

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HEARINGS
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER
DESIGNATE

Mr Stavros DIMAS

(Environment)

Part A – General questions

I. Personal and professional

1. *What aspects of your personal qualifications and professional experience do you feel were of particular relevance with regard to your nomination and your prospective role as Commissioner?*

I feel that the following aspects of my personal qualifications and professional experience are particularly relevant for my prospective role as Commissioner:

- My political career as a member of the Greek Parliament for more than 25 years and as a Member of the Greek Government in a number of Ministerial posts. I was Minister of Trade, Minister of Agriculture and Minister for Industry, Energy and Technology. Also as Deputy-Minister for Economic Co-ordination I dealt with international economic relations, private investment, energy and environmental issues (during my term of office I introduced grants and tax incentives for the promotion of solar energy, and I negotiated and signed on behalf of Greece the UNECE Convention on cross-border air pollution). As a Greek MP, I was a long-standing member of the Committee on Economic Affairs, which is also the Committee dealing with environmental issues in the Greek Parliament.
- My experience in managing human and financial resources: in addition to my ministerial posts, I was Deputy Governor of the Hellenic Industrial Development Bank for two years and Secretary-General of the party of New Democracy for nearly five years.
- My experience in working in an international environment: I worked for a Wall Street law firm and for the World Bank, served on the committee negotiating Greece's accession to the EEC and headed the New Democracy Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. As a Greek Minister, and in my short term as

Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, I gained first-hand knowledge of the operation of the EU Institutions.

II. Independence

2. ***How would you describe your obligation to be independent in carrying out your duties and how do you concretely envisage putting this principle into practice?***

I will fully respect the obligation defined in paragraph 2 of Article 213 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, according to which the Members of the Commission shall, in the general interest of the Community, be completely independent in the performance of their duties. In concrete terms I will neither seek nor take instructions from any government or from any other body, and I will refrain from any action incompatible with my duties. During my term of office, I will not engage in any other occupation, whether gainful or not. I will also take all necessary precautions to avoid any possible conflict of interest in the performance of my duties.

3. ***Could you provide the European Parliament with details of your recent and present business, financial and political interests and positions, and of any other commitment that might clash with your prospective duties?***

I have no business or financial holdings or any other commitments that might clash with my duties as a Commissioner. I am a member of the party of New Democracy, but no longer hold any active position or function in it.

III. Future of the European Union

4. ***It is clear that until full ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, the Commission and its members are bound by the existing Treaties. However, the Constitutional Treaty having been adopted, which are in your view the actions the Commission can already undertake without waiting for its formal ratification?***

The actions that the Commission can undertake prior to formal ratification of the Constitutional Treaty are three-fold.

First, whilst it is primarily the task of the national governments to bring the ratification process to a successful conclusion, the Commission can and should communicate to the European citizens, in a clear and objective way, what the Constitution means for them. In this connection, the Commission's role will be to inform and to explain.

Second, where implementing measures are needed to give flesh and bone to the Constitution, the Commission should start preparing the ground in a timely manner, in order to ensure an efficient and a smooth transition to the Constitutional legal order. The Commission, together

with the High Representative and the Member States, has the task of preparing the setting up of the European External Action Service. Useful work can also be done in other areas, for instance regarding the preparation of the provisions on the "Citizens' initiative".

Finally, more generally, the actions of the Commission can already be guided, to the extent possible, by the spirit of the Constitution.

5. *The Lisbon Strategy is a ten-year strategy to make the European Union the world's most dynamic, competitive and sustainable economy by 2010. The Lisbon strategy comprises the three pillars of sustainable development: the economy, social affairs and the environment. The date of 2010 will coincide with the term of your mandate. What would you do, as Commissioner, to accelerate progress towards the Lisbon goals and what in your views should be the main priorities?*

It is crucial that we remain committed to the Lisbon strategy and its objectives and continue to focus on the goal of a dynamic, competitive and sustainable economy. In order to do this, we should fully exploit the positive interaction between economic, employment, social and environmental policies.

It is true that sluggish economic growth over the past years has set us back. It will be our joint responsibility to further pursue concrete actions that will help to release and develop Europe's potential for economic progress and full employment. Decisive action is now necessary to turn commitments into reality.

The mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy in the year 2005 is an extremely important date. As a Member of the Commission, and more specifically of the Group of Commissioners on the Lisbon Strategy, I intend to work closely with other Commissioners to ensure that progress made towards the 2010 objectives is realistically assessed and that the actions needed to give further impetus to these objectives are clearly identified.

Europe needs to take advantage of the opportunities offered by enlargement and to build on existing strengths. We must reinforce the knowledge dimension, including research and innovation. We must complete the internal market, and improve the business environment and competitiveness. We must step up efforts to modernise the European social model in the face of the challenges posed by globalisation and an ageing population, complete labour market reforms, invest in people and combat social exclusion, and exploit synergies from environmental aspects to improve European competitiveness.

As the Commissioner for the Environment, and without prejudging the line the new Commission would define in due time, I will focus especially on the environmental dimension. I strongly believe that the focus on growth and employment can and should be done without questioning the necessary equilibrium between the economic, social and environmental dimensions. There are two main reasons why this is both desirable and possible. First, the Commission should focus on the issues that EU citizens care about. Europeans want to live in a society where economic growth is combined with high employment and a healthy environment. Second, environmental policy can make an important contribution to the Lisbon strategy and deliver win-win solutions to the problems that the EU is facing. We should aim at becoming not only the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, but also the most eco-efficient, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, greater social cohesion, and a healthy environment.

Environmental technologies can contribute directly to increased competitiveness and create a comparative advantage for Europe. Moreover, a healthy environment means a healthier population and a healthy work force, and these are key productivity factors.

We must take environment into account now in order to ensure that changes are made both gradually and in good time. Failure to take action now means it may be too late in the future or that the damages and costs of remedial action will be much higher, thus hampering meeting the Lisbon goals.

We also need to put emphasis on implementation of existing legislation – if all our laws were fully implemented we would have a significant impact on the environment. I intend to work with the Member States to raise the level of awareness and the overall level of performance.

In order to solve environmental problems we also need to integrate the environmental dimension more into other policy areas, such as agriculture, fisheries, transport or energy. I intend to work closely with my colleagues in the Commission to achieve this.

Finally support from citizens, social partners, NGOs, and other stakeholders is crucial to make the Lisbon Strategy an inclusive process, a condition for its success. As a Commissioner I will ensure that the views of all stakeholders are taken into account in formulating policy.

6. How do you intend to improve the public image of the Commission?

I believe that the good image of the Commission depends on the behaviour of the Commissioners in the performance of their duties. As a Commissioner I will do my best to manage my portfolio in an efficient, sound and transparent way, both in policy and financial matters.

In addition, I will endeavour to make the EU and its policies more accessible to EU citizens. President-designate Barroso is committed to reinforcing the Commission's communications efforts, and he has appointed a Commissioner with responsibility for Communications Strategy, with whom I intend to work closely. In my view, there is a need to communicate more clearly the added value of Europe to its citizens, both by being present in national debates and by using all modern means of communication to greatest effect. In order to be effective, communication must be objective, timely, in a clear and understandable language, and it must focus on matters of practical relevance to the European citizens.

IV. Democratic accountability to the European Parliament

7. How do you envisage your accountability to the European Parliament?

Accountability of the Commissioners and the entire College to the European Parliament, which represents the people of Europe, is extremely important for the democratic functioning of the European Institutions. Having served for many years in the Greek Parliament, I am convinced that constructive co-operation between the Commission and the European Parliament will be essential for achieving our common goals.

In his speech before Parliament, President-designate Barroso made a commitment to a “partnership with the Parliament”, promised to continue a regular dialogue, and recognised the importance of the role of democratic oversight of the Parliament. In this connection, he undertook to provide full and timely information on matters needed for Members to exercise

that control, and to provide Parliament with information about documents sent to other institutions, as well as information concerning the consultative bodies which provide expertise to the Commission. I undertake to fully respect these commitments, as well as the commitments made under the Framework Agreement of 5 July 2000 on relations between the Parliament and the Commission.

a. *From a strictly political standpoint, do you consider that, in case a hearing should lead to a negative conclusion, the concerned Commissioner designate should withdraw his/her candidacy?*

I consider the hearings to be a key event in the relations between the Commission and the European Parliament and an opportunity to establish confidence between the two institutions.

It is the responsibility of the President of the Commission to make the evaluation and to draw the appropriate conclusions in case a hearing should lead to a negative conclusion. I fully accept the principle that the President of the Commission can ask a Member of the Commission to resign if Parliament expresses a lack of confidence in him/her.

b. *To what extent do you consider that you are responsible for the answers provided by your services to the Parliament as a result of requests emanating from its Committee on Petitions or other responsible committees? If called upon to justify or explain previous acts of the Commission, or previous omissions, to what extent do you consider yourself as being accountable to Parliament?*

The Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission states that “without prejudice to the principle of Commission collegiality, each Member of the Commission shall take political responsibility for action in the field of which he or she is in charge”. I fully accept this principle.

On taking up office, I will ask my services to inform me of the scope, the respective responsibilities, the problems and risks linked to the daily work in my department. If a problem were to be detected, I will make a thorough assessment of the situation and take all necessary action. I undertake to keep the Parliament up to date on any significant changes or adaptations that I consider important to put in place, especially if they are aimed at addressing the previous situation.

c. *What do you understand by the concept of political responsibility before the Parliament for the activities of your Directorate(s)-General? What steps do you intend to take to ensure your Directorate(s)-General are well-managed?*

As I mentioned in question 7b above, I fully accept the provisions of the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission regarding the political responsibility of the Members of the Commission. I also fully accept that the President can ask a Commissioner to resign if he/she clearly underperforms or fails in his/her duties.

Under the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, I will be answerable to the College for my activities and those of my department. I intend to work closely with my Director-General and my department. I will encourage a relationship based on clear division of responsibilities, loyalty, trust and transparency.

I will also encourage an open flow of information between my services and myself and my private office. In this connection, I attach great importance to the action plan implemented by the Commission with a view to improving internal communication and information received by Commissioners.

8. *How important would you consider implementing the interinstitutional co-operation (Commission-Parliament), in particular with the relevant parliamentary committees in your area of competence? In this new context, what does transparency mean for you, in the interinstitutional legislative procedure between the European Parliament, Council and Commission, as well as in the interinstitutional relations in general?*

I attach utmost importance to the implementation of the inter-institutional co-operation. In this connection, I will fully respect the commitments made under the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission, as well as under the agreement between the two institutions on procedures for implementing Council Decision 1999/468/CE on Comitology. I also fully subscribe to the commitments made under the Inter-Institutional Agreement of 16 December 2003 on Better Law-Making.

As regards co-operation with the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee or other parliamentary committees, I am committed to establishing a constructive working relationship based on transparency and regular dialogue. During my term of office I will follow an open-door policy for MEPs, and be regular in my attendance. I intend to listen carefully to the concerns of MEPs, take their views into account and provide prompt and clear information. Given the particular importance of the co-decision procedure in the field of environmental policy, I intend to co-operate fully with the joint legislators, and to support, as an honest broker and guardian of the general interest, their efforts to reach agreement. I consider that the hearing will be a first important occasion to set the basis of a good co-operation with the Committee.

Transparency is important for the quality of law-making, for democratic legitimacy and for bringing Europe closer to its citizens. During my term of office, I intend to seek the highest degree of transparency and information flow. I undertake to keep the Parliament informed of the Commission's work during the legislative process as well as of any problems regarding the proper implementation of existing legislation in the Member States.

V. Gender mainstreaming

9. *What concrete measures do you consider necessary in order to ensure that the concept of gender mainstreaming is implemented in your specific policy area? Do you have a policy strategy, and what financial and human resources do you think are necessary to implement gender mainstreaming in your portfolio?*

I am fully committed to promoting gender equality in practice and making it a visible concern in planning and policy. During my term as Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, I strongly supported the initiative for the creation of a European Gender Institute, which the European Council endorsed in June. The activities of the Institute should give a boost to gender mainstreaming through activities such as data collection, dissemination of information and awareness-raising.

As regards environmental policy, I firmly believe that gender perspectives should be integrated, in an effective manner, in policy and planning. Concrete measures to achieve this should include: training, as a means of raising awareness and disseminating best practices and techniques; the launch of relevant studies; contacts and exchange of views with relevant NGOs; and the development of tools to measure gender impact. I understand that a number of such measures are already being implemented. For example, the Commission has developed a gender impact checklist for environmental policies and projects to be filled out at the same time as a preliminary impact assessment or external impact assessment is being undertaken. Furthermore, in the context of one of the priorities of the 6th Environmental Action Programme to get more citizens involved in environmental issues, representative women's NGOs have been asked to help the Commission to define the connection between gender and environmental problems. I intend to continue these good practices and to improve or supplement them, where appropriate, in the light of the experience gained.

I also intend to make best use of the existing financial and human resources. Upon the assumption of my duties as Commissioner I will review the available means to check whether they are adequate, and I intend to make the case for additional resources, should these prove to be necessary.