

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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

**HEARING OF DUBRAVKA ŠUICA**

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE

(Mediterranean)

TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2024

BRUSSELS



1-0002-0000

**IN THE CHAIR: David McAllister**  
*Chair of the AFET Committee*

1-0003-0000

*(The hearing opened at 14:33)*

1-0004-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, dear guests, a very warm welcome to all of you to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and, of course, especially to the Commissioner-designate for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica. In addition to the Members of AFET, I'm also glad to welcome with us colleagues from the invited committees, namely LIBE and EMPL, and our subcommittee DROI.

The purpose 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 an appropriate level of expertise in her prospective portfolio.

This hearing presents a key moment in parliamentary scrutiny over our executive, because it increases the accountability of the Commission to Parliament.

Dear colleagues, on 22 October, we received Miss Šuica's replies to our written questions. Her responses have been distributed to Members and 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 the hearing.

Now, please allow me to very briefly describe the structure of this hearing. To begin with, the Commissioner-designate is invited to give an opening oral statement of no longer than 15 minutes. Thereafter, we will turn to the questions from the Members. 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 five-minute slots, including a possibility of a follow-up question from the same 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 three-minute slots. In the third round, we will have the questions by the chairs of the invited committees. These will also be three-minute slots. The fourth and that means the final round of questions will be by the eight political groups in reverse order, also with three-minute slots. At the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate will have five minutes to make her closing statement.

Please note that the total time of the hearing is strictly limited to three hours. We have a lot of speakers and there is absolutely no reserve. Therefore, I ask all speakers to respect the allocated speaking time. You will only have one minute. For those who are not so familiar, that means 60 seconds. You will only have 60 seconds to ask your question. So please, please ask your question and don't use up your time for making statements. I will have to strongly enforce the time limits. That means after one minute I will knock this hammer. That means come to an end. When I knock the hammer a second time, I will say I've had enough, and then I will switch off your microphone. I have to do this. So please, you will get it done in 55, 56, 57 seconds, I'm very sure.

I would like to 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 again 'enjoy a fair opportunity to present themselves and their opinions'.

Therefore, dear colleagues, please respect the smooth conduct of this hearing. It also goes without saying that I will not tolerate disruption of the good order, any improper behaviour or any offensive language.

Interpretation will be provided in the 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.

This hearing is being streamed live on Parliament's website, and it will also be possible to access a video recording within a few minutes after the hearing.

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

Dear Dubravka Šuica, 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 commitments and on your full cooperation to also inform our committee in advance of all upcoming proposals.

The growing instability and the rise of unprecedented challenges in the immediate European neighbourhood and the international environment demands a close and efficient cooperation for the EU actions on the global scene. This is a new portfolio for the Commission, which signals both the importance the European Union attaches to the Mediterranean, as well as the complexity of the challenges we face together.

Undoubtedly, there is a need for strong EU relations with our southern neighbourhood. You have already outlined some of your ideas in the written answers, and we now look forward to hearing more today.

And with that, I come to item number two. Dear Dubravka Šuica, you now have the floor for your opening statement of 15 minutes. The floor is yours, madam.

1-0005-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Chair. Dear Chair, honourable Members, it is an honour to be with you today, asking for your confidence, especially here in AFET, the Foreign Affairs Committee, where I was fortunate enough to be one of the vice-chairs.

Those of you who know me, know my firm belief and commitment to the European project. In many ways, this European project has been the defining work of my life and career. I have seen first-hand how Europe can transform the destiny of a country, especially a country like mine, that had been through so much devastation in the past and is now building a European democratic future for all generations to come. This is why I am dedicated to building a stronger Europe. And I have been honoured to do this from all sides: being the Mayor of Dubrovnik for two terms, serving in the Council of Europe for ten years, working on Croatia's accession, serving in this very House as a Member of Parliament, and as Vice-President of the Commission for the last five years. Today, I hope I will earn your trust to continue to serve Europe as Commissioner for the Mediterranean – the task President von der Leyen has entrusted me with.

I am conscious of the great responsibility that comes with this role. It reflects the immense significance the region holds for our collective future.

The Mediterranean has always had a special place in the heart and history of Europeans, connecting Europe to Africa, the Middle East and the rest of the world. One sea, three continents. But the region now stands at a critical crossroads: enduring conflicts and political instability threaten peace and security; climate change is transforming ecosystems and economies; demographic pressures are intensifying, and economic growth is elusive and fragile.

On all sides of this great sea, there is a deep desire for peace and prosperity and for greater cooperation, and we are not starting from scratch. Soon we will mark the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona target, or rather the Barcelona Declaration, which laid the groundwork for a political partnership between people on both shores of the Mediterranean.

But we need to go much further. Our neighbours are looking for economic opportunities, access to clean technologies, and particularly for the investments they need. They want to develop local industries and create jobs for their own growing population, particularly the young people. In this quest, they need reliable partners, and Europe must make clear that it is their first partner of choice.

The Mediterranean is significant for Europe for several reasons:

First, it is a cultural bridge with shared histories, languages and traditions that shape European identity.

Second, it is historically a strategic trade route linking Europe to North Africa and the Middle East. The Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar are key maritime passages, crucial for global trade and for our access to the Indo-Pacific.

Third, geopolitical influence, stability and security in the region is essential for Europe. We cannot ignore the growing influence of Russia and China in North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Fourth, clean energy. The southern neighbourhood has great potential for clean energy production and also for collaboration, which is mutually beneficial.

Fifth, the protection of the environment and biodiversity.

And sixth, managing migration. We need to invest in neighbouring countries to provide greater opportunities in terms of education and jobs. We need to prevent young people from putting their lives in the hands of smugglers, risking even their own life. We need to build stronger partnerships with our neighbours in the region to pursue together the prosperity, peace and security that we all yearn for.

If confirmed, I will work towards this every single day. I will work hand in hand with all members of the College, in particular the High-Representative / Vice-President and the Commissioner for International Partnerships, to ensure that we leverage the full set of European policies at our disposal, taking a holistic approach.

I will also work with Member States and stand ready to closely collaborate with the European Parliament, in particular with the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET), to ensure Parliament's views are reflected in our work.

And I know how important this is. I was together – some of you may remember – with some of you on the mission to Morocco some years ago, when we already started an exchange and partnership. This is exactly why I will be available to update you on developments, and will always be at your disposal to answer any questions.

Honourable Members, allow me now to touch on a few main priorities.

The first is delivering the new pact for the Mediterranean. It will be developed together with our partners in the southern neighbourhood to achieve our common aspirations and priorities. The new pact will build comprehensive partnerships in key areas to deliver investments, economic growth and jobs, renewable energy, clean technology, talent mobility, digital connectivity and the blue economy.

We will launch concrete regional investment initiatives. These will be partnerships of equals, delivering sustainable economic benefits for today and for tomorrow. For example, I will strive to make it a priority to invest in the education of girls and the economic potential of women entrepreneurs in the region, and I plan to ensure that these partnerships help promote much-needed macroeconomic and sectoral reforms, as well as new investment opportunities for European companies. In this way, the pact should be a key part of Europe's competitiveness agenda and bring to life the Draghi report.

I will endeavour to propose a trans-Mediterranean energy and cleantech cooperation initiative. This should create jobs, growth and investment in cleantech and help boost our energy security and the decarbonisation of economies. On this, I intend to cooperate with the Commissioner for Energy and Housing.

Of course, many of you are concerned about migration, which will be another important element of these partnerships. I aim to support our partners in developing a comprehensive approach, which includes safe and legal pathways, fighting migrant-smuggling and preventing loss of life at sea, strengthening migration and border management, and increasing safe, dignified and voluntary return. I intend to work closely with the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, as well as this House, to ensure that the external dimension of our migration policy is fully implemented.

Honourable members, allow me to say a few words on the Middle East.

Just over a year ago, the world witnessed horrifying images of unspeakable and unjustifiable violence. There can be no justification for Hamas' acts of terror against Israel. Since then, those atrocities have brought immense suffering, not only to the people of Israel, but also upon innocent Palestinian civilians. I believe that the European Union should be a leader in creating the conditions for sustainable peace and stability in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with the High Representative / Vice-President in developing a new EU-Middle East strategy. We have different tasks and responsibilities, but we will always speak with one voice.

And I want to be crystal clear: the tragic loss of life in Gaza, Lebanon and beyond must end and it must end immediately. This means an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, and increasing the flow of assistance to Gaza to address the catastrophic humanitarian situation there.

But we also need to look further ahead; we need to look at the day after. Our goal continues to be a two-state solution, with an Israeli and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security. And I'm committed to working on a multi-year support programme for the Palestinian Authority, which should support necessary reforms, to ensuring the EU-Middle East strategy caters for the

security of Israeli and Palestinian citizens, contributing to bringing peace to Lebanon, and helping all children across the Middle East have a safe future.

Dear colleagues, now I will have a moment to say a few words on children.

You know that I have been working on demography, and children are part of this portfolio, and I was honoured to have three bilateral meetings with Pope Francis this year. The reason why he wanted to talk to me was exactly because of children and because of their destiny. On one of these occasions he told me – I will quote – I cannot stand the sorrow in the eyes of Israeli and Palestinian children, but also Ukrainian. It is the same. Dear colleagues, I believe that we all share this sentiment.

Honourable Members, I am fully committed to working with all countries in the region to achieve our goals. The commitment also applies to our closer cooperation with Gulf countries. I will support the High-Representative in the implementation of the Gulf strategy. We will strengthen both regional and bilateral cooperation. We will work on concluding strategic partnership agreements with each of the six Gulf countries. They should be based on mutual interest in high-growth sectors such as green energy and cleantech.

Dear Members, let me now say a few words on demography – a topic close to my heart. As I have emphasised many times, the fact that we live longer, healthier lives is a remarkable achievement. It is a testament to the social and economic progress Europe has achieved over the past decades. As demography impacts virtually all European policy areas, including our competitiveness agenda and the green and digital transition, I will continue to mainstream it across all relevant initiatives. We are speaking about a very sharp decline of the working age population, with the loss of 27 million people by 2050. Clearly, demographic change requires measures to increase productivity in order to maintain our competitiveness.

And Europe is not the only one experiencing demographic change. All continents are concerned, but in different ways.

When it comes to world economies, all are trying to find ways to manage and capitalise on their demographic change. For example, China, by increasing the employment of older workers, Japan or Korea by investing in digitalisation and robotics, and the United States and Canada by attracting talent. We need to make sure that we keep our competitive edge and that we put in place policies to mitigate demographic change.

And now, dear colleagues, to conclude, as Vice-President for Demography and Democracy, I have always ensured that our democratic and fundamental freedoms are at the heart of my work. This will continue to be the case for the next five years.

It is my strong belief that Europe's engagement in the Mediterranean can only reach its full potential if accompanied by commitment to reform, to good governance and to respect for the rule of law. Respect for human rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms will be the basis for our strategic agenda in the region and for all my work. The European Union will continue to be a strong supporter of civil society organisations across the region, and I will make sure that European money is invested with our interests and our principles in mind. This is the only way to build shared prosperity for all in our region, and to stay true to our founding values.

Dear friends, dear colleagues, I truly believe that building shared prosperity, security and stability with our partners and neighbours is one of the most important tasks for Europe in the years ahead. I look forward to leading it with your trust and cooperation.

And now I stand ready to answer your questions.

1-0006-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Thank you very much, Commissioner-designate.

We now come to item number three, the first round of questions and answers; the first round of questions by representatives of the eight political groups. Just once again, to remind you, you have one minute for the question, then two minutes for the answer. And, only in this round, there is a possibility of a follow-up question from the same Member, no longer than, again, one minute, with then one minute for the reply.

1-0007-0000

**Michael Gahler (PPE)**. – Dear Commissioner, I have duly noted your mission letter, your replies to our written questions, and now your introductory statement on this basis.

Because we know each other since many years, both in the Parliament and in your first term as Commissioner, I'm convinced that you have developed the right spirit for this job, which is an important newly created portfolio. For our neighbours in the south and in the Middle East, it is a crucial and powerful signal.

However, we had preceding initiatives and programmes – Barcelona Process, Union for the Mediterranean – which were, if I look where we stand now, unfortunately not particularly successful.

So my question is: how do you plan to deliver better and turn this ambitious mission letter effectively into a success on the ground? What will be the first initiatives you take?

You also mentioned that your objective has to be beneficial on both sides of the Mediterranean. How will that work? What does that mean in practice?

1-0008-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Mr Gahler, for this question. Of course, I read thoroughly my mission letter and my introductory speech was in line with the mission letter.

So, first initiative will be a new pact for Mediterranean. This will be a new document as a basis for our future work. What does it mean? New pact for Mediterranean will comprise of two pillars. One pillar will be building strategic partnership agreements with countries in North Africa, but also in countries all over Mediterranean. The second pillar will be regional cooperation, which understands bringing European companies to the region.

You know what are our goals there. As I said in my introductory speech, it's about deepening trade and investments first. Second, about accelerating energy transition. Then it's about – very important to me – developing human capital, and it is about external dimension of our new pact for asylum and migration. So all these strategic partnership agreements will be built on these priorities and on these pillars.

So, to cut the long story short, we will propose comprehensive strategic agreements with each and every state, be it with Middle East, be it with North Africa, be it with Gulf countries. Because we need to be there. We need to be present there.



You know what is going on at the moment. Europe is a big donor. Europe is a big payer. But at the same time, Europe is not that big player. We want to change the role. We want to be important in the region. We want to have influence there. But everything will be done mutually.

1-0009-0000

**Michael Gahler (PPE).** – *(start of speech off mic)* ... exactly on these strategic and comprehensive partnerships, of which we have now got already Tunisia and Egypt. So which are the next countries in the southern neighbourhood and the Middle East with whom you envisage such? Is there already, so to say, a specific plan? Have we got countries who are volunteering and have shown up? We want to have that. And what is your timeline in this regard? When do you want to fulfil that? And are all our Member States on board in this respect?

1-0010-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – As you know, we already have two agreements. One is with Tunisia, another one is with Egypt. What we are planning, since I'm still a member of this Commission, so the negotiations have started with Jordan and we are aiming at Morocco because we have very good relationship with Morocco. And we think that these two countries can be helpful for us, but also we can help them, Jordan because it's the most stable country in the region there and on Morocco, because we have good relations and because, as I earlier said, we need each other. Asking about Member States – yes, some Member States are interested, especially those in the Mediterranean, especially, as you know, Spain, France, Italy, but many others. So we will build it not only with them, but also with Member States who have interests. And this will be a mutual cooperation.

1-0011-0000

**Yannis Maniatis (S&D).** – Dear Commissioner, we express our gravest concern over the legislation approved by the Israeli Parliament forbidding contact between Israel state entities and UNWRA. The legislation goes against international law and breaches fundamental principles of humanity and will only exacerbate an already severe humanitarian crisis.

Do you agree that it would be urgent to ensure support, both politically and financially, to UNWRA and continue the EU financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority and to Palestinian society?

Despite these difficult constraints, how concretely do you intend to support the Palestinian state-building and institutions, and their capacity in preparation for future statehood?

1-0012-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Maniatis, for this question. Yes, we are aware of the situation in the Middle East, and we are aware of the humanitarian crisis in that part of the Mediterranean. So, yes, I can I can reply positively to your questions. We will and I will, once confirmed, continue to finance both the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA.

On the Palestinian Authority: just to be clear, we we don't treat Hamas as our interlocutor. For us, Hamas is a terrorist organisation. So the Palestinian Authority, we know that they are weak at the moment, and what we are doing is we are trying to empower them, to strengthen them, to support them, in order to make them interlocutors for the future dialogue on a two-state solution. Because all of us say a two-state solution. But there should be some preconditions for this. We have to start talking with someone, and it's the Palestinian Authority. At this moment, we are financing with EUR 300 million and with an additional EUR 100 million.

On UNRWA, because I won't have time to reply, we will also continue. You know that there was one pause after the 7 October, but afterwards a thorough assessment was done on both Palestinian Authority and UNRWA by independent actors. One was done by former French minister Colonna, and the other one also by an independent agent. As you know, we resumed our financing and we will continue because – I don't know if I have time – UNRWA is the only organisation on the ground which can provide, at this moment, be it humanitarian assistance, be it basic services. I'm talking about education; I'm talking about health. There are other organisations there also, the Red Cross, the World Food Organisation, but they don't have the operational abilities to do it.

1-0013-0000

**Yannis Maniatis (S&D).** – Thank you for your answer. Now my second question: how do you intend to play your role in order to promote genuine collective engagement regarding the settlement of the delimitation of exclusive economic zones and the continental shelf in both the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, in line with international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Do you plan to propose concrete measures in order to dissuade concerned parties from any unilateral, illegal actions or threats?

1-0014-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – This can't be elaborated within one minute, but I will try to elaborate it.

Of course, we always adhere to UN processes, and whatever is done there is under the auspices of UN processes. The Commission condemned several times all these unauthorised actions in the sea with drilling or whatever. So did the Council in March this year.

So we know that Türkiye is our partner, but at the same time they have to adhere to international law. And this is something which we follow, because the exclusive economic zone is something where they could not go on with these activities. So far, as I am informed, as of 2021, there were no more activities. But we are following closely what's going on there.

1-0015-0000

**Sebastian Stöteler (Pfe).** – Mass migration is a hot topic in the Netherlands and in many parts of Europe. If you become Commissioner for the Mediterranean you'll be busy implementing on this EU Migration Pact, on the Return Directive, and especially on this Return Directive – because in your introduction, you only mentioned voluntary return, but it also includes involuntary return, and for that you need cooperation from countries in the Mediterranean.

So, how will you make sure that countries like North Africa, Mediterranean, that they cooperate in this involuntary return of their citizens when they're illegally in Europe?

How do you feel about conditionality? If we have some financial support for countries and they don't take back their migrants. Are you willing to promise that on every bilateral meeting you'll put this on the agenda, remigration?

1-0016-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Stöteler. As I said in my introductory remarks, migration is one of the key components of these strategic partnership agreements. When I say migration, that means both legal and illegal. On legal, we will create legal pathways, as I said. We will work with them. It's about human capital. It's about creating talent partnerships, and so on.

On illegal migration, we were not that good until now. I have to tell this. Only 19 % to 20 % of illegal migrants were returned to their countries. So this is why we have to work on it. I am sure that you are familiar with the October European Council conclusions on that.

So we have to, first of all, accelerate, step up our work on asylum pact and asylum legislation. We have to implement existing legislation, but we have also to continue work on new return directive. This is what Council tasked Commission to work, so we will work on it. Of course, it is not an easy task, but this is exactly the reason why we are proposing these strategic partnership agreements, and migration, as I said, will be important topic.

We are trying to help them to build capacity within their countries, in order to be able to accept them, to work on reintegration and readmission, and we need some money for that. So, there is much more to say, but maybe in your follow-up question.

1-0017-0000

**Sebastiaan Stöteler (Pfe).** – One second question concerning the Middle East problems. The European Commission funds the Palestinian Authority by disbursing EU funds while knowing that the PA is corrupt and incites terrorism, including with their 'pay for slay' policy, while terror organisations still enjoy large support among Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Will you, as Commissioner, address the vast corruption within the PA, and how will you join forces with the US to address the PA's 'pay for slay' policy? How will you address the vast support for terrorism in Palestinian society? For example, if today elections were held, Hamas would probably win.

So does the Commissioner consider that de-radicalisation and combating anti-Semitism are just as important as expanding sanctions to supporters and facilitators of terror groups?

On the Abraham Accords, are you willing to invite other countries in the region to join if they have not done so yet?

1-0018-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – The Middle East, as you know, is a very complex situation and the disputes have been going for decades.

I don't pretend to be the one who will solve the situation, but I will try to solve it in collaboration with the HR/VP, and I will not rest until I do some progress there.

On the Palestinian Authority, I already said, we need the Palestinian Authority to be reformed and they committed to reform themselves. This is one of the key preconditions. Without this reform, we will not finance them. We have very, very robust safeguards, because European taxpayers' money won't go into terrorists hands, I can reassure you on this.

On the US, I cannot say more. We will see what's going on. The polls have been open half an hour ago.

On the Abraham Accords, may be later on, to someone else, if someone asks, because the time is over.

1-0019-0000

**Rihards Kols (ECR).** – Madam Commissioner-designate, the ECR Group has consistently advocated for a strong stance against illegal migration and opposes the EU Migration Pact approach, especially in the area of so-called solidarity quotas.

With the Mediterranean as a key route, the EU must focus on preventing illegal crossings and supporting measures that reinforce border security. That was clearly stated by you as well. So with this I have a question on how will you address these concerns while ensuring the partnerships with the Mediterranean nations do not compromise on security?

Additionally, do you see illegal migration as a viable answer to Europe's demographic decline, or do you support an alternative, more centralised, approach to tackle this issue? You touched upon that as well – mitigate demographic challenges.

Finally, how do you plan to coordinate with the other Commissioners, which was outlined, that you have to work with, in guidance from other commissioners? Will that be a conflict for you or not?

1-0020-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – May I start with the last question, on how I will coordinate and cooperate? You see that the new structure, the new college is completely different, and it's exactly with the purpose of better coordination among us. We won't work any more in silos, but we will work together. As you see, I have to cooperate with many of them, so this is the only way how we can be efficient. I think this is a good trial from our President this time.

On the legal and the illegal, and do I see this as a demographic reservoir, we have to strongly differentiate between legal and illegal migration. So this is why I said that we are trying to create legal pathways for those who may need or want to come to Europe. This is why we are creating talent partnerships. When I say talent partnership, that means that these young people, because we have 30 % of youngsters below 25 years in that region, and they are searching for jobs. So is it better that they search for jobs in a legal way than to be smuggled or trafficked and drowned into the sea?

So we have two options. The option is to fight smugglers, to fight human traffickers, and to work on legal pathways. This is the way how we will, in fact, address root causes of migrants. But this is a long story.

On demography, it is true – and everybody knows the figures – that we are shrinking and that part of the world is booming. It's so evident. So we have to find the balance, but we also badly need talent here in Europe. You know that our first priority is competitiveness – and I will later on maybe have a chance to explain the demographic toolbox and how we see it.

1-0021-0000

**Rihards Kols (ECR).** – Well, there is a legal way. It's called the working visa.

On the EU-Middle East strategy, do you believe the EU battle groups should have an operational role in this region?

Also, would you endorse a shift to a qualified majority voting for crucial decisions within the EU and, if so, in which areas?

And finally, can you clarify your stance on migration as part of the long-term demographic strategy? You used the word 'demographic strategy'.

1-0022-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – It wouldn't be possible, but I'll try with qualified majority vote, since you know that I was chairing the Conference on the Future of Europe on behalf of the Commission and one key part of our discussions, debates and deliberations was exactly the right of initiative to this Parliament, qualified majority, unanimity passarelle clause, unanimity clause, whether to trigger a Treaty change or not.

So, on qualified majority vote, it is true that big Member States, the Commission has nothing against this, but the Commission is only an honest broker, according to Article 48. Member States, I was several times in the General Affairs Council with ministers of European affairs, and they were strictly divided – bigger Member States are in favour of qualified majority vote, and smaller- and medium-sized Member States are against, because they think they will lose their importance within the Council.

Later on, I will reply to the other questions to someone else, maybe someone from your group.

1-0023-0000

**Hilde Vautmans (Renew)**. – *(start of speech off mic)* ... you very much, Commissioner-designate, and in your introduction, you were very firm on ambitions. You said you want the EU to play a leader in the Middle East. That's very, very ambitious. How will you do that, if you look at the groups in this parliament, if you look at the different visions of the countries?

And secondly, I'm very positive towards your declarations on UNRWA – that you will continue the political and the financial support. But how do you react to the decision of Israel to end the ties with UNRWA? That's very important.

Secondly, migration is a very hot topic here, and you speak positively about the bilateral agreements we have with Egypt and Tunisia. I'm certainly not against them, but how do we make sure we do not get dependent on the goodwill of some of these countries? Remember the time we gave the keys to our European borders to Erdoğan and he blackmailed us? So how will you prevent this?

1-0024-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – On the leader in the Middle East, I wanted to say that we want to be not only payer, but player. So it is our close neighbourhood. It's not someone else's neighbourhood, but Europe's neighbourhood. And it is very important to be important there and to have impact. We don't want to be the biggest donor for everything and don't have political influence. But as I said, we cannot do it alone. We cannot solve the problem in the Middle East alone, without international partners, without the United States, without Gulf countries. This is exactly why Gulf countries are within the remit of my portfolio, because it's their close neighbourhood and, without peace and stability in that part, their economic prosperity cannot also go forward. This is how I explain our leadership in the Mediterranean. And this is exactly why this new portfolio is being established. Because, it doesn't mean that we start from scratch, but we haven't been that prominently present there. And we will continue.

On UNRWA, on Israel's reaction, I think that all the agencies which are under international legislation, international laws-bound could not be taken into consideration. I think that this was not, if I may give judgement, this was not a good move from Knesset.

And on bilateral agreements with Egypt and Tunisia, I think they help us a lot. There are some things which we have to correct. There are some lessons learned, but there are also very good examples, especially with Egypt. Since I am talking about the economy, we mobilised in the conference on Egypt in June EUR 49 billion and brought 20 European projects to Egypt, which means this will go on. But we have to see how to continue that.

I don't have time to go on. Sorry.

1-0025-0000

**Hilde Vautmans (Renew).** – *(start of speech off mic ...)* question – because you named it – we have to correct some things. Which things will you correct in these agreements? And secondly, you talked very softly on the children. You know that we worked a lot on children and migration. Ten thousand of them go missing entering Europe. How will you tackle the human smugglers and how will you protect the children in migration? For me, that's very important. And then a follow-up question on what other colleagues said on the majority voting and the ending of the unanimity voting. How will you do that? Will you support a Treaty change also? Because I know that you were also in the Conference on the Future of Europe, and also on that side, I wanted to react. How will you make sure that citizens can participate in this important portfolio that you have? Because you know that citizens' participation is very important also for us.

1-0026-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – On citizens and majority vote, you know that the consequence of the Conference on the Future of Europe are citizens panels on different topics. So we already had five or six different topics with citizens who are randomly selected, but I don't want to waste time on this now. Although citizens are the most important – this is not a waste of time.

On children, I know that you wrote a book on missing children. I want to thank you for this. This was really an excellent move from your side. Since I was a teacher and this is my original profession, I spent half of my professional life with children. I like children, and what I did during this mandate was work on Ukrainian children, on those who were abducted to Russia. And so it's still ongoing during this mandate.

On what we can correct, the only thing which I can say now that we can correct is that we will come to this Parliament, talk to you, exchange the views, and then start signing the agreements. This was not the case.

1-0027-0000

**Hannah Neumann (Verts/ALE).** – Commissioner-designate, a follow-up on your announcements of a new pact for the Mediterranean, partnership agreements with the Gulf countries, an EU–Middle East strategy, and potential further migration deals.

I assume we agree that it is of utmost importance that all those contribute to improving the lives of the people in these countries and regions, which means we will use them as a tool to promote human rights and ensure that they do not just make autocrats and dictators richer.

Therefore, my question is: how do you intend to enforce a strict conditionality in the fields of democracy, human rights and rule of law in these agreements – by the way, the only kind of conditionality that we need if we want to really fight the root causes of migration, dear colleagues.

Do you commit to monitoring the implementation of these agreements, and do you commit to sharing the results of these monitoring reports with the European Parliament to deliberate with us on the necessary corrective actions where needed?

1-0028-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you. I mentioned earlier that our priority is human capital, but it's people-to-people contacts, which you mentioned in your question on strict conditionality and human rights.

So all our agreements include protection of human rights. So there are clauses and there are mechanisms how we monitor this. So there is no penny, no cent from European taxpayers' money will go into wrong hands, be it whatever you may mean.

We have also civil society organisations on the ground. We cooperate with them very closely. And on the assessment which you were referring to, yes, we made the assessment. We had the assessment. If you refer to Tunisia, for example, as of 2022, and we have results. But the results are of a confidential nature, which doesn't mean that we cannot share the results with you. We will find avenues how to communicate. It doesn't mean it can be *in camera*, it can be bilateral. So there are results of this assessment, but at the moment there are some reasons why we cannot share them publicly, but we will do it. There is no reason to hide anything from Members, especially members of this committee, because it's very important that we work on this together.

I cannot do anything alone. So with you, with Member States, with civil society organisations and with the HR-VP and with other Commissioners, and this is the only way forward.

1-0029-0000

**Hannah Neumann (Verts/ALE)**. – So I take note of your commitment to share this kind of information with us, and I have one follow up question. The Commission is supposed to carry out ex-ante human rights impact assessments on all the regulations and wherever we spend money. This has not been done for some of the migration deals. So for me, the question is: will you commit and ensure that the Commission carries out ex-ante human rights assessments prior to the adoption of new partnerships with third countries and follow up on compliance through robust monitoring?

1-0030-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This was not migration deal, but these were strategic partnerships or memorandum of understanding: none of these were migration deals.

This is the reason why they are called 'comprehensive', so everything is there: be it energy, be it biodiversity with whatever. And migration is a key part, or one part, of this.

On these two, especially the first one on Tunisia, I have to tell you that there were exceptional circumstances at the moment. That country – both countries, also with Egypt – they were on the brink of collapse, and this was the reason why we had to act urgently, so we enacted the emergency clause.

So I can tell you that I will not do it, if only extraordinary circumstances, but I cannot say what extraordinary circumstances can appear in the future, but this was the only reason, because we helped these countries to provide their basic services, both with Egypt and Tunisia. These were these moments, just to reassure you.

1-0031-0000

**Γιώργος Γεωργίου (The Left).** – Κύριε Πρόεδρε, κυρία Šuica σας εύχομαι καλή επιτυχία. Θα χρειαστείτε την ευχή μου γιατί αναλαμβάνετε ένα δύσκολο χαρτοφυλάκιο, καθώς η Μεσόγειος αντιμετωπίζει πάρα πολλές προκλήσεις. Είναι ζητήματα, όπως η ασφάλεια, η ειρήνη, το μεταναστευτικό και τα ενεργειακά, που παραμένουν σε εκκρεμότητα. Για να μπορέσετε να συμβάλετε στην επίλυσή τους θα χρειαστεί να συνεργαστείτε με τους εταίρους στην περιοχή.

Ένας δύσκολος εταίρος είναι η Τουρκία. Ξέρετε ποια είναι η Τουρκία, ότι παραβιάζει τα δικαιώματά μας στην Κύπρο, κατέχει το 40% και δεν αναγνωρίζει την Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία —ένα κράτος μέλος της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης. Αλλά πρέπει να δείτε προσεκτικά και τις αντιπαλότητες που δημιουργούνται στην περιοχή ανάμεσα στα διάφορα κράτη μετά από τα εγκλήματα που διέπραξε το Ισραήλ στην περιοχή. Και το ερώτημα δεν είναι αν θα συνεχίσετε τη συνεργασία με την UNRWA —γιατί μέχρι να αναλάβετε μπορεί να μην υπάρχει UNRWA. Το ερώτημα είναι αν θα συνεχίσετε τη συνεργασία με το Ισραήλ.

1-0032-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Yes, Mr Georgiou, I can agree with you that this is a very complex region, and that the duty which, if confirmed, I will take over, is very responsible.

On your last question, which was about Israel. Israel, you know that we have association agreements with almost all of these countries. We have an association agreement since 2000 with Israel, and this is the only basis on which we cooperate with them. So, in order to resolve the situation in the Middle East, we need also them on the board. So we need Palestinians, we need Israel, we need the international community, we need the Gulf countries. So they have also to be on board. And we need to keep any channel of communication. And this time, this is on the basis of the association agreement that we are keeping dialogue with them.

On UNRWA, I already said what we are doing. I wanted to tell you earlier that there are other organisations on the ground, but unfortunately they don't have the operational capabilities to do all these job with humanitarian assistance and with the basic services. When I say 'basic services', that means education, health, schools, and so on.

Just to reassure some of you: we know at the moment the money at the level of each beneficiary, and not only beneficiary, but also beneficiary's spouses. So this is how the monitoring is and how we are controlling this. So this is it. So we have our financial regulations here in Europe and we have to follow them. Without that the money cannot be spent.

On Turkey, it's a complex issue. Maybe in a follow-up question?

1-0033-0000

**Γιώργος Γεωργίου (The Left).** – Όχι, αφού είναι δύσκολο το θέμα, θα αποφύγω να ρωτήσω την κυρία Επίτροπο. Θα πάω σε κάτι εξίσου δύσκολο όμως.

Ως αποτέλεσμα της μείωσης των βροχοπτώσεων και της αύξησης της θερμοκρασίας, ιδιαίτερα στη Μεσόγειο, έχουν εμφανιστεί διάφορες οικονομικές, κοινωνικές, πολιτικές και περιβαλλοντικές επιπτώσεις. Σας ερωτώ, πώς σκοπεύετε να συμβάλετε στην προσαρμογή των χωρών και των κοινωνιών της Μεσογείου σε αυτές τις επιπτώσεις της κλιματικής αλλαγής; Αν πραγματικά εννοούμε αυτό που λέμε για την πράσινη μετάβαση. Πείτε μου, εσείς το εννοείτε; Πιστεύετε πραγματικά στην πράσινη μετάβαση;



1-0034-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Yes, I believe it, I believe in the EU Green Deal. This was the first priority of the actual Commission, as you know. We are all aware that climate change is going on in front of our eyes, so we have to we have to admit that there is climate change.

When I mention investing in energy, I'm not talking about fossil fuels, I'm talking about renewables, I'm talking about decarbonisation. This is the way how we can secure our Mare Nostrum, our Mediterranean, to stay clean. So we want to bring decarbonisation, less emissions also to that part of the Mediterranean because we are two shores but one sea and this is the reason why we will work on it.

But it's not directly my portfolio, I work with the Commissioner for environment, the Commissioner for climate, also the Cyprus Commissioner, who will be for fisheries. So we will work, as you see, together in order to save our Mediterranean.

1-0035-0000

**Tomasz Froelich (ESN)**. – Wir wissen, dass die Demografie in Europa katastrophal ist: Die Geburtenraten sind zu gering und die Menschen werden immer älter, die sozialen Sicherungssysteme kollabieren. Die schlechte Demografie wird oft als Ausrede für noch mehr Migration genutzt. Nur sehen wir, dass noch mehr Migration eigentlich zu noch mehr Problemen führt, denn sie entlastet nicht die Sozialsysteme, sondern sie zerstört sie. Und wir wissen zudem, dass ein beträchtlicher Teil der illegalen Migration über das Mittelmeer stattfindet.

Da eben das Mittelmeer und die Demografie in Ihren Zuständigkeitsbereich fallen sollen, wüsste ich gerne: Erstens: Mit welchen Maßnahmen möchten Sie die Geburtenraten in Europa erhöhen? Zweitens: Halten Sie die derzeit stattfindende Migration für ein sinnvolles Instrument zur Bekämpfung der demografischen Schieflage? Der Kollege von der ECR hat ja bereits eine ähnliche Frage gestellt. Und drittens: Wie stehen Sie zu externen Rückführungszentren in Drittstaaten, die jetzt nicht unbedingt unsere Werte teilen? Und wie stehen Sie zum Italien-Albanien-Protokoll?

1-0036-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for raising the question on demography, because it's another part of my portfolio and, as I said, it is very close to my heart.

You know what? I'm pioneering this work on demography here in the Commission because demography was never on the agenda of the European Commission. So this is the first time ever that we had a Commissioner for demography.

But, let me tell you, demography is in competence of jurisdiction of the Member State. When we speak about birth rates, mortality rates, it's a Member State competence. When we speak about the environment, creating an environment for young families to thrive, then it's also a European issue. And this is why we found a hoop in our Treaty, which is Article 173, how to deal with demography. So we have to create the environment. We have to use cohesion policy in order to help rural areas, and also women and others, to thrive. And this is what we have been doing with demography.

I worked on the demography toolbox, we were tasked also by the European Council, and it's more from the angle of competitiveness. When we look at the demography toolbox, when you look at women and youngsters and older people and you use all this human capital or potential, which we have at European level, we don't have enough workers for our labour market. This is the case, this is the truth – we have to admit this. We are shrinking; other continents are booming.

So it doesn't mean that we want to attract people to come here illegally. But we want to attract talent. I told you earlier what North America and Canada are they doing. They are attracting talent. It's not because they are lacking birth rates, but because they need talent. We also need talent, whatever talent may mean. So we are not using migration for this. We have different passages to solve this.

1-0037-0000

**Tomasz Froelich (ESN).** – Danke für Ihre Antwort. Wäre es aber dann nicht sinnvoller, erst mal die arbeitslosen Europäer in Arbeit zu bringen? Wir haben mit Ende August rund 13 Millionen Menschen in Europa, die arbeitslos sind. Wäre das nicht erst einmal der sinnvollere Ansatz, dass man da ansetzt?

1-0038-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – At the moment, I will quote our President, earlier people were searching for jobs, and now jobs are searching for people – it's vice versa now.

We have, at the moment, 8 million young people who have their diplomas but don't work because their diplomas don't match the needs of the labour market. They don't match with new skills: digital skills, green skills, and so on. We have 10 million European women who are not in the labour market, they are at home although they have their CVs, but they don't work because they don't have affordable kindergarten or affordable nursery home for their parents, for their kids, and so on.

So we need to employ all these people. We need to create circumstances. This is why I was saying that the work on demography is that we have to upskill, reskill these young people. Also, it's about older people, but later on maybe I will reply.

1-0039-0000

**David McAllister, Chair of the AFET Committee.** – We now come to the second round of questions posed by Members, based on the overall distribution of speaking time among the political groups, including now also a representative from the non-attached Members.

It's one minute for the question and two minutes for the answer. From now on there will be no follow-up questions. So we kick off with the second round.

1-0040-0000

**Λουκάς Φουρλάς (PPE).** – Επιτρέψτε μου κυρία Επίτροπε, ως Κύπριος και μέλος του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινοβουλίου, να ρωτήσω πώς μπορεί να είστε αισιόδοξη και πώς μπορεί η Μεσόγειος να καταστεί θάλασσα ειρήνης, ασφάλειας και συνεργασίας, όταν αντιμετωπίζει συνεχείς απειλές και αμφισβητήσεις της οικονομικής της ζώνης, καθώς και ανεξέλεγκτες ροές μεταναστών. Η Μεσόγειος αποτελεί σήμερα πύλη παράνομης μετανάστευσης, με την Κύπρο να βρίσκεται στην πρώτη γραμμή των προκλήσεων αυτών. Ποιες λοιπόν είναι οι πρωτοβουλίες που σκοπεύετε να πάρετε για την ενίσχυση της ασφάλειας και της συνεργασίας στην περιοχή και πώς μπορεί η Κύπρος, η οποία είναι στο κέντρο των συγκρούσεων, όλων των συγκρούσεων στην περιοχή, να αξιοποιηθεί ως στρατηγικός εταίρος τόσο στην αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης μετανάστευσης όσο και στην προώθηση της ειρήνης στην ευρύτερη περιοχή;

1-0041-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Furlas, for this question. Of course, if we talk about Cyprus, Cyprus is a very important strategic country in the East Mediterranean, and everybody can agree on this, and in order to prosper, you need also peace and security in your vicinity, in your surroundings.

We are very aware of the Turkish influence, we are also aware of unauthorised activities in the sea, in the exclusive economic zone. As I already said, we condemned what they were doing. Also, the European Council unanimously condemned it, and we will continue monitoring what is going on there.

On the other hand, Türkiye is also an important partner and ally, be it NATO, be it for migration, we have to be aware of that, so this is something which we will continue working on it together.

On migration flows: yes, I know that almost 5.5% of citizens of Cyprus are migrants. Ah, now 7%: so it was when I visited Cyprus two years ago when I talked to your authorities, Minister of the Interior and to your Speaker of the Parliament. But I have also been informed by Stella Kyriakides, who is my colleague in the college, so I know what's going on there.

We think that Cyprus can be part of a solution. It's not only about agreements between European Union, bilaterally, and states in the region, but we can also work trilaterally, which means you can be one of these signatories when we talk about comprehensive partnership agreements.

So this is tailor-made always, so we can speak about it.

1-0042-0000

**Evin Incir (S&D).** – Commissioner-designate, a couple of hours ago I came straight from the airport after a visit to Israel and Palestine. One of the Israeli representatives aptly described the situation. The last decades have seen a horrific, crawling Israeli annexation. We must change it and work for a crawling peace to ensure a two-state solution.

Commissioner-designate, how do you plan to contribute to ending this ongoing annexation? What measures will you take to pressure Israel for a ceasefire, to secure the release of Israeli hostages and to put an end to the mass killing of Palestinians? How will you advocate for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, to pave the way for a two-state solution and to ensure that international law applies universally and is respected by Israel?

Let's go from talking the talk to walking the walk. Will you support suspending the EU-Israeli Association Agreement and work towards a unified stance among Member States to freeze arms exports to Israel? The question is simple: yes or no?

1-0043-0000

**Dubravka Šuica,** *Commissioner-designate.* – The question is simple, but the answer is not simple.

If we talk about a European-Israeli association agreement, you know, it's not in our power here, it's in the power of Member States. If we want to stop it, we need unanimity in the Council. And this is not the case at the moment. As I said earlier, we need some basis and we need to keep some diplomatic channels open. And this is what we are doing with Israel, because this is the only basis for our communication.

In order to achieve a two-state solution, we need to achieve it, we know it, but it's easy to say a two-state solution, but there should be conditions met before we start talking about that. And conditions are that all of them are at the same table, which means ceasefire, de-escalation immediately, and this is not the case.

I will do all what I can in order to achieve this with the diplomatic and economic and different tools. As I said earlier, everybody is aware that this dispute has been here for decades. I am not pretending

that I will be the one in the world who can solve the problem, but in combination with international partners, with the Gulf countries, with the two of them – Palestinian and Israel – sitting together, I hope we can we can, little by little, make some steps in that direction.

1-0044-0000

**Reinhold Lopatka (PPE).** – Commissioner-designate, the EU hosted the first-ever EU–GCC summit three weeks ago, and there’s a strong momentum in recent years for stronger relations with the Gulf region and a growing need to cooperate on energy, regional security, countering terrorism, fighting climate change, promoting human rights, only to mention some issues. How would you take forward the outcomes agreed in the summit?

The joint statement following the EU–GCC summit welcomed the formation of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, announced by Saudi Arabia, EU and Norway.

How would you involve the GCC region, which is an important partner for a solution on working towards a two-state solution and sustainable peace? Do you plan concrete initiatives in the recent time?

1-0045-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Mr Lopatka, thank you for this question. As I said earlier, Gulf countries are part of my mission letter exactly because they are also part of the solution.

Two weeks ago, as you rightly said, there was a first GCC council here in Brussels. All Member States were there, and the joint statement was adopted in unanimity, which means they can agree on something. I think they have common interest to have peace and security in their neighbourhood. Without peace and security also their societies cannot prosper.

On concrete examples, may I remind you of two projects? One project which is there is IMEC, the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor, which is now blocked for the moment. But it’s something which is about connectivity. And also Caspian Corridor, which means peace and security and cooperation can bring also prosperity there.

So I will be working on economic track of the solution, and opening the Chamber of Commerce in Riyadh was a very good start and very good symbol to show that we think seriously, that we want to cooperate with them, especially on energy, especially on renewables, but also there is much more.

1-0046-0000

**Jordan Bardella (Pfe).** – Madame Šuica, je voudrais vous permettre de continuer à nous éclairer sur la question de l’immigration, qui a été mentionnée à plusieurs reprises.

L’explosion démographique du continent africain et l’angélisme de l’Union européenne et de la précédente Commission à l’égard de l’immigration font qu’une partie de notre avenir se joue aujourd’hui à l’évidence au Sud, tout autant qu’une partie de notre sécurité. Vous avez mentionné la directive retour: on sait qu’aujourd’hui une grande partie des gens qui se présentent sur le sol européen ne répondent pas aux critères de l’asile, mais restent sur le sol européen.

Vous avez également mentionné la question des partenariats stratégiques. La question que je voulais vous poser est très simple: est-ce que, dans votre esprit, ces partenariats ont vocation à augmenter le nombre d’entrées sur le sol européen ou, au contraire, à diminuer le nombre d’entrées dans nos différents États?

Je voulais également avoir votre avis, s'il vous plaît, sur la possibilité d'établir des camps humanitaires aux portes d'entrée, notamment dans les pays de départ de la région dont vous aurez la charge, peut-être, dans quelques jours.

1-0047-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – As I said, the migration and the external part of the pact on asylum and migration is the part of this comprehensive partnership agreement. So we need to frame our communication. We need to frame it. We don't need to do it ad hoc. And as I said earlier, isn't it better that we create conditions there for young people who ask for work or need work? Or is it better to let them into the hands of smugglers and traffickers? I am sure that everybody here will agree with me that it's better to create conditions for them to strive in their countries.

But, if we need, as I told you, some talent, we are creating talent partnerships. We have talent partnerships already with Tunisia, with Morocco, but also with Bangladesh, with Pakistan, with some other countries. It doesn't mean that we are starting from scratch. My colleagues Schinas and Johansson have been working on it. And this is how we are trying to make these migration issues legal, to create legal pathways. And I think that this could work. But of course, we have to deepen this, and we have to find also some innovative solutions. And this is what we have been doing.

Of course, I have to tell you that there is a commissioner who is in charge of home affairs and migration, but OK, I will cooperate with him closely.

1-0048-0000

**Alberico Gambino (ECR)**. – Signor Presidente, signora Commissaria designata, come Lei certamente sa, il governo italiano ha varato il cosiddetto piano Mattei, ovvero un nuovo modello di cooperazione con i paesi africani, a partire da quelli che ovviamente si affacciano sul Mediterraneo. Questo piano rappresenta un'importante opportunità per costruire una partnership strategica con il Mediterraneo, affrontando sfide come la sicurezza energetica e la gestione dei flussi migratori.

In che modo intende integrare questo piano nelle strategie attuali dell'Unione europea e quali azioni concrete prevede per promuovere una cooperazione efficace con i paesi mediterranei, contribuendo alla stabilità e alla resilienza regionale?

1-0049-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Mr Gambino. On the Mattei plan, I'm sure that you know and you have heard of the Elmed initiative. Elmed is a submarine cable between Tunisia and Italy. It is one very good project which is done under the global gateway project. And of course, I haven't mentioned Team Europe, so I will work with Member States also. It means that Mattei plan is, in fact, a plan between Italy and African countries. And what I'm talking about is a European plan between us and African countries, so our new pact for Mediterranean does not exclude your Mattei plan.

But if you come to the European Commission with projects which could be evaluated and which are good for Italy and good for Europe, there is no reason that we won't also finance them. So let's see what are the ideas, especially in energy, because we know that these countries are very abundant and they are very rich with energy, especially with renewables. At the same time, the price of energy is much cheaper than in Europe. So we have mutual interests. They have interest to produce and

export. And we have interest to invest and to somehow invite our European companies to work on their ground.

1-0050-0000

**Bernard Guetta (Renew).** – Madame la Commissaire désignée, pour dire les choses comme elles sont: nous ne sommes pas pris au sérieux quand nous parlons de la nécessité de relancer la recherche d'une solution à deux États. Nous ne sommes pas pris au sérieux, car on nous dit immédiatement: «Mais vous n'avez aucun moyen, vous n'êtes pas des *players* dans la région!»

Ces sceptiques oublient que, sans les fonds européens, l'Autorité palestinienne ne pourrait tout simplement pas payer ses fonctionnaires, et donc ne pourrait pas exister. Ces sceptiques oublient que, sans les accords commerciaux signés avec nous, l'économie d'Israël se porterait beaucoup, beaucoup moins bien, pour ne pas dire plus mal.

Alors question: seriez-vous prête à pousser le retour de la recherche d'une solution à deux États, à appeler, à menacer Israël d'une suspension de nos accords commerciaux et l'Autorité palestinienne d'une suspension de notre aide?

1-0051-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – So far as I know, we have trade agreements with almost all countries in the regions, including Israel. On a two-state solution, as I already said, it's easy to say, but not easy to develop this, so we also need Israel on board. Without having them on board, we would not be able. Who is a two-state solution? We will help Palestine on one side, Israel on another, and us, the European Union, plus our international partners there. This is the only way plus Gulf countries. We are including Gulf countries now because without them, this won't be possible. They have an interest in Gaza.

I haven't mentioned the day after; we still think about the day after. They have an interest to come there and to assist in this reconstruction. So this is also very important. I think that, to reply to your question directly, I'm not sure that I can reply to this question in yes and no. So we think that, as I said, we have to keep all the channels open.

1-0052-0000

**Tonino Picula (S&D).** – Commissioner-designate, welcome to European Parliament and *dobra večer*.

My question is on the interinstitutional cooperation with the HR/VP and the European Parliament. How do you envisage to shape the cooperation with the High Representative and other Commissioners to ensure coherence and coordination in your policy field?

Furthermore, in your written questions, you announced that a strategic partnership with some Mediterranean countries will take a form of memorandum of understanding. Do you agree that it would be important to ensure that strategic partnerships are based on full democratic control of the Parliament, and are not framed under the bilateral relationship between the Commission and the concerned country?

You said earlier that you are ready to come to the Parliament and talk to us. What I would like to understand is, are willing to include Parliament in the decision-making process? Is this reading of your statement correct?

1-0053-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Tonino. First on the communication and collaboration with the HR/VP Kaja Kallas. We have had several meetings and we have been trying to see what is whose role. Her role will be more on the diplomatic track, and my role will be – if we talk about these strategic partnerships – more on the economic track. So we will not overlap: we will work together, we will cooperate, and this will make synergy and I'm sure that we will talk with one voice. There is no place here in Europe to have divergent voices. Then we won't achieve anything. So this is about our cooperation.

Another question was on the Parliament and, as I said, you know that there is renewed cooperation between the President of the Parliament and President of the Commission, and we will definitely work on a new partnership agreement. It's not in under my remit, but it will be done. But I will come to this Parliament and try to find a way, from the very beginning and before we start negotiations, to talk to you, to listen to you, of course, always in accordance with prerogatives of the Parliament.

I have to inform you that I was once one of you. As I said, I was Vice-Chair of this Committee. So I think that we have to work together, and I can commit that I will come here and talk to you, and then we will see what is whose role in the end. But without having Parliament involved, I don't think that we will succeed.

1-0054-0000

**Antonio López-Istúriz White (PPE)**. – Primero quiero comentar que me alegra y reconforta saber que será una croata con gran experiencia como usted quien se ocupará, tras la votación oportuna de la futura Comisión, de nuestro querido Mediterráneo.

Hoy no estoy preguntando como miembro de la Comisión de Asuntos Exteriores, sino como eurodiputado español ante la tragedia humana que ha sucedido la semana pasada en Valencia, región mediterránea donde las haya, donde los efectos del cambio climático se han dejado sentir en forma de una DANA asesina que ha dejado cientos de ciudadanos valencianos, españoles y europeos muertos o desaparecidos. La tragedia actual se suma a inundaciones en Eslovenia, en su propio país, Croacia, en Bosnia, con veinte muertos este verano...

Seguro que estará de acuerdo conmigo, y por ello quiero preguntarle: ¿no cree necesario incluir en el nuevo Pacto por el Mediterráneo la prevención y ayuda a quienes se vean afectados por estas catástrofes naturales que azotan con cruel regularidad nuestro Mediterráneo?

1-0055-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Antonio. Let me first express my condolences for the tragic loss of lives in Spain. It's devastating what we have seen.

To reply to your question: climate change is evident. We have to address it, and what we are doing with our Green Deal and all our activities, is addressing it. In the scope of our comprehensive agreements, there would be environment and protection of the environment. So protection of the environment is one of the important parts of it. When we talk about renewables, when I talk about decarbonisation, that means protection of the environment. So if we protect the environment only on this shore and not on that shore, that won't happen. The same will apply for Spain.

So this is why our comprehensive agreements will contain chapters on environmental protection, on biodiversity. And this is what we will be doing.

We have to protect our *Mare nostrum*. This is what we have to do. This is our responsibility and this is the responsibility of this generation. So let's work together on this and hope that we will see the results.

1-0056-0000

**Tineke Strik (Verts/ALE).** – Dear Ms Šuica, you talked quite positively about the situation in Tunisia, but the human rights situation has dramatically deteriorated since the MoU has been signed. The EU remains silent and leaves in that way the human rights defenders who try to uphold the rule of law in the cold. So, this shows exactly how key it is to conduct ex-ante impact assessments on the situation, on the human rights impact of such cooperation. The EU better regulation guidelines require it, but so far it has not happened. So, will you ensure that the Commission carries out human rights impact assessments prior to the adoption of new partnerships with third countries, follows up the compliance through robust monitoring and speaks up and eventually, if necessary, suspends the cooperation in case of violations?

1-0057-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – I don't want to correct you, Ms Strik, but I haven't spoken positively. I have only said what are the facts with the Tunisian Memorandum of Understanding. And I said that we have lessons learned. This is just to clarify this. So I am ready to impose robust monitoring. This is at the moment also ongoing. But just to let you know, I know that this democratic situation, having in mind the elections which happened some weeks ago with 91 % of the victory and so on, we have to impose definitely, and to enforce human rights conditionality. I had several meetings with civil society organisations from Tunisia, so I'm very well informed what's going on there. So we will continue monitoring it.

And you were asking for the new comprehensive agreement – we are ready to work on an impact assessment prior to signing this agreement. So I think it is very important because human rights are at the core of our European democracy. And how can we work against it? I said at the beginning that I was serving ten years in the Council of Europe. So these elements are always there. And I don't think that we can.

The only positive thing which I have to mention – not 'only', but one of the positive things I have to mention is 80 % less migrants coming from Tunisia in the last year compared to 2023 or 2022 – sorry – when we had the great influx of migrants. And also, there is a slight change. In Tunisia, they have a little bit advanced their economy. According to the World Bank, 2.3%. And they now have this CCC grade, so it helps a little bit.

1-0058-0000

**Željana Zovko (PPE).** – Poštovana povjerenice Šuica, s poviješću koju Hrvatska poznaje, a poglavito Vi koji dolazite iz grada žrtve, Dubrovnika, gdje ste i sami, kao i Vaša obitelj, bili žrtve opsade i agresije na Republiku Hrvatsku i mislim da ste ključna osoba za ovaj portfolio sa svojim diplomatskim sposobnostima.

U sklopu Vašeg rada s Visokom predstavnicom za vanjsku i sigurnosnu politiku na strategiji Europske unije za Bliski istok sudjelovat ćete u medijacijskim naporima s ciljem okončanja sukoba i tenzija u regiji. U ovom kontekstu Libanon može poslužiti kao primjer nestabilnosti koja može dodatno eskalirati.

Na koji način će Europska unija pomoći libanonskom narodu u pronalaženju sveobuhvatnog rješenja kad je riječ o izboru libanonskog predsjednika i osiguranju odgovornosti njihove vojske



kako bi se zaštitile granice zemlje u suradnji s misijom UNIFIL-a i u skladu s UN-ovom rezolucijom 1701?

1-0059-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Kandidatkinja za povjerenicu.* – Hvala, Željana, na lijepim riječima prije svega. Da, nije baš jednostavan zadatak, ali evo, sad s iskustvom koje imam ću ga nastojati odraditi. Naravno, ukoliko dobijem povjerenje vaše.

Kad se radi o Libanonu, situacija je delikatna. Prvo što tamo želim reći, prvo što treba deeskalirati i prvo što treba doći do primirja, ono da bismo bilo što mogli napraviti. To je ono što pokušavam.

Situacija je takva da sirijske izbjeglice, kojih ima više od milijun u Libanonu, trenutno prelaze granicu, odlaze u Siriju iz razloga što im je sigurnije u Siriji nego pod bombama u Libanonu. To je jedna tragična situacija koja se događa tamo. No, 400 000 ljudi trenutno prelazi granicu prema Siriji, koju nismo proglasili trećom sigurnom zemljom jer sigurna zemlja nije, ali eto, bar nema bombardiranja.

Što mi radimo trenutno? Predsjednica von der Leyen je obećala milijardu eura za Libanon za osnovne potrebe i trenutno smo upravo isplatili 500 milijuna eura za pomoć Libanonu.

Dakle, nažalost, to je jedino što možemo u ovom trenutku napraviti. Ono što radimo je da ne razgovaramo s ovima koje smatramo teroristima, ali razgovaramo s libanonskim vojnim snagama. Dakle, oni su nam partner, tamo njih želimo ojačati. Što se tiče UNIFIL-a, svjesna sam njihove uloge. Moram reći da smo imali plave kacige i snage Ujedinjenih naroda i u ratu koji se vodio protiv Hrvatske devedesetih godina, tako da mi je jasna njihova uloga i moram reći da simpatiziram s time da su napadnuti, simpatiziram s austrijskim vojnicima, ne vojnicima nego snagama Ujedinjenih naroda koji su, nažalost, ranjeni. Tako da, svjesni smo situacije. Nastojimo pomoći Libanonu koliko je god to moguće.

Puno hvala i na prilici da govorim hrvatski malo.

1-0060-0000

**Danilo Della Valle (The Left).** – Signor Presidente, signora Commissaria designata, l'Unione europea lo scorso 17 marzo 2024 ha sottoscritto – nella persona della Presidente della Commissione europea Ursula von der Leyen – con il Presidente al-Sisi un accordo di cooperazione con l'Egitto, il *Memorandum of Understanding* con l'Egitto, il più sostanzioso mai siglato dall'Unione europea con un paese africano: prevede un pacchetto finanziario di investimenti di 7,4 miliardi per il periodo 2024-2027.

L'Egitto viene considerato un paese sicuro da molti Stati europei, Italia compresa, ma nonostante ciò il Tribunale di Catania, nella giornata di ieri, ha annullato il trasferimento di un migrante verso l'Egitto, ritenendolo un paese non sicuro, confermando quindi, di fatto, ciò che dicono da anni le ONG e le associazioni per i diritti umani.

Io chiedo – visto che Lei ha posto al centro l'attenzione verso i diritti alla democrazia – cosa pensa di fare rispetto alle continue violazioni dei diritti umani da parte del regime di al-Sisi? E, soprattutto, come si pone rispetto al continuo ostruzionismo da parte delle autorità egiziane nei confronti della giustizia italiana, che sta svolgendo le indagini sulla questione dell'omicidio del nostro ricercatore universitario Giulio Regeni?

1-0061-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Our engagement in this part of the world, this part of the Mediterranean, is very important. If we don't engage, who will engage? So is it better to be there or not to be there? This is our motto. So we are engaged there. We want to assist them, but we also have our interests. They have interests. We have interests. But nothing will be done without protection of human rights, without protection of fundamental rights, without international law. This is something I have to reassure you. So, we started with 1 billion in macroeconomic assistance because the country was on the brink of collapse and we had to help them. But I told you earlier that we signed the agreement sometime in June this year, and there was an international conference, an investment conference, and this conference brought EUR 49 billion to that country. We want to help them, but of course everything comes with conditionality. Without conditions, nothing will be done. Unfortunately, I'm not familiar with this situation of the murdering of a citizen. Maybe I can come back to you with precise information on this.

1-0062-0000

**Francisco Assis (S&D)**. – Ia fazer-lhe uma pergunta, mas a evolução do debate leva-me a que altere e lhe faça outra pergunta.

Há pouco, numa resposta a uma colega ou a um colega, a Senhora Comissária indigitada fez referência, e bem, à inaceitável violência cometida pelo Hamas há precisamente um ano e que teve as trágicas consequências que nós conhecemos.

Logo a seguir faz referência ao sofrimento e às atrocidades cometidas sobre o povo palestino, mas em nenhum momento referiu que há um responsável por isso e esse responsável é o Estado de Israel.

A pergunta que eu lhe faço é muito simples: é ou não é importante, para que façamos um debate sério e profícuo acerca deste problema, que comecemos também por reconhecer que a resposta do Estado de Israel é absolutamente inadmissível e é de índole criminosa?

1-0063-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is an interesting question, but I am not judging the Court at the moment. I said that there are atrocities and there is suffering, and there is – at this very moment, as we are speaking here – suffering on both the Israeli and the Palestinian side. Both children deserve freedom. Both children deserve to live in a free and secure world.

The dispute has been ongoing for some decades, so nobody in the world at this moment is able to reply to this question in black and white terms. I have to be open with you: I cannot reply to this question. I understand what you are aiming at, but it's not easy.

I really sympathise with all casualties. I sympathise with the situation in Gaza, which is totally disastrous. I understand what you are saying, but at the same time, we need a ceasefire, we need de-escalation, and we need to sit at the table and find a solution. But they will not be able to find a solution. We want to be engaged. We want to be an important player. But at the same time, we also need international partners, and I hope that we will manage to work on it during this mandate.

1-0064-0000

**António Tânger Corrêa (PSE)**. – Chairman, Commissioner-designate, two simple questions. First, how do you intend to address the instrumentalisation of migration by the many NGOs which fight against European laws, namely the Schengen treaties? Are you committed to uphold the Schengen treaties? First question.

Second question. Six times it was proposed a two-state solution. Six times the Palestinians refused. The time we were closest was at Camp David, and Arafat refused that solution, not the Israelis. So how do you intend to create a Palestinian state without geographical continuation, where the two main forces hate each other? They only have a common enemy, and one of them is a terrorist movement, like you said, and the other one is accepted by us. So how is it going to be? What kind of state are we going to have?

1-0065-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is a hot potato, when we speak about the Middle East crisis. We are trying to do our best, we are trying to have interlocutors who won't be corrupted, who won't be terrorists, who will be the ones who we can trust. This is what we have been doing with the Palestine Authority at the moment. Of course, it's not an easy task, I know.

You speak about hatred. There were several moves on this path. One was the Oslo Agreement, in 1993 I think. Then it was breached. Then it was the Abraham Accords, which were a good move, but unfortunately didn't work. I don't know whether we can go in that direction, I cannot reply. I'm just trying to be open and honest to you, to see how we can go on.

On the question on militarisation, the weaponisation of migration, I know that this happens on the Russian, Ukrainian, Belarus and Polish borders. I won't say that this is the case in the southern Mediterranean, but exactly because of that, you see that this is an important issue and we want we want to have partners in that part of the world to see how we can solve this issue in the best possible way.

1-0066-0000

**Marion Maréchal (ECR)**. – Madame la Commissaire désignée, l'Europe court un risque mortel qui est celui de la dénatalité. Or, j'ai l'impression que ce sujet de la démographie est bien souvent traité comme un sujet parmi les autres ou de manière accessoire. Vous le savez, aujourd'hui, l'immigration est en train de remplacer le renouvellement naturel des générations européennes, puisque, pour la première fois en 2022, il y a plus d'immigrés qui sont entrés sur le sol européen que d'enfants qui sont nés sur le sol européen. Vous-même, à plusieurs reprises, lors d'un forum à Athènes, lors d'entretiens télévisuels, vous avez dit que la migration était essentielle pour l'équilibre démographique européen, que nous avons besoin de migrants pour rester compétitifs, et vous vous concentriez sur les effets économiques hypothétiques. Vous oubliez peut-être les conséquences en matière sécuritaire, sur le plan du terrorisme, de la dilution des identités nationales, et surtout l'opposition croissante des Européens à cette politique d'immigration illégale et légale.

Ma question est très simple, une fois de plus: soutenez-vous, face à l'hiver démographique européen, une augmentation de l'immigration extra-européenne ou, en tant que commissaire à la démographie, voulez-vous soutenir et coordonner une politique nataliste pour impulser cela dans les États membres?

1-0067-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – As I said earlier on demography, what is our competence? What is the competence of Member States?

So, Member States are in charge of birth rates and death rates, mortality rates. When we speak about migration, just to have some figures, in 2023, we had 3.5 million migrants here in Europe who were legal, and only only 350 000 illegal migrants, to put this into balance.

On demography, of course we are promoting the European way of life, and this is one of our mottos. So for those who come here legally, they have to, of course, respect our European way of life. And this is also the same in France, I hope.

Yes, I'm talking about migrants in the context of competitiveness, because we are trying to get everything, as I said, from the human capital we have, from women, from youngsters, from all the people, trying to attain greater flexibility in working patterns. I know what happened in France when someone proposed that in France, there was an uprising, as far as I remember. So people don't want to work longer.

But by early retirement, we are creating a brain drain. This is also something from my portfolio at the moment, so we badly need people who will work. We are trying to engage in robotics, artificial intelligence. It's not enough. We need human capital and this is the reason why we are talking about talent partnerships, about a talent pool. We need to attract talent. It's not that we want to change or replace our demography, or it's not about that. It's about European competitiveness.

1-0068-0000

**Dan Barna (Renew).** – Chair, my question is related to Russian and Chinese influence. In the last decade, the influence of China and Russia in Africa has posed a significant challenge for the EU engagement with the continent, particularly in the Mediterranean region. Addressing this challenge requires a strategic and proactive approach. This is clear. Countering disinformation. How can the EU effectively counter the wave of manipulation and disinformation spread by Russia and China in the Mediterranean region? Can you invest? Do you foresee the EU investing, from the Commission's perspective, in a strategic communication initiative that promotes accurate information and highlights the benefits of partnership with the African countries?

That is one aspect; the second one is addressing reluctance. How can the EU address the growing reluctance towards its engagement in Africa, particularly in this context of the increasing Russian and Chinese influence and presence there? Can you demonstrate its commitment to a mutual beneficial partnership with African countries based on the shared values and respect for sovereignty?

1-0069-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you very much, Mr Barna. You know, at the moment, I'm still serving as Vice-President of the Commission for Democracy and Demography. So, first we have to solve the issues also here in Europe. So what have we been doing? We adopted the 'defence of democracy' package. Since I come from a part of the world which didn't know democracy until 1990, I thought, why do we have to defend democracy? Nowadays, we have to defend democracy because of what you have been saying. This is not going on only in African countries; it's also going on here.

So we have different threats. We have disinformation, we have fake news, and we have to teach our kids, our children at kindergarten and school, how to differentiate between disinformation and information. How to differentiate what is fake, what is not fake. This goes on also there. So I will try to use all the tools which we have here to use there too. But just to let you know, it's not an easy task.

What are we going to do? We are going to be present there, in order to diminish the influence of Russia and China in that part of Africa. This is what we have been doing, and this is the ultimate

goal of this portfolio to be present in the Mediterranean, to invest there, to develop their economies, and by doing that, to promote all these values.

Also, as I said, we have these conditionality clauses in all our contracts and agreements, and this is how I will try to do this job in future.

1-0070-0000

**Massimiliano Salini (PPE).** – Commissioner-designate, thank you very much for your clear reference on the energy challenge included in your portfolio.

We have to speak, obviously, about renewables, as you said in your introduction, but we have also another challenge included in this energy topic, and this is the gas strategy for the future.

After the period where the road energy and road gas was from East to West, nowadays, often, the new road is from South to Europe. Then, in order to preserve manufacturing industry, we have to combine these two different challenges: renewables and gas.

Which kind of project and collaboration and cooperation with other Commissioners, including this topic, you can ensure today?

1-0071-0000

**Dubravka Šuica,** *Commissioner-designate.* – You remember, in my introductory speech, I mentioned the Trans-Mediterranean energy and clean tech cooperation initiative, so the abbreviation is 'Team Med'.

So, what we want to achieve: we want, of course, to use the resources of renewables from that part of the world and, as I said, one megawatt-hour is produced in Egypt, for example, for EUR 30, and one megawatt-hour in Europe is produced at EUR 60.

So, what is our goal? We will help bring European companies, build the infrastructure, create new jobs and produce energy which is cheaper.

What we will achieve? This is the moment to mention triple-win. So, first, decarbonisation. Second, securing new jobs, which is also important. And third, being competitive. If we import energy which is cheaper, that means that we can be better and we can be more competitive.

And everything in the end is about our European competitiveness and about our European role. At the same time, helping them in that part of the world.

So I think we have very good projects: one of them is ELMED, to mention ELMED once again.

We cooperate with partners like the World Bank, like the European Investment Bank, and this is what we have been doing in that part of the world.

So decarbonisation is our ultimate goal, it's not gas. It's about decarbonisation, but of course we still need gas, as you said. But we are very good in this. It's not only Egypt, it's also other states like Morocco, also some others. So we will continue working on it.

And I know that it's very important for Italy, and this is why the Mattei Plan is also to be mentioned here.

1-0072-0000

**Costas Mavrides (S&D).** – Commissioner-designate, the Mediterranean region is characterised with uneven levels of socio-economic development and growth. Despite the attempts, the gap between the North and South Mediterranean countries has widened in the last two decades. Now, regarding the Eastern Mediterranean, as you mentioned earlier, Cyprus, acting on behalf of the EU, can be and in fact has been a factor of stability in promoting regional cooperation in the region. For example, specifically, energy projects including the Great Sea interconnector, the East Med pipeline, both included in the EU projects of common interest, and also we have in the region the platform, the East Med Gas Forum, in which the EU participates.

Two specific questions. How do you plan – can you be more specific as to – the proposed pact for the Mediterranean? How do you envisage to promote the multilateral dimension of the partnership regarding specific energy corridors? And the last question: as you probably as you know already, Türkiye is not a good player in the region, to say the least. How do you plan to manage Türkiye or other countries in the region if they try to impede such projects? And please be specific, not just condemnation and monitoring – something more than that.

1-0073-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – As I already said, Cyprus is a very important strategic country in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is something which cannot be denied. It's important for many reasons. So this is why I think the pact you are mentioning, the new pact for the Mediterranean is only the basis, the basic document from which other comprehensive agreements will derive. This is the idea. So a new pact for Mediterranean is only the beginning.

As I replied earlier, we are speaking about European partnerships with states in Africa, in the Middle East and the Gulf. But of course, there is no reason not to have trilateral agreements, not only bilateral, between Europe and Egypt, Europe and Tunisia, but also the EU can be part of this. So it's a 'team Med' approach, which means we are always cooperating with Member States. So we will not go in this without talking to Member States and, of course, with Parliament and with this committee. So this is what I can say specific about this, not more at this stage.

On Türkiye, as I said, there are two different positions. We don't allow, and we are not happy with, what they have been doing in the economic exclusive economic zone, but at the same time they are partners for other reasons. So we are following closely on migration, on other issues. We have also conditions for them. So this is only what I can say at the moment. The settlement is done under United Nations auspices. So the United Nations are there if I talk about the division of the island.

1-0074-0000

**Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE).** – Gracias, comisaria propuesta, por su solidaridad con los afectados por la terrible DANA que ha golpeado trágicamente a la Comunitat Valenciana. Como usted ha dicho, una de sus primeras tareas será poner en marcha un nuevo Pacto por el Mediterráneo. En el marco de este nuevo Pacto tienen que reforzarse, a mi juicio, siempre en beneficio mutuo, los acuerdos económicos y comerciales con los países de la zona, acuerdos que tienen que abarcar la energía, el comercio de servicios —y no solo de mercancías— y, además, una importante financiación.

Yo celebro el compromiso que usted ha expresado hace poco con la protección del medio ambiente en los acuerdos futuros con los países de la región. Creo también que se debe reforzar la cooperación en materia de medio ambiente y agua en el marco de la Unión por el Mediterráneo para tratar de evitar catástrofes como la DANA reciente.

En definitiva, se trata de crear una vecindad verdaderamente estable, segura, próspera... Y, para ello, es preciso también dotar este nuevo Pacto por el Mediterráneo de una financiación adecuada. Señora comisaria propuesta, ¿se compromete usted a trabajar en favor de un pacto que englobe grandes acuerdos económicos y comerciales también en materia de servicios y que incluyan una amplia ayuda financiera y cooperación reforzada para responder a los fenómenos climáticos extremos?

1-0075-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Excuse me, may I ask you to repeat last question?

1-0076-0000

**Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE)**. – *(start of speech off mic ...)* to present a broad Mediterranean pact, which must include not only agreement on services trade, but also financing, and also in cooperation in order to face these environmental threats.

1-0077-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for this question. As we already repeated several times, strategic comprehensive partnerships will be derivation of new pact of Mediterranean and they will be done bilaterally and they will be tailor-made. So it doesn't mean that, what I mentioned at the beginning, trade, energy are the only elements of this strategic partnership. They will be tailor-made and this is the reason why I mentioned the Team Med approach, which means it will be done also in collaboration with Member States. So I know that something what is important for Spain is not important for Cyprus maybe, or vice versa. So this should be done in Team Med approach and we will be working on it.

So, I'm all the time mentioning this element, but there is also the project Medusa. I don't know whether you heard about the project of digital interconnectivity, which starts in Barcelona, goes to Tunisia, then goes back to Marseilles and from Marseilles to southern shores. And it will end somewhere in the Middle East and could be extended to Persian Gulf and to Gulf countries. So this is something which connects us. So we are not talking only about hard connectivity, but we are also talking about soft connectivity. And digital is also important. So this is, for example, one of the projects.

But I understand you would like to incorporate national interests which could be also of European interest, of course. So there is no reason not to work on it specifically. So they will be tailor-made.

1-0078-0000

**Lukas Sieper (NI)**. – Like my colleagues, I could ask the Commissioner many, many important questions about migration, demographic shifts, transparency, humanitarian and security concerns. But this hearing is also an opportunity to get to know our future Commissioners, for speaking to them not only as a politician, but as a person.

So, dear Dubravka, in your written answers, you mentioned the importance of democracy and social fairness, and you have a long career advocating for these values across different levels of governance. Yet, as the Mediterranean and Demographics Commissioner, you will be responsible for addressing complex and sometimes contentious issues like migration, democratic backsliding and external influences that challenge our very principles.

In your view, what personal values or experience will guide you in making difficult decisions in this role? How will you ensure that these policies promote resonance with the citizens that we represent, and those who may feel disconnected from EU governance?

1-0079-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – It's not easy to speak about yourself, but I have a long-standing career. And, as I said earlier, I was always fighting for democracy since I was not born in democracy. And for me, it's something which is precious.

So I think that I will do all my best from my earlier experience, and I will invest it into into these strategic partnerships and cooperation. Coming from the country and, as my colleague mentioned earlier, I experienced the war in Dubrovnik. So I know what it means to live through all this suffering and struggles. At that time, just to share with you only one episode, not to say anecdote, I was running to the shelter - just as those people are running to shelters now, if they have shelters, in some countries such as Ukraine - with my then eight-year-old daughter.

So I know what war means. And I know how and what reconciliation means and what renovation means. So I try to do all in my capacity, my knowledge and my experience and my emotion to work on this. But I cannot do anything alone; only with, first of all, you, but also with my Commissioner colleagues, because you see how complex this portfolio is and nothing can be done within the remit of one portfolio.

As you see, everything is somehow interconnected. Thank you for this question. I thank you for the opportunity to explain a little bit about my background.

1-0080-0000

**Roberto Vannacci (PFE)**. – Signor Presidente, Commissario, innanzitutto vorrei farle i miei complimenti, perché Lei si appropria ad assumere un ruolo di grande prestigio: "Commissario per il Mediterraneo", Mediterraneo che da sempre è stato sinonimo di benessere e prosperità per tutta l'Europa.

Allora, Le chiedo come intende rilanciare e supportare i porti del Mediterraneo e il commercio navale, recentemente messo in crisi dall'instabilità internazionale, soprattutto nel Medio Oriente – ma non voglio parlare di questo problema – ma soprattutto anche da decisioni interne dell'Unione europea, come il Green Deal e il fatto di prediligere combustibili sintetici, costosi e poco adeguati alle strutture già esistenti nel bacino del Mediterraneo, piuttosto che i biocombustibili: già disponibili, rispettosi della natura e molto, molto, molto più convenienti.

1-0081-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is a very particular question. May I recall that I was, for six and a half years, a member of the ENVI Committee here, so not only AFET, but also the ENVI Committee. I remember that I went on a mission to the IMO, the International Maritime Organization, two or three times, and we were discussing exactly this. So this is something which we have to take into consideration.

I understand that the EU Green Deal may be strict, but at the same time we have to think about the environment. We have to think about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. So, on this environmental issue, let me come back to you. I will talk to my colleagues, who are better equipped with the knowledge on this.



But also on ports and ports in the Mediterranean, I think they are very important. And you cannot skip the Mediterranean; if you want to go either to Asia or to the south of Africa, you have to pass through, as I mentioned in my introductory speech, the Gibraltar passage and you have to go through the Suez Canal. And this is very important for us also to mention here that we have to take care about maritime security, about freedom of navigation, which we know is a little bit – or not a little bit but rather is – endangered and was endangered by the Houthis. So this is a very complex issue. On ports and on the details, let me come to you with a detailed reply.

1-0082-0000

**Elio Di Rupo (S&D).** – Madam Commissioner-designate, with your experience, you know better than others that our core European values, in particular respect for human rights and the rule of law, make us unique in the world. As you know, these values are not respected in certain countries around the Mediterranean.

How to combine respect for our values with the desire to collaborate with these countries? What are our requirements? Same question for Western Sahara. What attitude should we adopt in relation to the hearing of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the explicit political support of certain Member States for the Moroccan claim?

1-0083-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you for this question. As I said, I will repeat: protecting fundamental rights is a shared obligation and is key in European partnerships. I had a meeting the other day with Olaf Skoog, who is our European envoy for human rights. I talked to him, and I think that when we start negotiating these agreements, we also have to consult him, because he has a lot of knowledge. We have our EU envoy on human rights. Let's let's work on it.

Partnerships come with conditions. They are not without conditions. They come with conditions on respect for human rights, and they will be firmly monitored, including our international partners or our implementing partners. When I say this, this means UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and other third parties on the ground. So this is what we are doing.

On the Western Sahara ruling, we took note of this ruling from the 4 October, I think. We are assessing now this ruling; we will come back by January next year with what we can do. But we need a partnership with Morocco, and we want to keep this partnership. But I'm not now giving any qualification and I'm not assessing it, but I know that we have to respect the rulings. At the moment, we are assessing the substance of this ruling. Thank you.

1-0084-0000

**Ingeborg Ter Laak (PPE).** – Chair, dear Madam Commissioner-designate, I would like to raise the demographic dimension of your new portfolio and the new pact on the Mediterranean in particular.

Linking your portfolio on the Mediterranean with your portfolio on demography, recognising the contrasting demography, demographic landscape in the north and the southern Mediterranean, what plans do you have to address these differences? And what tools or mechanisms are at your disposal to deliver on your plans?

And maybe, moreover, more so, will you be able to tackle the so-called 'circular mobility' from young citizens in the southern Mediterranean and the brain drain from these countries in the southern neighbourhood?

1-0085-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, Ms Ter Laak, for this question. 'Circular mobility' is exactly the reply to your question. So we don't call it any more 'brain drain'. We don't call it 'brain gain', but we call it 'circular mobility', because we think that we can help each other on both shores or Mediterranean. We can invest in education and skills.

Just to let you know, there is data from my colleague Urpilainen. What we did in this mandate was we increased our development assistance for education. It was earlier 6 %; now we invest 13 % of our development assistance for the education of girls, especially. I think that we have to invest there specifically for the young population.

Talent partnerships are mutually beneficial. When we say how to address root causes of migration, then it's about investing in their countries, investing in education, investing in legal pathways. So I think that civil society organisations are also important on the ground and they are vital partners for this.

We are also extending our programme Erasmus+ there, but also Horizon and, as I said, I think what we can do is better invest in the education of women, the education of girls. This will help the situation on the ground. At the same time, I am aware that by attracting talent we can create brain drain in these countries. But this is not our goal. This is exactly why we call this circular migration or circular mobility.

1-0086-0000

**Jaume Asens Llodrà (Verts/ALE)**. – Señora comisaria propuesta, usted tras las preguntas de un compañero ha dicho que lo de Palestina era muy complejo y que no era juez. Yo quería hacerle dos observaciones: la primera es que los jueces ya se han pronunciado sobre este asunto, y la segunda es que seguramente su comentario no habría sido ese si le hubiera preguntado sobre Rusia. Y mi pregunta es: ¿por qué las resoluciones de la Corte Internacional de Justicia o de la Corte Penal Internacional valen en el caso de Rusia y no valen en el caso de Israel?

Otra cuestión es que la Unión Europea, por un lado, apoya el UNRWA, y está bien que sea así, pero, por otro lado, da apoyo militar, político y financiero a Israel, que hemos visto que ha matado a doscientos treinta trabajadores del UNRWA, que ha bombardeado fuerzas de mantenimiento de la paz de las Naciones Unidas y que ahora ha prohibido la actividad del UNRWA. Entonces, ¿cómo va a poder hacer su actividad el UNRWA en Palestina?

Y la última cuestión: usted ha dicho que el Acuerdo de Asociación de la Unión Europea con Israel es cuestión de los Estados: tiene razón, pero ¿no cree que hay que hacer algún plan, que hay que presionar a los Estados? El señor Borrell lo hizo. ¿No cree que habría que hacer algo más que quedarse con los brazos cruzados?

1-0087-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I want to reply to your question, but I understand that you want to talk about double standards, Russia and Israel, but, without Israel, there is no two-state solution, so we need them on board. This is what I am trying to repeat all the time. I understand your question, but at the same time, there is no other solution but to have them on board.

I am not aware of any financing of military support. I'm just telling you that on UNRWA once again, there is no other alternative to UNRWA. I know that some people may think different, but I have to be sober and open to you to tell you there is no other solution. They are the only ones who are capable at the moment to provide humanitarian assistance, to provide basic services. And this is the

only way how these people in Palestine survive. So I don't see how we can escape Israel if all of us are saying that we are in favour of two-state solution. It doesn't mean that I approve of what is going on there. But I'm just telling you that they are the ones who also have to be at the table once the conditions are met.

1-0088-0000

**Sebastian Tynkynen (ECR).** – Madam Commissioner-designate, on 23 October, when voting for the accompanying resolution to Parliament's position regarding the EU's 2025 budget, the following amendment was put to vote.

I'll read it: 'The European Parliament notes the increasing trend to look into offshoring parts of the EU migration policy. Calls on the institutions to explore the idea of developing return hubs outside the Union and, if necessary, to dedicate appropriate funding to the project.'

It is noteworthy that this amendment gained the support of the majority of this House, with 326 MEPs voting for, 293 against and 17 abstaining.

Madam Commissioner-designate, in your actions, would you support this policy that is already supported by the majority of the Parliament?

1-0089-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Let me repeat the October EU Council conclusions. There was a discussion on migration and on the Middle East, but also on migration, and the Commission was tasked to propose a new return directive, as you might know. So we were also tasked to come up with innovative solutions. But also Member States are there who have to come up with innovative solutions. So I don't know what innovative solutions will be in the end. I know one example which is going on between Italy and Albania. It's a Member State to a third country, so it's not our European proposal. Let's see.

At this moment I cannot tell you what will be the solutions, but we have to step up and accelerate returns. This is what we have to do. We are aware of that. I said earlier that we were able to return only 20% of illegal migrants, which is not true. Whatever we are doing should be done in accordance with international law and whatever we are doing should be voluntary, safe and dignified, this is what we are saying. But this is true. So each person has its rights, regardless of human rights, regardless of whether they have a right to stay or not. But we have to work on it, accelerate this, and I'm sure that we will do it together.

I cannot reply to this question. I wasn't aware of this voting in the European Parliament on who is plus, who is minus, but I am in favour of working on a new directive and to offer to talk to you and to exchange views with you on its substance. But you have to know that there is a commissioner, I hope Brunner, who will be in charge of migration and home affairs. I will work closely with him.

1-0090-0000

**Malik Azmani (Renew).** – Dear Madam Commissioner-designate, you have repeatedly stated this afternoon that you will prioritise migration and return policy through the strategic comprehensive partnerships during your mandate, and that seems positive to me. However, you haven't concretely responded when exactly you are anticipating to complete this task. Can you give us a specific time frame, for example? You mentioned also in your responses that your first priority is Jordan and Morocco. When will you start and when do you hope to finalise? And are you then also accountable for the expectations, whether they are met or are not met?

And I'm also curious in your toolbox, are there only investments, i.e. carrots? Or do you perhaps also have some sticks in your toolbox?

1-0091-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – On timing, first. The timing depends on you. If confirmed, then we will start. I don't know whether we will be confirmed or not as of 1 December. So this is the first precondition to do that. But on timing, of course, I'm kidding a little bit, but let's work on this together this time.

On the toolbox, of course, there is some money there, but there are also sanctions. If conditions are not met, the last measure which we can use is sanctions, and this means we can withdraw the funding. Just to let you know, this is one of the conditions. And so, on investments, as I said, we have some money. It's DG NEAR at the moment; later it will be transferred into DG MED. We will have some money in this investment period, but for the new multiannual financial framework, we will start conversations next year on this, so we will see how much money we need for all this. But, you know, since we are credible partners, this is very important. This is why we are speaking about European companies, about European investments. We are credible. And this is important so that financial institutions trust us. So this is how we are blending our money, how we are leveraging the tools we have and how we can go on. And there are different financial instruments.

So, on Jordan and Morocco, as I told you, this is what has already somehow started. But we will come back to you in this committee and exchange views on that.

1-0092-0000

**Marc Botenga (The Left)**. – Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Commissioner-designate for the answer.

So far, I'm a bit flabbergasted about how you are avoiding the questions regarding Israel. You're treating Israel as if it was a normal country, with whom the European Union should now develop even new partnerships. Now, Israel is not a regular country. Israel stands accused of genocide in front of the International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice just stated that its occupation of Palestine is illegal. And I'm not sure you're aware of this because in your 12 pages of replies, you do not refer to the illegal colonisation, but this creates obligations for all member states of the United Nations. There is a United Nations General Assembly resolution confirming what the ICJ said.

So my question here, because in your answers, you're only speaking about the pressure you want to put on the Palestinian Authority. What pressure, what sanctions on Israel? Should Israel respect international law? And what are you going to push for in order to make Israel respect international law? Should Israel respect human rights, and hence, should we suspend now the Association Agreement for whom this is a condition?

1-0093-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I already replied that we cannot suspend Association Agreement at the moment because this is the only basis on which we can continue our cooperation with Israel, because without them, there is no two-state solution. If we imagine that we want to suspend agreement, you have to have 27 on board. So this is a vicious circle. We can start talking again on qualified majority vote. So this is something which we cannot achieve from this position here. So we need Member States on board. Of course I am aware of ICJ opinion. I am aware of that.

I know what's going on. I'm aware of breaching UN resolutions, but it's not under my competence. At this moment, it's not possible. So we need to keep open channels of communication with them. Without them, which country it will be? So let's see how the situation develops internationally. I won't mention elections which have started this morning. So let's see. But we want to be there. We want to be present and we want to be part of the solution.

1-0094-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Dear colleagues, we now come to the third round of questions, posed by the chairs of the invited committees. It's one minute for the question and two minutes for the answer. Once again, no follow-up questions are admitted, and I'm now very happy to give the floor to the Chair of the LIBE Committee, our dear colleague Javier Zarzalejos.

1-0095-0000

**Javier Zarzalejos**, *Chair of the LIBE Committee*. – Thank you, Chair. Commissioner-designate Šuica, your portfolio will require building up comprehensive partnerships with third countries in the Mediterranean region covering the external aspects of our migration policy, notably covering border checks and border surveillance and the fight against the smugglers in respect of human rights.

You will also lead the work on the new Pact for the Mediterranean. So we'd like to know what specific strategies and measures this possibility might entail, and how relevant do you see this partnership as being in preventing the loss of lives at sea, and also in preventing irregular departures and fighting against smugglers and traffickers?

Finally, how will you collaborate with the Commissioner for International Partnerships, who will also work on building comprehensive partnerships with an integrated approach?

1-0096-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much, Mr Zarzalejos, for this question. I know what is the core business of your committee, and I know where your interests lie. It's about, of course, migration and how we can manage this external part of the Pact on Asylum and Migration.

First, about border management, we know that we have to invest in border management more. What we are doing is not only about investing in guards and Frontex – you know that President von der Leyen has committed that we will increase the number of Frontex staff from 10 000 to 30 000 people – we are also investing in boats, we are also investing in radars, in surveillance systems, and we also invest in search and rescue operations, although it's a Member State competence.

So this is about providing equipment, but we also have to invest in these countries in their capacity building, and this is what we are doing to help them with how to manage these migrations, be they countries of origin or countries of transit. This is what we have been doing within these comprehensive partnership agreements. So it is what we do.

We also do this in parallel with the protection of human rights. We work with civil society organisations. We work on – as I already mentioned – talent partnerships. We work on reintegrating returning migrants. When I say reintegrate, that means readmission. This means that the non-refoulement principle is valid. So this is something on which we work. And, as I said, I will work with the other Commissioners who are in charge, and who I hope will be confirmed.

1-0097-0000

**Johan Danielsson**, *Vice-Chair of the EMPL Committee*. – Commissioner-designate, as part of your portfolio, you will be responsible for demography. And so, on behalf of the EMPL Committee, I would therefore like to raise the following questions:

Firstly, which concrete steps will you take to support the largest possible participation in the labour market, especially for under-represented groups?

Secondly, what technical and/or political solution do you propose to improve data collection on hard-to-reach populations as part of the demography toolbox?

And thirdly, how will you do the necessary adaptations of strategies for people living in rural areas?

1-0098-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – It's exactly what I have been doing for five years. Thank you for this question.

On the demography toolbox, you see in my mission letter that I'm in charge of implementing the demography toolbox. The demography toolbox can be implemented only via Member States, only via communication with Member States. And it should be then tailor-made. It can't be done with a top-bottom approach. You ask about under-represented groups. This is firstly about female entrepreneurship, about female workforce participation. I told you earlier that there are many European women who are not in the labour market due to constraints of not having affordable infrastructure. This is why I earlier made the lapsus when I was talking about Barcelona. I said 'Barcelona targets'. You know that we changed the Barcelona targets: 50 % of kids from from 0–3 and 95 % of kids from 3–6 should be enrolled in kindergartens.

When we talk about data collection, you know that I will have DG MED. I will have also DG EMPL together with the Executive Vice-President. But the JRC, the Joint Research Centre, is the main service which was helping me during this mandate and all data, also whatever we did, we did it based on scientific research. So the Joint Research Centre was and will be the main service for us in demography.

We also have the 'Atlas of Demography'. I don't know whether you are aware? Maybe this is the moment to tell you that there is an 'Atlas of Demography'. I don't have a mobile phone now, but if you have, you can see everything about your region, about your city, about your village. All the details. Everything. Atlas of Demography, done by JRC.

On rural areas: there was a long-term vision for rural areas on which we have been working a lot. But, okay, next time I'll reply.

1-0099-0000

**Mounir Satouri**, *président de la sous-commission DROI*. – Madame la Commissaire désignée, le protocole d'accord avec la Tunisie et la manière dont la Commission en mesure l'impact sur les droits de l'homme sont une source de préoccupation, vous l'avez compris, ici, au Parlement. J'ai lu le rapport, édifiant, récemment élaboré à ce sujet par le commissaire européen compétent en la matière. Je vous invite à le lire. Quelles conséquences allez-vous tirer de tout cela?

Vous dites respecter le Parlement et son rôle. Allez-vous nous impliquer, partager avec nous le rapport d'analyse d'impact? La Commission interviendra-t-elle devant le Parlement, devant sa sous-commission «droits de l'homme», pour présenter l'impact et répondre à nos questions?

Vous dites rencontrer la société civile tunisienne. Très bien. La société civile tunisienne va-t-elle être impliquée dans l'évaluation de ce protocole d'accord?

Vous dites que vous êtes prête à prendre des mesures pour faire respecter les droits humains. En cas de violation, allez-vous suspendre le versement des fonds?

Enfin, question très directe, Madame la Commissaire: que pensez-vous de ce protocole d'accord? Très sincèrement, quelle évaluation en faites-vous aujourd'hui?

1-0100-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Mr Satouri, I know how passionate you are about this topic. I know how your subcommittee takes care about this. Yes, I will come to your to your meetings and I will exchange the views. We will find the way, as we already discussed. We will find a way how to share data, how to share assessment, how to share reports. There is no reason to hide anything, but we should be prudent. And we should be prudent in order to achieve our goals. This is what we want to do.

On the situation in Tunisia, I have a rhetorical question. If we haven't done anything, would it be better? So, if we don't engage, who will engage? We don't have a luxury not to engage. So we have to engage and engagement is something what we have been doing with all these countries.

So, if you want me to repeat, I will repeat. On conditionality, EU money will never be spent on illegal activities, and it is always with conditions. So this is it. On civil society organisations, I already have several exchanges with them online. And I know the situation. I know the situation, I'm aware of that. But I am also aware of what's going on. But sometimes, you have to do something in a subtle way, not to tell everything openly. So maybe this is not the moment to talk about that. I don't want to spoil all this, but money will go with conditions, as I said. We can suspend payments, as I say, if we see that there is deterioration and if there is no respect for these conditions. I will continue raising these issues with Tunisian authorities, if they receive me. I hope they will.

1-0101-0000

**David McAllister (PPE)**. – In the fourth and final round of questions, we now have the political groups, but in reverse order. Once again, it's one minute for the question, two minutes for the answer. And once again, there are no follow-up questions.

1-0102-0000

**Pernando Barrena Arza (The Left)**. – Señora Šuica, hay dos cuestiones sobre las cuales quisiéramos conocer su punto de vista, aunque algo ya ha avanzado al respecto. La primera de ellas es el genocidio israelí contra Palestina, que ya ha alcanzado cotas insostenibles y exige una reacción por parte de la Unión Europea: ¿es usted partidaria de la cancelación de cualquier contrato de venta de armas por parte de los Estados de la Unión a Israel? Se están utilizando puertos españoles como escala para buques que trasladan armas a Israel: ¿cree que la Comisión puede orientar a los Estados miembros para que no colaboren ni siquiera indirectamente en este tráfico?

Y, en segundo lugar, usted ya ha dicho algo al respecto y por eso queremos decir que no entendemos que en estas circunstancias siga pensando en colaboración y en mantener el Acuerdo de Asociación entre la Unión e Israel. ¿Dónde nos deja como europeos un Acuerdo de Asociación con un Estado que está cometiendo limpieza étnica contra los palestinos? ¿No estamos una vez más ante una utilización con doble rasero del Derecho internacional?

1-0103-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – On Israeli genocide against Palestine and an arms embargo, it's a Member State competence, so it's their responsibility. On trade and stopovers in Spanish ports, let me check. I'm not aware of that, so let me see what's going on. I will check this with my colleague Maroš Šefčovič, who is in charge of trade.

On association agreements, once again, we don't have any other solution if we breach or if we cancel the association agreement with Israel. Who will be our interlocutor, with whom will we solve the two-state solution? Who will be in charge? I don't know how we can continue without that. If we want to do it once again, it's not up to me, it's not up to the Commission: it's up to Member States. There is no unity in Member States. There is no unity. You must have heard this from the High Representative many times. I was talking to him, Mr Borrell, several times. There is no unity and nothing can be achieved within.

There is no unity on Member States' side. So I understand your question, but we also need an interlocutor there. You see that we are trying to find an interlocutor on the Palestinian side. We are trying to find an interlocutor in Lebanon, on the Lebanese Armed Forces. This is what we are doing here. There is no nothing else that we can do at the moment. So this is my position. Unfortunately, it doesn't please you. I understand, but I cannot say more than this. Let me see how the international situation will develop tonight or tomorrow. I think you understand.

1-0104-0000

**Villy Søvndal (Verts/ALE)**. – When I meet with representatives from both Israel and Palestine, civil society organisations, because I think it's important to remember in this discussion that there is another Israel than the present government of Netanyahu, and there also is another Palestine than both Hamas and other organisations. They ask both the Israelis and the Palestinians to put more pressure on them to press for a solution, so that this madness that's going on now should not continue. If we do that, we need to strengthen the cooperation with civil organisations.

I ask you: what possibilities do you see here in the Parliament? Four of us present here are trying to form a two-state solution intergroup to give a platform for some of the moderate voices. Do you see possibilities to strengthen cooperation with civil organisations?

1-0105-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – I can easily reply to this question. Absolutely. I see the possibility to talk to them, to strengthen them. This is what we have been doing all the time in all these countries. There is no reason to do it with Israel. As I said, without them the two-state solution wouldn't be possible. This is why we say once the conditions are met. The conditions are met when we have them at the table. Maybe civil society organisations can be stronger and they can push them. This is one of the solutions, but at this moment, let's see.

Once I start cooperating – if confirmed of course – I can see what we can do together. But what I haven't told you, my idea is just to let you know, and this is what I haven't said. My idea if I have a mission in these countries, be it Morocco or the Middle East, I will try, if you agree, to compose joint delegations so that we can go there together. It's not, you know, once they receive me. Maybe they need some more people. I hope we will speak with one voice. And this is how we can strengthen our cooperation. This is what I forgot to tell you at the beginning. This is one of the ideas.



1-0106-0000

**Michał Kobosko (Renew).** – *Dobar dan*, Madam Šuica. Let me bring the issue of demographics again, as this is one of the key challenges ahead. Traditionally, the higher birth rates can be found in countries where an ideology in favour of having children is being promoted. But not always. It does help. In Poland we have a social programme named 800+, which was a revolution for the state budget but has not changed anything. The numbers are still dramatically falling down.

It seems that not only the Member States, but also the EU is not doing enough on that issue. The main topic of the Draghi report is obviously competitiveness. In 1960, Europe's population was 20 % of the global population; in 2015, our share dropped to just 10 %. Europe cannot be competitive without people, not just without workers and consumers, but without new talents or ideas on how to develop our continent.

So, looking at the substantial drop in the fertility rate, what should be seen as the Commission's key mistake during the past five years, which should be avoided during the next term? Also, do you see a chance to undertake a horizontal plan for the EU in scope, for example, as a European demographic strategy?

1-0107-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – It's hard to speak about mistakes, being in this position for five years. I think there was a big achievement, which was, as I said, the first time ever talking about demography at European level. This was not the case earlier. So this is what we did. We did the first and second report on demographic change – the first one at the beginning of the term, the second one after Brexit, after COVID, during the Russian-Ukrainian war. So we have some data on this. So it's evident that we are shrinking. It's evident the European population is ageing. It's evident.

But also – you mentioned Poland and the 800+ – there is also one very good example in Greece, which is called, they call there the campaign 'Rebrain Greece'. I like the title, and they are doing a lot on this. Just to give you an idea, let me tell you that the Spanish Presidency, a year ago, this time last year, in December, recommended to Member States to establish Ministries for Demography. The country I know best, my home country, they established a Ministry for Demography. Also Greece, also Italy.

This is also not to increase administration, but just to show that this is an important topic for Europe, and it's also symbolic. But also they can do something because the birth rate is, as I said, their competence. I also remind you of the Letta report, and not only Mario Draghi's report, where he promoted a fifth freedom. You know our four freedoms – and the fifth freedom is the right to stay. We are the politicians who have to help and assist our citizens, our regions, our cities, our villages, that they can choose whether they want to leave or to stay. It will be their choice, not their necessity.

This is what we have been doing. So we are not making mistakes. We are trying to just to make democracy prominent on our agenda.

1-0108-0000

**Γεάδης Γεάδης (ECR).** – Τα πλούσια κοιτάσματα φυσικού αερίου στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο μπορούν να συμβάλουν στην πολυαναμενόμενη ενεργειακή ασφάλεια και αυτάρκεια της Ευρώπης. Ποιος είναι ο σχεδιασμός σας, κυρία Επίτροπε, για την εκμετάλλευση των φυσικών πόρων και την προστασία των έργων κοινού ενδιαφέροντος στη Μεσόγειο, όπως ο Great Sea Interconnector, με δεδομένο την πειρατική στάση της Τουρκίας που εμποδίζει τόσο τις εξορύξεις όσο και την πόντιση καλωδίων; Αν μου επιτρέπετε

να σας διορθώσω, δεν είναι «μη εγκεκριμένες ενέργειες», όπως έχετε πει, αλλά παράνομες ενέργειες, αντίθετες στο διεθνές δίκαιο. Δεν είναι εταίρος, όπως σας άκουσα τρεις φορές να λέτε. Κυρία Επίτροπε, εταίρος είναι ο φίλος και όχι αυτός που κατέχει παράνομα ευρωπαϊκά εδάφη. Θα συνεχίσουμε να αποκαλούμε την Τουρκία εταίρο ή θα αντιδράσουμε αποφασιστικά, όπως και με άλλες περιπτώσεις; Τελικά έχουμε αρχές και αξίες ως Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση ή δεν έχουμε; Επιπλέον, με δεδομένο ότι στη Μεσόγειο εντοπίζεται το μεγαλύτερο πρόβλημα παράνομης μετανάστευσης, με τη μικρή πληθυσμιακά Κύπρο να κινδυνεύει δημογραφικά και ταυτόχρονα την Τουρκία να το εργαλειοποιεί, είναι αυτό στις προτεραιότητές σας;

1-0109-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – What I haven't said – when colleagues from Cyprus asked me a question, I didn't want to say this, but now I will tell you – is that Türkiye is an enlargement country, and it is under the remit of Slovenian Marta Kos' portfolio. It's not my portfolio. But I wanted to tell you that Cyprus is important. And of course, it's in the middle of the East Mediterranean, so how can I say that it's not my portfolio? But it's her direct responsibility, not mine.

But of course, we will work together on this, with the cooperation of HR/VP Kaja Kallas. So let's see how to solve this issue.

On principles, of course we have our principles. We work in accordance with our principles. As you know, we are 27 different countries, but we are really trying to work and to stick to our principles and to stick to our standards, to stick to our norms. Once again, we have to always try to find diplomatic solutions, including with Türkiye.

1-0110-0000

**Hermann Tertsch (P/E).** – Señora comisaria propuesta, gracias por el pésame por la tragedia de Valencia, pero no se crea todo eso del cambio climático que le están contando aquí al respecto. Valencia es una ciudad milenaria que tiene perfectamente documentadas inundaciones similares a lo largo de siglos, desde el siglo I, de forma regular, y la muy grave de 1957, que cambió totalmente la propia ciudad.

Lo que lo agrava son muchas de las medidas de la Unión Europea: la prohibición de cortar los cañaverales que obturan los puentes, la prohibición de limpiar los ríos, la destrucción de presas y de azudes... Son tantas las medidas que se han adoptado y que sí agravan muchísimo la situación, medidas que son supuestamente para la restauración de la naturaleza.

Pero lo que no saben ustedes es que ha habido un terror aparte dentro de esos cuatro días de abandono total por parte del Gobierno: terror por el saqueo, y el saqueo lo han hecho en gran parte bandas de inmigrantes ilegales. Y esos inmigrantes ilegales jóvenes, que llegan desde Marruecos y Argelia, desde el Magreb, vienen y siembran el terror y no son devueltos a su casa. Cuando un niño polaco o un niño australiano llega a Europa, se le devuelve a su casa; a los niños marroquíes y argelinos, ahí se les deja. ¿Van a tomar medidas para que esos niños sean tratados como niños europeos y sean devueltos a sus familias?

*(el presidente retira la palabra al orador)*

1-0111-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – I understood your questions as statements. It's very hard to comment on your questions. I understand what you are saying, of course. You want to deny

climate change and the mention that 1957 was ... You're not denying? Okay, I wasn't quite sure. But you think that this was not the cause, okay.

But on cleaning rivers and what you have been saying, it's up to local, regional, national authorities who have to work on it. It's very hard to comment. I understand, but it's not easy. Also, on illegal migrants, I am saying that we are doing everything in order to frame this, to have a framework for returns, not to do it ad hoc. And this is what we have been doing and this is what we will provide you with – I mean, the Commission once established. Maybe can you repeat? I would like to hear the question once again.

1-0112-0000

**Hermann Tertsch (Pfe).** – Minors, minor illegal immigrants ...

Los menores de otros países son devueltos a sus familias, ¿por qué no son devueltos a sus familias los menores que vienen de Marruecos y Argelia a España, se quedan y son una fuente interminable de problemas?

1-0114-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Let me see what the situation is. I just wanted to tell you that I will come back, once I see what is going on on the ground, to check what you have been saying. I am not quite sure. This is what I can reply at this moment.

1-0115-0000

**Nacho Sánchez Amor (S&D).** – Gracias por la referencia a Valencia. Yo me he quedado en este último turno para tratar de algunos flecos, y hay uno obvio. Su lógica, señora Šuica, ha sido «ataque de Hamás, sufrimiento de israelíes y palestinos»: Israel desaparece de la ecuación del dolor. El máximo nivel de crítica que usted ha emitido a Israel ha sido decir que su política con el UNRWA ha sido un mal movimiento. Ayúdenos a ayudarla. Pronuncie conmigo: «Respuesta desproporcionada»; es lo mínimo de lo mínimo en política y en moral.

Díganos si está de acuerdo con las resoluciones de las Naciones Unidas que consideran que Israel ha violado reiteradamente el Derecho internacional durante años. Usted ha puesto de ejemplo a Borrell; es un ejemplo perfecto el de Borrell: de él sabemos lo que piensa, pase lo que pase con los Estados miembros. Díganos lo que piensa usted.

Y voy a los dobles estándares, y olvídense de Rusia, dobles estándares sin Rusia. A la Autoridad Nacional Palestina le pedimos reformas para ser financiada: ¿le vamos a pedir las mismas reformas a Túnez y a Egipto?

1-0116-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner-designate.** – Thank you, Mr Sánchez Amor. On Israel-Palestine, I can agree that this is disproportionate. Maybe I missed to say this, but it's so evident. So you are helping me, thank you. On Egypt and Tunisia, of course by putting conditions in these contracts, in these agreements, in these memoranda of understanding, we are in fact trying to reform them. We are indirectly reforming them. This is what we are doing. But when I said at the beginning that it's in our mutual interest to work with them, we have to be there. Our engagement is very important. If we are not engaged, who will be there? Then Russia and China will be there. This is the reason why we want to cooperate with them. But there are conditions. So there is nothing more to say. So reforms will be done indirectly.

1-0117-0000

**Davor Ivo Stier (PPE).** – Povjerenice, dolazite iz Hrvatske, dolazite iz Dubrovnika. Dakle, baštinite bogatu tradiciju Dubrovačke Republike i dubrovačke diplomacije i za kolege da možda to naglasim, to je diplomacija koja je uvijek naglašavala da trebamo imati kanale komunikacije otvorene, ne ih rušiti, nego ih zadržati, koristiti sve, koristiti i trgovinsku suradnju, ali ne za duple standarde, ne zbog toga što je to obogaćenje, nego zbog toga što se time služilo višem cilju, a to je bila sloboda.

Na koji način će Vam ta bogata tradicija pomoći sada da ovu dužnost izvršite, da Europska unija pomogne da Mediteran bude mjesto doista gdje će biti manje konflikta, više poštivanja međunarodnog prava, međunarodnog humanitarnog prava, gdje će to biti više mjesto suradnje u kojem će se doista moći prosperirati i Europska unija biti važan geopolitički čimbenik?

1-0118-0000

**Dubravka Šuica, Kandidatkinja za povjerenicu.** – Hvala, Davore. Nisam očekivala pitanje na hrvatskom. Nisam se htjela puno hvaliti Dubrovnikom i svojim porijeklom, ali činjenica je da me je grad Dubrovnik obilježio i da mi je, ako je *nomen est omen*, da mi je ime proizašlo iz grada Dubrovnika, Dubravka, hvala na tome.

Dakle, poznati smo bili po diplomatskim sposobnostima, ali to ne znači da mi je to jedina karakteristika. Moram ozbiljno raditi. Ovo je vrlo ozbiljna tema. Svi ste vi svjesni toga da je tema vrlo ozbiljna i da je regija zahtjevna.

Želimo biti čimbenik, vrlo važan čimbenik na Mediteranu, na Sredozemlju. Želimo se pozicionirati u odnosu na druge sile koje su tamo prisutne. Želimo, obzirom da je to naše susjedstvo, direktno naše susjedstvo, želimo more sačuvati i da bude čisto i da bude u funkciji građana koji žive u zemljama oko tog Sredozemlja.

I to je cilj, ali da bi se to postiglo, ne možemo to postići, nikakav prosperitet kojemu teži ova Europska unija, nikakvu konkurentnost bez sigurnosti i mira.

Dakle, cilj je postići mir i sigurnost na Sredozemlju, prije svega na Bliskom istoku. Ako to uspijemo, a nadam se da hoćemo u suradnji s drugim partnerima, kao što sam rekla, vjerujem da imamo velike šanse.

Osnovni razlog zašto je uopće osnovan ovaj portfelj je upravo da se pokaže važnost portfelja, važnost područja za budućnost Europske unije. Spominjem migracije. Važne su jer nisu samo migracije. Tu je energija, tu je trgovina, tu je sve ono ostalo što biste vi željeli da se tamo nađe ukoliko imate interese iz nacionalnih uglova, odnosno kutova.

Tako da, naravno da suradnju nećemo moći nastaviti ukoliko se demokratski standardi ne promijene. Mi ne želimo nikome nametati naše vrijednosti, ali želimo ih promovirati. Znači, promocija zajedničkih vrijednosti je naš *ultimate goal*, krajnji cilj.

1-0119-0000

**David McAllister, Chair of the AFET Committee.** – Let me thank all the Members for their questions, and let me thank the Commissioner-designate for her answers. Before we close this hearing, I would now like to invite Dubravka Šuica to make a brief closing statement of no more than five minutes. The floor is yours.

1-0120-0000

**Dubravka Šuica**, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Members, dear friends, dear David, I really want to sincerely thank you for this exchange of views, which was extensive. I have tried to present this new portfolio and its main objectives. I was trying to do it as diligently as possible in order to earn your trust. I appreciate all of your questions and I took note of ones that I wasn't able to reply to in detail. But since I promise you that I will be here frequently we will cover them together, I hope.

Let me remind you that not too long ago, I was also your colleague in this very committee. I not only hear your concerns, but I can humbly say that I understand them. As you heard, the portfolio is innovative, very broad and very complex.

To answer the many questions you raised, there will need to be close cooperation once again with the HR/VP, Kaja Kallas, and the other Commissioners. But I do know that I can count also on your expertise, on the expertise in this House, because it's not only this committee – you see now how complex the the situation is. So I will count on your expertise. I will count also on the expertise within our services, and in particular DG NEAR whose chair I see there, and also on the external service and also our delegations. I haven't spoken a lot about delegations, but there are our delegations on the ground. I have exchanged views with all of the countries, in capitals, so it was interesting. They are very helpful on the ground. Also on the expertise of the Council and on the expertise of the future DG MED, which will be established soon. I would like to jointly turn this into success.

We need to have all hands on deck and to move forward in synergy. Honourable Members, dear Members, the future of Europe and of the Mediterranean is interlinked by common challenges, by opportunities, and how we choose to engage. So this includes our citizens. You know that my actual portfolio is democracy and demography, and we find the root word, which is 'demos'. Everything is about people, and people are at the core of my work. This portfolio was no coincidence. I have always invested a lot of energy in direct contacts with citizens in this mandate, while in charge of democracy. This was especially the case in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Civil society, citizens engagement and respect for human rights have been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of my work here in Europe, but also in our neighbourhood.

I also look forward to continue working on demography in the next few years. Don't forget, demography is another another side of the coin of my portfolio. This means investing in human capital not only in Europe, but also in our relationships with the MENA countries, MENA neighbours, and with global partners dealing with demographic changes of their own.

A few final words. The world continues to show us that the challenges of today have no borders. We can turn them into opportunities, but we can do it only together. The mutual benefits are clear for our citizens, for our economies, for our environment, and for the security and the stability of the entire region.

I look forward to our future exchanges when we start negotiating new models of cooperation with the neighbours in the South. Let us stand firm in our shared values and united in achieving our common goals. If you lend me your confidence, I am ready to continue working with you. Thank you once again for this fruitful exchange and see you soon. All the best.

1-0121-0000

**David McAllister**, *Chair of the AFET Committee*. – Colleagues, may I just have your attention for one minute? First of all, thank you for the good questions. Thank you, Commissioner-designate, for the good answers. I would like to thank the interpreters on behalf of all of us for staying slightly longer

than expected. With regard to the next steps, please be informed that AFET coordinators will meet tonight at 18:30 *in camera* to evaluate the hearing. The evaluation process and the evaluation letter will be confidential. Our decision will be published by the Conference of Presidents after the conclusion of the last hearings. This brings our meeting to an end. Thank you.

1-0122-0000

*(The hearing closed at 17:42)*