can lock them into the process much more strongly than before.

1-096

David Martin (S&D). – Sticking with the principle of subsidiarity, the Members of the Scottish Parliament that I speak to – and I am sure it applies to other regional parliaments – are very interested in the new role that national parliaments will have in this area, and they wonder if, within the existing Treaty, there is a role for them in ensuring that subsidiarity principles are implemented properly. Do you envisage any way that regional parliaments can be involved in the subsidiarity process?

1-097

Maroš Šefčovič, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much for that question because it really is a very important one. As you know, in the protocols on the role of national parliaments, Protocol 1 and Protocol 2, in the Lisbon Treaty, it is very clear that we are speaking only about the national parliaments, so that each national parliament has two votes, depending on whether it is bicameral or not. But I fully agree that – especially in the case of Scotland – there is a very clear devolution of powers, there is a very clear division of competences; Scotland has a very strong position and role in justice, in education and in many other areas.

What I think I could do to respect the Treaty and to get the regional parliaments more on board would be to appeal to the national parliaments to continue with this inclusion of the national and regional parliamentarians into the European legislative process, to ask them to get in touch with the regional parliaments so that the opinions they send are not only their own, but also respect those of the regional parliaments.

1-098

Μαριέττα Γιαννάκου (PPE). – Κύριε Πρόεδρε, ο κ. Επίτροπος στις γραπτές απαντήσεις του, και κυρίως στην απάντηση 5 στην τελευταία παράγραφο, σημειώνει ότι η Ένωση μπορεί να υποστηρίξει τις προσπάθειες των κρατών μελών για τη βελτίωση της ικανότητάς τους να φροντίζουν το δίκαιο της Ένωσης και να προσαρμόζονται, αλλά και της διοικητικής τους ικανότητας, με σκοπό να αποτελέσουν παράδειγμα για τον εκσυγχρονισμό της δημόσιας διοίκησης στην Ευρώπη και να διαδραματίσουν σημαντικό ρόλο στην ενίσχυση των σχέσεων και στην ανταλλαγή των βέλτιστων πρακτικών μεταξύ των κρατών μελών· σημειώνει δε ότι η Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή και τα θεσμικά όργανα γενικά πρέπει να εμμένουν στην τήρηση των θεμελιωδών αρχών χρηστής διοίκησης, όπως η διαφάνεια, η ισότητα ευκαιριών, η δεοντολογία κλπ., τηρώντας μάλιστα την αρχή των έξυπνων ρυθμίσεων.

Κύριε Επίτροπε, και προηγουμένως με άλλους προκατόχους σας είχε σημειωθεί το γεγονός ότι η Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή έχει έναν παρά πολύ μεγάλο αριθμό υπαλλήλων και ένας αριθμός εξ αυτών είναι στην ουσία απενεργοποιημένοι, δεν χρησιμοποιείται ουσιαστικά, ούτε χρησιμοποιεί τις ικανότητές του. Πώς σκοπεύετε να αντιμετωπίσετε αυτό το φαινόμενο για το οποίο το Κοινοβούλιο έχει κάνει διάφορα σχόλια όχι μόνον τώρα αλλά εδώ και πάρα πολλά χρόνια; Πώς σκοπεύετε να αξιοποιήσετε τα στελέχη της Ευρωπαϊκής Επιτροπής με βάση όσα σημειώνετε εδώ για τη διαφάνεια, τη χρηστή διοίκηση και το καλό παράδειγμα;

1-099

Maroš Šefčovič, *Commissioner-designate*. – Regarding the Lisbon Treaty and the articles on offering good public service to the citizens or on good administrative behaviour or on good administrative cooperation between the EU institutions and the Member States; again I think that we have to make the best of it. We have to present initiatives on this matter.

One thing I am seriously considering is to work on and adopt the European Code of Conduct for Good Administration, which I would like to offer, not only to the European Commission but also to all institutions in Brussels; and which I hope in the end would serve as a positive example of good administrative cooperation, behaviour and so forth, for national administrations.

Regarding staff: I have not said they are underemployed or they had nothing to do. Now of course the debate is going on as to how to maximise the potential of the Commission staff. We have to closely follow zero growth policies until 2013. But we know very well that

the Commission – and as such the European Union – has got many more tasks to do than before.

What we are doing right now is mobilising internal reserves. Until 2013 we will find from within the Commission reserve 1 600 positions and I will press the DG services to look for additional reserves, to look for possibilities as to how we can transfer people from administration and support to frontline activities.

At the same time we have to fulfil a lot of functions in the field of access to documents, in the field of translation and many other things, which you cannot describe as frontline activities but, at the same time, are absolutely essential for the performance of the Commission and for serving the citizens.

1-100

Enrique Guerrero Salom (S&D). – Señor Comisario propuesto, he leído con detenimiento sus respuestas al cuestionario escrito que le ha remitido el Parlamento y he podido comprobar su alto grado de compromiso con el desarrollo de la iniciativa legislativa popular, un compromiso explícito y un compromiso concreto en su desarrollo, en su contenido y en los tiempos de ese desarrollo.

Las últimas noticias son que, la semana pasada, los 27 ministros encargados de Asuntos Europeos, reunidos en España, debatieron un *non paper*, elaborado por la Comisión y por la Presidencia española, y llegaron a un alto grado de acuerdo sobre el desarrollo de la iniciativa legislativa.

Quisiera preguntarle si, desde el primer momento de su confirmación, está preparado para trabajar aprovechando este impulso inicial con el fin de concluir el desarrollo de la iniciativa en este mismo semestre.

1-101

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Yes, I am. Because I know how important it is for European citizens; I know how important it is for the Spanish Presidency and I will do the utmost possible within the compulsory timeframes set down for the legislative process.

What we have to do right now is to complete the consultation process by the end of January. On 22 February we will have, as part of good lawmaking, the huge public consultation on the results of the Green Paper. I can tell you that in some aspects of the Citizens' Initiative we are really looking for the right answers because they are just simply not that easily available.

Once this is done I will do my best and I will use all my influence so that we can present the draft regulation on the Citizens' Initiative as soon as possible – I hope it will be in March/April or maybe sooner. I have to get the responses from the consultation; I have to be in this job to have the chance to monitor where the process stands so I can really exert pressure.

I am definitely aware that this is a huge priority; that we want to have it on the legislative table as soon as possible and I can promise you that I will do my utmost.

1-102

Enrique Guerrero Salom (S&D). – Sólo quiero subrayar la importancia de que desarrollemos esta iniciativa muy rápidamente para que los ciudadanos europeos no juzguen las reformas del Tratado de Lisboa solamente como algo institucional, frío y lejano a la gente. Tenemos que ser conscientes de que los ciudadanos han de percibir que ahora disponen, con esta iniciativa, de una nueva voz, y que esa voz hará más potente la voz electoral.

1-103

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I only wish to say that I fully agree with you. I read the report of the meeting of the European Ministers, which is really very encouraging. I can confirm that there is goodwill, not only in the European Parliament but also in the Commission, and very clearly in the Member States, too. I am therefore very hopeful that this process will move very quickly and we will have the Citizens' Initiative adopted very soon.

1-104

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE). – I will save the technical questions for the end. What we would like to establish here is: what are your views on Europe and European integration and whether you have the courage to actually pronounce your own views. There were some questions about it; Mr Schöpflin asked you about your views on Europe and Mr Duff tried to tempt you to actually pronounce yourself on federalism.

We have just finished another round of institutional reform. There will be a report from a reflection group headed by Mr González, but I would like to ask you a very specific question. Do you think that the European Union needs further institutional reform? If so, when should it embark upon such a reform, during your mandate or not? If so, in what fields should it embark upon such a reform? Does the European Union need new competencies according to your own views?

1-105

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Regarding institutional reform: I think that first we have to learn how the Union would operate under the new circumstances and how we would be able to maximise the potential of the European Union with the new legislative framework.

It is very clear that the European Union is an ever closer union. It is an evolving institution; so I am sure that there will be a time when we will need additional institutional reforms. When? I think it would very much depend on several factors: Firstly, how successful we are with the process of enlargement. I am sure that, if we continue with enlargement and have several new Member States coming into the European Union, it is clear that we will have to look again at how we can operate with a larger number under the existing legislative framework.

I think the crises of the last year – and the financial crisis especially – again demonstrated that what we would need would be a better coordinated response to the crises. I think that, under the circumstances, we did relatively well, but it is very clear that we could do much better.

Therefore, if the European Union needed more competencies, I am sure that it would be in the area of public finances, state budgets, managing deficits and, of course, in the area of greater coordination of the major economic policies, so we would not be in situations like the one a year or two ago where, from some corners of Europe, even the basic prerogatives and basic policies of the European Union were being questioned.

1-106

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE). – Very briefly: if we were to come to the conclusion that such an institutional reform was needed, how should it be carried out?

1-107

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that right now we have the mechanisms which are offered by the Treaty, so we can go for the mechanisms which are in the Treaty. It means that we could use them.

I think that there are two possibilities for how it could be done under the current Treaty and I think, depending on the importance of the change, we could use one or the other.

1-108

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE). – Señor Šefčovič, ¿usted qué cree? ¿Cómo han actuado la Unión Europea, y la Comisión en concreto, en la cuestión de Haití?

1-109

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think in circumstances like in Haiti you can never do enough. This is a tragedy which is out of all proportion, where the whole international community acting together will have to invest enormous efforts to alleviate even slightly the huge tragedy of the Haitian people. I think the European Union, as a major supporter of countries in the developing world and the major provider of development aid, should be at the frontline of activities to help Haiti get back on track. It is very difficult to judge the response of the European Union to Haiti, because I do not have the latest information.

1-110

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE). – Yo también estoy de acuerdo con usted en que es muy importante prevenir para el futuro. Por ejemplo, hay una propuesta -yo creo que de Michel Barnier- que se llama *EuroAid*. ¿La Comisión estaría dispuesta a tomar en cuenta *EuroAid* para el futuro? Y, en segundo lugar, ¿no cree usted que Lady Ashton debería estar hoy en Haití?

1-111

Should not Lady Ashton be in Haiti today?

1-112

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I agree with you that if a tragedy like this strikes, the European flag must be there among the first, because what counts is that the help, when it comes, comes on time, is proportionate and well targeted – and here I think that we definitely have to improve our reaction mechanisms and, as you said, we have to involve the European External Action Service more closely in such operations.

It must be very clear that when, there is a problem, we will be there, because sometimes we complain, saying: ‘Look, we are helping the developing world all year round, and then when it comes to some crucial debate or discussion, such as Copenhagen, they do not always back us.’

I think we have to be very realistic about this, to look again at what we can do better, and I am absolutely in agreement with you that, when it comes to a tragedy like this, the European flag must be there.

1-113

Ingeborg Gräßle (PPE), CONT. – Herr Vorsitzender! Herr Kommissar, Sie vertreten ja einen Bereich, in dem die Kommission ein parlamentsfreies Selbstorganisationsrecht beansprucht. Bislang enttäuscht es schon, dass die Fragen aussagekräftiger waren als Ihre Antworten. Sagen Sie uns bitte eine Verschärfung des Verhaltenskodex für Kommissare zu, eine Deklarationspflicht für Einladungen zu Reisen sowie eine Bestimmung, was ein Interessenkonflikt ist und eine unabhängige Beschwerdestelle dafür.

1-114

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – As I said, I am ready to engage with the European Parliament, and of course within the college, to discuss how we can improve the Code of Conduct. I think we should definitely review it. The first thing is clearly for me to do my best to ensure that the declarations of interests are uniform and that they are regularly updated – at least once a year.

If there is a major change in someone’s personal situation, we would improve and concretise the gift policy. I will discuss with you and within the college what we can do with hospitality. I understand that there is a need to have an overview of this as well. We have to find the right balance: how to have a clear overview of the situation and how to create the conditions to ensure that the protocol obligations, which are very often connected to the performance of the duties of the Commissioner, are also respected. Here I would definitely look for ideas.

One more area where I would need your help, your advice, would be: how are we going to react to the political reality which is there? Many of my fellow or future fellow Commissioners have very important positions in their parties. I think that, here, the European Parliament is more political. I believe that the Commission is getting more political as well. I think we also have to look at the way we can combine all these things. I think it would be of great help if we could

achieve some common standards, at least for the top executives in all European institutions. I believe this would be clear proof that transparency is being improved all over the European institutions.

1-115

Ingeborg Gräßle (PPE), CONT. – Herr Kommissar! Ich darf noch einmal auf den Unterschied hinweisen: Kommissare sind Amtsträger, Abgeordnete nicht. Ich fürchte, dass die Kommission versucht, sich hinter allen zu verstecken. Das werden wir natürlich nicht mitmachen. Es wäre schön, wenn Sie das noch einmal klären könnten.

Ein weiterer Punkt ist für uns ebenfalls wichtig: Wir brauchen von Ihnen eine Zusicherung, dass die Budgetverantwortung im Auswärtigen Dienst als *authorising officer by subdelegation* – also Budgetverantwortung – an den Status des EU-Beamten geknüpft bleibt, so wie es bis jetzt ist. Denn nur dann können wir Haftungsregeln weiterverfolgen. Eine Ausdehnung auf alle anderen würde bedeuten, dass ich meine Haftungsregeln in die Tonne treten kann. Damit würde das gesamte Konstrukt, auf dem die Haushaltsordnung der Europäischen Union aufgebaut ist, in sich zusammenbrechen. Bekommen wir eine solche Zusicherung von Ihnen?

1-116

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I will have to come back to you. I honestly do not have enough information on this, as it would really fall under the remit of my colleague who is responsible for the budget.

But it is very clear – and I take your point – that we have to make absolutely sure that budgetary questions and financing are very transparent. It is under the control of the European Parliament; the European Parliament will be giving discharge to the European External Action Service, which will be accountable to the European Parliament.

I am sorry but this is the best answer I can give you right now.

1-117

Inés Ayala Sender (S&D), CONT. – Señor Šefčovič, usted tiene una larga carrera como diplomático. En primer lugar, voy a hablarle, precisamente, del control del gasto, de la puesta en marcha y del desarrollo del Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior, siguiendo un poco a mi colega Gräßle.

Usted ha dicho en sus respuestas escritas que la puesta en marcha de ese Servicio Exterior es el gran reto, y que deberá responder adecuadamente ante el Parlamento; que deberá ser efectivo, deberá ser eficaz, rentable, etc. Para ello, cuenta usted con dos instrumentos: la propuesta de modificación del procedimiento legislativo ordinario y el apoyo administrativo.

Le pregunto, siguiendo un poco lo que ha dicho la señora Gräßle: ¿puede comprometerse aquí, ante el Parlamento, a que el Servicio Europeo de Acción

Exterior sea un verdadero servicio de la Unión Europea y no un mero instrumento intergubernamental? ¿Puede concretarnos algo más? Habla usted de una escuela común, de formación, el espíritu de cuerpo, pero díganos algo más.

En segundo lugar, ¿cómo piensa usted garantizar plenamente el derecho de control del Parlamento Europeo en el marco de la aprobación del presupuesto? ¿Cómo nos asegurará la transparencia tanto en la puesta en marcha del Servicio de Acción Exterior como en el funcionamiento posterior?

Finalmente, desde su competencia interinstitucional, ¿cómo cooperará con el Parlamento Europeo para que no vuelva a repetirse lo que ha ocurrido con la aprobación de la gestión del presupuesto de 2007 en el caso del Consejo, que rehusó colaborar y cooperar para darnos la información necesaria hasta el último minuto, y también con organismos internacionales como las Naciones Unidas en cuanto a la cooperación?

1-118

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you for that question and I shall try to be as telegraphic as you. Concerning the setting up of the European External Action Service, it will of course have to be the package solution, so it means we would need the budgetary amendment, we would need the amendment of the Staff Regulations and in the end we would need the Council decision.

I can promise you that I will do my utmost to ensure that the European Parliament is consulted on all these events so that there will be no surprises and there will be strong, wide consensus behind creating and setting up the European External Action Service.

I believe it should be a real European service. As I said, there must be a strong *esprit de corps*. It must be felt that this is a European service by the European institutions, by the citizens and by the Member States. I. One of its tasks, and one of the reasons why I pushed to have the European External Action Service, is that, if there were a major earthquake like the one in Haiti or the tsunami in South-East Asia, it would offer consular assistance to people in need. European citizens would see that European officials and diplomats would come to their rescue if there were a problem or a crisis.

Just telegraphically coming back to the debate with the Council on budget discharge, I would also represent the Commission in the General Affairs Council. I would do my best to work closely with colleagues in the Council. I would use my contacts and my influence there to try to convey the displeasure and the messages of the European Parliament. In this area also we have to cooperate better than before.

1-119

Inés Ayala Sender (S&D), CONT. – Siguiendo a mi compañero David Martin, sólo quería preguntarle: en relación con los Parlamentos regionales que tienen competencias legislativas y competencias de control

presupuestario, ¿está usted dispuesto a cooperar con la REGLEG, que es la asociación europea de las regiones con capacidad legislativa, por lo que se refiere al principio de subsidiariedad?

1-120

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Absolutely! I think that subsidiarity is a very important principle and a very important issue because we must be absolutely sure, if we are adopting a decision, that it is adopted at an appropriate level which guarantees the most efficient execution of the decision and that the decisions we are taking are giving real value to our citizens.

I think for that we need to further improve our law-making system. We have to work more with the smart resolution concept. Part of this is wide consultation, be it over the content or quality of the legislation, but also the level at which this legislation should be adopted. In this respect it is very important to have the opinion of regional or local parliamentarians, because in the end it is often they who are actually involved in implementing and executing these decisions.

1-121

Jorgo Chatzimarkakis (ALDE), CONT. – Herr Kommissar! Sie haben sich zur Transparenzinitiative geäußert. Das finde ich sehr gut. Allerdings bezieht sich diese Transparenzinitiative vor allem auf Lobbyisten. Meine Frage an Sie: Wie halten Sie es mit den Nichtregierungsorganisationen, den NGO? Die Kommission hat es bisher nicht geschafft, überhaupt eine einheitliche Definition einer NGO zu liefern. Zweitens hat sie es nicht geschafft, eine Übersicht zu liefern, welche NGO was bekommt. Man muss sich das einzeln bei den Generaldirektoren zusammensuchen.

Mich interessiert in diesem Zusammenhang, ob Sie gedenken, eine solche einheitliche Auflistung von Nichtregierungsorganisationen, die in den Genuss von Mitteln der Europäischen Union kommen, zu erstellen. Ich will auch von Ihnen wissen, ob Sie darüber informiert sind, dass es einzelne NGO gibt, die sogar gegen die Europäische Union oder einzelne Organe arbeiten. Ich halte das für einen untragbaren Zustand und würde gerne Ihre Meinung dazu wissen.

1-122

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – It is, of course, very important for the European Union and Commission as such to support the development of civil society.

I think that NGOs play a very important role in our lives, and of course they have brought a lot of positive developments.

At the same time, I know that sometimes among the NGOs you can have a very well-hidden, very strong lobbyist company or interest, so I really think that your question is very legitimate.

Thank you very much for bringing this to my attention because I presume that it could be, as you said, quite difficult to find out how many NGOs and what kind of NGOs are involved, and how they are supported by different Commission programmes.

So it is a very good idea just to have an overview of whom we are supporting, and by what means. I will look into it, and I believe it should be possible once we come to Parliament with a very clear description of how we spend the money. This should be definitely one of the things we should be able to do.

If it comes to the NGOs whose activities could be perceived as activities against the European Union and the European Commission: yes, I know one or two of them, but at the same time I think that I will have to look into it a little bit deeper because sometimes it is very difficult to judge the activities of NGOs on the basis of one or two leaflets.

But then we have a philosophical question: do we want to support only NGOs that are supporting the European Union? Do we want to have really democratic debate and have also the NGOs which could be critical about the European Union, which is also sometimes very necessary?

So I think we have to put everything in perspective, but, if it comes to the money and the list, then I think that there, definitely, we should be able to provide Parliament with better and more concrete figures.

1-123

Jorgo Chatzimarkakis (ALDE), CONT. – Herr Kommissar, das hört sich sehr gut an. Wir freuen uns darauf. Ich habe noch eine Frage zum Personal und zur Rekrutierung. Sie werden ja auch zuständig sein für EPSO, und EPSO steht ja vor einer Revolution, wenn es darum geht, das Personal nach neuen Methoden zu rekrutieren. Wie stehen Sie zu diesen neuen Methoden? Unterstützen Sie das? Wir im Parlament finden das sehr gut. Allerdings sehen wir auch, dass ein Großteil des Personals – Sie haben das ja selbst gesagt – für Verwaltung, für Selbstverwaltung zuständig ist. Mich interessiert, welche Schlüsse ziehen Sie aus dem *Staff Screening*, das Sie ja selbst gemacht haben? Sind Sie bereit, uns auch Zahlen aus dem *Staff Screening* zur Verfügung zu stellen? Denn zu viel Selbstverwaltung tut nicht gut. Wir brauchen mehr operative Mitglieder der Kommission.

1-124

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you very much. I will be very glad to come before you in April this year and present to you another screening which will be done by the HR DG.

On EPSO, I can tell you that I fully, wholeheartedly, support the development of EPSO. I really think a positive revolution is taking place in EPSO and that we are finally going to change the method of how we recruit people. We are no longer going to test the ability of the people to get the job: we are at last going to test the

competences they need to perform their jobs. I think this very important; a new concept of '7+1 competences' is very important for the future, and I will support it as much as I can.

Concerning the figures, one figure from the last year which was quite striking was the 5.7% of the personnel who work in HR, which was due partially to the decentralisation which took place a few years ago. Now, however, I believe this is one of the areas where we can offer more support from corporate level and probably motivate the DGs to use the people for more frontline activities than before.

1-125

Jutta Haug (S&D), BUDG. – Herr Šefčovič! Wir als Parlamentarier lesen natürlich sehr gern in Ihren schriftlichen Antworten, dass Sie das Parlament als das demokratische Herz Europas bezeichnen. Allerdings mögen wir es noch viel lieber, wenn auf solche Lyrik dann auch Taten folgen. Wie wollen Sie als für die Administration zuständiger Kommissar dafür Sorge tragen, dass hinsichtlich der administrativen Ausgaben größere Transparenz geschaffen wird? Sie wissen, ein großer Teil administrativen Handelns spiegelt sich nicht in der Rubrik V – Administration – wieder, weder in Zahlen, noch im Organigramm, sondern wird durch Externalisierung von Aufgaben einfach in andere Haushaltsrubriken abgeschoben. Ich habe jetzt gerade gehört, dass Sie schon ein *Follow-up* zum *Screening* vorgenommen haben und dass Sie damit in den Haushaltskontrollausschuss gehen wollen. Ich lade Sie selbstverständlich herzlich ein, auch in den Haushaltsausschuss zu kommen. Sie wissen, dass es Kompetenzen des Haushaltsausschusses hinsichtlich des Organigramms in Rubrik V gibt. Ich brauche Sie daran sicherlich nicht zu erinnern und auch nicht daran, dass wir durchaus über Instrumente verfügen, um die Kommission ein bisschen geneigter zu machen, wie z. B. die Reserven.

1-126

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I gladly accept the invitation. I know the Committee on Budgets so I had better come very well prepared. Regarding administrative expenditure, I understand your question points towards administrative expenditures in the programmes that are carried out under different headings.

We have of course one heading for administrative expenses and then we have the execution of the programmes under different headings where, of course, there are also some administrative expenses. I have to look into how we can make it more transparent so that you can see for each programme what proportion of the financial resources is actually allocated for administrative purposes.

I have to find out whether this is possible, how we can make it very clear and how I can report these figures to you. So when I come to your committee I hope that I will have the answer. We can then discuss the figures

and how we can monitor the expenses and how we would then report to you in the future.

1-127

Jutta Haug (S&D), BUDG. – Das ist alles richtig. Es gibt natürlich jetzt schon den Ausweis darüber, wieviel in die Verwaltung eines Programms fließt. Aber auf der anderen Seite wissen wir auch, dass die Kommission sehr dazu neigt, immer mehr Exekutivagenturen zu gründen, und und und. Das heißt also, vieles von dem, was die Kommission administrativ zu bewältigen hat, geht dann einfach weg. Und da möchten wir schlicht und ergreifend einen besseren Überblick, eine größere Transparenz haben. Ich hoffe, dass Sie einen Weg finden werden, uns das in jedem Haushaltsverfahren dann auch klar zu machen, gleich schon beim Haushaltsvorentwurf.

1-128

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I will definitely do my best because I think that your question is an absolutely legitimate one. As a member of the Committee on Budgets, you have a full right to know everything about the Commission's expenses.

Regarding the issue of the agencies, I think this is another big area where we have a lot to do and where I very much hope for the support of the European Parliament, because I think that we have to revive the interinstitutional group which works on the agencies. As far as I know, the last meeting at the high political level took place early last year. Currently we are in the situation where we have the analytical fiches done.

However, I think that we need to invigorate it at the political level, which I – I hope with the help of the European Parliament – could do, so that we have more transparent, clearer structures for our agencies and we could achieve an interinstitutional agreement on this issue, hopefully at the end of this year, or at the latest at the beginning of 2011.

1-129

Evelyn Regner (S&D), JURI. – Herr Šefčovič! Ich möchte eine weitere Frage zu EPSO stellen, dem Europäischen Amt für Personalauswahl. Derzeit arbeitet der Rechtsausschuss an einem Bericht über die Umsetzung von Artikel 2 des Europäischen Beamtenstatuts bezüglich der Einstellungspolitik der Institutionen und der Arbeit von EPSO. Er betont darin die Notwendigkeit, die gesetzlichen Vorschriften für EPSO einzuhalten und weist vor allem mit Nachdruck auf das Erfordernis der Mehrsprachigkeit bei Einstellungen sowie darauf hin, wie absolut notwendig es ist, auch die geografischen Kriterien einzuhalten. In diesem Sinne meine Frage: Ist Ihrer Ansicht nach EPSO die beste Lösung, Artikel 2 des Beamtenstatuts umzusetzen? Falls ja, was haben Sie vor, damit auch sichergestellt ist, dass EPSO seine Aufgaben, und damit die Einstellungserfordernisse der EU-Institutionen und natürlich auch des Europäischen Parlaments, entsprechend erfüllt?

1-130

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that the development plan of EPSO is a very good one

because it reacts to the current situation in human resources recruitment, which I could describe very briefly as the 'fight for talent'.

We simply have to work much better so we can find the best people. Our current problem is that we are recruiting people when they are over 30; we already face the problems of recruiting the best possible people for certain specialisations, such as competition lawyers and others. Therefore, I think we really have to innovate and we really have to look for talented people when they are younger.

I would encourage EPSO to start looking for graduate students, so we can hire people – committed Europeans – once they graduate from their universities.

I can promise you right now that I would support the multilingualism requirement, because I think this is part and parcel of European public administration. I obviously would like for European public administration to be one of the best in the world. I think we are quite good when it comes to expertise: our staff has a very strong educational background. And, if we are best in the world at something – that is, the linguistic skills of our staff – then I think we should not lose it: we should enhance it. I will support the programme in the recruitment procedure which will target multilingual talented people.

Concerning geographical criteria: again, Europe would not do well if the European nations were not properly represented in its public administration.

1-131

Evelyn Regner (S&D), JURI. – Ich habe kurz beim geografischen Element nach. Eine Verbesserung des geografischen Gleichgewichts ist wirklich dringend notwendig. Welche Möglichkeiten sehen Sie? Etwas präziser bitte!

1-132

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – As I said, we have to complete the 2010 exercise, which means that we have to complete the hiring of the people from the new Member States and to respect these indicative quotas which have been indicated for the new Member States.

We have to also respect the geographical balance. At the same time, we have to look for both. We have to look for high quality and for geographical balance. So I think the recruitment of these people should be merit-based and, it should, of course, respect the geographical balance. So, what I can promise you is that, once this 2010 exercise is over, I will look again at the figures and the geographical balance very carefully within the public service and, if there are any deficiencies, I will be ready to work on it so that we get rid of them, so that we would really have geographical equality in the public administration.

I believe that, if we have geographical representation in the public administration, it enriches the administration.

It brings new experiences, new languages and new skills to the administration. I think this is something that a European public service which will service the 500 million people from 27 Member States needs.

1-133

Erminia Mazzoni (PPE), PETI. – La commissione si sarebbe sentita rappresentata anche da *madame* Gruny, ma essendo presente assumo il ruolo e mi faccio carico delle responsabilità di presidenza, comunque.

Mister Šefčovič, lei nel corso dei suoi interventi ha fatto più volte richiamo al rigido rispetto del trattato di Lisbona, attraverso un rafforzamento delle relazioni tra le istituzioni europee; e nella sua risposta scritta, in più parti, fa riferimento all'importanza che lei annette alla partecipazione, ad una più compiuta partecipazione dei cittadini alla vita delle istituzioni europee.

Su questa premessa, quale presidente della commissione petizioni, che – mi permetto di dire, come ha detto anche la sua collega Reding – è il luogo nel quale trovano lo spazio e voce le denunce vere dei cittadini, le chiedo, in riferimento alla procedura di infrazione – laddove lei afferma: mi impegno per rendere più stringente la procedura di infrazione e quindi mi impegno a garantire un maggior rispetto della normativa comunitaria – se intende modificare la disciplina della procedura di infrazione ormai datata, è risalente al '58?

E se in questa intenzione lei immagina anche di attribuire un diverso e maggior ruolo alla commissione petizioni e un maggior ruolo di collaborazione al Parlamento, rispetto alle procedure che tendono a garantire un rispetto della normativa europea, anche perché la commissione petizioni si occupa proprio delle ipotesi di violazione della normativa europea?

1-134

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you for that question because, of course, respect for Community law is absolutely crucial for the success of the European Union. If we did not respect the *acquis communautaire*, we would not exist; the European Union would not perform.

Therefore, we have to use all the powers of the European Commission, of the Court of Justice, so that there will be clear, strict and fast enforcement of European law.

The Commission is always trying to achieve positive results. That means it brings the respect for the law to the attention of the Member States, pointing out where the problems are, negotiating with the Member States and saying – look, here is the problem, you should deal with it, and this is the time you have to correct it.

I agree with you that, when I see every month the pile of infringement cases, sometimes it is striking because there really are a lot of them.

Now I think that the Lisbon Treaty is offering us faster procedures which we can use for stronger and faster recourse to the Court, and I think that first what we have

to do is to remind the Member States that things change; times have changed. Now we have new tools in our power and we are ready to use them, because only uniform and faithful application of the *acquis communautaire* of European law will definitely guarantee that our Union will perform faster and more efficiently.

So, sure, absolutely: I think we have to be more energetic. We have to be much clearer about what we want to achieve and how we want to correct the problems or insufficiencies in the application of the European law in the Member States.

If it comes to information on how things are evolving, I would really have no problem in coming before your committee to give you the information on the latest developments, how we see the situation, so you will have an even broader picture and we can work on these issues together.

1-135

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE). – The European External Action Service is a step-by-step exercise, but, in the final version, what services should it encompass? What principles should be the most important in the process of setting up the new administration structure? Thirdly – you posed this question but did not answer it – what should be the line of command, relations between the EAS and those services which remain in the Commission?

The icing on the cake is the question of the role of the European Parliament. You have said that we should be involved, that we should be consulted and so on, but I would like you to be more specific. First of all, when it comes to the Staff Regulations, the financial regulations for setting up the Service: do we have consultation rights, or do we have codecision rights? Secondly, do you think that it is possible for the EP officials to be part of the Service? And thirdly, in Mr Brok's report, which was adopted by this Parliament, we proposed that the heads of EU delegations should undergo hearings before this House. What is your position on that?

1-136

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – When it comes to administrative structures and support, as I said, I would create the best possible conditions for the European External Action Service to focus on its priorities, which are the promotion of European interests and the exercising of European diplomacy abroad.

I would therefore like to alleviate the burden of administrative work which comes when you are running such an enormous service. So I am ready to offer service-level agreements for human rights management, financial entitlements, logistics, informatics and training. I believe that this would alleviate the pressure from the administrative side in organising the smooth running of the European External Action Service.

On my understanding of the situation on changes to the Staff Regulations, I see it as a clear codecision right

because it is written in the Lisbon Treaty, and I would treat it as such.

Regarding European Parliament officials in the European External Action Service, here the Lisbon Treaty says that, when the European External Action Service is being established, the staff should come from three sources: the Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council and the Member States, but I would say here and now that, once the Service is established, of course it should be open to the officials of the European Parliament because they are European officials, and I think that it should be open to officials from all institutions.

On hearings for the heads of delegation, I think here we have to consider what we are looking for in heads of delegation. We need excellent diplomats and we need very good managers because they will be managing a lot of staff. We also need people with enormous experience in running quite big financial programmes. They have to be selected through very rigorous selection processes, because we need the best for these positions, and I would underline that we need very good civil servants. These are not political duties. These are the duties of civil servants, and therefore I am a little hesitant to tell you that I agree with the hearings.

What I would appreciate, though – and here I am coming to the role of the European Parliament – would be to have more foreign policy debates in the European Parliament, so that on concrete topics heads of delegations could come to the debate and report to you what is going on from the field and tell you their personal experiences. They can listen to your political guidance regarding the execution of their duties.

This I would wholeheartedly support, and I am absolutely sure that it would be to the benefit of the European External Action Service, European diplomacy and the execution of European foreign policy goals.

1-137

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE). – On a completely different topic, I have a very short question on relations with national parliaments. Can you envisage a situation whereby three national parliaments tell you that you are overstepping your rights when it comes to subsidiarity, and you ignore it?

1-138

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – I think that we have a very clear procedure to follow in this respect. We have a yellow light, we have an orange light and, of course, we have to stick to the Treaty.

But of course, if a national parliament thinks that we are overstepping our rights and infringing the principle of subsidiarity in this respect, I think that we have to have serious discussions with Parliament and really discuss with them why they have this feeling, what causes it, why they think this way and how we can deal with it, because I think that it is very important not to treat this as a purely mechanical legislative process. I think that

the instrument is there to improve discussions and our contacts with national parliaments.

Even if the threshold is not achieved, if there are parliaments who feel that we are overstepping our competences, I think we should talk to them and try to find a consensual solution on how to move forward, because we need the support of all Member States when it comes to European legislation.

1-139

Presidente. – Bene, io vorrei ringraziare tutti i membri del Parlamento che hanno partecipato a questa riunione, mi pare che le loro domande sono state numerose, hanno toccato molti aspetti e hanno suscitato risposte e promesse.

Vedremo se le promesse potranno essere mantenute! Naturalmente siamo qui, tutto sarà verbalizzato e potremo riscontrare che cosa succederà se il candidato Commissario riceverà l'investitura definitiva.

Non so se l'aspirante Commissario Šefčovič – spero di aver pronunciato bene – vuole fare un'ulteriore dichiarazione finale, molto breve, il modo con cui abbiamo ordinato la serata glielo consente.

1-140

Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner-designate. – Firstly, I would like to thank you very much for the very fair way you chaired the meeting. I really appreciate that. I would like to tell you that I feel humbled by many of your comments, and I really feel inspired by your questions.

I hope that you will judge my nomination on its merits and on my track record, and I hope that I will get your support. If this proves to be the case, I would be delighted to work with the European Parliament and with your committees in the future.

(Applause)

1-141

Presidente. – Bene, domani mattina, alle ore nove e trenta, si riunirà, si riuniranno i coordinatori per esprimere una valutazione più matura, non emotiva, e alle dieci e trenta si riunirà la commissione per esprimere appunto una valutazione definitiva.

Approfitto dell'occasione per dire ai membri della commissione affari costituzionali che lunedì 8 febbraio a Strasburgo sarà presente il Presidente in carica del Consiglio e segretario di Stato per gli affari europei López Garrido e questa partecipazione è già confermata, quindi è giusto che ce ne ricordiamo, ce lo ricorderemo anche domani, ma lo dico fin da questo momento. Grazie e buona serata.

(La riunione termina alle 21.00.)