



**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE
Corina CREȚU
Regional Policy**

1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence

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

Over the last 14 years I have been closely working with European issues. This experience has helped to acquire a good knowledge of the European Institutions and their working methods.

I am honoured that I have been designated Commissioner for the regional policy portfolio. As a trained economist and through my political experience (in my home country and) in the European Parliament I am convinced that EU Regional Policy is a powerful tool to create jobs, growth and promote the integration of disadvantaged groups, particularly but not only in the least developed regions.

I am particularly motivated and committed to the regional policy portfolio as it is a policy that brings the joint European effort to the regions, to our homes, to our citizens. Regional policy invests in a broad range of areas such as better research and innovation, more accessible digital economy for all, energy security and efficiency, improved transport, more competitive SMEs and higher quality and accessibility to education. These investments make European action visible on the ground and have direct impact on everyday life of citizens. They thus not only have a clear social and economic objective but provide also a substantial contribution to overcome the frequently perceived distance of the European project from its people.

President-elect Juncker has put in place a new organisation of the Commission. As Commissioner for Regional Policy I will closely liaise with the Vice-President for Jobs Growth, Investment and Competitiveness to make sure the Commission delivers its strategic agenda. I see a great opportunity in this set up to pool the resources to ensure that the investments of the Cohesion Policy can make a substantial contribution to the Jobs, Growth and Investment package announced by the President-elect.

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

As a former member of the European Parliament, I have always acted in the European interest and I intend to continue doing so. I am fully aware of the obligations foreseen in the Treaties to ensure the independence of the Members of the European Commission and I am deeply committed to comply with the highest ethical standards set out in the Treaties and in the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. I have completed my Declaration of Interests, which is accessible to the public and which will be updated should there be any changes. I guarantee that I will avoid any position or situation which could put in question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission and I will inform the President-elect of any situation which might involve a conflict of interests in the performance of my official duties.

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

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

As a prospective Member of the Commission, I fully subscribe to collegiality as the key principle for the Commission's functioning. Collegiality constitutes the basis for balanced decisions that take into account the different facets in the decision-making process and ensures coherence in our policies and proposals. Therefore, I will take my political responsibility for the activities in the field of Regional Policy without prejudice to the principle of collegiality and I will carry out my responsibilities in full cooperation with the other members of the Commission and in accordance with the working methods established by the President-elect. I will also work closely with a number of colleagues, notably with the Vice Presidents responsible for the European Energy Union and for the completion of the Digital Single Market, as support from regional policy funding can significantly enhance development processes in these fields. As a member of the College I know I am accountable to the directly elected Members of the European Parliament. In this respect, the equal treatment of the European Parliament and the Council will be a must in my day-to-day activities.

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

The President-elect has my full support for his intention to pursue the special partnership between the European Parliament and the European Commission as a source of our democratic legitimacy. As a MEP I believe to have managed to gain a good understanding of the concerns, needs, way of thinking and sensitivities of the European Parliament. Members of the European Parliament can be assured that I will fully commit myself to a transparent flow of information towards the European Parliament, as foreseen in the Framework Agreement between the Institutions. I will ensure that the European Parliament receives all relevant documents and information in a timely fashion and on equal footing with the Council. Concerning the follow-up to European Parliament's positions and requests, I will apply the provisions of the Framework Agreement and, in my areas of responsibility, make sure that the Commission responds to parliamentary resolutions or requests made on the basis of Article 225 TFEU, within 3 months after their adoption. In this context, I support and fully endorse the commitment made by President-elect Juncker that the future Commission will be particularly attentive to legislative initiative reports. I share and will ensure the need for broad stakeholder consultation and rigorous impact assessment, reflecting our common emphasis on the quality of legislation and the right regulatory environment, and will work closely with the First Vice-President designate to achieve this.

Questions from the Committee on Regional Development

3. Cohesion Policy reform and the EU2020 goals

Cohesion policy represents the main investment tool in the real economy, accounting for over one third of the EU Budget, and the ESI Funds are key delivery instruments of Europe 2020 Strategy's goals. How will the Commissioner-designate maintain the achievements of Cohesion Policy reform, in particular the integrated approach, the partnership involvement and the regional focus? How could the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the Funds be maximised to reach the EU 2020 goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as to achieve economic, social and territorial cohesion, especially in the context of a slowing convergence between regions, as pointed out by the Sixth Cohesion Report?

Cohesion policy has undergone a far-reaching reform for the 2014-2020 period. The reform has strengthened the links between cohesion policy and EU priorities and increased its effectiveness and results-orientation, firmly linking it to the European Semester and economic governance processes. I will ensure in the ongoing negotiations of Partnership Agreements and programmes with Member States - and also later at the implementation stage - that this ambitious reform agreed by the EP and Council is translated into reality.

An integrated approach allows Member States and regions to address complex challenges in an integrated and coordinated manner. It will thus add value to the effectiveness and targeting of sectoral investments in the regional and local context and should therefore be the norm. The new regulatory framework provides for possibilities to implement such integrated approach, for example in the context of smart specialisation strategies, synergies between cohesion policy and other EU funds or of sustainable urban development. I will pay particular attention to the take-up of these opportunities and encourage regions and cities to share their experience.

The reform has strengthened the provisions on partnership, not least thanks to the strong support from the EP. The quality of partnership in the European Structural and Investment Funds (hereafter ESI Funds) is of great importance, because it enhances commitment, ownership and expertise of the policy through the involvement of regional and local authorities, social partners and NGOs. I will pay particular attention to the application of the European code of conduct on Partnership.

Concerning the impact of the Funds to reach the Europe 2020 goals, it should be underlined that the regulatory framework for the new generation of ESI Funds has significantly strengthened the links between cohesion policy and EU priorities from 2014 onwards and that close alignment is ensured with the Europe 2020 objectives. All investments will thus contribute to thematic objectives that are directly derived from the Europe 2020 strategy and its headline targets. Within this framework, each programme should set out its own strategy on how best to drive jobs, growth and structural change. My services will closely follow programmes to make sure that cohesion policy makes its full contribution to the achievement of Europe 2020 goals. I will pay particular attention to the contribution that the Funds under my responsibility should make to the Digital Single Market and the European Energy Union.

4. Conditionality mechanisms

Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes must be consistent with National Reform Programmes and should address the necessary reforms identified in the relevant Country Specific Recommendations under the European Semester process. How, in the view of the Commissioner-designate, would the conditionality mechanisms function in practice? How will the Commission, involved in the structured dialogue with the EP, take into account any EP reservations when proposing to suspend part or all of the commitments or payments?

During the current negotiations, the Commission is paying particular attention to the consistency of Partnership Agreements and operational programmes with National Reform programmes and relevant country-specific recommendations (hereafter CSRs) as foreseen in the legal framework governing the ESI Funds. The use of the Funds must be closely aligned with the economic challenges identified in the relevant CSRs. Both Member States and the Commission need to focus on setting the right priorities from the beginning in line with the recommendations adopted by the Council. In this way, there will be limited need for reprogramming in the years following the adoption of the Partnership Agreements and programmes. Stability of programmes should be the

general rule, as ESI Funds typically support multi-annual investment strategies. In addition, although CSRs are updated annually, the underlying challenges of Member States are normally also of medium to long-term nature. Therefore, I will ensure that if reprogramming is used it will be just to address new emerging economic and social challenges identified in the relevant CSRs and Council recommendations under the economic governance mechanisms or to maximise the growth and competitiveness impact of the available ESI Funds in Member States under financial assistance. The regulatory framework foresees a number of safeguards in relation to the application of conditionality provisions. I am fully aware that the European Parliament attaches great importance to these. I will work closely with my colleagues in the Commission to ensure that these provisions are applied in a proportionate and effective manner, respecting equality of treatment between Member States, and taking into account where appropriate the economic and social circumstances of the Member State. Let me also recall that the regulation spells out with a great amount of detail the methodology to be applied in the case of suspension of ESI funding, including in particular as regards the suspension of commitments, a list of safeguards reflecting the economic and social situation of the Member State concerned, but also the moment when a possible suspension occurs in the programming cycle. The regulatory framework sets out the occasions when the Commission shall inform the European Parliament in case there is risk of suspension of the ESI Funds. The Parliament may invite the Commission to a structured dialogue on the application of macroeconomic conditionality provisions, in particular in cases where it has received such information from the Commission. This will allow members of the European Parliament to convey their views. I will consider these views as a valuable source for information and I will welcome receiving them. I can assure you that I as Commissioner will consider seriously all relevant information and give due consideration to any elements arising from, and opinions expressed through the structured dialogue with the European Parliament. As recalled in the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Annual Growth Surveys, the Commission is very much concerned with the importance to preserve productive investment in the Member States, and my intention is certainly not to deprive Member States of well-needed resources. But in order to ensure the effectiveness of EU funding, we need to provide the right level of incentive in restoring a proper macroeconomic framework or the right investment mix.

5. Implementation of cohesion policy: parliamentary involvement

How will the Commissioner-designate develop regular and constructive dialogue with the REGI Committee regarding the finalisation of the programming process and - especially - the implementation of cohesion policy during the lifetime of the next Commission? What measures will she take to ensure that MEPs are informed regularly, systematically, and in a timely manner, about the policy implementation?

Having served as a MEP for the last 8 years I fully understand the importance of good cooperation, communication and coordination with the EP. Having in mind the common goal to facilitate the best implementation of the policy, I would appreciate a regular and constructive dialogue with the Members of the REGI committee. The REGI Committee has done a great job in the first time the regulations were adopted under co-decision and it is important that REGI Members are kept regularly informed of the developments on the ground in relation to the implementation of these regulations that have been for the first time adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure.

The regulatory framework for 2014-2020 foresees increased reporting on the progress in the implementation and on the achievements of the policy. A first report about the outcome of the negotiations on Partnership Agreements and programmes will be presented by the end of next year and I am hoping for a fruitful discussion with you. It is obvious in my view that I, as well as my services, am ready to report to the REGI Committee on specific issues whenever the Committee would consider useful and ensure a follow-up of views expressed. In the past, there have been arrangements regarding the flow of information on EU cohesion policy between the Commission and this Committee and I would be happy to continue this practice.

We should also engage in a debate about the further development of the policy for post-2020 early on, based on a sound analysis and assessment of how the new elements of the reform have been taken and led to a change in the way the policy is delivered. The budgetary and legislative proposals for the next round should be based on a broad debate with the EP, with the consultative Committees, with the stakeholders in Member States and regions and also with the academic world.