

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE
Valdis DOMBROVSKIS
Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue**

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 had the honour to serve as Prime Minister of Latvia in three consecutive governments, from March 2009 to January 2014. I took office when my country was going through the deepest economic crisis in the EU. The priority of my governments was to restore economic growth and job creation as quickly and as convincingly as possible. As a result of structural reforms and the return to sound public finances, Latvia steered out of the deep economic and social crisis to become one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. Other important factors that contributed to this turnaround included the use of economic stimulus (most notably by accelerating the use of EU funds) and creation of an additional social safety network to deal with the social consequences of the crisis. Latvia also successfully fulfilled the Maastricht criteria and joined the euro area this year. In preparing for euro adoption we have demonstrated our trust to the future of a European project and the euro currency, at a time when many others were calling it into question. These processes could not have been successful without regular and close dialogue with social partners and other stakeholders on very sensitive economic and social policy decisions. The functioning social dialogue was one of the key factors that convinced the majority of Latvians to go along with unpopular decisions in those difficult times.

As a member of the European Council, I also actively participated in the decision-making surrounding the Eurozone crisis and the strengthening of EU financial and economic governance framework.

Prior to this, I was a Member of the European Parliament (2004-2009), where I was a member of the Committee on Budgets and a substitute member on the Committee of Economic and Monetary Affairs. This year, I was elected to the European Parliament for the second time. I had been elected to the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia) three times (2002, 2010, 2011).

From 2002 to 2004, before Latvia's accession to the EU, I served as Minister of Finance of Latvia. I also was Member of Young Global Leaders at the World Economic Forum (2005-2010).

I believe this long-standing political experience, covering a wide range of domestic and EU policy areas, provides me with detailed knowledge of the way the EU functions. It gives me the necessary experience to contribute to social, economic, monetary policy on an equal footing as a Member of the European Commission, and more specifically to tackle the challenges facing the Economic and Monetary Union, to preserve the stability of our single currency and to work towards the convergence of economic and fiscal policies with social and labour market policies in the EU. If approved by the European Parliament, I would work hard to ensure that the

objectives of stability of the single currency and macroeconomic governance are coherent with social fairness and inclusion.

My motivation to take up the post of Commission Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue is rooted in the belief in the European project. I am convinced that more ambitious and smarter Europe is the best answer to the future geopolitical and economic challenges that our countries face in the 21st century. We have to grow stronger together. Yet we must not underestimate the significant challenges that lie ahead of us. I believe that, if confirmed, I could bring valuable political experience and solid know-how to the new College.

Regarding the setting of the strategic agenda, the Political Guidelines of President Juncker, set out a number of well-defined priority projects. If confirmed in my role of Vice-President, I would be responsible for steering and coordinating work across the Commission related to, amongst others, the ongoing reform of the European and Monetary Union, the stability of the euro, the solidity of public finances and social fairness underpinning the necessary structural reforms. To shape coherent policies and deliver results, a team of several Commissioners would need to stay focused on priorities in their day-to-day work. I believe that I would have a significant role to play in that respect.

My understanding is that the priority projects can evolve over time, to take into consideration new realities in Europe and beyond. Adjusting the strategic agenda of the European Commission is the prerogative of the President-elect. I would be fully available, to assist him in this task within the area of my competences and in dialogue with EU institutions, including the European Parliament, as well economic and social stakeholders.

I commit to fully respect the treaty obligations on independence and integrity, impartiality and availability, as defined in paragraph 3 of Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union and in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. I solemnly declare to comply with the ethical standards as set out in the above mentioned articles and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners.

In line with the rules set out in the Code of Conduct of Commissioners, I have completed and made accessible to the public my Declaration of Interests. In case of changes, I will immediately update my Declaration.

I also commit to avoiding any position or situation which might put in question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission.

I will refrain from holding any other public office and from engaging in any other professional activity, unpaid or paid. I pledge to immediately inform the President of the Commission if a situation involving a possible conflict of interest in the performance of my official duties were to emerge.

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?

As Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, I would be entrusted with an important role of co-ordination and representation in the new Commission, should my appointment be confirmed. I will work closely with the other Vice-Presidents and a number of Commissioners to ensure that we present coherent, effective and mutually-reinforcing action in the area of social and economic policies. My objective would be to bring together these two policy areas as essential pillars of a strong EU social market economy. Within the Commission and with stakeholders, I intend to act as catalyst, moderator and facilitator. I aim to promote a shared Commission agenda to deliver in the areas under my responsibility. I would look for synergies, support mutually-reinforcing initiatives and would ensure that actions which are not in line with our shared priorities are adjusted. I believe that my experience as Prime Minister would help in delivering on these tasks.

I hope to count on the Parliament's support in this endeavour. I would like to develop a very close working relationship with the Parliament and its Committees. I am confident that the fact that I was an elected Member of the European Parliament with direct political support from Latvian citizens would guide me in that process. I would regularly attend plenary and committee meetings, and would be available for informal discussions and would remain in regular bilateral contact with MEPs, in particular the Chairs of my corresponding parliamentary committees. I confirm my full support to the intention of the President-elect to reinforce the special relationship between the two institutions. I also take good note of the President's-elect guidance 'to have a political and not technocratic dialogue with the European Parliament'.

I will exercise my role of managing and organising the representation of the Commission in my area of responsibility in a way that maximises the Commission's political presence in committee meetings and in trilogue negotiations. I believe that the new working method of the Commission and the role of coordinating Vice-Presidents should offer important added value to the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission.

The European Parliament is the representative of the Union's citizens and hence an essential source of legitimacy. The Commission is accountable to the European Parliament and depends on its political support. As a member of the Commission I will, if confirmed, take that responsibility very seriously. Without prejudice to the principle of collegiality, I accept my personal political responsibility in the areas assigned to me, in line with the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission.

Concerning the follow-up to the Parliament positions, I will ensure that such positions are considered with the utmost attention. A shared understanding between the Commission and the co-legislators is an important ingredient of a successful policy agenda. Within areas of my responsibility, and in particular on economic governance, I commit to discussing personally the Parliaments' views and feeding them into the work of the Commission. 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.

In responding within the three-month deadline for written follow-up, I would take into account the state of internal preparation and collegial discussion within the Commission, the need for broad stakeholder consultation and rigorous impact assessment, reflecting our shared emphasis on the quality of legislation and the right regulatory environment.

Finally, it goes without saying that I support and commit to fully implement the principle of equal treatment for the European Parliament and the Council regarding access to meetings or the flow of information, in line with the provisions of the Framework Agreement.

Questions from the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs:

Euro and Social dialogue

3. Dealing with the EMU challenges

Are you confident that the European governance framework is sufficient to avoid balance of payments problems and a sovereign debt crisis in the future, and to ensure sustainable growth and employment? What is your view on the future of the EMU and how would you ensure the respect of the community method in all euro issues and the full involvement of the European Parliament? What will the Commission's role be if it again becomes necessary to help a country in severe difficulties? What lessons can be drawn from the experience of the Troika? How do you intend to implement the recommendations of the European Parliament in its Troika Report?

In response to the crisis, important steps have been taken to address weaknesses in the design of the Economic and Monetary Union, including a significant strengthening of economic governance and budgetary surveillance, particularly with the creation of European Semester to coordinate economic and fiscal policies of the EU Member States, and the introduction of financial assistance mechanisms.. It is crucial that the framework put in place is fully implemented by the EU institutions and by the Member States. The implementation of structural reforms and healthy public finances are essential to improve the conditions for investment and employment.

Going forward, further work is needed to complete the design of the Economic and Monetary Union to make it more resilient and cohesive.

Taking forward the Economic and Monetary Union over the next five years will be a key task of the upcoming mandate of the Commission and I would build my work on the basis of the Commission's Blueprint for a Deep and Genuine Economic and Monetary Union, the "Four Presidents Reports" and the Commission's Communication on the social dimension of EMU.

In line with the commitment made by President Juncker, during the first year of the next mandate, I would carry out preparatory work and present legislative and non-legislative initiatives to deepen our Economic and Monetary Union, firmly anchored in the Community method.

The first element among these initiatives will be a review of the "six-pack" and "two-pack" legislation, mindful of the need to preserve the stability that they have provided for our reinforced economic governance.

Secondly, I would look into how the necessary structural reforms in the Member States could be further advanced and accelerated. This includes a reflection on how to improve delivery on reform commitments made and how to encourage further structural reforms in the longer term. We need well-functioning labour, capital and product markets and a positive business environment to strengthen Europe as an attractive place to work and invest. We can also look into possible additional financial incentives to bring forward reforms and, in the longer-term, study the possibility, if necessary, of a targeted fiscal capacity for the euro area.

Thirdly, I would also work towards a proposal for a more efficient external representation of our Economic and Monetary Union. Finally, communication must play an integral part of the policy delivery to take citizens on board and ensure the broadest-possible support for further advancing and deepening the Economic and Monetary Union.

I believe that the Economic and Monetary Union needs to be further strengthened and deepened to support our single currency and, at the same time, that overall convergence needs to be strengthened in the EU as a whole. A fair distribution of benefits in a monetary union is strongly linked to policy frameworks that prevent the accumulation of excessive macroeconomic imbalances and facilitate a smooth macroeconomic adjustment. Sound economic policies based on structural reforms and prudent fiscal behaviour have already contributed to a reduction of internal balance of payment accounts in the last years and function as a safeguard against sovereign debt crises.

As of last year, work has started on strengthening the social dimension of the EMU. A set of economic and social indicators has been introduced into the economic governance instruments to gain better understanding of the social and unemployment risks and to detect social developments more accurately. It will be necessary to make the most of such framework and to use it to its full.

Progress has been achieved to involve the European Parliament in euro area issues, but further steps should also be considered. For instance, the new intergovernmental governance arrangements regarding the European Stability Mechanism and the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance do not include provisions that allow full scrutiny by the European Parliament. In its Blueprint for a deep and genuine EMU the Commission suggested to integrate the European Stability Mechanism and other intergovernmental agreements into the Community framework. This raises a number of complex legal and political questions and cannot be achieved in the short term, but I am committed to working towards that objective during the upcoming mandate.

The programmes set up to assist countries in difficulty avoided disorderly default and limited contagion. As part of the next mandate and drawing on the lessons learned, I would work towards re-balancing the way in which conditional stability support is granted to euro area countries in difficulty, should the need for this arise in the future. This work would include revisiting the role of "Troika", including the possibility of replacing it, over time, with a more democratically legitimate and more accountable structure, based around European institutions with enhanced parliamentary control both at European and at national level. I share the view of President-elect Juncker that, in any future case, a strong emphasis must be given to assessing, in a systematic way, the likely social as well as economic impact of proposed programme measures. The preparation of social impact assessments should thus become an integral part of any future conditional stability support programme for euro area countries, in addition to fiscal sustainability assessments.

4. Convergence of fiscal and economic policies

How will you use your role to improve the convergence between the different fiscal and economic policies of Member States, both within and outside the Eurozone, so as to reduce macro-economic imbalances and avoid that progress towards recovery in some Member States is offset by economic developments in others? Beyond that, do you intend to propose a new step implementing the work of the four Presidents and the Commission Blueprint on ensuring a genuine EMU?

Under my mandate from President-Elect Juncker, I shall, if confirmed as Commissioner, steer the Commission's work on the European Semester of economic policy coordination which is our main instrument to foster convergence and reduce macro-economic imbalances through close and timely coordination of the fiscal and economic policies of Member States. In delivering on this task, I will work closely with other Commissioners, in particular the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility and with the Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs. The resulting effort should be balanced policy guidance to the Member States that takes due account of the economic, employment and social dimensions. I believe that my co-ordinating role for the implementation of the European Semester will help to improve the consistency between our fiscal, economic and social policies, and will support closer co-ordination between economic and social policies within and outside the euro area.

In line with my mandate, I will supervise and coordinate the implementation of the annual cycle of economic policy coordination. I will also work on streamlining and reinforcing the European Semester process. I will pay particular attention to strengthening of the multilateral nature of the economic governance and peer review among Member States, increasing ownership at national level which is crucial to improve implementation, and strengthening democratic accountability.

Reform of the European Semester is of course closely related to efforts to further deepen the EMU. For example, through the upcoming review of the Six-pack and discussion of additional instruments in the economic surveillance system I will work to enhance ex ante coordination of plans for major economic policy reforms and other improvements. In the context of further steps on the future of EMU I will also consider streamlining the current EU economic surveillance framework which combines a large number of complex pieces of secondary legislation and intergovernmental surveillance arrangements and is not easy to communicate.

Questions from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs:

5. Working methods:

How do you see the role of the Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue developing over the next mandate? How will you exercise your right to influence initiatives submitted by the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility? [See the mission letter which Mr Juncker addressed to you: "As a general rule, I will not include a new initiative in the Commission Work Programme or place it on the agenda of the College unless this is recommended to me by one of the Vice-Presidents on the basis of sound arguments and a clear narrative that is coherent with the priority projects of the Political Guidelines."] How will you improve the involvement of the European Parliament in the preparation of Delegated Acts, in particular as regards information on and access to experts meetings? Do you commit to improving the transmission of secondary legislation and 'comitology' documents?

I consider the role of the Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue as a tangible expression of the change promised by the President-elect to put economic and social matters on an equal footing and to strengthen the role of social dialogue.

In this context, I would work hard to consolidate, complement and simplify the system of economic governance, making it more socially legitimate. In steering the European Semester of economic policy coordination, and in close co-operation with the appropriate Commissioners, I would ensure that the objectives of stability of the single currency and solidity of public finances are complementary. As an important part of my mandate, and based on the preparatory work carried out so far, in particular the Commission's Blueprint and the "Four Presidents' report", I would work to further deepen the Economic and Monetary Union, taking into full consideration Europe's social dimension.

As Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, and in close cooperation with the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, I would endeavour to give fresh impetus to the social dialogue at EU level. I believe that this is a crucial element of the social dimension of the EMU and an essential part of the EU's social market economy. My approach will be to focus on substance - a real exchange between social partners that delivers results for citizens.

In my role of Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue I would work very closely with the Vice President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness and a number of Commissioners, including the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. Based on my experience as Prime Minister, I intend to act as co-ordinator and facilitator, supporting the work of other Commissioners and ensuring that the College delivers on the commitments made in the Political Guidelines of the President-elect. In line with my mandate, I would in particular act to ensure the right coherence and balance between social and economic matters.

As regards legislative matters, I am aware that the distinction between delegated and implementing acts and the different control mechanisms have led to some inter-institutional controversies in the legislative process in recent years. This is a subject of common interest to all institutions and we will need to work together to find joint, Treaty-compliant solutions to these issues. Reflections are ongoing on how to ensure more ownership and transparency. I fully support these efforts. I consider that they need to be taken forward at a horizontal level in the Commission as they touch on all portfolios and are of an inter-institutional nature. In my view, the new Commission will be very well equipped to deal with these issues thanks to the role of the First Vice-President.

In the areas under my responsibility, I would make sure that the Commission's existing commitments, in line with the Common Understanding on delegated acts and the Framework Agreement with the Parliament, 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 Parliament's experts in expert groups meetings. I am convinced that the Commission should always be available to respond to questions or concerns of the Parliament. For implementing acts, a clear and comprehensive legal framework is in place with Regulation (EU)182/2011/EC, and transparency is ensured via the Comitology Register.

6. Priorities:

What are the main priorities you intend to pursue as part of your responsibilities in view of the social and employment crisis, in particular youth unemployment, which affects several Member States? What will you do to improve the social and employment dimension of the European Semester and the involvement of the social partners in the field of economic governance? How will you strengthen the role of the European Parliament in the economic governance process? How will you promote social dialogue and the role of the social partners in the European Union as a whole? What are the specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives in the fields of 'Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility' you intend to put forward together with Commissioner-designate Thyssen, and according to what timetable?

Job creation through increased investment and strengthened competitiveness is among the first priorities of President-elect Juncker and his Commission. I will work very closely with the Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness and the appropriate Commissioners to deliver on this priority.

Tackling unemployment, including youth unemployment, requires a comprehensive and cross-cutting response, including investing in human capital, creating an attractive business environment and strengthening the internal market to unlock investment and to create jobs in the EU. I will work actively with the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility to this end.

Investing in human capital by providing quality education, helping students to acquire the right skills, matching current and future labour market needs and facilitating a smooth transition between school and work are indispensable to improve employability. In this context, we need to ensure that the Youth Guarantee, supported by the Youth Employment Initiative, is effective and delivers. This will require close co-operation among all key stakeholders.

Similarly, improving the efficiency of social protection systems, investing in children and youth, activating enabling benefits, that are adapted to people's needs, is key to reduce poverty and social exclusion. In addition, measures that promote inclusive labour markets by addressing discrimination and removing other barriers to people's labour market participation, increasingly contribute to employment growth. The implementation of the EU policy guidance and the use of EU funds to support necessary reforms shall be stimulated.

Moreover, improving the quality of the business environment by reducing the administrative and regulatory burden that often weighs on businesses and enhancing the efficiency of public administration and judicial systems will support economic growth and, at the same time, help people get into work. I am convinced that, by working as a team, all Commissioners will be able to present complementary, mutually-reinforcing and integrated initiatives. I would particularly provide a strong input into the ambitious Jobs, Growth and Investment Package, which will be the first priority for the new Commission.

I share the view that one of the main priorities for the Commissioner in charge of Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility is to help the younger generation to get decent jobs, promoting free movement of workers and further strengthening the skills level of the population. We need to ensure that employment and social considerations are appropriately taken into account in our policy making. The fight against social exclusion and poverty should be kept high on the Commission's agenda. A new political impetus is needed for addressing specifically the growing gap between rich and poor in Europe.

In steering the work on the European Semester of economic policy coordination, I strive to put the social, economic and employment dimensions on an equal footing. This means, amongst others, making full use of the information available in the targeted scoreboard for employment and social aspects, deepening our country-specific knowledge and further stepping up the quality of the policy guidance on structural reforms. In terms of concrete policies, I believe that to help Member States tackle unemployment, the Commission will need to continue to encourage necessary reforms in Member States so that labour markets become more responsive, open and inclusive and labour market policies more targeted and effective, so as to create more jobs in the EU. Policy action will also need to concentrate on tackling skills mismatches and the transition from education to work, on measures to help companies recruit more people and to encourage entrepreneurship.

I would also like to make full use of my role as Vice-President for further social dialogue and involve social partners more, especially in the field of economic governance and in the European Semester. The existing structures for social dialogue must be used actively. I intend to encourage technical-level social dialogue within the Social Dialogue Committee and on topical issues in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs in particular. The results would then feed into the work on the European Semester. As regards political level social dialogue, I would pursue regular discussions on economic and social priorities within the Tripartite Social Summit and consult the social partners prior to the adoption of the Annual Growth Survey, as the Commission already suggested in 2013.

The European Semester of economic policy coordination is a collective process between the European Union institutions and the Member States and I want to co-operate closely with the European Parliament in this context. I believe that role of the European Parliament should be a substantive one.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I would like to promote the full use of the Economic Dialogue which provides for discussions between the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the European Council and the Eurogroup. I will participate in discussions on the Commission's Annual Growth Survey and would actively engage with the Parliament on the challenges the Commission identifies at national level as well as on the Commission's assessment on implementation of country-specific recommendations. I would also encourage active participation of the Commission in inter-parliamentary meetings between representatives of the European Parliament and of national parliaments during the European Semester.