

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

**Vytenis ANDRIUKAITIS**

**Health and Food Safety**

**1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission?**

**What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

All my life I have dedicated to health, human health and the health of society. Being a cardio-surgeon, I have seen the importance of functioning health system, the importance of knowledge and innovation for the health of people. And health can come only with healthy food, as well as with a healthy lifestyle. Being also a historian and a politician, having worked on the European Convention and European affairs in general, I have experience and knowledge of what it takes to find our European compromise. I have 20 years' parliamentary experience, I know how important is to listen to people's voices. I believe that I can make a difference. I have a passion for people and passion for Europe and will work relentlessly for the better of both in my new capacity if my nomination is confirmed. I am proud to be part of President Juncker's team. Health is a part of every policy in the Commission's strategic agenda. Health creates jobs and extends people's lifespan. E-health not only creates growth, but also prevents health threats and contributes to productivity. By increasing access to health systems we contribute to fairness. By helping all to have a fair treatment we contribute to our democracy.

The guarantee that I will deliver is my life story and my principles. I believe in truth and honesty. These were and are my guiding principles in life. Truth, especially about mass deportations, was forbidden in Soviet Empire. When in Soviet times, in 1969, during the interview to enter University I was asked why I was born in Siberia (no one dared to mention the Gulag), I answered - why did you deport us? Fighting for truth and being honest meant that I have been arrested and imprisoned, but it did not change me. In more recent history I was wrongfully publicly accused of fraud, by the General Prosecutor. The Parliament did not revoke my immunity, so I voluntarily gave up my mandate, went to court and won the case. I asked for nothing more than a public apology, which I received. All my past, present and future activities are public, open and dedicated to serving the people. And I will continue to work openly, transparently and honestly, because that is who I am.

**2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

**What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up on Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or on-going procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I see my role as a member of a team of Commissioners, working together in full collegiality, to deliver added value results that make a difference for European citizens.

I will work in close cooperation with the other Commissioners, in particular with the First Vice-President and with the Vice President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness. I intend to achieve synergies with other Commissioners and enshrine health and food safety concerns into our joint work.

My overriding goal is to help improve citizens' lives. To achieve this, I intend to work closely in full co-operation with citizens' elected representatives – the Members of the European Parliament.

I have been a member of a national Parliament myself for six successive mandates, since 1990. As such, the European Parliament can count on me to listen carefully to its views, to engage in regular dialogue with MEPs, and to be available for frank and open debate.

Concerning the follow-up to European Parliament's positions and requests, I will apply the provisions of the Framework Agreement and, in my areas of responsibility, make sure that the Commission responds to parliamentary resolutions or requests made on the basis of Article 225 TFEU, within 3 months after their adoption. In this context, I support and fully endorse the commitment made by President-elect Juncker that the future Commission will be particularly attentive to legislative initiative reports.

I intend to base this relationship on transparency, openness and mutual exchange of information; and I will ensure that the Directorate-General under my responsibility abides by the same principles, in accordance with the provisions of the Framework Agreement.

As regards initiatives currently under discussion or in the pipeline, the Parliament can count on me for regular and open dialogue, in particular with the Committees for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and Agriculture and Rural Development.

I further commit myself to implementing the provisions of the Framework Agreement with regard to the provision of information and documents treating evenly the Parliament and the Council, as co-legislators.

### **Questions from the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety**

#### **3. Commissioner's priorities**

**What will be the Commissioner's top priorities in the field of public health and food safety? What specific legislative and non-legislative measures, and according to what timetable, do you intend to put forward to support these priorities on both the EU and Member State levels?**

Citizens' health and safety is a cornerstone of our social market economy. Our Internal Market is based on a high level of health protection – which the Treaty requires in all the policies and actions of the European Union.

We have some of the highest standards in the world in terms of health and food safety. Past crises such as BSE and SARS, which triggered major economic losses, have further shown the economic value of strong health protection, which I intend to pursue.

I believe we need "a new boost for Health in Europe" if we are to improve people's health and boost Jobs and Growth. Health encourages growth. I therefore intend to promote investment in health, as an investment in Europe's human capital and an investment in our future.

I can summarize my priorities in three words – promotion, protection, prevention. My key priority will be to both deliver real benefits to citizens and support key sectors of the EU economy, such as the healthcare sector – a major job creator – as well as the agro-food industry which can only prosper if trade flows under safe conditions.

Promoting Europe's economic recovery is a key objective, and I am persuaded that health and food safety policies can make a significant contribution.

As regards my priorities on public health, against a background of population ageing, growing burden of chronic diseases and increasing demand for healthcare, if I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will support efforts to make health systems more efficient and innovative; so that they can provide equitable healthcare to all citizens, while remaining financially sustainable.

As such, I plan to continue work to assess the performance of health systems underpinning advice on healthcare systems reform within the European Semester; and to promote the uptake of innovation for healthy and active ageing.

As much of the disease burden and related expenditure is preventable, I intend to put much focus on enhancing prevention. I believe that the more health systems invest in prevention now, the less they will pay in treatment in the future.

I will seek to make recent EU legislation having an impact on the protection of public health deliver results to citizens. For example, I will ensure the timely adoption of secondary legislation foreseen under the Tobacco Products Directive. I will work tirelessly with the Member States to ensure that the Directive on patients' rights in cross border healthcare translates into citizens' better access to quality care; into in-depth co-operation on eHealth towards better care; and into joint work on Health Technology Assessment to improve patients' access to innovative technologies, business predictability and cost-effectiveness.

I will also work with Member States to protect citizens against any cross border health threat, with an immediate focus on the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

Finally, I will seek to ensure that every initiative on health contributes to bridging the wide inequalities in health that persist in Europe.

Moving on to food safety, my priority is to ensure that European citizens continue to enjoy the safest food in the world. This is their right and our obligation.

For citizens to be in good health, they need safe food. I will therefore promote healthy and safe food as a means to prevent unnecessary spending in healthcare and help Member States improve the long term sustainability of their health systems.

I believe safe food is also a pre-requisite of a modern, developed economy and our best asset in an increasingly competitive global arena. I will endeavour to ensure high levels of animal and plant health; efficient management of any crisis that may arise; safe additives, pesticides, and biocides; strict controls on the safety of imported products of both plant and animal origin; rigorous and transparent scientific risk assessments of new products and technologies; and strict enforcement of controls.

I will work with all the relevant stakeholders in pursuit of this agenda. I will address challenges such as the opportunities for fraud which arise from the complexity of the food production chain, and which can jeopardize consumers' trust on the food chain.

Europe has a food safety system of which it can be proud, and I will seize every opportunity to maintain and improve this system, and to promote it at global level. I believe our food safety system can contribute to President Juncker's plans for a Europe with more jobs and greater prosperity, particularly for small and medium enterprises which make up the bulk of the food sector.

The European Union has a comprehensive legislative framework for food safety. My intention is to ensure that this is properly enforced and implemented. However, should the need for new legislation arise, I will not hesitate to act.

It is my clear intention to ensure that all legislative proposals currently under discussion with the European Parliament and the Council are brought to a successful conclusion, keeping in mind the need to modernise and simplify existing laws, in line with better regulation principles. These include the proposals on animal health, plant health, official controls, novel food, cloning, zootechnics and medicated feed. On plant reproductive material, I will consider the views expressed during Parliament and Council discussions to shape the best course of action.

Within the first six months of my mandate, I will review the legislation applicable to the authorisation of genetically modified organisms, as indicated by President-elect Juncker in his Political Guidelines. Concerning pesticides, both the legislation on Plant protection products and on maximum levels of residues will be evaluated in parallel in the mid-term. Most of these texts will also require the adoption of numerous implementation measures, which will receive my full attention. This will include making progress on fulfilling our obligations to define the criteria for endocrine disruptors.

Finally, I will ensure that legislation on animal welfare is duly enforced.

#### **4. Quality and transparency of legislative proposals**

**How will you personally ensure the good quality of legislative proposals, full transparency of lobbying activities directed at you and your services, consistent and balanced consultation of all stakeholder and efficient cooperation among all relevant Commission services in the cross-cutting areas under your portfolio?**

I am committed to improving the quality of legislative proposals.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, before considering shaping new policy, I will ensure a thorough evaluation of the results of existing action, an in-depth impact assessment, and extensive consultation of stakeholders. My aim is to achieve the most efficient solution for citizens' health and safety, with the least burdensome approach.

Health and food safety have a strong citizen focus as they cover the daily concerns of 500 million citizens. To deliver results for citizens, I intend to work closely with citizens and their representatives.

I am committed to an open and close dialogue with the European Parliament, Member State representatives, stakeholders, and third countries to ensure optimal solutions that secure high levels of health protection, while ensuring an innovative and competitive environment for businesses.

I pledge to engage fully in College, as a true team player, with all other Commissioners. The health and food safety portfolio has numerous synergies with the portfolios of other Commissioners and I intend to prioritise joint work. In fact, every policy has a health vector, be it from Education to Transport, from Agriculture to Digital Agenda. Healthy population brings growth, jobs and prosperity.

The EU response to the Ebola outbreak – bringing together health, humanitarian aid, development, transport, research and external cooperation policies – shows how the European Commission can work together across policies. Another example is the Food and Veterinary Office, which has diversified to use its expertise in auditing systems in new areas such as organic products.

In line with the President's Political Guidelines, I fully support that transparency should be a priority for the new Commission and will make public all the contacts and meetings with stakeholders on matters relating to policy-making and implementation – as I always did in my professional career.

#### **5. Improvement of quality of policy output and consumer trust**

**How does the Commissioner plan to maintain and contribute to further improving the quality of health systems and the levels of food safety in the Union? How does he plan to re-establish consumer trust in the face of recurrent scandals?**

The quality of health systems, and their ability to provide universal access to care and deliver results, is a matter of great concern to me given my medical background and experience as a Health Minister in Lithuania. Given that Member States are responsible for the funding and organisation of their health services, I believe EU action in this field must seek to add value, support and assist national efforts.

It is perhaps unfortunate that money all too often dominates discussions about health systems. But whilst fiscal sustainability is of course important, so are other key factors – such as equity and citizens' access to high quality healthcare.

I am committed to helping Member States strengthen the effectiveness and the resilience of their health systems, while keeping universal health coverage. I plan to use all the tools at my disposal for this purpose, including Health Systems Performance Assessment; joint work to promote quality and safety of care; as well as work to shape common methodologies for Health Technology Assessment and health workforce planning.

As regards food safety, I believe, that in some sectors, such as pesticides, additives and food contact materials, the EU enjoys some of the highest standards in the world. My mission will be to maintain this high level of safety and defend it as a model worldwide.

No system can, however, offer a cast iron guarantee against crisis situations which will inevitably arise from time to time. Our well established system of rapid alert, traceability and quick reaction, provides the necessary tools to face emergencies and take the appropriate remedy actions.

I would see the fight against food fraud as an important priority, as the integrity of food is essential to ensure people's health and a high level of safety and quality of EU products.

The 2013 horsemeat scandal highlighted the need to reinforce the EU control system as regards food fraud. In addition to the new Food Fraud Network, a dedicated IT tool will serve as a further means to fight such fraud, as will tougher financial penalties proposed for the new official controls regulation; training for food inspectors, police and customs officers; and future EU-wide control plans.