

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

INVITED COMMITTEES:  
COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

**HEARING OF MARTA KOS**

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE

(Enlargement)

THURSDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2024

BRUSSELS



1-0002-0000

**IN THE CHAIR:****DAVID MCALLISTER***Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*

1-0003-0000

*(The hearing opened at 09:01)*

1-0004-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Good morning, dear colleagues, dear guests. A very warm welcome to all of you, to this Committee on Foreign Affairs and, of course, especially to Commissioner-designate for enlargement, Marta Kos. *Herzlich willkommen* – a warm welcome to you.

In addition to the members of the AFET Committee, I'm also glad to welcome colleagues from the invited committees: these are the LIBE Committee, AFCO and our subcommittee, DROI.

The purpose, dear colleagues, of this hearing is twofold. On the one hand, we will evaluate whether the Commissioner-designate is qualified to be a member of the College of Commissioners. And on the other hand, we will assess whether the Commissioner-designate demonstrates the appropriate level of expertise in her prospective portfolio. This hearing – and I don't have to underline this – presents a key moment in parliamentary scrutiny over our executive, because it increases the accountability of the Commission to Parliament.

On 22 October, we received Madam Kos's replies to our written questions. Her responses have been distributed to you, to the Members, and they have also been published on Parliament's website. The JURI Committee assessed the question of potential or actual conflict of interest, and has not raised objection to the holding of this hearing.

Now please allow me to very briefly describe the structure of this hearing. Firstly, the Commissioner-designate is invited to give an opening statement of no longer than 15 minutes. Thereafter, we will turn to the questions from the Members, to which the Commissioner-designate will have time to reply.

The questions will be structured in four rounds. In the first round, we will have the questions by the eight political groups. In that round, we will have 5-minute slots, including the possibility of a follow-up question from the Member. In the second round, we will have the questions by the Members based on the overall distribution of speaking time among the political groups, including a representative from the non-attached Members. In that round, we will have 3-minute slots.

In the third round, we will have the questions by the chairs of our invited committees. These will also be 3-minute slots. And finally, in the fourth round of questions, we will once again hear the eight political groups, but this time in the reverse order, also with 3-minute slots. And after this, at the end of this long hearing, the Commissioner-designate will have 5 minutes to make her closing statement.

Now, colleagues, I want to be very clear on this matter once again. Please note that the total time of the hearing is strictly limited to 3 hours. We have a lot of speakers; there is absolutely no reserve. Therefore, I ask all speakers to respect the allocated speaking time.

You will have only 1 minute to ask your question. And for those who are not familiar: one minute is 60 seconds. Don't try to start a discussion that a minute might be 70, 80 or even 90 seconds – it won't work. It's 60 seconds! So please, ask your question. Don't use up your time for making unnecessary statements. I will have to strongly enforce the time limits, and I might even be forced to switch off your microphone if you exceed the time. That's not very nice. That's actually pretty rude. I don't want to do that. Please don't force me to do so.

So let me recall that, under our Rules, the hearing shall aim to 'develop a pluralistic political dialogue between the Commissioners-designate and the Members', and that the Commissioners-designate should 'enjoy a fair opportunity to present themselves and their opinions'. Ms Kos should enjoy her hearing, it says. Therefore, please respect the smooth conduct of his hearing. Also let me underline – and it goes without saying – that I will not tolerate disruption of the good order, any improper behaviour or any offensive language.

Finally, colleagues, interpretation will be provided in 23 official languages. All speakers can therefore use their own language. But I would like to kindly remind you that you need to be interpreted. Therefore, please do not speak too quickly. The hearing will be streamed live on Parliament's website, and it will also be possible to access a video recording within a few minutes of the end of this hearing.

Before I give the floor now to our guest, I would like to stress the importance our committee puts on close cooperation and dialogue with the Commissioner-designate and the European Parliament.

Dear Marta Kos, we acknowledge your readiness to cooperate with Parliament, in particular regarding your engagement to be regularly present in committees and plenaries, to follow up on Parliament's initiatives, and to timely share information with us. This is particularly important in the context of the revision of the Framework Agreement. We count on the full implementation of your commitment and on your full cooperation to also inform our committee in advance of all upcoming proposals.

I would now suggest that we move on to item number two. Madam Kos, you have now the floor for your opening statement of up to 15 minutes.

1-0005-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, honourable Chair David McAllister, chairs of the invited committees and honourable Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, I feel humbled to appear before of you as Commissioner-designate for Enlargement. I am grateful for this opportunity to be able to present to you my vision of how I would, if confirmed, boost the EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy with concrete and effective actions.

Širitev Evropske unije je kot rdeča nit mojega življenja. Ko se je moja država Slovenija bližala samostojnosti, sem bila del mlade generacije, ki je zahtevala več svobode in demokracije. Pot v Evropsko unijo je takoj postala prava pot. Ko se spominjam teh časov, še danes čutim neverjetno pozitivno kolektivno energijo, ki je nastala iz takratnega zgodovinskega zanosa.

Če bom potrjena, želim v širitveni proces, ki je pred nami, vnesti enako osredotočenost in energijo. Večino svoje kariere sem se ukvarjala z evropskimi in mednarodnimi zadevami, zato verjamem, da bom lahko v tej vlogi dobro služila Evropski uniji.

Leta dela kot novinarke in dopisnice so mi dala edinstvene izkušnje o pomenu komunikacije in javne diplomacije pri oblikovanju javnega mnenja. Kot slovenska veleposlanica v Nemčiji, Latviji, Švici in Lihtenštajnu sem pridobila neposredne izkušnje z evropsko politiko in diplomacijo. V teh vlogah sem videla priložnost, da pomagam tkati našo skupno Evropo nekoliko tesneje in močnejše in še danes čutim enak smisel in globoko zavezanost.

Spoštovani člani odbora! Živimo v času globokih sprememb. Svetovno ravnovesje moči se hitro spreminja in postavlja pod vprašaj naše demokratične vrednote in institucije. Avtoritarni režimi želijo propad Evrope.

Ruska vojna proti Ukrajini nas jasno spominja na bistveno vlogo EU, ne le pri spodbujanju gospodarskega in družbenega napredka, temveč tudi kot ključno varovalo pred tiranijo in promotorja miru. Ukrajina se bori za obrambo svoje ozemeljske celovitosti in za evropske vrednote ter se postavlja po robu silam surove moči.

Naša moralna dolžnost je, da smo najmočnejši možni partner in zaveznik ukrajinskega naroda. Evropska pristopna perspektiva to zavezo najbolj uteleša. Podpirati Ukrajino in se upirati ruski agresiji je zame absolutna prednostna naloga. Politično, gospodarsko, finančno. Z uporabo vseh orodij Evropske unije.

Mehr denn je ist eine größere und reformierte EU ein strategischer Imperativ in unserem eigenen Interesse. Eine gestärkte und besser integrierte Union gibt uns eine lautere Stimme in internationalen und globalen Angelegenheiten. Eine solche Union bedeutet mehr wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Fortschritt für mehr Europäerinnen und Europäer in den bestehenden und in den zukünftigen Mitgliedstaaten. Und das wiederum bedeutet eine stabilere, sicherere und widerstandsfähigere Union in einer zunehmend unsicheren Welt.

Falls mir diese Aufgabe anvertraut wird, werde ich mich mit aller Kraft dafür einsetzen, dass zukünftige Mitglieder gründlich auf den Beitritt vorbereitet sind. Denn für mich ist klar, die EU-Erweiterung ist ein Marathon, kein Sprint. Ich werde dafür sorgen, dass die wesentlichen Elemente des EU-Beitrittsprozesses das Fundament des Erweiterungsprozesses bleiben und dass der Aufbau einer soliden Erfolgsbilanz entscheidend ist. Wir sollten nur neue Mitglieder aufnehmen, die sich aktiv zu dem bekennen, was Europas DNA ausmacht: unsere Werte, Demokratie und Rechtsstaatlichkeit. Um dies zu erreichen, werde ich alle mir verfügbaren Mittel einsetzen und eng mit allen Mitgliedern des Kollegiums zusammenarbeiten, um sicherzustellen, dass die gesamte Kommission an einem Strang zieht.

Mein oberstes Ziel wird es sein, unsere Erweiterungspartner auf ihrem Weg zur EU-Mitgliedschaft tatkräftig zu unterstützen. Gemäß unserer neuen EU-Erweiterungsmethodologie werde ich sicherstellen, dass der Beitrittsprozess vorhersehbar und glaubwürdig ist und einer starken politischen Steuerung unterliegt. Und ich werde dafür sorgen, dass die Verhandlungen transparent, inklusiv und fair verlaufen, sodass die Beitrittskandidaten sich weiterhin vollkommen für ihren Weg in die EU einsetzen. Und im Gegenzug erwarte ich von den Kandidaten, dass sie ihr strategisches europäisches Engagement noch stärker und glaubwürdiger unter Beweis stellen – gerade weil wir in einer Zeit der Multipolarität leben.

Consequently, if confirmed, I will ensure that, first, the path to joining the EU remains fully merit-based. Each candidate country will be assessed on its own individual progress. I'm all for ambition, but there can be no shortcuts, and I will never compromise quality over speed.

Second: the political commitments, especially in critical areas such as justice reform, judicial independence and fight against corruption. I will not hesitate to propose corrective measures in case of serious or prolonged stagnation or backsliding, as our process is also based on reversibility.

Third, the more-for-more principle will be upheld. Those who do undertake the necessary reforms should reap the benefits of their efforts and move towards accession, and we can facilitate the gradual integration of our partners into key sectors of the EU single market.

The annual enlargement package will remain the primary tool for evaluating reforms across the fundamentals and all negotiation chapters, and for making recommendations against which further progress is measured. And I promise I will present and discuss it with you, honourable Members of the Parliament, immediately after the adoption by the College and before informing the media.

My objective will be to work closely with Kyiv on scheduled reforms, while maintaining momentum in the accession negotiations, and supporting recovery and reconstruction in coordination with the G7 and other like-minded partners. Our economic, military and political support is not helping only Ukrainians, but is defending Europe as a continent and even more: it is protecting the global world order based on international law and multilateralism. If confirmed, I will ensure that the enlargement negotiations remain the European guiding star for this heroic nation. The same must, of course, apply to our friends in Moldova.

I also intend to ensure that the Ukraine Facility – worth EUR 50 billion – the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans – EUR 6 billion – and, once adopted, the recently proposed Growth Plan for Moldova – worth EUR 1.8 billion – are all effectively and consistently implemented. With existing financial instruments, we can facilitate the gradual integration of our partners into key sectors of the single market. This approach will also pave the way for smoother integration into our shared policies and practices, and enable us to better manage irregular migration.

At the same time, I'm aware of the expectations of this House about the sustained reforms and political commitments to EU membership on the part of enlargement countries. In case of stagnation or backsliding, we can react.

I want to see tangible results in the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. Let us turn this opportunity into reality, under the principles I set out above. Reconciliation and regional cooperation are essential elements of the enlargement process to the Western Balkans. If confirmed, I will engage more in addressing bilateral issues and facilitating solutions. They must not become permanent obstacles on the road to Brussels. I know I will always find an ally in this House when tackling these issues.

I acknowledge that the United Nations-led process for finding a solution to the Cyprus issue, based upon the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, is the right way to bring peace to this divided island, 50 years after the invasion. This will also determine the pace of the future EU-Türkiye relationship.

I will continue to engage with Türkiye, which is a candidate country and a key partner for the EU. In doing this, it is essential to understand that the cooperation cannot be simply a matter of

economic alignment or geographical proximity. Just like this House, I will always defend human rights, democracy, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, and remind the enlargement countries that our principles are non-negotiable.

I will also ensure that the enlargement policy is closely aligned with our Neighbourhood Policy. This includes taking a fresh look at the design and tools of the Eastern Partnership, with a renewed focus on connectivity in and with the southern Caucasus and Black Sea towards Central Asia. This is increasingly important for Europe's security and competitiveness, because these regions are subject to the same geopolitical forces that tear at our European project. In doing so, I will work closely with the High Representative / Vice-President on the Black Sea strategy, while also supporting efforts to foster peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Honourable Members, at the heart of these efforts must be our sustained engagement with civil society. I strongly believe in the power of civil society to hold leaders accountable. If confirmed, I will apply a zero-tolerance policy to all actions against civil society organisation, human rights defenders and journalists. I intend to meet with their representatives whenever possible during my visits, because democracy is not just built in the parliaments, in the courts; it is built in communities, in homes and in the hearts of everyday citizens.

Whether they live in Galicia, in Lapland, in Apulia, at the shore of the Masurian lakes, in Slavonia or in Hessen, our citizens might have different perspectives and concerns on enlargement. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will listen to them, including the specific concerns and aspirations of young people, and this will help me to shape a detailed communication strategy. We need to actively communicate what we do and why enlargement is so good for Europe. Likewise, active communication in the enlargement countries is an integral part of gathering support and understanding of what European membership means. This is a priority for my mandate.

Honourable Members, President von der Leyen has rightly said that the enlargement should be a catalyst for progress on the EU reforms. Together with my colleagues, I will engage in the pre-enlargement policy reviews to help identify gaps and needs, including in the areas under my responsibility. I am committed to advancing efforts to strengthen interinstitutional cooperation between the Commission and European Parliament.

Honourable Chair, honourable Members, since the day I became Commissioner-designate, and after many meetings with you, I feel motivated, energised and passionate about what we can all achieve in the enlargement process in the next 5 years. Today, in front of you, I commit to 'walk the talk' about European values. I commit to consider and support with equal care all enlargement partners that share an EU perspective.

I commit to teamwork, and I mean by teamwork not only with the College, but also with the European Parliament, and especially with you, members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. If confirmed, I will listen to you and take your views into account, and explore how we can reinforce each other in our efforts to take forward the EU priorities. I, for my part, will be available for regular discussions and exchanges of views in the enlargement countries and our neighbourhood. Furthermore, I encourage all of us to communicate the benefits of EU enlargement more effectively, and I warmly welcome you to join me in visiting enlargement countries.

During her first speech as the President of the European Parliament in 1979, Simone Veil stated, 'All the Community members are faced with three great challenges: the challenge of peace, the challenge

of freedom and the challenge of prosperity, and it seems clear that they only can be met through the European dimension’.

I believe that the vision expressed by Simone Veil 45 years ago holds true today, as we are working on the next enlargement. Enlargement today is again a historical opportunity to achieve peace, freedom and prosperity on the whole European continent. This is what the European project is and has always been about. And today, more than ever.

1-0009-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Commissioner-designate, thank you very much for your opening statement.

We now come to the first round of questions and answers. You have 1 minute for the question and 2 minutes for the answer. And only in this round – as you all are aware – there is a possibility for a follow-up question from the same Member: no longer than 1 minute with 1 minute for the reply.

1-0010-0000

**Michael Gahler (PPE)**. – Commissioner-designate, you may assume your new role as Commissioner for Enlargement in extraordinary circumstances. On the one hand, we have an imperialist Russia that continues its brutal war of aggression against one of our candidate countries and at the same time tries to exert its malign influence not only in Moldova but also in multifold ways in the countries of the Western Balkans. On the other hand, we have an unpredictable incoming presidency in the US.

Against this background, when we as Europeans need to get our acts together to stabilise our immediate neighbourhood also with the instrument of enlargement, how would you weigh the different arguments with regard to the candidates? There is, of course, this need to fulfil the accession criteria, but there’s also the geopolitical challenge not to leave any country out in the cold and grey zones of malign influence. And there is our promise to deliver on enlargement.

Is there a general approach, or would you weigh these considerations differently with regard to the individual candidates? Apparently, you can imagine creative ways of gradual accession not to overcharge the countries and the Member States. Which chapters of the Treaty do you consider particularly suitable for such a gradual approach?

1-0011-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Mr Gahler, for raising this very important aspect of enlargement: how to help the candidate countries to fulfil the criteria to become a member of the EU. There is a work they have to do and there is also a work we have to do. I have stressed the merit-based principle before. I will be strict on this because I strongly believe that we can only accept into the EU the members who will really, first, finish all the negotiating chapters – and if I go one step back – who stick to the European values.

I agree with you there: somebody could say there is a tension between the geopolitical situations, which is not easy nowadays, especially this week, and on the other hand, the aspirations of the countries – and some of the countries are waiting for some years. If we want to really be consistent, and I think we should be consistent, then we have to take care of the integrity of the enlargement process. And this is, for me, crucial.



I will firmly uphold the merit-based approach because it is fair. But because of this special dimension you have mentioned – the geopolitical dimension – we also have to help those countries. So it is merit-based, but we are the ones who have to help them.

I like to say that the application to join the EU is a choice, not an obligation, but it comes with conditions and commitments. And our task, my task as Commissioner for Enlargement, if confirmed, will be to help the countries getting ready. And I see, Mr Gahler, this not only my work, not just the work of the College, but for all of us together.

1-0012-0000

**Michael Gahler (PPE).** – When it's about sending credible signals to the candidates that they are actually on the way, concrete example, would you commit to delivering to the candidates for next year the enlargement of the common roaming area and the SEPA zone for banking?

I think such a concrete deliverable would credibly impact each and every citizen in the candidate countries, and make them feel in their daily lives that they are actually on a good track.

So would that be a project that you could embrace and push in the College and with the Member States?

1-0013-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – *(Start of speech off mic)* ... Mr Gahler, I think that the principle of gradual integration is what we can build on. Why? The negotiation process is not easy, but if we can show not just to the government members, the members of the negotiation teams, but the people of the candidate countries that they could have the benefits of future membership even before they enter into the EU, I think this would be good not just for them but also for us.

I am fully on your side in the sense of what we can offer them, and I am willing to develop new tools or new possible areas where this gradual integration could be then in favour of the candidate countries. I hope I can count on your support, too.

1-0014-0000

**Nacho Sánchez Amor (S&D).** – Señor presidente, señora Kos, voy por un camino similar al de su señoría Gahler. Históricamente, los procesos de ampliación de la UE se han desencadenado a causa de cambios en la escena geopolítica. Pasó con el final de las dictaduras del sur de Europa, pasó con el final del mundo soviético y pasa ahora con la guerra de agresión rusa.

Las urgencias geopolíticas, sin embargo, pueden ser malas consejeras si erosionan un aspecto esencial de los procesos de adhesión, y algunos ejemplos tenemos precisamente este semestre en esta casa. Mi Grupo necesita llevarse de aquí hoy la más firme seguridad de que los aspectos ligados a principios y valores -a los criterios de Copenhague- no van a ser sacrificados en favor de presiones geopolíticas.

La afirmación que usted ha hecho de que no hay atajos hay que ponerla en práctica. Somos un club de democracias y estamos vacunados contra las prisas bajo la lógica del "bueno, ya madurarán dentro". ¿Está usted dispuesta a mantener a toda costa los estándares democráticos como núcleo del proceso de ampliación y a tomar medidas si no hay progresos?

1-0015-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Yes, this is the nucleus of whatever we do here.

This discrepancy might be a discrepancy but I don't see it, because if we do not stick to the principles which make our Europe – I was talking about this before – how can we make the candidate countries ready to enter the EU?

So it is about the values. I said it before when I was speaking about Türkiye, it is not only about the economy, it is not only about the geographical proximity.

For me, Mr Sánchez, a very important question is what kind of Europe do we want to have? And how will this Europe be?

The elections in the US have shown, I see a positive side of this result of the elections, because I think we should make more out of what Europe is based on: the values.

So, the whole negotiation process is built on starting with fundamentals and finishing with fundamentals. And, Mr Sánchez, I think that this is the best way that we will always stick to them, which is very important.

Prosperity is important, as I was talking about before, the economy is important, but without the values perhaps we will be the last part of the world who is really defending the values and today this is more important than ever.

And when I speak about the fundamentals, I really believe that we should respect human dignity, freedom, democracy and, of course, equality – this is Article 2 of our Treaty, which should be a guiding star for whatever we do in the way of bringing the countries into the EU.

1-0016-0000

**Nacho Sánchez Amor (S&D)**. – Conectado con lo anterior, también queremos garantías sobre el carácter individual de los procesos de adhesión.

Muchas veces hablamos del proceso basado en méritos y lo planteamos como una exigencia, una condición o una limitación para los candidatos, pero un proceso basado en méritos también nos crea obligaciones a nosotros; y es que el país que haya cumplido no tiene que esperar a otros. No hay paquetes, no hay bloques: si se ha demostrado la voluntad y la preparación, el ingreso debe ser inmediato.

La excusa de arreglar la casa antes puede tener sentido en la lógica de bloques, pero no lo tiene para casos de países individuales cuya capacidad para ser absorbidos es perfectamente lógica.

¿Está usted dispuesta a promover el ingreso de los candidatos que hayan demostrado estar preparados? ¿Está usted dispuesta a evitar nuevas frustraciones?

1-0017-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – You have raised a very important issue. If we want to preserve the integrity of the enlargement process, yes. If the countries fulfil all the criteria to be able to finish the negotiation process, then, of course, if the Member States and the Council say 'Yes', we have to take them on. Rightly so.

It is not only, as you have stressed, the obligation of the candidate countries to do what they have to do. It is also an obligation from our side to do as much as possible, and this will be a part of internal reforms or internal changes we have to do to be able to get them on board.

And I think we can do this very good in parallel. It will not be easy, but this is the only way that we will stick to the European credibility.

1-0018-0000

**Kinga Gál (Pfe).** – Commissioner-designate, enlargement is where promises of the EU has not been kept in the past, many years in relation to the Western Balkans. Due to the work of Commissioner Várhelyi, the process has moved forward considerably.

Do you plan to continue this work and further accelerate accession for the Western Balkans, in particular also in the case of Serbia?

How will you make sure that accession remains a merit-based process for all, and it is not selective, based on political bias, ideological conditionalities or considerations? If, as you just said, it is merit-based, then why are there 'buts'?

When it comes to the selective and politically-biased treatment, I have to ask, do you commit to treat and work with all MEPs and groups of the European Parliament equally? And will you apply neutrality, as expected from the European Commission?

1-0019-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – *(Start of speech off mic)* ... in the Western Balkans. I know this area. I used to live in the common state, and I can assure you, and you have already stressed what will be the most important criterion: this is the merit-based. I know that there are some different expectations, perhaps to treat them differently because they have been on this way longer.

But as you have twice said, it is merit-based. I will do everything I can – together with my services and with the encouragement in the whole college – that we will prepare them.

And we have good possibilities today: for the first time after 10 years, there is a real chance that we will bring one or two countries to the end of the negotiating process. We could end the negotiations with Montenegro, closing the chapters until the end of 2026. With Albania, until the end of 2027. Even Mr Vučić said a few days ago when he got the enlargement report, that he is willing to do everything to align their legislation with the European *acquis*. I think this is a huge success.

Still, the actions have to follow, but what I think also is very important: the war in Ukraine has brought a new dynamic in the enlargement process, and we should build on this that the countries who applied later are not the competitors to the countries who applied earlier. They have to work together, and this will also be my work.

1-0020-0000

**Kinga Gál (Pfe).** – In your written response, you replied that you are open to abolishing the unanimity requirement.

Also, you come from Slovenia, the only central European country to be part of the Group of Friends on qualified majority voting in EU foreign policy. Qualified majority voting could force smaller countries to align with positions they do not support and that are against their national interest.

So how do you intend to balance your support for QMV with your commitment to respect the Treaties and competences and interests of all Member States?

1-0021-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – (Start of speech off mic) ... that you have addressed this issue.

There are some steps where the unanimity has to be preserved, especially at the end of the negotiation process and at the beginning.

Where we could be much more effective with the qualified majority are interim steps: opening the cluster, closing the cluster. I think this goes together well with the question of Mr Sánchez before: how could we assure that if they do something, we deliver on our promises?

So it is about the Member States to decide how we will proceed, but I think from my side and from the side of the Commission, we will be able to do this in the way that we enhance the speed of the process if the countries will, of course, deliver. And of course, at the end, if the Member States will give a green light to this.

1-0022-0000

**Adam Bielan (ECR)**. – Madam Commissioner-designate, the prospect of EU enlargement in the Eastern Partnership is undoubtedly complex, balancing both aspiration and rigorous standards. My first question will be on Ukraine and my follow-up on Georgia.

There is no doubt that the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has accelerated the prospects of EU perspective for Ukraine and also, separately, Moldova. While we recognise there is no fast-track option and that strict accession criteria must be met, the geopolitical significance of Ukraine's potential integration into both the EU and NATO cannot be overstated.

How do you envision the integration process of Ukraine unfolding in the coming years? And, beyond the immense damage caused by the war, what do you identify as the major obstacles on Ukraine's path to EU integration?

1-0023-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Putting stress on the enlargement perspectives of Ukraine, I've talked that Ukraine has brought a new dynamic in the whole enlargement process, and we live in the historical moment where the enlargement process has become the priority of the European Union, also because of the Ukraine. And we have never had before a candidate country being in war, but still we see how much development this country has made. Therefore, the integration of Ukraine into the EU recovery and helping Ukraine building up whatever is destroyed, as I mentioned before, will be my priority.

How will we do this? I was upset when I heard in the news in these days that the United States of America is the biggest financial contributor to Ukraine, and the number was 56 billion. I tell you the numbers for the EU: it's 118, and we will do more. We have developed a great facility, which is the Ukraine Facility, and we will support – we are already supporting – in different pillars, the Ukraine Plan, meaning how to encourage their reforms, how to take care about the reconstructions. It is true: we cannot do this by ourselves; we need international partners.

And on the other side, how to help private investors to see Ukraine as the possibility to invest. Under the line, Mr Bielan, this will be my priority, and I already plan to go to Ukraine, if confirmed, right after the new Commission will start to work.

1-0024-0000

**Adam Bielan (ECR).** – Turning to Georgia, we have been witnessing a sad and unfortunately stable decline in the situation in terms of democracy and human rights.

The recent elections have shown, once again, the influence of anti-democratic powers at play, as is the general consensus of the Georgian population and the international community.

Given that both EU and NATO membership are enshrined in the Georgian Constitution, but that progress seems stalled under the current government, what path forward do you envision for EU-Georgia relations?

What minimum requirements do you believe must be met to reactivate the accession process?

And how do you see the EU supporting democratic reforms in Georgia in the coming years?

1-0025-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – I have a message for the people of Georgia: don't give up hope.

We are ready to go on with the enlargement process. You asked about the conditions. The first condition would be that the government of Georgia shows us that it is willing to go this way. So we expect it to abolish two laws which have been accepted: the law on foreign interference and the law on values and family. This would be the first sign.

And we are ready. We are ready to support Georgia on their way into the European Union. We have prepared the package of money not only for the government, for the reforms, but also for the civil society.

Nothing is finished yet. I hope that we will be able, also with your support here in the European Parliament, to go on with helping Georgia.

1-0026-0000

**Ilhan Kyuchyuk (Renew).** – Ms Kos, let's play a bit with the terminology: regatta approach, merit-based approach, 'Big Bang' enlargement, geopolitical European Union, gradual approach. And you can add more and more. But the reality is different, right? And we all know the reality. We are at deadlock when it comes to enlargement. If we look when the last country joined in enlargement, I can point Croatia and that was many years ago.

So the question is what can be done differently this time? I think it's very important because enlargement is about the trust: how you can convince the countries on their way to the European Union to do more, to do it differently. But also you have, I think, an even more difficult task: how you want to convince those countries being already in the European Union that they have to give their trust to those willing to come to the European Union.

1-0027-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for raising this very important question. During many visits to the Members of the Parliament, I was asked which country I would like to see or what my vision would be which country would be the first in the EU tomorrow? And I said, Ukraine. I wanted to say I don't have a miracle stick to do this, what you have just mentioned. So yes, we have to do it in parallel: the negotiating process or enlargement process and then the reforms.

Mr Kyuchyuk, I cannot, and I will never accept that if the enlargement countries fulfil the criteria at the end of the process, they will be stuck. So how to do this? I see a very important task of myself to work with the Member States, to work with the Council. But the most important thing is, I hope I have 721 allies here in the European Parliament. This is not something I can do by myself, especially when it is about working with the Member States. If confirmed, I will also in December immediately go to Warsaw.

Why to Warsaw? Because Poland is taking over the EU presidency. I want to speak with our Member States who will take over the presidency how we could include the communication of the enlargement in the whole presidency process. And I see a good ally, Mr Kyuchyuk, with you, in Bulgaria, with Mr Stier, in Croatia. So how can we talk to the public in your countries? How can we talk not only to the Council to get the green light to take the countries in if they fulfil the criteria?

1-0028-0000

**Ilhan Kyuchyuk (Renew)**. – Let's talk about integrity and transparency in this House. In the existing geopolitical environment, I think is even more important.

In the same environment, in the context, the integrity of Europe and its institutions is being constantly questioned by media, but it also is subject to disinformation campaigns by third actors.

Recently, I read also allegations about you, that you were involved in the activities of the Yugoslav secret service in the period before Slovenia became independent. Is that true, or is it only disinformation?

1-0029-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – *(Start of speech off mic)* ... about the integration, and it is also about disinformation.

I have read so many new things that I never knew about me. I took this seriously, even if I was sad because there were many, many lies.

Back to your question. I was never a collaborator or informant of the secret service of Yugoslavia. I am on that list, I don't know how, but on that list are also three past prime ministers, three past presidents of the State, three past Members of the European Parliament. There are thousands and thousands of people on this list.

It is about my integrity, and I'm happy that you ask the question, because it gives the opportunity that in front of all of you, we clear this once forever.

If I go through, if I will be confirmed, I tell you, integrity is so much important in my life. That's why I wouldn't want to see this challenged by the accusations which really, Mr Kyuchyuk, go into the direction of disinformation.

1-0030-0000

**Reinier Van Lanschot (Verts/ALE).** – *(Start of speech off mic)* ... questions about the Eastern Partnership. So the Eastern Partnership was created in conditions of relative peace, and not all its members are EU candidates. They are marked by different challenges, but they all face hybrid threats or even war: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are the victims of Russian aggression and interference; Armenia needs support and conditions for a just peace; the Belarusian opposition is still fighting for a democratic future; and in Azerbaijan, the government's assault on dissidents and human rights defenders has seriously worsened over the last two years.

So all of this requires a clear vision for the Eastern Partnership, and I was very surprised that your mission letter misses that clear vision.

So I have three questions. Firstly, can you commit to creating a dedicated vision of the Eastern Partnership? Will you strengthen the EU candidate countries with new security tools against foreign interference? And thirdly, what will you do for democratic forces and civil society struggling for EU values in countries like Georgia, Armenia, Belarus and Azerbaijan?

1-0031-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Mr Chair, do you give me half an hour to answer those questions?

1-0032-0000

**David McAllister, Chair of the AFET Committee.** – Commissioner-designate, you can talk about everything, but not for more than two minutes.

1-0033-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – I got your message at the beginning.

Mr Van Lanschot, thank you, you have raised the issue of the Eastern Partnership. It is not written there, but this will be one of the focuses during my work, if I am confirmed.

But we have to adapt and reset it to the new realities. We will probably go on two ways. One is the enlargement, because from the ex-Eastern Partnership countries, we have now Ukraine on the European path, we have Moldova, hopefully Georgia will be back, and there is the neighbourhood part with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

I will work hand-in-hand with the High Representative / Vice President on the Black Sea strategy, or on the strategy on how we can deal with the Eastern Partnership in the future.

It is very important, as I have said in my introduction, also in this area, there are regimes who want to see Europe fail. The enlargement process is a tool against this. And if these are not the enlargement countries, then we have to build on the good relations. Meaning, what can we do on the basics of the mutually beneficial partnerships? It is about transport, it is about connectivity, it is about energy security. And this will be the key focus in my mandate.

Since I have only 15 seconds left, perhaps later on I will speak more about the real importance of the civil society. As I have stressed, this will be one of my focuses, and I will do everything, we will put more money into supporting the civil societies, especially in the countries who are not on the EU path yet.

1-0034-0000

**Reinier Van Lanschot (Verts/ALE).** – Different question, as you may know, in 2016, a referendum in the Netherlands on an association agreement between the EU and Ukraine was hijacked for political purposes that were completely unrelated to the association agreement itself.

And as we've seen in Georgia and Moldova, Russia will stop at nothing to fuel divisions between Member States and candidate countries and preventing people from choosing their European future freely.

So I'm happy to hear that you see an important role for communicating and listening to the voices of people in the enlargement countries and in the EU.

We also learned from the Conference on the Future of Europe that including citizens in EU decision-making only works if their conclusions lead to actions.

So that leads me to my questions. The first one is can you commit to an awareness-raising campaign, with the European Parliament, which will show the challenges and massive benefits of EU enlargement? And what other models of citizen participation can you commit to using for including citizens?

1-0035-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – The answer is yes, yes and yes. I cannot imagine having a communication campaign in the Member States and in the candidate countries without cooperating with you. Are you willing to cooperate with me, if I am confirmed?

So I see this really as hand-in-hand work. Why? Who would know what's going on in your country better than you and other Members of Parliament from your country?

You also mentioned disinformation. We will have to find disinformation, and we will have to work on this. What I see as difficult, it will have to do also with the fear in the Member States that bringing in the new countries could make their living worse.

So we also have to address the fears. This is on the field of the irrationality. So we have to talk about it, talk about it, talk about it, and listen to each other. And I'm surely willing to do this.

1-0036-0000

**Ilaria Salis (The Left).** – Dear Commissioner-designate, I'd like to start with a concrete case, that of Albania and the connection between its EU integration application and the Albania-Italy agreement on the externalisation of asylum requests.

In 2021, the Prime Minister, Edi Rama, publicly stated Albania will never be a place where very rich countries create camps for their refugees, and it's therefore surprising that he appears to have so drastically changed his position.

There is concern that Albania's EU integration prospects may have been used as a bargaining chip to exchange for hosting asylum seekers on behalf of Italy and the EU.

Do you support such an arrangement, and if so, which is the justification? And if not, what steps will you take in the coming years to avoid similar scenarios with other countries seeking EU integration?



1-0037-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – You have raised an important question, and if I understand you correctly, it's about the agreement between Albania and Italy on the refugee centres. The centres are based on the bilateral agreement between Albania and Italy. This is not an EU project.

What I want to stress is that we will see how this arrangement will work. For the time being, it's not working well, and I see this only as an opportunity to see how it can work if this is done differently.

What we have decided to do, in the European Union, we have a Migration and Asylum Pact, and this is what I will work on. So this is for me the priority: the implementation of the pact, making Frontex stronger and putting the question of migrations in the enlargement processes to which extent so that we help the candidate countries so that they are able to do the migration management.

But whatever we do, it is very important that we do this in the sense that we follow the European values so it is about the dignity of the refugees; that we, for all the people who really deserve the asylum, enable that they get the asylum, and that we return the people who don't have a right for asylum, that they go back to those countries.

1-0038-0000

**Ilaria Salis (The Left)**. – On Tuesday, Commissioner-designate for migration and home affairs, Mr Brunner, stated that return hubs will be a key part of his policy. This means that we can expect more of these hubs to be set in EU candidate countries, as we already see in Albania.

While these hubs raise serious legal and humanitarian concerns, they could also, ironically, hinder these countries' EU accession. Evidence from existing hubs shows that these centres often become places where human rights are neglected, even though respect for human rights is essential for EU integration.

It seems the EU may be using candidate countries to handle tasks it doesn't want to address directly, effectively making them responsible for this dirty work. Will you take actions to address this problematic situation for candidate countries?

1-0039-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This issue is very important. The first part is what do we do with the people who come to Europe and don't get the right for stay? The second question is how do these return centres work?

Having return centres, wherever they are, is a part of the migration management. But if we have those centres – and I know that your party is really a watchdog on what is happening in the return centres, and I find this is okay – everything that is happening there should be really grounded in, again, Article 2 of the European Treaty. It's about dignity; it's about human rights.

And the European Union is giving money so that the management of those return centres will really respect human rights and, of course, that the returns in question can only come if they are voluntary, safe and dignified. And this will be the primary focus. I will work together with Commissioner Brunner, if confirmed, on this very important question. So I see enlargement and management of the migration together.

1-0040-0000

**Станислав Стоянов (ESN).** – Уважаема г-жо Кандидат Комисар, бихте ли изяснили Вашата позиция относно опитите на Република Северна Македония да отложи или ограничи прилагането на конституционните промени, които биха осигурили равнопоставеност на българите с останалите части от народи в основния закон на страната, както е според заключенията на Съвета относно присъединяването на Северна Македония и Албания, приети на 18 юли 2022 г.?

1-0041-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Stoyanov. The answer is clear and the answer is a part of this year's enlargement report. We expect that candidate country North Macedonia will change the constitution as promised, nothing more and nothing less: the rule of law, respect of human rights, right of belonging to minorities. Again, Article 2 – I will come back to this article apparently today many times – is the basis. So we expect the Government of North Macedonia to fulfil this requirement.

1-0042-0000

**Станислав Стоянов (ESN).** – Във Вашия писмен отговор на въпросите, зададени от AFET, вие заявявате, че така наречените „спорове“, както ги определяте, между страни – членки на Европейския съюз, и кандидат-членки трябва да бъдат решени бързо, за да се избегне възпрепятстването на напредъка по разширяването и подкопаването на доверието в процеса.

Бихте ли разяснили какви конкретни действия или срокове предвиждате, за да гарантирате, че разрешаването на тези спорове ще се случи не просто бързо, но и съхранява интересите на държавите членки на Европейския съюз? Ще работите ли за това да спрат нарушенията на човешките права в държавите кандидатки, какъвто е случаят с българите в Република Северна Македония?

1-0043-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Fulfilling commitments, Mr Stoyanov, is very important. When I speak about the bilateralisation or the possible disputes between the Member States and the candidate countries, the interests of the Member States of course come first.

What I see is – and this will be my work, if confirmed – me and my services and the other colleagues will do everything that we will not import the bilateral issues in the process of the enlargement.

But we have a situation like in your country when this is now a part of this, and once we have the negotiation process, we have much more tools how to help the candidate countries – and on the other side, the Member States – to find the solution.

So, there is no other way and I cannot set the dates – how quick, how long the development should be. We should resolve the disputes on the grounds of our values.

So, helping the Member States and helping the candidate countries will be a very, very important part of my work if confirmed. There is no other way.

1-0044-0000

**David McAllister, Chair of the AFET Committee.** – Thank you. Colleagues, this concludes the first round of questions and answers.

We now come to the second round, and now it's 1-minute question, 2-minute answer and no follow-up question.

1-0045-0000

**Michał Szczerba (PPE).** – Szanowna Pani Komisarz! Przed wszystkim bardzo dziękuję za tę deklarację złożenia wizyty w Warszawie. Za osiem tygodni zaczyna się polska prezydencja, mam nadzieję, że będzie ona dynamiczna, że będzie nastawiona na bezpieczeństwo, kwestie obronne, ale również rozszerzenie, bo przecież rozszerzenie jest wprost powiązane z naszym bezpieczeństwem. Jeżeli chcemy być dostawcą bezpieczeństwa, jeżeli chcemy być strategicznym, globalnym partnerem, musimy się rozszerzać, musimy być więksi, musimy być silniejsi. I to jest podstawowy cel, który również trzeba mieć na uwadze.

Ważna sprawa dotycząca Ukrainy. Dzisiaj Ukraina jest w stanie wojny, ale za kilka lat – i to będzie również prawdopodobnie czas funkcjonowania Pani Komisarz – rozpocznie się gigantyczny proces odbudowy Ukrainy. Jak Pani Komisarz zamierza wspierać ten proces? Z jakimi partnerami? Ale przede wszystkim, czy uważa Pani, że również europejskie firmy powinny w tym procesie mieć swój istotny udział?

1-0046-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Szczerba, for mentioning this very important question: reconstruction of Ukraine. I'm happy you look forward to what we will do once the war is over, but the reconstruction is already on the way. We are helping, restoring or building up the hospitals, the schools, administrations. So reconstruction, we cannot do it by ourselves. We need the international partners and we will seek them. I have mentioned G7 before, but there are many, many others.

If I go back directly to your question – 'Who will do this?' – I hope that a lot of European companies, and probably a lot because you know the area well, a lot of companies from the European Union, we will invest a lot from Poland. We will invest a lot of money in the reconstruction process. And I think that the best would be that the companies who know the area, who know the geography, who know the people, who know the mentality will be able to do this. And I count that, really, we will have many, many companies from the European Union who will work on this reconstruction.

Reconstruction will not be easy, but it is also not only a challenge, but really something which can give us new energy. What I am talking about: we can bring in the digitalisation. Ukraine is good in the digitalisation, meaning that we can bring in this reconstruction process all the modern tools which will enable us to be more effective. And, of course, we will have to take care of the transparency of spending the money.

1-0047-0000

**Thijs Reuten (S&D).** – Thank you Chair, thank you, Miss Kos, for your commitment and congratulations on this portfolio, which will make our bloc stronger, which automatically brings me to Ukraine. The EU and Ukraine launched accession negotiations in July and, as usual, starting with the fundamentals such as democracy and rule of law.

At the same time, Russia continues its brutal war of aggression. Ukraine's accession-related reform process therefore takes place under martial law, which inevitably entails restrictions on the democratic process itself. In the long term, this may negatively affect the role of the Parliament, the Verkhovna Rada which, however, plays a crucial role in preparing for the EU.

So how do you intend to deal with the particularity of EU accession negotiations with a country at war? And which measures can the EU take to protect Ukraine's democracy and rule of law and help the country advance in its reform process, despite Russia's continued war of aggression?

1-0048-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for naming this issue, Mr Reuten. Yes, the influence of Russia is huge. The influence of Russia can cause a lot of damage, but we can do a lot of good things too and supporting Ukraine is a must, as I have said before.

We are aware that there is a martial law, but even if the country is in war, it is progressing well in the negotiation process, and I think that sometimes the very hard situations bring even a higher level of motivation for the people to do what's best for them and for the whole country, so Ukraine will get my support completely.

Yes, martial law, we are monitoring this, the European Commission is in discussion with Ukraine on this. Until now, I was told everything is in the proper manner, so the rights are not cut too much.

How to proceed? It depends on how long the war will be, but especially because I hope we will open the fundamentals in early next year. The negotiation process always gives us the opportunity to look or monitor the areas even deeper or easier. So I count on a very good dialogue with the authorities on the Ukrainian side, also on these limitations caused by the martial law.

1-0049-0000

**Milan Zver (PPE)**. – Spoštovana gospa kandidatka, verjetno ne boste presenečeni, če povem, da vas Slovenska demokratska stranka pri tej kandidaturi ne bo podprla.

Pa ne samo zaradi politične preteklosti, ki je lahko neprijeten nahrbtnik, ampak predvsem zaradi vaše sedanjosti.

Prihajate, bi temu rekeli, iz ekstremno levega političnega prostora, kroga Milana Kučana in Zorana Jankoviča. Oba sta zelo blizu Vladimirju Putinu. Vladimir Putin je osebno odlikoval Jankoviča, ki je iz njegovih rok prejel celo visoko rusko odlikovanje.

In zdaj me zanima, ali bo ta vaša politična ujetost lahko kakšna ovira pri vaših bodočih nalogah, pri izvajanju politik Evropske unije? Boste lahko 100-odstotno na strani Ukrajine?

In drugič, ali si boste prizadevali za to, da bi Beograd še pred vstopom v Evropsko unijo odprl tudi vse arhive, vključno s tistimi od civilne in vojaške tajne službe?

1-0050-0000

**Marta Kos**, *kandidatka za komisarko*. – Hvala lepa, da mi dajete priložnost, gospod poslanec, da spregovorim o tem. Nisem od nikogar, razen malo od mojega moža, ki je danes na desni strani te dvorane. Pišem se Kos, hodim v svojih čevljih, nisem ne od Milana Kučana, ne od, ne od drugih.

Kdorkoli sem že, in odgovarjam na vaše vprašanje, prepričana sem, da bom lahko odlično opravljala delo komisarke za širitev. Seveda, če me boste, če me boste potrdili. 35 let dela je za menoj, 35 let dela, kjer sem služila slovenski državi, kjer sem zagovarjala, zlasti kot veleposlanica, interese slovenske države in vedno delala najboljše možno zanjo.

O moji integriteti govori tudi to, da sem, ko sem bila veleposlanica v Nemčiji, dobila enega najvišjih državnih odlikovanj Nemčije, da sem bila nagrajena tudi kot veleposlanica leta. O moji integriteti govori tudi to, da sem vedno na strani civilne družbe, da sem delala tudi v nevladnih organizacijah, da si prizadevam za človekove pravice.

Toda še enkrat k vašemu vprašanju. Prepričana sem, da bom res lahko dobra komisarka, še posebej na tem področju, ki mi res izjemno veliko pomeni, če bom potrjena. To, da je Slovenija dobila portfolio širitve, je nekaj najlepšega, kar se nam je lahko zgodilo. Zakaj? Predvsem zaradi naših izkušenj pri širitvi oziroma pri vključevanju v Evropsko unijo in jaz sem to sama doživela. Doživela sem tako pluse kot minuse in vse te izkušnje bom lahko potem delila seveda zdaj, če bom potrjena kot komisarka.

1-0051-0000

**Sebastiaan Stöteler (PFE).** – Firstly, I would like to follow up on Ms Gál's unanswered question. Will you ensure political neutrality not only towards 720 MEPs, but also towards all political groups, in particular the third-largest group?

When it comes to enlargement, I am concerned about the hundreds of millions of euros that are involved in those processes. The EU seems primarily driven by geopolitical ambitions that it has set for itself, and that raises the question to what extent you, as Commissioner, can promise that you will not lose sight of a strict assessment process. Does the ambition to enlarge not threaten the strict application of the Copenhagen criteria, for example? Shouldn't those criteria be all or nothing?

How will you ensure that the tax money that is transferred to those countries is well spent? What do you think about conditionality? Turkey, for example, has been receiving the so-called Pre-accession Assistance for years, while the country has only continued to backslide. So should those accession procedures not be finally cancelled?

1-0052-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Mr Stöteler, you have raised a very important question: what is happening to the money we are giving to the candidate countries or to the neighbourhood countries?

I've stressed that the enlargement process, if I will be confirmed, will be done in the transparent and fair way. Transparency is very important. Why? It is taxpayers' money, meaning it is our money.

So if I speak about the new tools and conditionality, exactly the conditionality – the new Ukraine Facility or Growth Plan for the Western Balkans have inside many possibilities on how to react if somebody is not delivering. Conditionality means that the candidate countries will only get money if they fulfil their commitments. One point.

Second point is that you have mentioned the Copenhagen criteria. They are important, meaning that the candidate countries also have to have institutions who audit how this money is spent. In the case of Ukraine, we will have even a special audit board with the members – three here in Brussels – who will overview the Ukrainians' auditing of how the money is spent.

So I think that especially in the case of Ukraine, we have already some results. The institutions have been built. So one part of the negotiation process is also technical support and capacity building.

There is no other way than following the money to the last euro how is it spent, and I think this will be a very, very important part of my work.

1-0053-0000

**Rihards Kols (ECR).** – Ms Kos, yes, of course, the questions would be fit for the College and fit for the portfolio. And I will start with the portfolio. Well, Ukrainians endure immense hardship to align

with European values. And Moldova remains steadfast under external pressure. How will you prioritise support for these nations, ensuring a clear path towards EU membership, and counter disinformation that undermines public support for enlargement within the European Union?

On the fit for the College, Parliament must be assured of your integrity in the enlargement process. Your diplomatic background is valuable here, yet transparency is essential. Colleagues from other groups already raised questions that maybe are not at ease for you at the public hearing, but still, I will call out this question from myself as well. Have you ever worked or collaborated with repressive institutions or held membership in any communist party?

And last but not least, regarding your consultancy freelance work, how do you ensure transparency with your clients, and could you name who you have consulted since 2021? Thank you.

1-0054-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I would need more time, but I will try to be short in these two minutes. First part about supporting Ukraine and Moldova fight against disinformation, one part of the communication strategy which we will prepare, if I am confirmed, very soon during my mandate will also include a fight against the disinformation.

And I'm happy you mentioned it is not happening only in the candidate countries. It is happening also in the Member States. That's why when I speak about the communication campaign, it will be in the Member States and in the candidate countries. How to do this? We will see. We need many people involved. Also, I have said before the Members of the Parliament, and I hope I can count on your cooperation. Then, of course, we can count on what the European Union has already done on the field of fighting FIMI and disinformation. And we will more include this in the enlargement process.

Regarding my work for a consultancy, yes, I worked for a company, Kreab, here in Brussels. I had two arrangements or consultancy with them. First has been that I helped them picking up the women who could attend the Roundtable on Healthcare at Davos at the World Economic Forum. And the second part has been the work done on how the process of ratification of trade agreements is in Slovenia. I have never, during my work, worked with the institutions of the European Commission, and I got paid for the whole period of my cooperation with this company EUR 4 280.

1-0055-0000

**Helmut Brandstätter (Renew)**. – Sehr geehrte Frau Kos, ich möchte die erste Frage zu uns, zur Europäischen Union stellen: Sehen Sie die Notwendigkeit, die Verträge zu verändern, bevor wir ein neues Land aufnehmen? Und wenn ja, wo, in welchen Bereichen wird das notwendig sein?

Zweitens zur Desinformation, die schon angesprochen wurde: Das ist natürlich in Moldau, das ist in anderen Ländern, vor allem aber auch am Westbalkan, und das führt mich auch zum Thema der Medien. Und da frage ich Sie von Journalist zu Journalist: Was können Sie dafür tun, dass dort eine Medienlandschaft aufgebaut wird, dass die Menschen wirklich objektiv informiert werden, was jetzt – und ich sage zum Beispiel Serbien – ganz sicher nicht der Fall ist? Und wie kann da die Europäische Kommission helfen?

Von Serbien komme ich auch zur nächsten Frage, zum Kosovo: Ich weiß, es gibt auch EU-Länder, die den Kosovo nicht anerkennen. Wie sehen Sie das? Ist eine Voraussetzung auch, dass Serbien – und die anderen EU-Länder selbstverständlich auch – den Kosovo anerkennt? Und werden Sie auch mit diesem Land Gespräche führen?

1-0056-0000

**Marta Kos**, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Danke schön für Ihre sehr wichtige Frage, wenn es um die Medienarbeit geht, sehr geehrter Herr Kollege.

The country which doesn't guarantee freedom of expression, freedom of speech and media pluralism cannot become a Member of the EU. This is clear. And I will work on this with the candidate countries, if confirmed, during my mandate with other Commissioners and my services.

This is very important because especially the public media play a very important role in democracy. I am a great believer in the public broadcasting system because they have some obligations the other media do not have. We should work with them a lot. And, I don't know how, but I would love to see them also included in the communication campaign, which we will have in the Member States and in the candidate countries.

Regarding the Treaty change, our President made it clear in the political guidance that we need the Treaty change where it can improve our Union.

It cannot happen from today to tomorrow, but we can thoroughly go through what the Treaty is enabling today. For instance, activating the passerelle or breach clause where appropriate. With the qualified majority, it is already possible.

So I think we should work on the parallel. To see how we will change the Treaty, if necessary, to be more effective. And I will work on this very, very cautiously together with my colleagues.

1-0058-0000

**Alessandra Moretti (S&D)**. – Signor Presidente, benvenuta signora Commissaria, mi ha fatto molto piacere sentire che Lei abbia ribadito che i valori e i principi dell'Unione europea non sono negoziabili. Era una frase che ripeteva spesso il nostro compianto David Sassoli, quindi sono felice che Lei l'abbia ribadito più volte.

Torniamo alla Serbia. Lei sa che la precedente Commissione, in particolare il Suo predecessore Várhelyi, è stato criticato per un atteggiamento abbastanza permissivo nei confronti della Serbia: nessun adempimento sull'allineamento di politica estera, molti problemi con lo Stato di diritto, irregolarità dal punto di vista elettorale, eppure non ci sono mai state sanzioni nei confronti della Serbia, anzi si sta dicendo che si vuole aprire un nuovo "cluster 3" nei negoziati di adesione. Qual è la Sua opinione in merito?

Ultima domanda: il vostro gabinetto si impegnerà di più rispetto al passato nel dialogo tra Serbia e Kosovo o lascerete che sia l'Alto rappresentante a occuparsene interamente? E al Kosovo, perché e qual è la Sua opinione rispetto alla revoca di alcune misure nonostante il Kosovo si sia adeguato a certe richieste da parte dell'Europa?

1-0059-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for mentioning two states which are on the way into the EU, Ms Moretti. The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is formally in the hands of the High Representative / Vice-President – if confirmed, Kaja Kallas – so I will for sure work with her on this dialogue.

On the other hand, since I know this area and its mentality well, we have already met and we talked about it, which confirmed that we will cooperate on this field. Why? We have to move forward.

Formally, a lot has been done. We have an agreement, a path on the normalisation of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Also, in the enlargement report, it is said that we expect that Kosovo and Serbia will follow the agreement without additional questions. So, my work will be even more included to move on.

With one of the meetings I have had with your colleagues, I was explaining that if the things are not working, we have to find new ways. In the sense of what Mr Einstein once said: that stupidity is if you do every day the same and you expect different results. I want to see different results, so I shouldn't be stupid.

So let's find out what works, because I'm sure if there is a will, we will be able to move things forward. But the will is there verbally, many times much more expressed than the action. So what kind of action we will see.

1-0060-0000

**Alice Teodorescu Măwe (PPE).** – I dessa dagar är det 35 år sedan min familj och jag lämnade den kommunistiska diktatorn Ceaușescus helvete. Den skada som denna förkastliga ideologi åsamkade miljoner européer är ett levande sår i hela Östeuropa. Dessa regimer som aktivt dödade, torterade, förföljde och bevakade sina befolkningars minsta rörelser möjliggjordes av människor som valde att lyda istället för att opponera.

Jag förstår att du säger att de uppgifter som framkommit om dig inte stämmer, men du bekräftar att du har funnits med på en lista. Därför blir min fråga, vilken lista och under vilken kategori du förekommer, samt varför du inte har bett om att få de här uppgifterna korrigerade om de är felaktiga?

Vidare undrar jag hur du, som tidigare varit medlem i det jugoslaviska kommunistpartiet, skulle beskriva din ideologiska övertygelse och hur denna övertygelse påverkar dig i förhållande till såväl Ryssland som Ukraina? Tack!

1-0061-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – The war of aggression against Ukraine is something that shouldn't happen in 2022, 2023, 2024, and it shouldn't be there at all. I fully support everything that the European Union is doing in helping Ukraine. And if confirmed as Commissioner, I will even have more tools, more services to do this really concretely.

So helping Ukraine today is not only helping one country; it is helping to make Europe stronger, it is helping to restore international order, it is fighting against the forces who – as I have said in my introduction – want to see Europe fail. There are many of them, but we are 450 million.

It is true: we cannot always have answers in advance for every new challenge which is imposed upon us, the members of the European states. But I am sure that we are able to find answers built on the values to help Ukraine. How long will this take? I don't know, but the Ukrainian nation can really count that we will be on their side all the time.

We need the support of all of you. We need the support of all the political groups in the European Parliament. We need the support of our partners, and our partners can also be the candidate countries. So in this respect, I also see the possibility that we involve the candidate countries in helping Ukraine today.



1-0062-0000

**Tineke Strik (Verts/ALE).** – Thank you Chair, thank you, Ms Kos, for your presentation, but also for your commitment to approach the accession process as a two-way process and also to base it strongly on Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union's values.

In the previous legislature, the Parliament, but also the Court of Auditors, had serious concerns regarding the application and the success of the rule of law conditionality in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, which Commissioner Várhelyi could not remedy.

Do you commit to the application of the rule-of-law-based conditionality of IPA III funding as enshrined in the regulation?

And, to make it concrete, are you prepared to freeze IPA funds to Serbia to force Vučić to progress on rule of law, to break ties with the Kremlin and advance relations with Kosovo?

Do you commit to keep funds to Republika Srpska frozen until Dodik fully withdraws his secessionist plans and rhetoric? And which benchmarks do you plan to use in that regard? Are you prepared to report in a transparent manner to the European Parliament?

And finally, do you commit to follow up on the recommendations issued by the Parliament in the framework of the IPA III geopolitical dialogue?

1-0063-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Ms Tineke. I will mention it again: the rule of law is the basis of what we do, in the Member States and in the candidate country. So yes, I will always stick to the rule of law, and when it's about the negotiation process or IPA or any other instruments, we have conditionality and we mean it – in the sense that if the reforms or commitments will not be fulfilled, there will be no money. Not for Serbia, not for Kosovo, not for any other candidate country.

In order to be able to do this, we have to be transparent. In this respect, yes, my answer to your question is: I will always be available to be in contact with you to discuss what is going on. I am always willing to discuss with you what is going on in the negotiating process, and I hope that we will develop good coordination and good communication between the Members of the Parliament, especially this committee, and myself.

Serbia has done some progress, but it has to do more. I hope that the new methodology will induce this.

I didn't have time, Ms Moretti, to answer your question about the alignment with the CFSP. This is not a precondition for the enlargement process. But of course, I cannot imagine that the country who is not aligning their legislation or their behaviour or their words with the CFSP 100 % can become a member of the EU. But once again, it is a process which cannot happen, and this we understand, from today to tomorrow.

1-0064-0000

**Davor Ivo Stier (PPE).** – Commissioner-designate, the European Council on Foreign Relations recently published a report on the possible impact of a Trump administration for the Western Balkans, and implies that autocratic leaders could be empowered and the influence of Russia and China could increase.

We will see about that but it also points out, in particular, the risk of the so-called Serbian world, a copy of the Russian world in the Balkans with destabilising effects, in particular for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro. We saw already that the speaker of Montenegro's parliament, Mr Mandić, advocates a foreign agent act like in Georgia or Russia.

The report also provides recommendations to prevent the Serbian world.

So my question would be, do you share the assessment on the risk posed by the Serbian world concept?

And, in order to prevent it and in addition to what you already said, would you be ready to use the leverage of the accession negotiations and the growth plan with a more strict implementation of the conditionality policy for those advocating the Serbian world, and a more rewarding approach for those advocating the EU path?

1-0065-0000

**Marta Kos**, *kandidatka za komisarko*. – Hvala lepa, gospod Stier. Lepo je, da se lahko pogovarjava vsak v svojem jeziku, v maternem, in se tudi razumeva. In tako vaš kot tudi moj jezik, slovenščina, je eden od uradnih jezikov v Evropski uniji. In tudi to je posledica članstva Hrvaške in Slovenije v Evropski uniji in to je lepo.

When we speak about Serbia and the Western Balkans, or influences of China and Russia, you have tackled a very important issue. Namely, how can we fight against the influence of Russia and China in this area?

One very important thing, if the EU will not be there, somebody else would be. In this respect, it is very much important that we take really care first what other countries are doing and what candidate countries are doing.

So, when we speak about this area, our involvement in the negotiation process is showing that even if they will wait for some time to become a Member of the EU, the path of the transition is already bringing huge changes.

Back to your question, if we will stick to the fundamentals, if we will stick to all the most important principles of the negotiation or enlargement process – rule of law, conditionality, merit-based process – then there is no other way that the countries who will want to join us will have to align with our policies.

And there is then no Serbian part, there is no this part, and probably as much as you, me too – and Mr Kovatchev is giving the sign with the head – want to see those countries in the EU. So I would appreciate your help in this, too.

1-0067-0000

**Danilo Della Valle (The Left)**. – Presidente, signora Commissaria delegata, a settembre 2024 la Commissione europea ha proposto un nuovo meccanismo di supporto in favore dell'Ucraina, che prevede un finanziamento eccezionale di 35 miliardi di euro.

Il meccanismo si propone di supportare l'economia ucraina e di provare a sostenere la ripresa del paese e la ricostruzione di diversi settori, in particolar modo rispetto alle infrastrutture

pesantemente messe in crisi dal conflitto con la Russia, che purtroppo non sembra trovare ancora una via diplomatica per cessare.

Il meccanismo prevede diverse condizionalità, tra cui la cooperazione dell'Unione europea nel settore della difesa, la creazione di un organismo indipendente anticorruzione e la liberalizzazione del servizio dell'energia. Sfide che sicuramente possono essere interessanti per certi versi, ma per altri molto preoccupanti, come quelle del settore della difesa e della liberalizzazione.

Come pensa di evitare che le liberalizzazioni, ad esempio, diventino un pretesto per la svendita degli asset strategici ucraini, creando un ulteriore danno al popolo ucraino e alla propria sovranità?

1-0068-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – The Ukraine Facility, as I have mentioned – and thank you for mentioning this – is 50 billion. So 50 billion is huge money, and with this money we go in different direction. Pillar I of this direction is that Ukraine has to fulfil the reforms which are needed for the country to join us. One part of this is also technical assistance, capacity building, and one part is the Ukraine Investment Framework.

We have to do the things we planned in parallel. So it is not only the enlargement process; it is the reconstruction process. Then, of course, we have the EU macro-financial assistance.

In the negotiation process, everything is set very clearly. So Ukraine will have to fulfil the reforms in order to be able to get the money. On the other hand, during the negotiation process or enlargement process, we will see what else the European Union has to do in order that Ukraine will be prepared, will build up all the institutions which will enable them to be a Member of the European Union at some later point.

1-0069-0000

**Andreas Schieder (S&D)**. – Frau Kos, die Erweiterung der Europäischen Union wird ein zentrales Projekt in dieser Periode sein, und wir haben in den letzten Jahren auch viel zu viel Zeit verloren in diesem Zusammenhang. Ein zentraler Punkt ist die Erfüllung der Kriterien für jedes Land für sich. Da haben wir auch erlebt, dass in der Vergangenheit oft Länder aneinandergelagert waren. Albanien zum Beispiel hat große Fortschritte gemacht, in vielen, vielen Bereichen, hat aber auch in einigen Bereichen noch viel zu tun, wie zum Beispiel Medienfreiheit, Unabhängigkeit der Medien. Daher die Frage: Was kann man in diesem Bereich tun?

Die zweite Frage ist: Wie können wir in Zukunft verhindern, dass innenpolitische Schwierigkeiten einzelner Mitgliedstaaten zu einer Blockade gegenüber den Verhandlungen für Kandidaten führen, wie es zum Beispiel im Fall Nordmazedonien lange Jahre der Fall war?

Und die dritte Frage ist: Wir sehen in den Erweiterungsländern eine immer mehr wachsende Europaskepsis – wie können wir die bekämpfen? Kann zum Beispiel auch der Weg, den der Wirtschafts- und Sozialausschuss der Europäischen Union gegangen ist, nämlich Kandidaten aus den Erweiterungsländern in seine Verhandlungen bereits miteinzubeziehen, ein solcher Weg sein?

1-0070-0000

**Marta Kos**, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Sie haben viele Fragen gestellt, Herr Schieder, ich werde in dieser kurzen Zeit nicht alle beantworten können. Aber Sie haben erwähnt, es stimmt, es gab Zeiten, wo es Gruppen der Kandidatenstaaten gab – zum Beispiel bei der größten Erweiterung bis jetzt, wo auch Slowenien dazugekommen ist, in 2004, da waren wir zehn Länder. Das gibt es

heute nicht mehr und wird es auch nicht mehr geben. Warum? Weil wir es ernst meinen mit dem *merit based approach*, und dann kann es keine Gruppe geben – okay, unter der Bedingung, dass die wirklich alle das Gleiche machen würden.

Was aber gut ist an diesem *merit based approach* und der Konditionalität, ist, dass das zu einem positiven Wettkampf zwischen den Staaten geführt hat. Das heißt, wenn jetzt Albanien gut abgeschnitten hat in der letzten Zeit, warum könnten nicht auch die anderen Länder dazukommen? Und ich bin froh, dass jetzt der letzte Bericht über Albanien so positiv war.

Wir müssen die Cluster öffnen und diese Cluster werden uns dann ermöglichen, in allen Fragen, die Sie erwähnt haben, dann auch tiefer zu gehen. Ob das jetzt nur Albanien ist – wir haben gesagt, wir könnten *fundamentals* schon nächstes Jahr mit der Ukraine, mit Moldau öffnen. Das heißt, ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, dass eine Gruppe der Staaten gleichzeitig dann in die EU kommen wird. Wir müssen noch einen Kaffee zusammen trinken, damit ich alle anderen Fragen beantworten kann, Herr Schieder.

1-0071-0000

**António Tânger Corrêa (PFE).** – Senhora Comissária indigitada, a situação atual da Sérvia é, em grande parte, devida à União Europeia – e particularmente à Comissão – desde a queda de Milošević. E eu relembro que Milošević caiu porque nós oferecemos um futuro europeu à população da Sérvia, que pouco ou nada se fez. E então, calmamente, eles foram entrando nos braços da Rússia e da China, que é a situação atual. E não é com dinheiro que isso se vai resolver. Tem de ser uma mudança mais profunda na técnica e na abordagem ao problema. E o que é que a senhora candidata pensa disso?

Por outro lado, os critérios de alargamento não podem só ser técnicos, têm de ser também políticos e outros, como por exemplo a imigração. E, neste caso, quer a Albânia quer o Kosovo, certamente estarão muito longe de cumprir esses critérios. E chamava a sua atenção para as fileiras de imigração ilegal que passam através desses dois países, um dos quais nem sequer tem relações com todos os países da União Europeia, e que a isenção de vistos no Kosovo foi considerada uma grande vitória e eu acho que foi um grande falhanço.

1-0072-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for this, for mentioning the important issue that money cannot do everything, first point, and secondly, that we have to tackle illegal migration. Indeed, money is just the tool. What we also need are political commitments and we can follow how these political commitments are fulfilled. And since we have the experiences that they haven't been followed always in the past, now, especially like a case in the CFSP alignment, it is not enough that they say, 'We will align this,' and on the other hand, praising their friends in Russia, so this doesn't go together. I agree with you. We should also embrace the political commitment.

About the illegal migration, you have said 'victory' and 'Albania'. Will it be victory for them or also for us when Albania will be a member of the European Union? But it has to happen a lot until then, and also Albania and Kosovo and other countries in the area of Western Balkans will have to show their political commitment, fulfil the criteria. And when it's about the illegal migration, there is a positive case. Also, with the help of our money, we have managed the situation on migration much better. Therefore, last year 75 % less illegal migrants came to Europe. So, coming back and ending my answer is: the part of tackling the migration is also a part of the enlargement process.

1-0073-0000

**Reinis Požņaks (ECR).** – Priekšsēdētāja kungs, komisāres kundze! Paldies gan jums, gan kolēģiem par daudziem labiem jautājumiem un atbildēm! Kā jau minēts, mums priekšā tiešām visai ambiciozi un svarīgi Eiropas Savienības paplašināšanās plāni. Mēs daudz esam apsprieduši gan ģeopolitiskos izaicinājumus šajā sakarā, gan reformas un izaicinājumus, kas ir kandidātvalstu priekšā, bet paplašināšanās tomēr ir divvirzienu ceļš un ir skaidrs, ka tik ambiciozi paplašināšanās plāni būs ļoti izaicinoši arī Eiropas Savienībai pašai un tās institūcijām. Un es saprotu, ka tas nav jūsu portfelis — Eiropas Savienības reformas tajās institūcijās —, bet tās diezgan cieši skars paplašināšanās procesu. Tāpēc jautāšu, kādus jūs redzat izaicinājums tieši pašai Eiropas Savienībai un tās institūcijām, lai mēs sekmīgi realizētu šo paplašināšanos.

1-0074-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Požņaks, to mention this issue. It is said that we will do the enlargement process and internal reforms in parallel. We will need a lot of commitment. We will need a lot of energy to be able to do this.

Yes, it is right what you said – this is not a part of my portfolio, but a part of my mission letter is also to work together with the President of the Commission, with all the other members, and especially with the Commissioner for Cohesion and Internal Reforms, to help coming to the necessary internal reforms.

We will also be measured – the whole European Union – not only on how many countries we will bring to the end of the negotiation process. Our success will be also measured by our capacity to take them on board. That's why I see my work on this field also very strong. Why? How could we preserve our credibility if we will not be ready to take the newcomers on board and they will be ready?

So for me, this shouldn't happen and I will do everything in my hands that the European Union will be ready.

But this also means, Mr Požņaks, that I will come to Latvia too and discuss with your government or NGOs how we could talk to your people there so that they will be happy when we will have new countries on board.

1-0075-0000

**Dan Barna (Renew).** – Commissioner-designate, the experience of Romania and Bulgaria, still waiting for full Schengen membership despite fulfilling the necessary criteria, highlights the challenges and frustrations that can arise even after accession.

However, this experience can and should be transformed into a positive driver for the foreseen gradual and inclusive enlargement process.

So there are two aspects I want to address you. The first one, learning from the experience: how can the EU learn from the experiences of Romania and Bulgaria to ensure that future accessions are truly complete and grant all membership rights once criteria are met? Can the next Commission – where I hope you will be part of – develop a more transparent and predictable accession process that fosters trust and avoids creating that sense of second-class membership?

And the second aspect, gradual integration: can those experiences of the states I've mentioned be used to refine the concept of gradual integrations, allowing candidate countries to progressively

participate in EU policies and programmes as they meet specific benchmarks? Can this approach foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the integration process, while also addressing concerns about backsliding on reforms after the accession?

1-0076-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for addressing this issue, Mr Barna.

I think the basics of being a part of the European Union is sharing the experiences among the Member States, between the Member States and the candidate countries and also between the candidate countries itself.

The gradual integration is a new element which is, in my eyes, very important: it is not a substitute for the membership, but it means that the countries who are on the way into the EU can have some benefits even before. We have been mentioning becoming a part of the common market or being able to come to SEPA or roaming. I hope we will find some more areas where we could also do this.

How could we use the knowledge and experiences of Romania and Bulgaria? This is also one part which I'm looking forward to discuss with the Member States when I will go around the Member States, because I think that what we need are good showcases and the cases where you could show us where you have been successful and where some other countries could be successful too. So I think this is the basis, coming back to your question: that we exchange what we have done already well in the past, which could contribute to further integration of the candidate countries.

1-0077-0000

**Andrey Kovatchev (PPE)**. – Dear Commissioner-designate, I have three points, clear and concrete, and I will kindly ask you for clear and concrete answers.

Do you intend to support any changes in the content of the already-agreed negotiation framework with North Macedonia?

Secondly, the implementation in good faith with tangible results of both agreements, Prespa and the treaty with Bulgaria with its protocols, and this is very important, with its protocols, is a part of the negotiation framework and the Commission, as stipulated in point 5 of the negotiation framework, should assess the implementation as a benchmark for achieving the negotiation progress. Could you please confirm this? And when do you intend to ask your services, if confirmed here, to do the first assessment of the implementation of both agreements with the protocols?

In the view of the follow-up of the screening of Cluster 1, how will the Commission under your leadership ensure the two roadmaps and the action plan on the minorities and communities, which are an opening benchmark for Cluster 1, to be elaborated through an inclusive process into the national legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia, as stipulated in the 2022 consensus?

1-0078-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Mr Kovatchev, I see you know every detail of what is going on between your country, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia.

Coming back to the first question. The short answer would be 'no'. So usually, renegotiating the negotiating framework with the Member States is not realistic. But what is very important is maintaining the integrity of the enlargement process, meaning sticking to the negotiating framework. And I will firmly, as I have said today, uphold the merit-based approach.

Then secondly, the short question will be *pacta sunt servanda* meaning that we expect that the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between Bulgaria and North Macedonia and Prespa Treaty between North Macedonia and Greece will be implemented. The Commission already reports on the good neighbourly relations agreement and the agreement's bilateral foresee-specific mechanism to assess the implementation of the related bilateral commitments and, if confirmed, I will follow this matter closely in line with the requirements, and now I see I can also count on your help in doing this.

So bilateral agreements foresee how to do this. And the last part of this is that I would really see a role of the EU delegation in the regard of following the roadmaps, action plans, minorities, communities. There is a lot to do so, under the line, please do everything possible and I will help, if confirmed, that the bilateral agreements will be fulfilled. This will be good for both countries and this will be good for the European Union too.

1-0079-0000

**Robert Biedroń (S&D).** – The situation in Moldova is an example of another serious challenge to the EU enlargement policy. The country's recent election and referendum has laid bare Moldova's vulnerability to Russian disinformation, information manipulation and interference. Russia will spare no cost to prevent further EU enlargement to the east.

Do you commit to support the allocation of more resources on strategic communication and public diplomacy, and targeted actions to prevent the impact of hybrid warfare perpetrated primarily by Russia, but also increasingly by China? Do you plan to suggest expanding the platform EUvsDisinfo towards Eastern Partnership countries with appropriate funding, website, database as requested by the Parliament? How will you coordinate your work on making the EU accession process resilient against foreign interference, together with HR/VP Kallas, the EEAS and the EU Member States?

1-0080-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for speaking again, Mr Biedroń, about the communication and importance of communication. How to fight disinformation and FIMI, for me, will be one of the very important tasks, also when it is about Moldova. We have seen developments which were not in favour of the EU integration; therefore, I'm even more happy that we have seen good results for Moldova and also for us.

Yes, I commit myself to do everything possible, together with my services, to bring more money in for the civil society, be it in Moldova or be it in Belarus, be it in Russia, or for the Russian civil society being outside Russia. I think this is our duty and our obligation. We shouldn't forget all the people who really fight for the EU path or for the democracy. And I don't say too much if I say that, if I will be confirmed as Commissioner, I want to at least double the money which will be at the disposal for the civil society and for the functioning of the media.

1-0081-0000

**Rasa Juknevičienė (PPE).** – Dear Ms Marta Kos, I would like to invite you to Vilnius as well, going to Latvia, because Vilnius became a capital of democracy, of democratic forces.

But my question is about enlargement, of course. One of the reasons why Russia started this full-scale bloody war was the security grey zones that were left open. Enlargement – by the way both EU and NATO – is the most important tool Europe has to crush Russia's imperialist appetite. By expanding the space of prosperity and democracy, we also strengthen EU protection.

Given the strategic importance, what measures will you take to convince all Member States, including their people, that enlargement is not only an opportunity for candidate countries, but also a chance for us, for the EU, to become safer and more competitive?

1-0082-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for raising a very important part. When we think about enlargement, I'm grateful to you that you have mentioned that enlargement is a very important European policy. In my eyes, it is the most successful European external policy – meaning bringing new Member States or new countries on board will make Europe safer, will make Europe stronger, and will enable to somehow fight better against the forces who want to see us fail. In this respect, of course, I will come to Vilnius.

What kind of messages we will develop for this campaign, how to work in the Member States to get the support – I think this is very important. There are three important parts of the future communication strategy, if I will be confirmed: the Member States, then the candidate countries, and the public opinion in general.

When I speak about the campaign, some messages will be general, but some messages will probably be tailored to your country. That's why the exchange in Vilnius, when I will come and you will help me to find the partners to talk to, will be that much important.

I also mentioned in my introduction that I would like to meet the representatives of the civil society. This is also very important. They're not only government officials and officials of the EU who have to speak about the enlargement. So I count on the support of the NGOs. That's why we have to work with them too.

1-0083-0000

**Luboš Blaha (NI)**. – Vážená pani Kosová, hovoríte, že pri rozširovaní Európskej únie musíme byť konzistentní. Tak sa pýtam, akú konzistentnosť vidíte v tom, že na jednej strane hovoríte o európskej perspektíve Ukrajiny a na druhej strane hovoríte o demokracii a boji proti korupcii. Veď Ukrajina je jedna z najskorumpovanejších krajín sveta. Podľa indexu korupcie sú v druhej stovke. Podporujú tam fašistických lídrov Banderu či Šuchevyča, používajú nacistické symboly, prenasledujú opozíciu a menšiny, Zelenský vládne bez volieb, a dokonca tam väznia politikov komunistickej strany. Toto je tá slávna európska demokracia a právny štát. V prípade Srbska tvrdíte, že do Európskej únie môžu vstúpiť, len ak sa vzdajú svojho suverénneho územia Kosova a Metochie. Ak hovoríte o konzistentnosti, budete to isté požadovať aj od Ukrajiny, aby sa vzdala Krymu a Donbasu? Alebo konečne priznáte, že uznanie Kosova je zločin proti Srbsku a že Európska únia sa správa pokrytecky?

1-0084-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I cannot tackle everything. Thank you for naming some issues which are important to you. One issue is important to you, and I think to all of us, and this is the fight against corruption.

The corruption exists not only in the candidate countries. It exists also in the Member States. We should tackle this very openly. So, in this respect, part of the negotiating process is how to fight against corruption and building up the institutions. I agree with you. We have to do this, because we have to know that every euro is spent for what it was meant to be. But in this respect, the country cannot move forward in the negotiating process if they don't fulfil conditions. One of the conditions is also building up the institutions who will fight the corruption.



In the latest time, one year, two years, we have already seen some cases being – in Ukraine, you have mentioned Ukraine – and the corruption cases could have been discovered because already, with the help of the European help and money, we have been able to build these institutions.

But this is an ongoing process. It is not just having the institutions. It is having the commitment of all the state institutions that fight against corruption seriously, and this will also be a very, very important part of my work.

1-0085-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Before I give the floor to the next speaker, my job is to chair this meeting; my job is not to comment on what colleagues are saying. But I would like to ask you, Mr Blaha, in future – I'm not sure if I got the interpretation correctly – to speak with respect about all our partners, and this includes Kosovo. Thank you.

1-0086-0000

**András László (PFE)**. – Thank you, Chair. There are many kinds of communists in the EU. There are Western communists who never lived in the EU. They are useful idiots who ignore the reality of communism. Then there are communists who are violent extremists, also in this House, like Ilaria Salis. There are communists who actually took part in institutional oppression willingly, but after regime change, they have gradually disappeared from public life.

And the worst kind of communists are those who oppressed their people, then rebranded themselves as democrats and returned to public life. That's you. You may claim ignorance, but the courts have ruled that you were a member of UDBA. You would not be the first black belt communist to become a European Commissioner. But, colleagues, do you understand how insulting it would be to candidate countries to send such a person, in the name of the EU, to negotiate about European values?

Madam Kos, my question to you: if you must come to Brussels – which I hope you don't – could you at least have the humility to ask for a portfolio where your lack of integrity is less of an issue?

1-0087-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Once again, colleague, look, we now have 11:15. This has been a rather smooth hearing for 2 hours and 15 minutes. And once again, we can utter our opinion, but I would kindly really ask you to stop these personal accusations and insults. We don't do this kind of style in the European Parliament.

(Applause)

1-0088-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I have never been an informant or worked for the secret service of Yugoslavia, which is not UDBA. UDBA was dissolved in 1966, and at that time I was 1 year old. So if you speak about the secret service, it was SDB. But once again, I have never been a collaborator of the secret service.

Once again – I have said before – I am on the list. I don't know how I came there. At that time, I was a student and I was then working in Germany for the German radio station Voice of Germany, *Deutsche Welle*.

This list of the names has been misused. I've said before, there are thousands and thousands and thousands of people on the list. Among them are three members of this Parliament, presidents of governments, presidents of States, the President of the Slovenian Supreme Court, of the Constitutional Court.

You know them; I know them. I will not speak about their names because I don't believe that they were collaborators. But I cannot speak in their name. I can speak in my name. I was never a collaborator of the SDB.

1-0089-0000

**Sandra Gómez López (S&D).** – Señora comisaria propuesta, volviendo a Georgia, precisamente en el año 2023 la Unión Europea le concedió el estatus de país candidato, todo ello con la esperanza de revitalizar las reformas proeuropeas.

No obstante, como bien saben, un año después de sus controvertidas elecciones, la realidad es que el sueño europeo se está convirtiendo en una pesadilla bajo la sombra del Kremlin: tenemos a una sociedad movilizada que protesta porque quiere modernizar su país.

Por eso, en este contexto, lo que quiero expresar es que la Unión Europea se enfrenta a un desafío delicado. Debe, en primer lugar, afirmar ante la clase política la indiscutible obligación que tiene el país de abordar reformas democráticas y que el Estado de Derecho es un requisito innegociable para entrar en la Unión Europea. Pero, a la vez, tenemos que apoyar a una sociedad civil que apuesta por la integración europea.

En este sentido, ¿cómo debería, por lo tanto, abordar la Unión Europea este proceso de estancamiento que, a día de hoy, sufre Georgia? ¿Cómo deberíamos, por lo tanto, abordar este asunto con estos países candidatos, en primer lugar con su clase política, pero con un inquebrantable apoyo a su ciudadanía, que está en pro de la europeización y de la modernización? ¿Cómo pueden integrarse y cómo podemos también apoyarlos antes?

1-0090-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for addressing this very important question: what to do in the case where, when we started with Georgia on this European project, how to go on when there is a clear way away from how this started.

Giving Georgia the candidate status, it started well. But then, as you have noticed, the government went away from this path. There is still hope that, with the support of the democratic forces, and perhaps also with the action of the government, they will come back to the European path. If they decide to do this, I will be the first who will then go on, but certain conditions have to be fulfilled. Why we stopped the negotiation, or why we stopped engaging Georgia in the European way, has been because of the laws who are not aligned with the values of the EU, so the first precondition would be that they get rid of the two laws which are against the European values.

You have mentioned how we should support the civil society. In my opinion, as I have said in my introduction, the civil society is a kind of watchdog over the government, not only in the candidate countries but also in the Member States, so I plan to first get a real good overview, if we speak about Georgia, which organisations, which individuals are those who would be really the strongest voice of democratic development in Georgia, and then I will work on this.

1-0091-0000

**Matej Tonin (PPE).** – Spoštovana kandidatka! Naj bo danes tudi dan za slovenščino. Obadva sva Slovenca, prihajava pa iz dveh popolnoma različnih političnih svetov. In naj povem zelo jasno, da ne podpiram vašega preteklega političnega delovanja. Si pa želim, da vam uspe pri širitvi, če bosta potrjena kot komisarka.

Širitev je nekaj izjemnega in nekaj dobrega, tako za stare kot tudi nove članice. Videl sem številne ekonomske analize, ki kažejo, da so predvsem od leta 2004, ko se je širitev zgodila tudi s Slovenijo, zlasti ekonomsko najbolj pridobile velike stare članice. Zato sem bil vesel, ko sem slišal, da boste vi sprožili posebno javno kampanjo v družbah obstoječih članic, da ko bodo nove članice pripravljene, da jih ne bomo na različnih referendumih v starih članicah ustavili.

Torej, zanima me, kako konkretno, kako konkretno boste šli v kampanjo prepričat francosko in nizozemsko javnost, da ko bodo nekatere države pripravljene za članstvo v Evropski uniji, da bodo tudi državljani teh držav podprli vključitev novih članic. Kakšne bodo vaše konkretne informacijske kampanje?

In še eno stvar bi rad omenil. Ves čas se izogibate na nek način jasnemu odgovoru glede vaše vloge v jugoslovanski tajni službi. Mislim, da bi bilo dobro, da enostavno poveste, da se v Sloveniji lustracija ni zgodila in da imamo tako na levi kot na desni strani številne politike, ki so bili člani komunistov in sodelavci tajnih služb.

1-0092-0000

**Marta Kos,** *kandidatka za komisarko.* – Gospod poslanec, gospod Tonin. Res je lepo, da se lahko pogovarjava v maternem jeziku tukaj v Evropskem parlamentu. To se ne bi moglo zgoditi, če Slovenija leta 2004 ne bi postala članica Evropske unije.

Mogoče res niste na moji strani, sem pa prepričana, da naju povezuje nekaj, tako kot še mnoge druge, ki so morda na različnih ideoloških bregovih. In to se mi zdi izjemna prednost tega Evropskega parlamenta. Na različnih bregovih smo lahko, ampak ko gre za širitev Evropske unije, pa opažam, da nas je veliko, ki smo na istem bregu ali ki smo v isti skupini. In vesela sem, da ste med njimi tudi vi.

Omenili ste, koliko je širitev prinesla Sloveniji, kako je tudi po drugi strani okrepila države članice. In to drži.

K vašemu vprašanju glede konkretnih korakov za to kampanjo. Konkretno korake bom lahko povedala, če seveda bom potrjena, takrat, ko bomo skupaj s službami, ki so v Evropski komisiji zadolžene za to, ko bomo skupaj z državami članicami in kandidatkami ugotovili, kakšno je stanje in katera bi bila najboljša orodja.

Kot sem prej že malo nakazala, bo zagotovo en nabor splošnih sporočil, ki jih bomo imeli v kampanji in bo za vse države enak. Po drugi strani bomo pa morali za posamezne države, ki ste jih tudi nekaj omenili, razviti potem še specifični prostor in zelo pomemben del kampanje vidim v tem, da bomo imeli znane glasove, znane ljudi, pomeni, v modernem jeziku bi jim danes rekli vplivneži oziroma influencerji, to bodo tisti ali pa to boste tisti, in za to podporo vas prosim, da boste pomagali to kampanjo z nami izvesti.

1-0093-0000

**Vladimir Prebilič (Verts/ALE).** – Spoštovane kolegice in kolegi, draga Marta. Kot Slovenec sem ponosen, da ste prevzeli portfelj za širitev, kar je v trenutnem geopolitičnem kontekstu izjemnega pomena in pogumno dejanje.

Pretekli mandat so zaznamovali poslabšani odnosi med Kosovom in Srbijo in ni skrivnost, da se odnosi do sedaj niso bistveno izboljšali. Kljub znatnim prizadevanjem različnih akterjev se lahko strinjamo, da se soočamo z zastojem, vendar bo z januarjem prihodnje leto prišlo verjetno do nove dinamike, ko bo gospod Trump znova v Beli hiši. Novoizvoljeni ameriški predsednik namreč že dalj časa podpira dogovore o menjavi ozemelj med Kosovom in Srbijo.

Sprašujem vas, kakšen je vaš odnos do te situacije in ali se lahko zavežete k temu, da si boste prizadevali preprečiti podpiranja kakršnih koli idej o zamenjavi ozemelj, saj bi to imelo nepredvidljive posledice za regijo in Evropo.

1-0094-0000

**Marta Kos, kandidatka za komisarko.** – Spoštovani gospod poslanec Prebilič, tudi jaz sem zelo ponosna, da ste mi dali priložnost danes tukaj v Evropskem parlamentu, da predstavim vizijo, kaj bi delala, če bom izvoljena kot komisarka za širitev. In ker sva oba iz Slovenije: zdi se mi izjemno pomembno, kot sem danes že enkrat rekla, in tudi priznanje Sloveniji, da obstaja možnost, da dobi ta resor, če bom potrjena.

Kaj se bo zgodilo, potem ko bo z januarjem novi stari ameriški predsednik? Bomo videli. Kar pa se mi zdi izjemnega pomena, je to, da se tudi, ko gre za vprašanje Kosova in Srbije, ki ste ga navedli, začnemo zanašati na to, kar more in zmore Evropa, ne pa, kaj bodo naredili drugi.

Ko sem sledila reakcije na zmago gospoda Trumpa, je gospod Donald Tusk na omrežju X zapisal: *The era of geopolitical outsourcing is out*. Pomeni, kaj bomo mi v Evropi sami naredili, da bomo postali akter, kar sem omenjala tudi že v mojem uvodnem nagovoru, da bomo močni, da bomo sprejemali odločitve, tudi mogoče nova partnerstva.

In tu se mi zdi pomembno: dajmo zaupati sebi, da smo sposobni delati odločilne korake, tudi sami ali z novimi partnerji. In glede menjave ozemlja: ne, ne pride v poštev. Evropska komisija, in jaz, če bom izvoljena, ne bomo sledili tem tendencam.

1-0095-0000

**Ивайло Вълчев (ЕСР).** – Имам два въпроса и те касаят страната – кандидат за член, Република Северна Македония.

Първият ми въпрос е, след като г-н Вархеи го потвърди, ще потвърдите ли и Вие просто с „да“ или „не“, дали и договорите, и протоколите, подписани от Северна Македония, са част от преговорната рамка? И договорите, и протоколите?

И вторият ми въпрос е как ще се уверите, че Северна Македония ще изпълни поетите ангажименти, без да се крие зад фалшивия наратив за „билатерален“ конфликт?

1-0096-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for mentioning the relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. It is important that what has been accepted – I speak about the agreements

– will be implemented, as I said before. This is the precondition, and this is what we will work on also with North Macedonia.

So we expect what is already put down in the enlargement report. We expect North Macedonia to change the constitution as it was promised.

Of course, we can understand that sometimes there are reasons inside specific countries, which then can be a cause of that nothing is done immediately, as it should be done.

Talking with the Members of the Parliament from Bulgaria, I know your stand, and thank you for all the information I got from you, because now I understand better what this is about. So this will enable me, when we will go on with the process with North Macedonia, what this is, what has to be done.

I am the first person, if confirmed as Commissioner, who'd love to see real development on this field. Because if we succeeded, and I think we can, then this will be a huge step forward. Because once North Macedonia – and the message is also clear from the enlargement report – will do the constitution change, we will move on without any further conditions. If confirmed, I will work on this very strongly.

1-0097-0000

**Petras Auštrevičius (Renew).** – Thank you Chair, let me thank you for your remarks concerning attempts to spread Russian lies in this House of democracy. It's a part of the hybrid attack, we know. And those who visit the Red Square probably receive some instructions on how to spread, how to do. But we will stand with Ukraine, your attempts will fail. You have to know it.

Madam Commissioner-designate, although generally accepted that the enlargement is a success story, around 40 % of the European public is still not convinced that it brings benefits, stability, prosperity and cooperation to the European continent.

What are you going to propose in order to explain Europeans better and more comprehensively about the enlargement benefits and, of course, the costs that we have to bear accordingly?

And my second question is on affiliation with CFSP: Georgia 50 %, Serbia 51 %. Standing on the crossroad, you are not looking at the EU: that's my message.

1-0098-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you again for the opportunity, Mr Auštrevičius, I know how to pronounce 'č', this is also important in my language, dear Petras.

My experience from Slovenia entering the EU and even 20 years later is: why actually is it happening that we see the enlargement process, or becoming a member of the EU, mainly through the economic glasses?

This economic part is important, but it is much more, it is really about the values – today even more than in the past. So in this respect, coming back to the communication campaign, I see a very important part. You know, I'm happy if I listen to the young generation. Okay, some of them care about the money, some of them don't, but generally they do care about the values. So perhaps we have made the mistake in the past of not talking enough about the values but more about the money, so this will be one point.

CFSP: yes, it has to be 100 %, otherwise we will not be able to go. I'm happy we share this together.

1-0099-0000

**Alexander Sell (ESN).** – Vielen Dank, Frau Kos, dass Sie sich hier unseren Fragen stellen, und Gratulation zu Ihren hervorragenden Deutschkenntnissen. Aber zur Sache: Fast 60 Milliarden Euro gibt die Europäische Union jedes Jahr für die Landwirtschaft aus, etwa ein Drittel des Gesamthaushalts. Und jetzt soll die Ukraine Mitglied der EU werden, als größter Flächenstaat Europas – 40 Millionen Hektar landwirtschaftliche Nutzfläche, ein großer Teil davon in Händen von Oligarchen. Wir müssen da realistisch sein: Wenn wir dieses Land aufnehmen, wird der überwiegende Teil unserer Agrarsubventionen nach Kiew gehen – etwa 15 Milliarden Euro jährlich.

Frau Kos, als Kommissarin für die Erweiterung der Europäischen Union werden Sie für die Aufnahme der Ukraine verantwortlich sein. Im September sagten Sie im slowenischen Parlament, der Import von billigem Getreide aus der Ukraine werde „der Tod unserer Landwirte“. Ein Beitritt der Ukraine zur EU könne deshalb nicht stattfinden, bis das geregelt sei. Ich frage Sie deshalb: Stehen Sie weiterhin zu dieser Aussage? Wie werden Sie unsere Bauern in Deutschland, aber auch in Frankreich oder in Polen, schützen? Und macht es Sinn, immer neue Mitglieder in die Europäische Union aufzunehmen, bevor wir nicht die vielen Probleme gelöst haben, mit denen wir bereits konfrontiert sind?

1-0100-0000

**Marta Kos, designiertes Mitglied der Kommission.** – Danke schön, Herr Sell, wir haben heute noch nicht über die Landwirtschaft gesprochen und ich bin Ihnen dankbar, dass Sie das erwähnt haben.

How long will the negotiation process with Ukraine take? We don't know, but what we know, and this is again one of the main messages, is that it is not enough that, if confirmed, I will bring Ukraine to the end of the negotiation process, if we will not be able to accept Ukraine in the sense of what are the internal reforms we need in order to be able to do this.

In preparation for the hearing, I also met the present Commissioner for Agriculture from Poland, and he told me that Poland got a transition period of 20 years for some parts of entering into the European agricultural market.

So, of course, we will have to see under which conditions we will be able, when Ukraine will be at the end of the negotiation process, to bring Ukraine in.

We have to take care about the farmers in the European Union and we will do this. And this will also be one part of my work, not being a part of my mission letter or my portfolio, but I commit myself to really strongly cooperate with the Commissioner for Agriculture and the whole cabinet.

I have full trust in the European Commission and European Union that we will find the right way, which will enable European farmers to be in a good shape, even when the farmers from Ukraine will join us.

1-0102-0000

**Marc Botenga (The Left).** – Merci, Madame la Commissaire désignée, pour les réponses que vous avez déjà données. J'ai le sentiment qu'il y a une dimension que, je pense, tout le monde omet: vous parlez tous de l'élargissement comme de quelque chose de forcément positif. Mais quand je parle aux travailleurs dans mon pays, mais aussi en France et aux Pays-Bas, je constate qu'ils perçoivent souvent l'élargissement comme la porte ouverte au dumping social. C'est-à-dire que des entreprises

profitent du système et du fait que les salaires et les conditions de travail sont moins bons dans des pays, disons, «nouveaux», ou des pays candidats, pour envoyer leurs travailleurs dans des pays comme l'Allemagne, la France ou la Belgique, et les faire travailler dans des conditions sociales moins bonnes, en profitant du système ou en abusant du système.

Comme les salaires minimaux, entre autres, dans ces nouveaux pays sont souvent plus bas, comment allez-vous empêcher que tout élargissement entraîne automatiquement, ou de manière indirecte, plus de dumping social pour les travailleurs dans d'autres pays?

1-0103-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Mr Botenga, for mentioning this very important part when we speak about the enlargement. And I agree with you – it's about challenges too, not only about the pluses, but I take this concern very seriously. And in this respect, I will, if confirmed, work with other Commissioners on how we can protect the workers in the Member States. And the same as it is for the agriculture, we have some tools developed in the EU with which we can protect our workers.

So I think that this will be a very important part, and also part of the Accession Treaties when they will be in the process of making. So I will all the time pay really a special time and energy and use my services to be aware of this danger you have mentioned.

1-0104-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Thank you. Colleagues, we now come to the third round of the questions and answers, and these are now the questions posed by the chairs of the invited committees. Once again, it's 1 minute for the question and 2 minutes for the answer. No follow-up questions.

1-0105-0000

**Javier Zarzalejos**, *Chair of the LIBE Committee*. – Commissioner-designate, what instruments will you use in encouraging reforms in the area of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights in the accession countries?

What will be the role of the Commission annual Rule of Law Report in the accession process, and how will the accession countries be held accountable for lack of progress in this area of rule of law?

In addition, how will you make sure that these countries respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights and execute the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights fully and in a timely manner, as part of their obligations to respect the rule of law?

1-0106-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for again mentioning the very important rule of law, which is, as I have said in my introduction, the basis of what we do. It is not just because it is in Article 2 of the Treaty. It is because if we will not stick to the rule of law, we will not be able to first accept new Member States, and I cannot imagine functioning the EU without the rule of law.

The new tool of rule of law is important. Until now, we have been able to include four countries in the Rule of Law Report. If confirmed, I will work on the premise that when the time will be right, we will include more countries.

Why is this so important? The new methodology, introduced in 2020 in the enlargement process, is in the sense that we start with fundamentals and close with fundamentals.

When Slovenia was negotiating about the membership, the methodology was different. So we could start with every possible chapter, and it was not so much stressing the rule of law. So I think that development has already been made on how important this part is and how to follow. I agree with you, it's very important not that the country just puts it down in the legislation, but that there is the implementation. I think that opening the fundamentals first and closing fundamentals last gives us the best possible tool that will allow us to follow thoroughly what happens in this respect.

1-0107-0000

**Sven Simon**, *Chair of the AFCO Committee*. – Commissioner-designate, the Constitutional Affairs Committee was not satisfied with your answer to one of the written questions: we asked you how you intend to better involve Parliament in the accession negotiations, and you simply mentioned, I quote, 'strengthening interinstitutional cooperation'. Could you provide further detail on how you would increase institutional participation on enlargement by Parliament?

Second, in the context of institutional reform, would you support expanding qualified majority voting to key policy decisions, such as initiating EU accession negotiations and opening or closing individual negotiation clusters?

And one remark that might help: you say you have never collaborated with any secret service, and that you are happy to clarify that since it harms your integrity: rightly so. Do you consider to press any charges in front of a court to stop those allegations?

1-0108-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – How I see the cooperation – and thank you, Mr Sven for going a bit deeper – with the European Parliament: I think we don't need everything put down on the paper, it is also about our relations. I am in favour of strengthening the relations with the European Parliament, because this will give a special leverage to what we do in the enlargement process.

I have said I will be available as much as possible, also when it's about the enlargement report. On the other hand, I want to commit that I will be at your disposal whenever you will need, or I would think that it is good that you are informed about what is going on in the enlargement process. You are a lawyer, so you know that it's important that some things are put down. On the other hand, I think it is also about the relations and I will strive for, if elected, that we build good relations out of many reasons: it will increase the number of people involved, information will be circulated and, as I have said many times before, I cannot imagine doing the communication campaign without you.

Now, I have forgotten the second question, if you could help me, Mr Sven.

1-0109-0000

**Sven Simon**, *Chair of the AFCO Committee*. – It was about qualified majority voting for opening and closing chapters.

1-0110-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – As I have stressed, there are some parts in the enlargement process where unanimity is needed. But in the process itself, especially for opening or closing the chapters, I think we can already, on the basis of the existing Treaty, go into qualified majority.



And, together with the European Commission, if confirmed, I think that I will really strongly work with the Member States so that this would be possible.

1-0111-0000

**Mounir Satouri**, *président de la commission DROI*. – Tout d’abord, permettez-moi de saluer votre résilience, votre calme, face à ces attaques personnelles répétées ici. Je trouve ça indigne et ça n’honore pas le Parlement.

Vous avez mentionné votre intention de ne tolérer aucune attaque contre les organisations de la société civile, les défenseurs des droits de l’homme et les journalistes. Je m’en réjouis, mais je veux en savoir plus, Madame la Commissaire. Je veux savoir concrètement quelles mesures vous allez mettre en place pour, par exemple, soutenir et protéger les journalistes qui subissent des attaques intolérables dans un certain nombre de pays relevant de votre portefeuille? Vous m’avez dit que vous alliez les rencontrer à plusieurs reprises, vous l’avez rappelé, mais au-delà de cette volonté politique, de manière opérationnelle et concrète, quels outils et quels mécanismes allez-vous mettre en place pour garantir la protection de la société civile et la préservation des valeurs?

Parce qu’on le sait, une fois qu’un certain nombre d’États sont entrés, ça devient beaucoup plus compliqué de le faire. Donc, donnez-nous, donnez à la commission DROI des choses concrètes et précises.

1-0112-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Mr Satouri. I think you are really a fighter when it’s about freedom of expression, freedom of speech, media pluralism. How I intend to do this, if confirmed? I see the civil society – the media, the journalists, the representatives of the NGOs – as a very important partner to me.

My intention is that wherever I will go, I will meet the representatives of the civil society. I also want to meet, as I have said, powerful women, to bring them on board, not only in the enlargement process, but generally. If we will meet, Mr Satouri, we will be able to speak. Then I will get information on what’s going on.

I have met with the European Endowment for Democracy NGO, who gets many finances from the European Union, and they told me things on what is going on in certain countries. What strikes me the most was their observation. They told me: if we only see the pictures of the leaders on the front pages of the mainstream media, but we don’t see the pictures of representatives of the European Union talking to the civil society, talking to the youngsters, talking to the other representatives than governments, then we can induce the wrong perception.

So, how can we all together come to the possibility that on the front pages there will be not only the prime ministers, the presidents, but also the representatives of the civil society fighting for the democracy? This is what I want to achieve if elected.

1-0113-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Thank you, Madam Kos, and thank you for mentioning the European Endowment for Democracy.

We now come to the final round of questions and answers, and this time it will be the groups’ representatives in the reverse order.

1-0114-0000

**Hans Neuhoff (ESN).** – Der amerikanische Botschafter in Moskau, William Burns, warnte im Februar 2008 seine Außenministerin Condoleezza Rice vor der Aufnahme der Ukraine in die NATO beim Bukarester Gipfel im April 2008. Ich zitiere aus seiner Email: „Die Aufnahme der Ukraine in die NATO ist die roteste aller roten Linien für die gesamte russische Elite, nicht nur für Putin. Sie würde von Russland als das Hinwerfen des strategischen Fehdehandschuhs verstanden“.

Die EU hat im Schlepptau der USA in ihrer Russland- und Ukraine-Politik fast alles falsch gemacht, was man falsch machen konnte. Wir stehen heute vor einem einzigen Scherbenhaufen – und Sie, Frau Kos, sollen und wollen diesen Scherbenhaufen aufkehren? Der neu gewählte US-Präsident Trump und insbesondere sein Vize Vance lehnen amerikanische Finanzhilfen für die Ukraine ab. Unkalkulierbare, selbstzerstörerische Risiken tun sich für uns auf. Ich frage Sie: Ist es nicht an der Zeit, ein Moratorium in der Erweiterungspolitik der EU einzulegen und zuerst einmal auf einen Waffenstillstand in der Ukraine hinzuwirken?

1-0115-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for giving your opinion on one issue which happened in the past. We have also listened to the speech of Mr Putin in German Bundestag 2001, and those were different times. You remember the speech? Me too. Very well.

I don't think that fighting for peace is the opposite, or that it excludes the enlargement process. I think we can do these both. And we do these both. Why? Especially because I see the enlargement process as a process of bringing peace to Europe. I mentioned this in my introduction.

So how we can secure that we will have peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe is by helping the countries who want to live with European values to be a part of it. Therefore, I will work on this. I think all of us want to have peace in Ukraine, but this peace has to be just and lasting, and it cannot be done without the people of Ukraine.

1-0116-0000

**Thomas Waitz (Verts/ALE).** – Thank you, Chair, and Madam Commissioner-designate, you have already elaborated very clearly that an accession process has to be merit-based, but especially if we expect quick delivery of legislation, especially from smaller countries, please don't forget that we need to support these countries with capacity.

It's not only about legislation passing parliaments, but also about implementation on the ground so citizens actually feel the changes.

I have one question that is related to reconciliation and good neighbourhood relationships. Is this for you a core ingredient of the accession process? And if yes, how are you going to support that?

And finally, my question: we have had good experiences on decoupling, decoupling on the Western Balkans, different countries from each other, so how do you stand to the regatta principle?

But I also would advocate to decouple our internal need for reforms from the actual enlargement process, and not using the need for internal reforms to keep countries out or in the loop. What's your position on this?

1-0117-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I'm very happy, thank you, Mr Waitz, that you have mentioned reconciliation. This will be, if confirmed, a very important part of my work, not just because it is written in the mission letter, but because I strongly believe that this is an ongoing process and that being in the EU or outside, we should be able to talk about it.

Why? So much harm has been done in the past in our different respective countries. I can speak of Slovenia. I grew up ten kilometres away from the Austrian border, where Nazis occupied our territory, and my parents had to go from the Slovenian to the German school and were not allowed to speak Slovene. We have territories on the border with Italy, where the Italian fascists have been.

And you are coming from the other side of the border, Mr Waitz, I think that we really go well together, and this is great.

You know, I will just name you one case, this is the case of the city of Gorizia, 'Görz' in German, and Nova Gorizia. After the Second World War, the city stayed in Italy. And we didn't want to accept this, or we wanted to give space for Slovenians who were living in this city who are then Italian, so we built Nova Gorizia, new Gorizia, on the Slovenian side.

So the border was in between in the Yugoslav times. But then, in 2004, this was the city where there was an official celebration of entering Slovenia into the EU. And also Mr Prodi, the President of the European Commission, has been there. The head of my team, Marco, is coming from this city.

You know, I really love to listen to people. So, going to the reconciliation – gosh, now I got emotional – it's the thing I strongly believe in. But we have to handle it with care, because it's about emotions and we should talk about it. Otherwise we will not be able to bring the countries into the EU, from the Western Balkans especially.

1-0118-0000

**Marjan Šarec (Renew)**. – Spoštovana kandidatka, draga Marta! Veseli me, da danes sedite tukaj na tem mestu in odgovarjate. Odgovarjate tudi tistim, ki vas obtožujejo sodelovanja z nekdanjo tajno službo.

Tisti bolj malo vedo o slovenski politiki. Kajti tisti, ki je to sprožil, je predsednik največje opozicijske stranke, ki je dejansko edini predsednik kakšne stranke, ki je bil dejansko član komunistične partije.

Pa pojdimo zdaj k vašemu resorju. Naj nadaljujem tam, kjer je končal kolega Waitz. Kako bomo zagotovili, da kljub tem težnjam k spravi in pomiritvi med narodi, da bomo vseeno preprečili, da bi nekatere članice Evropske unije to izkoristile za pritisk in reševale svoja bilateralna vprašanja s temi državami, ampak da bi se res posvetili vsi skupaj, kako jih bomo čim prej pripeljali v Evropsko unijo? Kajti ne pravim, da se to dogaja, je pa dobro misliti tudi na to.

1-0119-0000

**Marta Kos**, *kandidatka za komisarko*. – Najlepša hvala. Spoštovani gospod Šarec, dragi poslanec Evropskega parlamenta.

Z veseljem še enkrat poudarim, bilateralizacija – pomeni uvažanje bilateralnih sporov v širitveni proces – se, če bom potrjena kot komisarka, ne bo dogajala.

Kar ne pomeni, da bilateralni spori ne bodo obstajali ali nesoglasja, da ne govorim samo o sporih. Pomeni pa, da moramo biti dovolj zreli vsi skupaj, da bomo reševali te probleme.

Pomembni so tako interesi držav članic, lahko so tudi seveda nesoglasja med državami članicami, ampak moramo jih reševati ali že vnaprej ali pa vzporedno s procesom širitve.

In tu vidim zelo veliko možnost sodelovanja prav z vami, spoštovani gospe in gospodje poslanci, ker reševanje takih bilateralnih sporov ni enostavno. Čustva so vključena, zgodovina je vključena, različna interpretacija zgodovine. Ampak kjer je volja, je tudi pot. In jaz mislim, da si nikoli ne smemo vzeti tega iz naših rok, da lahko ukrepamo takrat, ko je možno. In spet z vsem spoštovanjem do vseh strani, ki so vključene v te morebitne spore oziroma nesoglasja.

1-0120-0000

**Sebastian Tynkkynen (ECR).** – Madam Commissioner-designate, Türkiye has been using the threat of mass migration into Europe as an instrument to extort the EU. At a time when NATO's unity is paramount, Türkiye unnecessarily delayed the accession processes of Finland and Sweden.

For the last 50 years, following a bloody invasion, Türkiye has occupied large parts of Cyprus. Over 30 000 outspoken critics of the government, political opponents, activists, journalists, lawyers and Kurdish advocates are rotting in Turkish jails. Türkiye's far from being a reliable partner and has moved deep into authoritarian rule.

Madam Commissioner-designate, isn't it finally time to declare that Türkiye no more has prospects of joining the EU, and thus its accession process should be terminated once and for all?

1-0121-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, I'm grateful that you have mentioned Türkiye, I have mentioned it too in my introduction, but before I mentioned Türkiye, I mentioned the Cyprus issue.

There is a clear line from the joint communication from the Council and HR/VP that we should start talking with Türkiye on a different level than the enlargement process, and I want to remind all of us that actually we stopped the negotiation process with Türkiye in 2018 because they didn't follow the European values. And this is now stopped.

When we speak about the relations with Türkiye, we speak about different things, but of course they are connected. But whatever we will do – be it on the field of the modernisation of the Customs Union, being on the field of the visa liberalisation, being on the field of how Turkey could help us getting a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan – the main rule will be that there will be no further development if we will not see development in the Cyprus issue. What is development? Development is that we work to the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions for the settlement.

Relating or being engaged in with Turkey, in my eyes, is exactly the opportunity to speak about this again and again and again, and also about the human rights and the rule of law.

1-0122-0000

**David McAllister, Chair of the AFET Committee.** – Thank you, Commissioner-designate. And your words have been carefully listened to by Türkiye's Ambassador to the European Union, who I see is

with us. Welcome. And I've been informed he's accompanied by Members of the Turkish Parliament. So welcome to this hearing. I hope you're enjoying it just as much as we are.

1-0123-0000

**Hermann Tertsch (Pfe).** – Señora comisaria propuesta, yo no le voy a preguntar si usted colaboró o no con los servicios secretos yugoslavos en su día, porque ya ha dicho claramente que no.

Lo que no puede negar es que es un hecho que, en Eslovenia y fuera de Eslovenia, existe la convicción de que usted y sus dos hermanos —Drago y Miran— trabajaban para la Administración de Seguridad del Estado de los servicios secretos del régimen comunista.

¿Comprende usted —le voy a preguntar así, para ver si me puede responder con un sí o un no— que haya mucha gente alarmada ante la posibilidad de que, pudiendo ser encargada de la ampliación, también hacia países que fueron Yugoslavia, tengan dichos países información suficiente sobre usted —u otros terceros países— como para someterla a presiones y a extorsión? ¿Lo comprende?

1-0124-0000

**Marta Kos, Commissioner-designate.** – I was never an informant or collaborator of the secret service in ex-Yugoslavia. I hear it for the first time that my brothers have been there, too. So if I haven't been there, I don't see any problems that I wouldn't be able to work well as Commissioner for enlargement, if confirmed.

1-0125-0000

**Matjaž Nemec (S&D).** – Spoštovana gospa kandidatka, dobrodošla v Evropskem parlamentu!

Verjetno bi se vsi tukaj prisotni strinjali, da je zagotavljanje kredibilne in realne evropske perspektive za širitev in za regijo Zahodnega Balkana ključna naloga ne samo vaše Komisije, ampak tudi tega odbora.

Moja vprašanja so vezana na eno bolj kompleksnih držav Zahodnega Balkana, to je Bosna in Hercegovina. Kljub njenim prizadevanjem, ta še vedno ne izpolnjuje ključnih zahtev za odprtje prvih pogajalskih poglavij. Zaostaja pri pripravljanih delih za pogajanja, vključno pri imenovanju glavnega pogajalca in nacionalnega koordinatorja za instrument IPA. Obstaja resno tveganje, da bi zamudila sredstva iz načrta rasti.

Kakšen bo, spoštovana kandidatka, vaš pristop v komunikaciji s političnimi voditelji države, da bi zagotovila čimprejšnji napredek te države? Kajti vemo, glede na to, da smo v prejšnjem mandatu bili priča stopnjevanju secesionistične retorike in dejanj Milorada Dodika in njegovih zaveznikov brez zadostne javne podpore vašega predhodnika Várhelyija.

Ali se lahko zavežete, da boste vi sprejeli odločnejše ukrepe proti takšnim dejanjem, ki spodkopavajo stabilnost ne samo regije, ampak tudi države?

Ali se lahko zavežete, da ne boste popuščali pri pogojevanju za odmrznitev EU sredstev za Republiko srbsko, dokler ne bodo vidne dosledne spremembe pri pristopu njegovega vodstva?

In še četrto, če mi dovolite. Evropski parlament je večkrat pozval k uvedbi ciljnih sankcij proti Miloradu Dodiku. Kakšno je vaše stališče?

1-0126-0000

**Marta Kos**, *kandidatka za komisarko*. – Najlepša hvala. Spoštovani gospod poslanec Matjaž Nemeč, in če lahko dodam, vi tudi prihajate iz tega krasnega mesta, Nove Gorice, kjer je Slovenija vstopila v Evropsko unijo. In tudi hvala za to, da ste omenili Bosno.

Bosna in Hercegovina: v zadnjem poročilu o širitvi je ne preveč pozitiven, ampak tudi ne negativen trend. Pričakujemo od Bosne in Hercegovine, pa se zavedamo, da je zelo težko, da bo vodstvo izpolnilo samo še nekaj pogojev, ki so potrebni, da se bomo končno lahko začeli pomikati iz Daytona proti Bruslju.

Kaj imam v mislih? Dayton je bil pomemben sporazum, ki je pripeljal mir v Bosno in Hercegovino. Tisto, kar si želim pa jaz, če bom potrjena kot komisarka, je to, da začnemo resna pogajanja. Da začnemo resna pogajanja in to pomeni pot v Bruselj. Pot v Bruselj, če karikiram, bo pomenila, da bo Evropska unija s svojimi sredstvi, s svojo energijo, s svojimi ljudmi pomagala, da se bo Bosna usposobila na način, da bo funkcionalno lahko peljala pogovore v okviru pridruževanja Evropski uniji.

To pomeni, da bodo sposobni sprejemati odločitve. Hkrati to tudi pomeni – omenili ste denar –, da bodo lahko črpali sredstva, in precej jih je na razpolago. Hkrati bo pa to tudi pomenilo – jaz res komaj čakam in upam, da se bo to res zgodilo kmalu –, da bomo začeli proces screeninga. Zakaj? Proces screeninga nam bo omogočil, da bomo odpravili vse tiste anomalije, ki so se izkazale v preteklosti kot ovira poti Bosne in Hercegovine v EU.

1-0127-0000

**Sebastião Bugalho (PPE)**. – Thank you, Chair, and thank you for defending this Chamber's dignity as you did today. Good morning, Ms Kos. First, I would like to ask you if you would accelerate the cooperation between Eurojust and the accession countries in order to help them fight corruption and use European funds in a more proper way.

Second, I have to thank you for being so clear about transparency during this hearing this morning, and so I have to ask: you told us – and I ask with respect – you told us you earned less than EUR 5 000 as a private consultant. You did not mention a consulting company you own in Switzerland. Do you still own it? And if you do or don't, did that company provide any services to companies or individuals on a sanctioned list that can compromise your mission as Commissioner? I thank you and I wish you the best.

1-0128-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much. You mentioned Eurojust, Mr Bugalho, yes, and Bosnia is also forwarding on this path. So, I welcome this step forward.

Yes, I still have a consulting company. This was what I was living from. But if confirmed, I will close it. And no, I have never had businesses with any company or people who are on the list.

1-0129-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, first of all, let me thank all Members for their questions and the Commissioner-designate for her answers. Before we close this meeting, I now invite Ms Kos to make a brief closing statement of no more than 5 minutes. It's up to 5 minutes. If you wish to be shorter, it's up to you.

1-0130-0000

**Marta Kos**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, honourable Chair. Thank you, honourable Members. It is still a privilege and I enjoy it, being able to talk to you, because this is what we should do. Even if we come from different areas of the ideological spectrum, I think what makes Europe strong is talking to each other – as long as we stick to the European values.

In this respect, I'm happy that you have raised great concern for the rule of law and fundamental values as cornerstones of the enlargement policy. But taking care about the European values cannot be just my concern or the concern of your committee; it should be a concern of all of us. And that's why, again, I commit myself to teamwork with the European Parliament, and in particular with you. I'm sure that we can achieve more in the enlargement process if we will cooperate.

Today I have already quoted Simone Veil. Her life story radiates resilience, courage and profound dedication to human rights – a legacy that resonates deeply and speaks to anyone. How can somebody who has experienced so much pain use this pain as a wellspring for justice and compassion? Therefore, I think we should build on her legacy. Her life showed us that peace is not just the absence of war, but the presence of justice, respect, resilience in the face of forces that threaten not just our unity, but also our shared humanity. Europe is worth fighting for, not because of the abstract ideas, but because of what Europe represents: its unity, freedom and the promise that no one should live in fear and oppression.

When I talked to you, you have given me a line for my introduction today, Javier Zarzalejos. You said that when we speak about the Union today, we should go to the basics. And this is the lesson I learned from you, visiting your office. I will never forget, because this is what it is about. The European Union is a foundation for peace, and we should protect and threaten that unity against anything that threatens it.

Supporting Ukraine now is about honouring the same principles. It's about standing with a nation struggling for its freedom. It's about standing with its people, who show extraordinary bravery, who are holding fast to their homeland, their identity and the very spirit of democracy. When we offer Ukraine our support, we are also defining sovereignty, human dignity and the freedom to determine its own future. We are reaffirming that peace in Europe, and indeed in the world, cannot be taken for granted, but must be protected and, when necessary, defended.

*(The Commissioner-designate spoke in Ukrainian)*

Dear Ukrainians, the European Union is supporting you, not from fear or mere necessity, but from a profound sense of shared destiny. In supporting you, we are not only offering you solidarity. We want to prove that the values of democracy and peace are not just ideals; they are commitments we must – and will – uphold.

Honourable Chair, dear chairs of the invited committees, members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, because of the war in Ukraine, we are reminded that peace is precious and fragile, and that to defend it is to protect the essence of what it means being European. This is why I will carry out my work as Commissioner for enlargement, if confirmed, with the utmost responsibility to European unity, to the Member States, to the candidate and neighbourhood countries, and to all Europeans.

*(Applause)*

1-0131-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Thank you, Madam Kos.

With regard to the next step, please be informed that the AFET coordinators will meet at 13:00 in camera to evaluate this hearing. The evaluation process and the letter will be confidential. Our decision will be published by the CoP after the conclusion of the last hearings.

This concludes the meeting. Thank you very much. And once again, thank you, Madam Kos, for 3 hours and 15 minutes.

1-0132-0000

*(The hearing closed at 12:18)*