

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE VICE-PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE**

**Dubravka ŠUICA**

**Democracy and Demography**

**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? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? 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?**

For almost three decades, I have been active in politics, public policy making, local and regional government, carrying out various State administration and political functions.

For more than a decade, I accompanied, promoted and actively participated in the process of Croatia's integration into the EU. During this process, I had the honour to hold various functions helping to prepare Croatia for EU membership, in particular as Vice-Chair of the European Integration Committee of the Croatian Parliament.

In a four-year term, as the Chair of the Croatian Parliament Committee on the Family, Youth and Sport, I had the opportunity to participate in the monitoring and implementation of national policies in areas related to family issues, quality of life of young people, protection of children and young people from all forms of addiction, as well as promotion of sport and demographic renewal.

Throughout my career, I have always been driven by democratic values, which later on became a part of my political interest and professional responsibilities.

I have participated at local, regional, national and European levels of governance, and have served for 10 years as Vice-President of Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, whose main pillars are democracy, rule of law and human rights. I feel therefore capable of performing the role assigned to me in the Mission Letter for the portfolio on Democracy and Demography.

I strongly believe that close cooperation within the College of Commissioners is essential in order to ensure coherence, quality and effectiveness of the different policies. I commit to strictly abide by the principle of collegiality, if my nomination is confirmed.

I intend to assist the President, and my fellow colleagues to deliver on the European Union's priorities.

If I am confirmed as a Vice-President, I will fully respect the letter and spirit of the Treaty, in particular the obligation to act in the European interest and without taking any instructions. I will also honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflict of interest. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I will update it rapidly should any change be required.

In line with the Political Guidelines from President-elect Ursula von der Leyen, I intend to apply the principle of gender equality to my Cabinet, as well as in all areas of my responsibility.

As a Member of the European Parliament from 2013 and as a Vice-President of EPP Women, I have constantly advocated gender equality across all European policies and within the European decision-making processes. Also, I have been active in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), where I have actively worked on improving the legislation on equality between women and men. In my new role, I will put emphasis on the full participation of women in democratic processes. In addressing Europe's demographic challenges, I will focus on aspects especially affecting women, with an emphasis on developing the full potential of young girls' skills.

As a long-standing Member of the European Parliament, where I was elected for three consecutive terms, I met all obligations towards the institutions, including by submitting and updating all declarations of financial interest as required. I have always fully respected the letter and spirit of the EU Treaties and obligation to act in the European interest.

## **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 to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

### **Role and co-operation with the European Parliament and its committees**

If confirmed as Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, I commit to take full political responsibility for the activities in my area of competence, as set out in the Mission Letter sent to me on 10 July. I will perform my duties as a Member of the College without prejudice to the principle of collegiality and therefore, I will collaborate fully with other Members of the College. As set out in the Mission Letter from the President-elect, we, as Members of the College, will decide collectively and we will take ownership of what we agree on.

Cooperation with the European Parliament is of utmost importance to me. As a longstanding Member of the European Parliament, elected in three consecutive terms, I have always advocated close cooperation among all the European institutions, and that perspective is in line with President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines. Strengthening the partnership between the European Commission and the European Parliament is our goal, and I will responsively and fully take part in that process in the capacity of Commission Vice-President.

I fully commit to engage with the European Parliament in the policy-making process and political dialogue, cooperating at every stage from designing to debating resolutions, especially by being available to take part in all relevant plenary discussions, committee meetings and trilogue discussions. Permanent dialogue between the European Commission and the European Parliament is a matter of priority for our future College, as set out in President-elect von der Leyen's Political Guidelines. I will therefore, inform and include parliamentary committees in all major developments under my scope of responsibility, while acknowledging the importance of equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council. If elected as Vice-President of the European Commission, I commit to relationship based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, exchange of information and regular reporting with the European Parliament.

I fully commit to a regular flow of information with the Chair of relevant parliamentary committees and ensuring that I am available for bilateral meetings. Acknowledging the importance of Member's questions to the Commission, I will ensure that questions that fall under my responsibility are responded to quickly and precisely.

### **Transparency**

As a Member of the European Parliament, I have always asked for full transparency from the European Commission towards the Parliament, representing the voice of European citizens. In order to improve the transparency of policy-making process and regain citizens' faith in the Union, I will ensure that citizens are duly informed on the Commission's role and what our policies are bringing to them. I believe that good interinstitutional cooperation fully contributes to efficiency, and that is why transparency is our means of accomplishing better policies.

If confirmed as Vice-President, I will entirely respect the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.

### **Follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives**

If confirmed as Vice-President of European Commission, I will commit to implement fully the provisions of the Treaty, the Framework Agreement and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making in the areas of my responsibility. President-elect von der Leyen supports the right of initiative for the European Parliament, which I sincerely believe will give a stronger role to the voice of the people. Furthermore, I will ensure that the Commission will follow-up to parliamentary resolutions adopted by a majority of its component members with a legislative proposal, with full respect of the proportionality, subsidiarity and better-law making.

In order to identify the best ways to design new and better policies, I commit to work hand in hand with the European Parliament at every stage of the process. In accordance with the Framework Agreement, the Commission will effectively follow up to resolutions within three months after their adoption.

### **Provision of information and documents**

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned importance of a two-way flow of information, openness, transparency, mutual trust and exchange of information, I sincerely acknowledge the significance of provision of information and documents. In order to deepen the partnership

between the European Parliament and the Commission, I commit to implement fully the relevant provisions of the Framework Agreement and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making, hence ensuring equal treatment in my relations with the European Parliament and the Council.

## **Questions from the Committee on Constitutional Affairs**

### **Conference on the Future of Europe**

**3. What are your views on the main objectives, scope, concept, structure of and participation in the envisaged Conference on the Future of Europe? Taking into consideration the numerous visits in the Member States and dialogues with citizens by the Commissioners in the context of the debate on the Future of Europe in the previous two years, which would be in your view the added value of this Conference? How do you envisage the role of the European Parliament and the modalities of cooperation between the Unions' institutions in the Conference?**

More than half of eligible voters cast their ballots in the May 2019 European elections. This turnout underlines the increased interest of citizens in European democracy. We must build on this increased interest and ask European women and men of all ages from across the Union to have their say – together with European institutions – on the future of the European Union. We must listen to their hopes, concerns and expectations relating to their realities: those linked to climate, the economy, digital developments, global transformation, demographic changes, etc. We must strengthen the link between citizens' expectations, on the one hand, and policies and initiatives pursued at EU level, on the other hand.

To improve participation in our democracies beyond voting in elections, the Commission's President-elect has proposed to organise a Conference on the Future of Europe, to start in 2020 and run for two years. The idea is simple: Europeans must have their say on how their Union is run and what it delivers on.

During these two years, the Commission will continue its valuable experience in actively engaging with citizens on the European Union. Along with all of my colleagues, I will visit every Member State within the first half of the Commission's mandate, including taking part in citizens' dialogues. We will also build on the almost 1800 citizens' dialogues, which took place in the current Commission's mandate and which attracted 200,000 Europeans in 635 locations to talk about the European Union. Part of my work will be to widen the participation in the Conference and the debates on the future of Europe, to make them as accessible as possible. This will ensure that we get the widest cross-section of society giving their ideas and shaping the outcome. In particular, I will look at ways to increase online participation, notably amongst young people.

We need to build on this together. I firmly believe that the Conference represents an opportunity for multiplying and joining efforts by the Union's institutions and bodies to engage with citizens.

The first step for a successful Conference is agreeing on a clear scope and set of objectives. This work must start immediately. If confirmed as Vice-President for Demography and Democracy, I will put forward the Commission's ideas as a basis for discussion with the European Parliament and the Council on the concept, structure, timing and scope of the

Conference. I am convinced that with the active and leading participation of the European Parliament and its members in the Conference, we can ensure the vital link between the citizens and their representatives. Events organised together with the Council and the Member States would further bring Europe to its citizens. I look forward to engaging with the Parliament and the Council in fruitful discussions on a concept, so that we can launch the Conference in earnest.

Part of the Conference's scope will be to work on improving the lead candidate system and discuss the idea transnational lists. This is a specific work-strand separate from the rest of the activities and time-cycles, for which the Conference should come forward with its proposals by summer 2020 at the latest. This will be driven by the Parliament and the Council, in close cooperation with the Vice-President-designate for Values and Transparency who will ensure that the Commission acts as an honest broker in these discussions. The Commission will ensure it follows up to the recommendations of the Conference on these issues, acting where it has the competence and supporting the European Parliament to amend the electoral law and secure its agreement in the Council.

**4. As an outcome of the Conference, do you consider that the Commission should be ready to put forward concrete proposals aiming at the modification of the functioning of the Union, notably through the revision of the Treaties in accordance with Article 48 TEU? Which areas do you consider as a priority to be discussed in the Conference in the perspective of the possible presentation of such proposals?**

I believe that the Conference on the Future of Europe should promote conversations between the Union's institutions and politicians and Europe's citizens and civil society, with a view, first and foremost, to listen. However, the Conference should also lead to a concrete outcome, in the form of a clear commitment on part of the institutions to Europe's citizens. This would be a sign that European democracy is a constant process, which should thrive not only at election times but also in between.

In terms of what topics and themes should be discussed: I believe we need an open mind and to listen to the views expressed by Europeans and the institutions that serve them. Picking up on my answer to Question 3, I believe it is essential to get a diverse range of views from right across Europe and from different parts of our society. This is why I will have a special focus on ensuring we get as many people as possible involved in the Conference. From my perspective, it will also be important to bring together the two parts of my portfolio. The issue of demographic change is one that affects many communities across our Union. I believe this is a topic, which should feature in our debates as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In terms of follow up, the form should follow the function: we should first agree on our objectives and our ambitions, and then decide the best measures to deliver on them. Without prejudging the outcome of the Conference and without prejudice to the institutions' prerogatives, President-elect von der Leyen has said that she would be ready to follow up on what would be agreed at the Conference, including by legislative action, if appropriate. This legislative action can indeed feed into our common work programme in the second half of our mandate. In her Political Guidelines, the President-elect also indicated she is open to Treaty change but we must first use the full potential set out in the Treaties.

## Citizens' rights and consultations

**5. Which initiatives do you intend to take in order to attain the full and harmonized exercise by EU citizens of their rights derived from the EU citizenship, especially also in view of the intended withdrawal of the UK from the Union? Do you consider there is a need for the extension of the citizenship rights listed in Article 20(2) TFEU through the procedure in Article 25 TFEU? If so, which initiatives would you consider undertaking?**

Putting the citizen first is central to my portfolio as it is key in improving democracy and dealing with the opportunities and challenges related to demographic change. Allowing EU citizens to fully exercise their rights as derived from EU citizenship is an important element in this. My colleague Vice-President-designate for Values and Transparency will pursue this task more specifically.

In this regard, as the Court of Justice has stated, EU citizenship is intended to be the fundamental status of nationals of the Member States. As stressed by the Parliament as well, I consider it crucial to make citizens better aware of their EU citizenship rights and support their exercise of these rights including by increasing legal certainty.

The next citizenship report to be issued in 2020 will provide a good opportunity to consider the need for updated guidance on free movement rights taking into account the case law of the Court of Justice. Moreover, enforcing and ensuring proper application of the *acquis*, including through dialogue with Member States will be of key importance, as is providing enhanced support to citizens in the exercise of their rights. The citizenship report will also provide good occasion to address the issue of the possible extension of EU citizenship rights through the procedure in Article 25 TFEU.

On the specific question on how the rights of EU and UK citizens could be maintained after the United Kingdom's withdrawal, I consider the Withdrawal Agreement to be the best solution to preserve these rights. In case of a no deal scenario, the current Commission has called on Member States to take a generous approach to the rights of UK citizens who are already resident in their territory. The EU27 Member States have put in place national contingency measures to ensure that UK nationals and their non-EU family members can remain legally resident in the immediate period after a withdrawal without an agreement. The Commission has worked with the EU27 Member States to ensure coherence in the overall approach, while recognising that flexibility at national level is needed. The Commission has also provided an overview of all national contingency measures on residence rights on its Brexit Preparedness webpages.

**6. How do you envisage the participation of citizens and civil society in the Conference on the Future of Europe? How will you integrate their contributions in the outcome of the Conference? How do you think that the results of the dialogues with citizens that took place in the Member States could feed the work of the Conference? In this context, what are your views on the proposals of the Presidents of the CoR and of the EESC to establish an interinstitutional working group to examine proposals for a permanent mechanism for citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultation, possibly to be framed within the annual programming cycles? Which concrete suggestions would you have concerning its specific objectives and the modalities for its operation? How do you think that such a proposal could be considered in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe?**

As an overarching principle, the discussion on the future of Europe has to be grounded in the reality of ordinary citizens. This is why I believe the Conference should promote conversations between Europe's citizens and civil society, the Union's institutions and politicians on broad topics linked to our political agenda. We will first and foremost listen, and collect their views, which will contribute to shaping our future policies.

The EU institutions and Member States have gained experience in recent years with actively engaging with citizens on the European Union. The Commission alone has participated in almost 1800 citizens' dialogues, gathering over 200,000 participants in 635 locations across the European Union. Moreover, the Commission is consulting widely before issuing legislative proposals, in the context of the policymaking cycle, leading the OECD in its 2018 Regulatory Policy Outlook report to rank the Commission as first on stakeholder engagement.

The Conference should take the next step in giving citizens a say on the Future of Europe. I fully realise that the credibility of the exercise will depend on transparency and adequate follow-up, and I will look at possible ways to ensure this. In this regard, I am aware of the mechanism proposed by the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee for a permanent mechanism for citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultation and I am ready and willing to assess the most effective methods to ensure such a permanent engagement. The Conference on the Future of Europe is one important step in this direction.

## **Subsidiarity and national Parliaments**

**7. As responsible commissioner for ensuring that legislative proposals respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, what follow-up do you consider should be given to proposals supported by the European Parliament to strengthen the political dialogue with and input from national parliaments such as:**

**- practical arrangements allowing for a technical extension of the 8 weeks period for national parliaments to raise subsidiarity concerns;**

**- suggestions to facilitate a more proactive and positive role of national parliaments as a source of proposals (also known as a "green-card" mechanism)?**

**Would you be favourable to the establishment of an annual European week in which members of national parliaments would simultaneously discuss European affairs with Commissioners and Members of the European Parliament?**

Improving participation in our European democracy is a focal point of my portfolio. This in my view also entails that participation of national Parliaments, who are a source of democratic legitimacy, in the European decision-making should be facilitated. Like the European Parliament, I see the need and potential to strengthen our dialogue with national Parliaments and to improve the application of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles in EU-legislation. My colleague Vice-President-designate for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight will pursue this task more specifically.

I consider that the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing less more efficiently' did important groundwork in this respect. In reaction to its recommendations, the Commission, in its Communication 'The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality:

Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking' of October 2018, took several commitments that it is now implementing and that I fully support. Notably, the Commission will for the first time as of this December discount the Christmas and New Year period from the calculation of the eight weeks deadline for national Parliaments' subsidiarity scrutiny of Commission proposals. This change in calendar intends to allow national parliaments to dispose of sufficient time for their assessment. Furthermore, the Commission will considerably enhance the visibility of national Parliaments' input into EU legislation by giving aggregated responses if a significant number of them express subsidiarity concerns, while not reaching the yellow card threshold set by the Treaties. These 'aggregated responses' aim at giving national Parliaments and the European co-legislators in one public document the full picture of all subsidiarity concerns raised and the Commission's position on them. Also the Commission's commitment to facilitate national Parliaments' input and to improve the subsidiarity assessment when evaluating existing legislation and preparing new legislative proposals are already being put into action as part of the follow-up on the stocktaking of the implementation of 'better law making' principles. However, I should emphasise that the Commission is not the only actor when it comes to improving the application of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. This equally concerns the European Parliament and the Council.

With regard to the so-called 'Green-card' mechanism, I think that at least in the short run we should not aim at creating a new complex and formal mechanism that would require Treaty change. Instead, we should encourage national Parliaments to use options already at their disposal today. As part of the well-rooted political dialogue, they can express their views about the Commission's annual work programme and can, at any moment, ask the Commission for legislative proposals or other initiatives. In fact, initiatives from national Parliaments on food waste in 2015 and on corporate social responsibility in 2016 were clearly reflected in the adopted legislation. Last but not least, I am in favour of strengthening the direct exchange with national Parliaments and I strongly support the initiative of the President-elect to make the visits of Members of the Commission to national Parliaments and debates with national Parliamentarians on topical European issues a regular practice.

I would also support the establishment of an annual European week in which members of national and European Parliamentarians and Commission Members would jointly discuss salient European issues. I think we have a good example with the annual European Parliamentary week in the context of the economic and budgetary policies scrutiny, which gives a parliamentary perspective to the European Semester process. We could consider extending this practice to other policy areas. Such events contribute to ensuring democratic accountability without prejudice to the competences of national Parliaments and the European Parliament and contribute to the development of a European public sphere.

The work on all these elements will be lead by my colleague Vice-President-designate for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight. I am fully committed to work closely with him on these issues, notably also in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe where the political dialogue with and input from national Parliaments will be a key feature.