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Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety  
Committee on Fisheries  
The Chairs

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ACCES RESERVE

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Jerzy BUZEK  
Chair of the Conference of  
Committee Chairs  
European Parliament  
PHS 8B46

Dear Mr BUZEK,

In accordance with Rule 118 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Fisheries, with the Committee on Transport and Tourism as associated committee held a public hearing on Monday 29 September 2014 with Mr Karmenu Vella, Commissioner-designate, who, subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure, will be responsible for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

Prior to the hearing, Parliament had sent the Commissioner-designate a list of written questions. The PECH coordinators considered that Mr Vella gave reasonable replies to the standard questions (addressed to all Commissioner-designate) submitted by the Parliament.

Mr Vella opened the hearing by making a statement in which he referred to the following priorities:

*In the field of Fisheries*

He underlined that fisheries is a central policy which must for obvious reasons balance the interests of protecting the marine environment and the sustainability of the fishing industry. Regarding maritime policy, all of his ministerial and private sector experience is relevant to the work of developing the blue economy.

He pledged to establish an open and transparent relationship with the Members of Parliament, based on mutual trust and regular and comprehensive exchanges of information in order for the Parliament and its committees to be able to exercise its legislative and scrutiny roles.

He reiterated his commitment to consult extensively with Parliament from the very early stages of the legislative process and to make himself available for regular meetings with coordinators, rapporteurs and committee members.

In addition, he committed himself to keep the European Parliament, both in committees and plenary, informed on the same level as the Council.

#### *In the field of Environment*

- Green Growth is an over-arching priority, necessary to strengthen global competitiveness while creating jobs and sustainable growth, which requires a change towards a more circular economy. The 7th Environment Action Programme will be a guiding framework for achieving Green Growth.
- The protection of natural capital notably via the Natura 2000 network is to be a main focus as well. The Commissioner stressed the importance of meeting the 2020 biodiversity targets with a legal framework that is fit for purpose and of carrying out an in-depth evaluation of the Birds and Habitats directives.
- Safeguarding the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health will also be a priority.
- The need to maintain the EU's international lead in environmental matters was highlighted by the Commissioner-designate, particularly in developing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Members then asked questions on the following subjects in particular:

#### *In the field of Fisheries*

- regionalisation/decentralisation of the CFP; financing of both the CFP and the Integrated Maritime Policy; the implementation of the CFP reform, in particular the application of the landing obligation and the achievement of MSY as rapidly as possible; relations with Norway; more involvement of the sector and Advisors Councils in the decision making process; special treatment to be given to small-scale fishing, inshore fishing and islands in the framework of the new CFP; specific problems concerning the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean; increasing cost efficiency faced in the fishing industry, marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products; problems related to imports (EU high level of dependency on imports, perceived unfairness of competition from imports, strict application of EU standards to imported products; Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements with third countries (economic importance for EU, human right and development issues; challenges and future of the aquaculture industry and strategy to encourage its development; specific problems related to the Mediterranean (including relations with neighbouring third countries and the role of the GFMG and ICCAT); specific challenges faced by ultraperipheral regions and support to these regions; the new regulation for driftnets.

#### *In the field of Environment*

- The cross-cutting issue of sustainable development is a key concern for Members, particularly with regard to the new structure for decision-making in the future College, whereby Vice-Presidents are assigned a strategic coordinating and filtering role. Given that Mr Vella is meant to closely liaise with the Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, Mr Katainen, several Members raised questions on ways to ensure that sustainability is given sufficient priority in legislative initiatives.

- Members clearly identified Green Growth as a priority area, stressing that environmental concerns should be mainstreamed into all policy areas, in particular in economic policies.
- A majority of Members expressed the view that the full implementation of EU environmental legislation across Member States is of the utmost importance, particularly when it comes to the objectives laid down in the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme. Specific questions were raised on the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, as well as on their planned review.
- Several Members also questioned the Commissioner on specific provisions contained in tabled proposals such as the Air Quality Package and the Waste Package.

During the debate, Mr Vella made specific commitments regarding his future Commission portfolio.

#### *In the field of Fisheries*

On the work of the Task Force on MAPs, he underlined that a continuous and open dialogue between the institutions is the best way forward as it produces results and he will make sure that work on the proposals for multiannual plans is stepped up and follows the agreement reached by the Task Force.

Regarding the Implementation of the CFP reform, he pointed out that regionalisation is a new governance tool that will develop and improve with experience and he will ensure the consistency and effectiveness of the measures within the sub-regions.

He stressed that the landing obligation is one of the most ambitious aspects of the reform and pointed out the importance of using the support offered by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to implement the discard ban.

Regarding the improvement of the coordination of the external dimension of the EU's fisheries policy, the recent reform of SFPAs has put emphasis on enhanced consistency with external relations objectives (notably with the inclusion of a human rights clause) and the necessity of the respect for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for the fair use of third country resources. He emphasised that fighting against IUU fishing is one of his key priorities and a useful tool in the global governance of oceans.

The PECH Committee was of the strong opinion that the defence of environmental sustainability should be added to the responsibilities of Vice-president-designate Katainen as part of the title of his portfolio.

#### *In the field of Environment*

- Mr Vella committed to working closely with Member States to promote effective implementation of EU environmental legislation. He will not hesitate to make full use of the Commission's legal enforcement powers whenever and wherever necessary.
- He emphasised that the waste proposal was now before the two co-legislators and that the Commission will wait for the EP's first reading position on this issue before making the assessment mentioned in his mission statement.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which he reaffirmed the priorities he outlined in his opening statement. He reaffirmed, inter alia, that he will implement the reform of the CFP, fight for better international governance and promote the growth of the blue economy.

On the basis of the responses of the Members present at the hearing, as well as the comments made by our committees' coordinators, who met after the hearing under our chairmanship, we hereby give the following assessment:

*Opinion of TRAN associated committee*

Members made a positive assessment of Mr Vella's vision for the future of the blue economy and indicated that they expected the Commissioner-designate to cover effectively its maritime affairs component.

*PECH*

PECH coordinators are in a position to confirm that Mr Vella is a qualified candidate with the independence, professional aptitude and European commitment necessary to perform his duties.

On the basis of his performance they are confident about his capacity to master his portfolio and to cooperate loyally with our committees.

According to the PECH coordinators, the general outcome of this hearing is that the Commissioner-designate gave an acceptable impression of his ability to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him.

This represents the opinion of a large majority of the PECH Members who attended the hearing.

*ENVI*

The ENVI coordinators considered that the lack of reference to sustainable development in the mission letter of Vice-President Katainen and to the full implementation of the objectives of the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme as raised in the letter of 26 September 2014 to President-elect Juncker continue to raise concerns. Although it provided some useful clarifications, the reply by the President-elect was not considered fully satisfactory.

As for Mr Vella's adequacy for the position, the coordinators considered that he has the necessary professional and political experience to master the challenges the position of a Member of the European Commission bring with it.

In spite of some lack of details in his replies, Mr Vella demonstrated that he had a sufficient grasp of the main issues inherent in the portfolio. He also committed to defending Community interest when dealing with Member States. He showed the intention and need to familiarise himself more with subjects falling within his remit as well as a positive attitude towards the environmental agenda and readiness to cooperate with Parliament.

The general outcome of this hearing is that the Commissioner-designate gave a positive impression of his aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him. In this context, however, coordinators expressed a strong recommendation that a higher profile should be given to environmental sustainability in the work of the future Commission by including this in the title and the portfolio of VP Katainen and that full implementation of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP shall be an explicit

task in the mission of Commissioner-designate Vella. It is crucial that a clear commitment be made on these matters prior to the plenary vote.

This represents the opinion of a consensus of the ENVI Members who attended the hearing.

Yours sincerely,

Giovanni La Via  
Chair of the ENVI Committee

Alain Cadec  
Chair of the PECH Committee



COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

Brussels, 29 September 2014

**OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND TOURISM ON THE  
EVALUATION OF MR VELLA, COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE FOR THE  
ENVIRONMENT, MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES**

*Maritime Affairs*

As regards maritime affairs, the Commissioner-designate stated in his opening statement that blue growth would be his third priority as a Commissioner. He emphasised that integrated maritime policy is central to achieving growth and jobs as well as for assuring sustainability in maritime and coastal activities.

During the debate, Mr Vella answered three questions from TRAN Members relating to the following issues: Integrated Maritime Policy, the social and environmental dimension of Blue Growth, Maritime Spatial Planning, and Coastal and Maritime Tourism.

Members agreed with the objectives expressed by the nominee and made a positive assessment of his vision for the future of the blue economy. The Commissioner-designate demonstrated a commendable understanding of the importance of promoting maritime affairs as an integral part of his portfolio. Members felt, however, that he might have been more specific in his statements and concrete in his policy commitments. His intention to work with his colleagues across the Commission to maximise synergies with all relevant policy areas related to the development of the blue economy was particularly welcomed.

Considering that Mr Vella's future portfolio is significantly broad, the Members of the TRAN Committee expect the Commissioner-designate to cover effectively the maritime affairs component of the portfolio, and to maintain and further promote the increasingly high profile that maritime affairs have gained over the past years.