



ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE
Phil HOGAN
Agriculture and Rural Development

1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence

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

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

I am a committed European and have always strongly believed in the value of a cohesive and effective EU. Faced with common challenges, we are strongest when we work together. Throughout my political career - 32 years as an elected representative - I have actively put forward the case for Europe, especially during referendum campaigns for the Single European Act, Maastricht, Nice and Lisbon Treaties. I have also been proud to serve as front bench spokesman for European Affairs for the Fine Gael party.

As Minister for the Environment I took an active part the Environment Council, which I also chaired under the Irish Presidency. That Presidency was a particularly productive six months: we agreed a range of important environmental laws with the European Parliament, including relating to water pollution; emissions from cars, vans and aviation; the 7th Environmental Action Programme, and more.

President-elect Juncker has made clear that this Commission should act together as a strong team, working across portfolios and focused on clear results: and I intend to play my full part. This Commission will operate with respect for the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and better regulation; indeed that will be central to our functioning. We will concentrate our efforts on those areas where action at European level best delivers the desired results.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development I will work closely with my colleagues, in particular the Vice Presidents for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness and for Energy Union. I want to see rural development spending well integrated into the jobs and growth agenda – and generating – and investment at national and regional level. That will be a priority as we come to implement the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), following its recent reform

Within the first twelve months we will look at the potential for further simplifying direct payments: in particular as regards greening, rural development, quality policy and the fruit and vegetable scheme. We will also examine how the agricultural sector can best contribute to boosting energy efficiency and cutting emissions; monitor the benefit of EU-level action and review the effectiveness of spending programmes. We will supervise expenditure in line with the financial regulation and the principles of sound financial management, while protecting the EU budget from fraud. And we will contribute to the 2016 review of the Multiannual Financial Framework by identifying ways to further focus the CAP on jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness.

If I am confirmed by the European Parliament, as Commissioner, I further commit to:

- act independently and in the best interests of all Europeans, in accordance with the obligations set out in the Treaties (Articles 17.3 TEU, 245 and 339 TFEU). The principle of independence goes to the heart of how the Commission works and its ability to discharge its duties.
- comply with the highest ethical standards as set out in Articles 17.3 TEU and 245 TFEU and in the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. These are essential commitments which must not be compromised in any way.
- make my declaration of interests, as required by the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, complete and accessible to the public, and update it should there ever be changes.
- avoid any position or situation which could put in question my independence, impartiality or availability to the Commission.
- inform the President of the Commission of any situation which might involve a conflict of interests in performing 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?

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?

I am a team player and I look forward to working with my fellow Commissioners in the new College in a spirit of collegiality. The principle of collegiality underpins the action of the Commission, which is accountable to the European Parliament as a body.

If I am confirmed by the European Parliament I undertake to fully assume my political responsibility for the activities in my field of competence 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. The future Commission's work programme for the coming years will, as stated by President-elect Juncker, be "a product of the College as a whole", based on the political guidelines of the President-elect.

As a Commissioner I would ensure a constructive political dialogue with the European Parliament and its committees based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, regular reporting and exchange of information. I see the relationship with you as elected Members of Parliament as vital and I would wish to engage fully with you at all times.

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 see the Commission having a very important responsibility as regards communication. It is much more than simply selling Commission initiatives, it is a role of real engagement and dialogue with the citizens of Europe. We need to be very attentive and listen to their views within the remit of our political engagement. In this sense, I fully support our new commitment to transparency set out in the political guidelines by the President-elect. I commit to making public all the contacts and meetings I hold with professional organisations or self-employed individuals on any matter relating to EU policy making and implementation.

I fully subscribe to the need for equal treatment of the European Parliament and Council, which is not only legally required in the context of the ordinary legislative procedure but is also a must for a Commissioner who is, as a Member of the College, accountable to the directly elected Members of the European Parliament. With each successive Treaty change, Parliament has increased its role and enjoys full democratic legitimacy as the representative body of the citizens of the Union. I am accountable for my actions both to you, as Members of the European Parliament, and to the public at large. Parliament plays a key role in safeguarding democracy in Europe and reflecting the general interest of all Europeans. This is why we need to continue to forge a very close working relationship. As an elected representative for the past 32 years in Ireland, this is something I understand and value greatly. As regards the provision of documents to the European Parliament, I will ensure the provisions of the Framework Agreement are fully implemented.

On a day to day basis I will work closely with my cabinet and my services to ensure that relations are based on loyalty, trust, transparency, a two-way information flow and mutual assistance.

Questions from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development:

3. Preserving Parliament's prerogatives according to the Treaty (Article 43(3) and delegated acts)

Are you committed to ensure that Parliament's prerogatives according to the Treaty are strictly preserved? Firstly, with regard to legislative process, will you commit to stand firm on a very strict interpretation of Article 43(3) TFEU and against any Council attempt to reduce Parliament's prerogatives under the Ordinary Legislative Procedure? Secondly with regard to non-legislative acts, in order to allow for an improved Parliamentary scrutiny of delegated acts, will you commit to ensure that your services treat Parliament and Member States on an equal footing, inter alia by ensuring easy access to meetings of expert groups and the simultaneous transmission of documents under consideration? Will you put in place a well-structured public register of draft delegated acts and other relevant documents under consideration in the expert groups, in order to increase transparency of decision-making for the Parliament and the public? Are you prepared to discuss in our Committee, at its request, draft delegated acts in advance of their formal adoption? How will you make sure that Parliament's views are appropriately taken into account?

As to the first point concerning the legislative process and the interpretation of Article 43(3) of the Treaty, I can confirm that I take a similar view.

When the Commission proposes new legislation, its decision on which procedure to use will be guided by two basic principles:

- Any use of Article 43(3), which allows the Council to decide alone, must be the exception. The ordinary legislative procedure, under which Parliament acts as co-legislator with the Council, is now the general rule in the area of the CAP.

- All structural parameters and fundamental elements of a measure must be decided by Parliament and by Council as co-legislators. This is also true for prices, aid levels, quantitative limitations etc. Where these latter elements are part and parcel of a new measure, if I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will therefore include them in the proposal that I will make based on Article 43(2).

I will stand by these principles when defending the Commission's proposals before the Council. This also includes the Commission's existing proposal for the new school scheme, which proposes that all elements of the new scheme, including its financial aspects, should be adopted by Parliament and Council acting together as co-legislators under Article 43(2) of the Treaty.

Moreover, as regards the court case brought by Germany against the use of Article 43(2) for the fixing of the reference thresholds in the CMO Regulation, I will fully support the Parliament's position that the legal base chosen by the co-legislators for fixing these thresholds was the right one.

With regard to delegated acts and the improved scrutiny by Parliament, I believe that the CAP can only function effectively and efficiently, to the benefit of farmers and operators, if the Parliament and Council as co-legislators give the Commission the powers to lay down the necessary details for the operation of a measure or to intervene in cases of urgency. About urgency, I have noted how quickly action was needed after the Russian embargo on EU agricultural products.

This being said, in the area under my responsibility I will ensure that the Commission's existing commitments in line with the Common Understanding on delegated acts and the Framework Agreement are fully respected. This concerns in particular the commitment to carry out appropriate and transparent consultations at expert level in the preparation of delegated acts and to ensure that the Parliament and the Member States receive the relevant information. It also means full respect of the provisions in the Framework Agreement in relation to the participation of experts from the Parliament in expert group meetings. This should also facilitate the Parliament's scrutiny, in particular of delegated acts, where the Parliament has ex-post control rights.

I also commit to a transparent and constructive relationship with COMAGRI and Parliament in general when it comes to the preparation of delegated acts. I see this as part of the frequent and constructive contacts that I hope to have with Parliament, to the mutual satisfaction of our two institutions.

Finally, I am aware that the Commission already maintains a register on experts groups which contains a considerable amount of relevant information and that this register is open to the public (1). Any solution to address horizontal issues such as increased transparency must be discussed at a horizontal level as they are not policy-specific. I stand ready to contribute to the reflections and I am convinced that pragmatic and Treaty-compliant solutions can be found.

4. Involving the AGRI Committee in negotiations on the agricultural component of international trade agreements

What specific commitments are you willing to make concerning the involvement of the AGRI Committee at all stages of the negotiations on the agricultural component of international trade agreements (bilateral and multilateral)?

What assurances can you provide to guarantee that if you are confirmed as Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development that you will continue to retain the role of EU lead negotiator on agricultural trade in the context of the WTO negotiations?

I would like to stress the full commitment of the Commission to work in a political partnership with the European Parliament. As foreseen by the Treaty, the Commission will report regularly to the European Parliament on the progress of negotiations. If I am confirmed as Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, I am ready to appear regularly in the AGRI Committee to update on relevant agriculture-related developments, both on bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

It is clear that the Commissioner for Trade has the key role to play in moving the EU trade policy forward and in leading trade negotiations in general and, if confirmed, I will obviously work in close cooperation with Commissioner-designate Malmström. At the same time, because of the particularities of agricultural trade, negotiations on agriculture in the WTO will continue to be under the responsibility of the Agriculture Commissioner in close co-ordination with the Trade Commissioner. I see no reason or justification to change this long-established practice which has worked very well in the past.

5. Reducing bureaucracy and committing to a mid-term review of the new CAP

Our Committee has always considered the bureaucratic and administrative simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy as a priority. The reform of the CAP, unfortunately, despite Parliament's proposals, has increased the red tape both farmers and Member States have to face. What measures do you intend to enact in order to effectively reduce this excessive bureaucracy? In particular, will you commit to undertake a mid-term review of the new CAP to improve this bureaucracy and other problems related to it?

Simplification and subsidiarity are at the top of the agenda of this Commission where – for the first time - a Vice President will be responsible for better regulation. If I am confirmed as Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, I would be determined to contribute to this agenda. I would ask my services to carry out a comprehensive screening of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) legislation to see what can be simplified without putting the effectiveness of the policy and its sound financial management at risk. In addition, I would want the concept of subsidiarity to play a bigger role in the CAP. Therefore the screening should also include a subsidiarity check to determine which political decisions could better be taken at Member State level. I would want to see a reduction in the administrative burden for both farmers and national authorities. This would also help reduce errors in the way EU money is spent.

On the basis of this screening, I would intend to present within the first year of my mandate a simplification and subsidiarity strategy for the CAP which will include concrete initiatives together with a realistic planning for their implementation. It will also describe the way stakeholders will be involved in the process. I am convinced that we all need to work together to ensure a simple, yet efficient and flexible CAP.

I would need the political support of the European Parliament to implement this simplification and subsidiarity agenda. Not least because simplification and subsidiarity are in many cases about political choices. This is not only about re-arranging forms or procedures; it will often also mean fewer choices and exemptions i.e. less tailor-made solutions. I mention this because many aspects of the CAP (reform) that may be perceived as an administrative burden may be the direct consequence of the complex legislative framework which has just been decided.

Without going into too much detail on the strategy at this stage, I can already say today that I would see it as a two-step approach with a first step being realised in the near future and a second step focusing on mid-term initiatives. The first step could thus include the following initiatives:

- after the first year of experience with the reform, a review of whether our policy, notably on direct payments, is designed so that it is being properly applied in practice. Where this is not the case, I will propose to amend our rules with a view to making them simpler and more efficient. This exercise will of course include the arrangement on greening and the Ecological Focus Area (EFA) measure, in line with the commitments made by the outgoing Commission.

- reviews and, where appropriate, proposals concerning:

- possibilities for further harmonisation and simplification in the area of geographical indications.

- the simplification potential with regard to the fruit and vegetable scheme.

1) <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/>