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BRUXELLES

COMMISSIONE PER GLI AFFARI ESTERI

AUDIZIONE DI CATHERINE ASHTON

VICEPRESIDENTE DESIGNATO DELLA
COMMISSIONE

ALTO RAPPRESENTANTE DELL'UNIONE PER
GLI AFFARI ESTERI E LA POLITICA DI
SICUREZZA

1-002

PRESIDENZA DI GABRIELE ALBERTINI

(La riunione è aperta alle 13.00)

1-004

Presidente. – Colleghi, per favore, se volete prendere posto, abbiamo i minuti contati, quindi dobbiamo cominciare in orario. Pregherei anche i signori fotografi e giornalisti di lasciare libero il posto sugli scranni, che sono impegnati per dare inizio al nostro lavoro.

Do il benvenuto alla sig.ra Ashton, che spero – come ci auguriamo tutti noi – potrà utilizzare questo incontro non solo per farsi ulteriormente conoscere e rappresentare le linee guida della sua linea politica, ma anche per avere, come già è stato, ma ancora può avvenire meglio, in questa seconda occasione (la durata sarà di circa 3 ore) uno scambio di vedute e di opinioni con il Parlamento.

È un evento importante, direi, simbolico, paradigmatico, che sia proprio Lei, sig.ra Ashton, ad aprire il ciclo delle audizioni dei Commissari designati, perché lei incarna la vera novità della politica europea.

Inizia la politica estera europea con l'applicazione del trattato di Lisbona e la sua figura, il suo ruolo di vicepresidente della Commissione ma anche, e soprattutto in questa sede di commissione esteri, di Alto rappresentante per la politica estera dell'Unione europea, rappresenta il vero argomento di novità.

Prima di darle la parola, desidero ricordare ai colleghi che le regole di questa audizione saranno rigorosissime, per ragioni di necessità e non certo di scelta del presidente: i tempi dovranno essere rigidamente contingentati, dobbiamo imperativamente chiudere i nostri lavori alle ore 16.

La struttura dell'audizione prevede un primo round con i coordinatori, ai quali è stata offerta la possibilità, dopo una prima domanda e la risposta iniziale, di effettuare una replica di precisazioni con un secondo intervento.

Per tutti comunque vale la regola che intendo applicare in modo rigoroso: avete un solo minuto a vostra

disposizione per porre UNA sola domanda. Vi chiedo la cortesia, per evitare alla presidenza di interrompervi, di formulare UNA sola domanda.

La sig.ra Ashton ha poco tempo per rispondere, ed è giusto che ci si limiti a una sola domanda e che la domanda sia formulata in modo chiaro.

Ringrazio tutti fin d'ora per la collaborazione che vorrete prestare a questi lavori così intensi e do la parola alla sig.ra Ashton per un intervento che prego di contenere nei dieci minuti.

1-005

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – I am delighted to be with you this afternoon and to discuss how I intend to act as the European Union's first-ever double-hatted High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

As you all know, I have the highest esteem for this House. Close cooperation with the European Parliament will be a key part of my responsibilities. The Lisbon Treaty is now in force. This is a moment of tremendous opportunity. It offers the promise of many things that the citizens of Europe – and Members of this House – have long wanted: a more democratic Union; a more effective Union that delivers results in the areas that matter most to citizens, including the economy; and, above all, a stronger and more credible European role in a fast-changing world.

Big power shifts are taking place. New crises are popping up every day. We have to ensure that our response keeps up. I say 'we' deliberately, as this is very much a collective European responsibility.

Like many of you, I am convinced there is a clear call – inside the EU and around the world – for greater European engagement: to promote peace, to protect the vulnerable, to fight poverty and to address the many challenges of our time.

We have to answer this call. Combining leadership with partnership; defending our values and promoting our

interests; listening to what our partners say, and making sure that, when we speak, our voice is heard – that is exactly what I intend to do with the help of all of you in the European Parliament, working with President Barroso and other colleagues in the Commission as a team, with the Ministers of the Foreign Affairs Council and appropriately with the President of the Council.

I know that my new role entails enormous responsibilities. And we all know that results do not happen by themselves or by merely stating our views. They flow from the choices we make and the actions that we take. So we owe it to our citizens, and those around the world that look to Europe for help, to seize the opportunities that the Lisbon Treaty offers.

One of the biggest tasks flowing from the Lisbon Treaty is the creation of the European External Action Service. This will be a top priority for me. Let me explain why. This is not just a bureaucratic exercise but a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to build something that brings together all the elements of our engagement – political, economic and military – to implement one coherent strategy. That is my vision.

We need to create something that adds value for our citizens to what our Member States are already doing and gives non-Europeans a reliable partner. We need the best and the brightest working for it, from all relevant backgrounds, in the Commission, the Council Secretariat and Member States, and we should also consider opening this up further in the future.

Work has begun, and I am personally stepping up preparations so that I can present a proposal to allow a decision by the Council in April. In all this, the European Parliament has a crucial role to play. Members have already made some contributions and I look forward to working closely with you, right throughout the process.

But while we are creating the Service, we also have to tackle the immediate issues that confront us. We need to be active and operational both on the global issues, where Europe is expected to play its full role, and in our immediate neighbourhood, where we are expected to take the lead. As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, I will try to ensure that we live up to these expectations.

Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran, the Middle East, Somalia and Yemen are clearly some of our top priorities. I have already taken part in the NATO Ministerial on Afghanistan, which provided a good opportunity to meet with NATO Secretary-General Anders Rasmussen. We agreed to work pragmatically for a very effective EU-NATO partnership.

I intend to travel to Washington soon, to discuss with Hillary Clinton and other top US officials how we can pull together our strategies and actions on the global issues, and I hope to visit Moscow and Beijing soon thereafter.

On the Middle East, I will be meeting tomorrow with Senator Mitchell and Tony Blair, and I intend to travel to the region as soon as possible.

On Iran, my services are in close contact with all the relevant actors, including the E3+3. We need to decide on next steps in the light of Iran’s refusal to accept its international obligations.

Alongside these global issues, we as the European Union have primary responsibility for our neighbourhood. This is important per se, but our wider international credibility also depends on how we interact with our immediate neighbours. That means promoting genuine political reform in the Western Balkans and making sure the whole region succeeds on its path of eventual integration in the EU.

We have taken positive steps on visa liberalisation with Serbia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and in addition we need an effective strategy to overcome the political stalemate in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Beyond the Balkans, I intend to play an active role in Ukraine, where presidential elections are looming and clear European interests are at stake, including on energy. Belarus, Moldova and the countries of the Southern Caucasus also call for active EU engagement.

The wider Mediterranean region, similarly, is a key priority. There are deep historical ties and common interests that bind us, as well as common problems, including illegal migration. We need to take forward the work started under the Union of the Mediterranean.

Beyond our neighbourhood, too, to the east and south, lie continents of crucial importance to Europe: Africa, Latin America and Asia. In all these we must remain engaged with creativity and determination.

Apart from these regional issues, I intend to develop ongoing work on some thematic issues: non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, human rights, energy and climate change. These are not stand-alone issues but part of our broader agenda and our strategies for dealing with them need to be joined-up and comprehensive.

The same applies to our crisis management operations under what is now called the common security and defence policy. I know many of you have a clear interest in these missions and agree just how important they are. They save lives. They create space in troubled areas for politics to work. They are a crucial part of what Europe is doing on the ground.

We need to build on the progress made in recent years, making sure that our missions are well-staffed, well-equipped and well-led, so that we are ready to take action whenever our engagement is needed.

Finally, a word on international partnerships. The complex problems of a globalised world require comprehensive, multilateral responses. For me, this is what the notion of sustainable security is about.

To achieve this, we need effective partnerships with all relevant players: the US, China and Russia, but also Turkey, Japan, Canada, India, Brazil and South Africa, with the UN, with NATO, with the African Union and many others. Nurturing these partnerships will be a big part of my day-to-day work, so that we have the necessary relationships to forge effective responses to individual challenges, but also to build the rules-based international system that we seek.

Members of this House, I see this as a unique moment in Europe's journey, above all a moment of opportunity. We need to be ambitious and results-oriented, making sure that our words are backed by action. The Lisbon Treaty gives us the tools.

This is very much a team effort. My job is to try and pull it all together, to provide impetus and leadership. Clearly, active public support is essential. That is why I will be accountable to this House, wherever the Treaty has provided for it.

Furthermore, I am keen to promote wider debates across our Union on all these issues. Thank you, and I look forward to the questions and our debate.

(Applause)

1-006

Gabriele Albertini (PPE), PT. – Grazie sig.ra Ashton. Passiamo ora ai coordinatori. Ricordo il formato di questo primo *step* di interventi: l'interlocutore ha diritto a 1 minuto di intervento, con la presentazione di una sola domanda.

La replica dell'Alto rappresentante sarà di 2 minuti, poi ci sarà o una seconda domanda o un commento alla risposta della durata di 1 minuto, e infine, alla conclusione dello *step*, la sig.ra Ashton avrà ancora 1 minuto a disposizione per la replica finale.

Inizia il giro degli interventi con 1 minuto di intervento, appunto, l'on. Brock ha facoltà di intervento.

1-007

Elmar Brok (PPE). – Herr Vorsitzender! Frau Kandidatin, ich bedanke mich im Namen der EVP-Fraktion sehr für die Darlegungen, die Sie gemacht haben, und möchte meinen und unseren Willen zum Ausdruck bringen, eine konstruktive Zusammenarbeit anzustreben. Lassen Sie mich für meine eigene Klärung einige wenige Fragen stellen:

Sie haben die schwere und neue Aufgabe, bei den gemischten Zuständigkeiten zwischen Rat und Kommission eine kohärente Politik im Bereich der Außenvertretung herzustellen, weswegen Ihr Amt ja geschaffen worden ist und auch der Auswärtige Dienst kommen wird. Sind Sie bereit, diese Kohärenz in der

Darstellung und der Umfassendheit auch bei der Berichterstattung gegenüber dem Europäischen Parlament vorzunehmen, was Ihnen ja als Vizepräsidentin der Kommission obliegt, oder wollen Sie bei der Unterrichtung Differenzierungen vornehmen?

Zweitens: Sehen Sie es auch so wie wir, dass bei *multiple programming* und solchen Fragen die vollen Gesetzgebungsrechte des Europäischen Parlaments gewährleistet werden ...

(Der Vorsitzende entzieht dem Redner das Wort.)

1-008

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – First of all, thank you for the spirit of constructive cooperation. I very much welcome that.

I think the overlapping nature of the responsibilities is an asset, not a problem. It is precisely because they come together that I am able to perform the functions of both roles in a way that makes it coherent in terms of the outside world, but also within the European Union. So I see this as a challenge, certainly, but also as an advantage.

In terms of my responsibilities to the European Parliament, I am both the Council and the Commission. I expect to be before the Parliament in the way that you would expect as a Commissioner, but I also have the additional value that I am before you on behalf of the Council.

So we will need to decide, in the logistics of life, precisely how to make that work. One of the things that honourable Members have been kind enough to point out to me is that this is a big responsibility, and that finding time to make sure that I am before Parliament needs to be worked out properly so that can I do that.

So, within the boundaries of what I am able to do, I am very keen and very pleased to be able to come to the Parliament as often as possible and to work with Parliament to develop the External Action Service as a policy as well.

1-009

Elmar Brok (PPE). – Frau Ashton, Sie haben leider Gottes nicht auf die Fragen in Bezug auf die Haushaltsrechte geantwortet, die das Europäische Parlament im Bereich der Außenvertretung wahrzunehmen hat, wie auch der Haushaltskontrollrechte, wo wir meinen, dass wir dieselben Möglichkeiten haben sollten wie gegenüber der Kommission, weil alles andere ja eine Verschlechterung der Rechte des Europäischen Parlaments wäre. Sowohl die Kontrollrechte als auch die Budgetrechte insgesamt müssten gewährleistet sein.

Ich frage Sie auch, ob Sie mit mir übereinstimmen, dass die Außenvertretung der Europäischen Union

entsprechend Artikel 22 in allen Fragen bei der Kommission liegt, außer bei der GASP, und – das bezieht sich auf Artikel 17 – dass alle Vorschläge für den Rat im Bereich der Außenvertretung von der Kommission kommen, beispielsweise wenn man sich für Kopenhagen vorbereitet, außer der GASP, wofür die Hohe Vertreterin zuständig ist. Oder interpretieren Sie diese Artikel unterschiedlich?

1-010

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – There are two models which have been explored: one, which some Members of this House would like to see, whereby the External Action Service works through the Commission; and one, which others have called for, seeing that the Treaty looks for what is called a *sui generis* operation.

Let me say this very clearly, Mr Brok: the EEAS budget will be subject to full scrutiny by the European Parliament whatever its final structure in the context of the Financial Regulation.

My job is to make it effective and to make the money flow effectively on the ground, to make sure that those who need to receive the resources – whether that is our delegations, ambassadors on the ground or others through them – receive support through the projects which we put in place. I want to see the money work well for the benefit of those people and the benefit of the European Union.

But, whatever that structure, Parliament has a role to play, and as I have said this structure will be subject to full scrutiny, which I hope is as clear an answer as you could wish for.

1-011

Кристиан Вигенин (S&D). – Уважаеми г-н Председател, уважаема г-жо Ashton, от името на групата на социалистите и демократите в Европейския парламент Ви приветвам в комисията по външна политика и Ви пожелавам успех днес.

Европейският съюз има нужда от по-ефективна, по-активна политика в сферата на външните отношения и сигурността и с тази цел Договорът от Лисабон въведе промени, една от които е създаването и на Вашия пост. Вие ще имате тежката задача да докажете, че сливането на постовете на Върховен представител по външната политика и сигурността и заместник-председател на Европейската комисия по външните отношения няма да бъде един неуспешен институционален експеримент, а важно завоевание.

С тази стъпка Европейският парламент получи много по-големи възможности да влияе върху външната политика на Европейския съюз. В своите предварителни отговори Вие заявихте, че през април ще представите проекта за организацията на Европейската служба за външна дейност, друго важно нововъведение на Договора от Лисабон.

Позволете ми да Ви запитам: готова ли сте да подкрепите настояването на Европейския парламент (...) предварително изслушване в комисията по външна политика и комисията по развитие?

(Председателят отнема думата на оратора)

1-012

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – It is an additional challenge to try and guess the question!

(Laughter)

However, never let it be said.

I think, Mr Vigenin, you were heading in the direction of looking for the relationship with Parliament again. So let me quickly just say a few things about that.

The first, as I have already indicated, is that Parliament has an extraordinarily important role to play in the development of this role – my role – and the development of the External Action Service. I will be coming to Parliament to share my views and ideas on the way to the Council decision, and I will be making sure that I am available for the committee as much as I possibly can be within, as I have said, the boundaries of the important, but quite enormous, job that I have.

I do want to make sure that this is a two-way street as well, so I hope the House will accept that I will also want to come and invite parliamentarians to give me their thoughts and ideas. As we work through how to make this effective on the ground, many of you have already asked me questions like: how will the services on the ground support parliamentarians, who are an integral part of visiting the regions, of actually developing the policy and so on? That is something we need to think about. Equally, how do we make sure that Parliament is able to talk with the appointed staff by letting them come forward when they have been in post to be able to talk about their areas of responsibility?

So I am looking for a framework that invites Parliament to play the full role that I would wish it to play and that it would expect to play, and I do, with the greatest respect, look for as many ideas as possible within the boundaries of what I am able to achieve.

I am not sure that answers your question, but it is a try.

1-013

Kristian Vigenin (S&D). – Sometimes it is difficult to speak in your own language, so I will try in English now. You almost got the question, but it was very concrete: would you agree that the high-ranking nominations in the External Action Service will have to come and have hearings in front of the Foreign Affairs and Development Committees, which is one of the issues that the European Parliament is very keen to do, because it is important to have really quality people in

this service, and we would like to ensure on behalf of the European citizens that this is the case?

My second question is not, by the way, a second question, Chair: it is the follow-up question that I was supposed to ask now. It was about the agreements with third countries. Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament has to approve these agreements, and we had the feeling that, so far, Parliament has not been properly consulted on these issues regarding human rights, for example. I would give the example with the partnership agreement with Libya. Can you assure us that the EP will be properly consulted from now on on this?

1-014

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – I will disappoint you on the first question because I am not convinced that Senate-style hearings, as I describe them, are the right way forward before appointment, not least because I think to single out one group of staff is very difficult. Having said that, I accept that it is important that, in the course of their work, those senior diplomats – as they will be – are able to come to Parliament. So we need to have a further conversation about that. I remain unconvinced about the idea of hearings.

In terms of agreements, I think the Treaty positions the European Parliament in the right way. Therefore, those issues of concern – particularly human rights, which a number of Members across the House have raised concerns about – should now be addressed through the way in which the Treaty describes the relationship.

1-015

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck (ALDE). – Among the many challenges you face, it seems to me that the main ones are the following.

Firstly, to establish your leadership over the EU's foreign and security policy, whilst coordinating the actions and rhetoric of the many partners in the field – for example the President of the Commission, the head of government of the Presidency-in-Office, and the other Commissioners, most importantly your colleague responsible for enlargement and neighbourhood policy.

Your second challenge, as you said, is the launching of the European External Action Service, and there you will also need to establish your leadership over the many interested partners while working closely, as you promised, with Parliament and with this committee.

So my blunt question is: how do you intend to establish your leadership – and I stress leadership – in these and all other CFSP matters?

1-016

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Thank you for the question. You are right to say that there are a variety of different people, with clear responsibilities.

I want to establish my leadership in a number of ways, and I have done quite a lot of work on this in the very few weeks since I last saw you all.

First of all, the Treaty is very clear about responsibilities, and in the end the Treaty is the reference point for all of us when looking at our responsibilities. Already, in my discussions both with the President of the Commission and with the President of the Council, we have been clear about ensuring that those responsibilities are identified, and in a sense I take my lead from that.

Secondly, the purpose of bringing all this together was precisely to bring coherence into a system so that there was a common policy – a common strategy – that brought the institutions together. So, in looking at the role of the three Commissioners with whom I will work closely, we have been very clear to identify that the responsibility lies with my role to set out the strategic framework and the strategic direction of our policy with Parliament, with the Council and with the Commission and, in doing that, for the Commissioners to work with me to deliver that strategic direction. We are very clear and very comfortable about that. I have met the three Commissioners-designate separately, and together as a team, and with the President of the Commission as a team, in order to work this through. So we feel very comfortable. We have plenty of practical things to work out, but we are comfortable as regards delivering the direction.

Again, in terms of the Foreign Affairs Council, my role is to be its Chair and to preside over it, and that is what I will do. So, while there is much to do, there is actually great clarity about the role.

1-017

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck (ALDE). – Thank you for your answer, which I felt was the beginning of a satisfactory response.

I would like to come back to what the previous speaker asked. I was quite surprised at what you said, namely at your lack of enthusiasm for subjecting the main nominees for head-of-delegation posts to hearings by Parliament. Could you explain a little further where this reluctance stems from?

1-018

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Yes, I am happy to. I always find it difficult to disappoint Parliament but, occasionally, I am afraid, I do and I will.

My thinking is this. First of all, we are creating a service built on a service that already exists, expanding into something new, but where we have had people working in the field for whom we have the highest respect and who, with Parliament, I know, have engaged in the right and appropriate way. That seemed to me to be working very well. It seemed to be that those heads of delegation

that have been to Parliament felt this was a very worthwhile and important exercise. If they have not done enough of it, I think we should do more.

Secondly, I do not want this to become a long, protracted process of appointment when it has already got to be something that we get in place as quickly as possible. We need a proper personnel strategy for appointment that is transparent and consistent, that takes into account equal opportunities and so on. That I will do, and that I will come to Parliament with.

1-019

Franziska Katharina Brantner (Verts/ALE). – Herzlich willkommen auch im Namen der Fraktionen der Grünen und EFA! Sie haben es schon angesprochen: Der Lissabon-Vertrag zielte darauf, die Kakophonie zwischen Kommission und Rat zu beseitigen, daher Ihre Doppelfunktion. Aber Herr Barroso hat Sie nach dem Motto „teile und herrsche“ erst einmal kaltgestellt und Ihnen einen der wichtigsten Bereiche der Außenpolitik weggenommen: die Nachbarschaftspolitik. Diese reicht von der Ukraine über Georgien bis Israel, Palästina und Tunesien. Das sind breite Bereiche. Sie sagten, Sie würden die Strategie machen, er die Implementierung. Aber in der Außenpolitik reicht die Strategie meist einen halben Tag, und dann kommt die wirkliche Aktion, und dann haben Sie nichts mehr zu sagen. Daher meine Frage an Sie: Werden Sie auch auf die Nachbarschaftspolitik für den Auswärtigen Dienst verzichten und vor allem auf die Gelder in der Nachbarschaftspolitik?

1-020

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security. – Thank you for the warm welcome, but I suppose I dispute the premise of the question and I think that will not surprise you in any way.

Here is what we have sought to do. I have worked with the President of the Commission in the proposals that he has put forward; indeed he discussed his proposals with me before he put them into action.

When you look at the role I have: as everyone has said, it is a big role that covers a huge amount of the landscape, and there are particular issues within it that we need to be very clear about in terms of how we implement our policies. Therefore, we have designated particular responsibilities within the cluster of Commissioners who work with me. Of course they will be having their hearings, and you and others will have the opportunity to hear directly from them.

Regarding what we are seeking to do – say, first of all, on development – it is important that there is somebody who is watching over the implementation of EDF. That is very important. Parliament has a key role; the Committee on Development has a key role in that. We may return to that in later questions.

Then, in terms of neighbourhood policy, I have identified and said that our relationship with our

neighbourhood is fundamental in terms of the policies that we pursue, where we are, if you like, in the lead. Having a Commissioner who is working with me to support that strategy means that we will develop expertise in the neighbourhood in a way that, with all the responsibilities that I have, I simply could not do.

Thirdly, as you will hear, if we have someone who is looking after the kind of coordination around regional bodies – ASEAN and so on – so we have someone who is focusing on those bodies, that adds to and enriches the role that I have.

1-021

Franziska Katharina Brantner (Verts/ALE). – Ich muss sagen, dass mich Ihre Antwort etwas überrascht, wenn Sie sagen, dass Sie bei den vielen Verantwortlichkeiten die Nachbarschaftspolitik nicht auch noch übernehmen könnten und deswegen froh seien, wenn es Herr Füle macht. Wenn Ihnen die Verantwortlichkeiten zu viel sind, dann ist das vielleicht nicht der richtige Job für Sie. Denn es ist nun einmal die Aufgabe, die in dem Vertrag vorgesehen ist, diese Verantwortlichkeiten zusammenzubringen. Daher noch einmal meine Frage: Werden Sie diese Bereiche für den Auswärtigen Dienst zusammenbringen? Es geht um die Missionen in der Region und die Kommissionspolitik. Die Hälfte der GASP-Missionen ist in der Nachbarschaft, und der Vertrag zielte genau dahin, nämlich Kommissionspolitik und Missionen in diesen Ländern zusammenzubringen. Meine wirkliche Frage an Sie: Wollen Sie, dass wir die Kommission insgesamt ablehnen, wenn die Nachbarschaftspolitik nicht zu Ihnen wandert?

1-022

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – On your first question: actually I do not think we disagree. I agree that there is a lot to do and I am not trying to pick and choose. I am merely saying that you would be surprised if I did not come to tell you where I think my priorities ought to be, particularly in these initial phases. That, I think, is right and proper for me to do, so I am not disagreeing with you. I am merely trying to do it.

As far as I am concerned, the strategic objectives on neighbourhood policy fall within my remit. However, we have a Commissioner who will take responsibility with me. Štefan Füle, as Commissioner-designate, and I have already started to meet and discuss. We have already had some intensive discussions on some of the work that we might be able to do in the region, particularly in Bosnia, where I am very worried about what I have described as political stalemate but where there is much work to do.

I think this is a huge advantage, not a disadvantage, and I know that it will be Parliament that will keep an eye on and keep track of what happens, to make sure it works effectively.

1-023

Charles Tannock (ECR). – You were treasurer of the UK's CND in the 1980s, which in the last exchange you described as youthful idealism, but you did not specifically repudiate their policies.

Given that, as well as being in charge of foreign policy, you are also now the EU's political supremo in charge of security and defence policies, it is important for this Parliament to know – and for the Member States, two of which, France and the UK, are nuclear powers, especially in the light of an Iran racing ahead to develop its own atomic weapons and the missile systems to deliver them – the answer to this question: Do you still support unilateral nuclear disarmament? A simple 'yes' or 'no' will suffice. If not, when and why did you change your mind?

And, still on the CFDP, are you in favour – 'yes' or 'no' – of a single EU military command centre in Brussels?

1-024

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – I am not sure I was as specific as saying 'youthful idealism'. However, the relevance of the 1970s is not the relevance of 2010. The proposals that were then part of a much bigger worldwide movement – I know that people want to pigeonhole it in some way, but it was indeed part of that – are not relevant now, and I am not a member of CND and have not been a member of CND for 28 or 29 years – I forget how long exactly.

The second thing that you asked me – more importantly – is about how we develop our relationships, as I interpret it, with NATO in particular. These are going to be very important, and I mentioned in my opening remarks that I had already met with the Secretary-General of NATO to work out how we can have a pragmatic and forward-looking relationship for the future, which I feel is going to be of great significance.

In terms of a single command structure, I remain to be convinced on this. One of the issues is whether, under the Berlin Plus agreements, our ability to work with NATO appropriately and to use NATO resources is developing well. This seems to have been the case on the two main occasions that have been of most relevance – one, of course, currently. I do not yet feel that we are anywhere close to a position of wanting a new structure.

There will be different views in this House. There will be different views across Member States. So, at the beginning of my tenure, what I will say to you is that I remain to be convinced by this, as I am not yet.

1-025

Charles Tannock (ECR). – You did not give me a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer to whether you are still in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament; I wanted a 'yes' or a 'no'.

My next question is on India, as the world's largest democracy and a key strategic and economic partner for the EU. How do you feel that EU-India relations could be enhanced further, particularly with regard to the fight against global terrorism, much of which comes from its neighbours Pakistan and Afghanistan?

What efforts will you make to accelerate the deep free trade agreement and enhance political cooperation between the EU and India? In particular, I would like your personal opinion on whether India should be a permanent member of the UN Security Council. If so, what other countries should be accorded such a position in your view? Finally, still in that region, what long-term security...

(The Chair cut off the speaker.)

1-026

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr Tannock, I fear I am back to guessing the end of the question, but I think I got the drift. I thought I had answered your question. I made the point that what was relevant in the 1970s is not relevant now. I am not a member, and have not been for a long time, and I do not believe that that strategy is now appropriate, not least because the European Union exists, in a way it did not before.

But what was youthful enthusiasm, to be opposed to nuclear proliferation, is still going to be relevant in the work that we do, because non-proliferation treaty issues will come back to us in May, and those are going to be very difficult discussions. I share with you one thing in common, though, which is that we in this House are all very concerned to make sure that we deal with issues of nuclear proliferation. If you disagree with what I did in the 1970s, so be it, but please do not try and label it as something more than what it was.

In terms of India, I think India has a very important strategic role, and indeed one of the things that I have been thinking about – and it may be that you can assist me in this thinking – is how best we can work collaboratively with India. I have met Prime Minister Singh on a couple of occasions. I have not had the privilege of discussing these issues with him, but I think India is an important player in the region, and we should be collaborating more fully with them. It is why I mentioned I will be visiting India as early on as I possibly can. I am not going to comment on the issues of the security...

(The Chair cut off the speaker.)

1-027

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL). – Madame la candidate Commissaire, dans votre propos liminaire, vous n'avez pas évoqué le partenariat transatlantique, qui a pourtant été qualifié de prioritaire, à la fois par le Conseil et par le Parlement européen. De la même manière, vous n'avez pas évoqué la formation du grand marché transatlantique. Je voulais donc vous demander

quelle participation vous comptiez prendre au développement de cette initiative, sachant que, par correction, je tiens à vous informer que je suis totalement en désaccord avec cette idée.

1-028

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – The translation of your words was ‘transatlantic market’ and I have to admit I do not quite know what that was. So let me answer about the relations with the United States in particular. Forgive me if I have not answered your question fully: you can come back to it.

The relationship with the United States is critical, they are our strategic partner in the world, and we stand, as I would describe it, side by side with them in many areas of the world where we need to make progress. We have different roles and different responsibilities. But nonetheless it is an important relationship.

Particularly from the Commission perspective, there are a number of strategic relationships that flow from that relationship: we have of course the Transatlantic Economic Council, we have the Energy Council, we have different ways in which we discuss our future in a transatlantic way, not least – and I speak as former Trade Commissioner – because of the amount of trade and investment that flies across the Atlantic and is of enormous significance to both of us in what we do.

I will pause there because I think I should give you time to put the question to me.

1-029

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL). – Madame, si vous ne savez pas ce qu'est le marché transatlantique, je vous renvoie à une résolution du Parlement européen, qui prévoit sa formation totalement ouverte pour 2015. Pour le reste, peut-être savez-vous comment se nomment les adversaires que nous affrontons en Afghanistan, puisque c'est la première présence militaire en importance pour l'Europe depuis la fin de la guerre. Et, dans ce cas, vous pourrez nous dire, à votre avis, quand et sous quelle forme seront atteints les buts de guerre en Afghanistan, sachant encore une fois que je désapprouve cette présence militaire.

1-030

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Thank you for sending me the paper. That will be extremely valuable.

On Afghanistan, I was present when General McCrystal set out his ideas at the meeting with NATO. You will know what the President of the United States has already said in that context. The critical area of work for us is to coordinate more effectively what we do on the ground, and to see how best we can support the population-centred approach, which is the imagery used by General McCrystal in promoting what he sees as the way forward.

We already have some effective work on the ground, which I think we can make more effective. The meeting on Afghanistan on 28 January in London will be very significant in terms of looking at how we go forward in that way.

1-031

Bastiaan Belder (EFD). – Geachte kandidaat-vice-voorzitter van de Commissie, als voorzitter van de eerste delegatie wil ik u graag een vraag stellen over het Joodse karakter van de staat Israël. Ik neem aan dat u als nieuwe Hoge Vertegenwoordiger en vice-voorzitter van de Europese Commissie volledige overtuigd bent van de noodzaak pal te staan voor het Joodse karakter van de staat Israël. Bent u echter ook bereid van de Palestijnse autoriteit alsmede van de Arabische landen waarmee de Unie officiële betrekkingen onderhoudt, de onvoorwaardelijke erkenning van Israël als Joodse staat te verlangen? Immers zo niet, dan valt de grondslag weg van de tweestatenoplossing conform het verdelingsplan van de Verenigde Naties van 1947. Dus graag uw antwoord op die vraag.

1-032

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – What I am prepared to say is this: it is absolutely vital that we get progress in the Middle East and end up with two states that exist. The State of Israel has the right to exist securely and safely in the Middle East, as indeed does the Palestinian state.

How – the character and details of that – is not for me to decide. In a way, this is partly about the debates and discussions that go on internally in these nations and externally in the relations with them. I will no doubt find that I am discussing these issues when I have the privilege of visiting the Middle East, which I will do as soon as there is an appropriate moment and when they are available to receive me across the Middle East.

For me, the most important thing is that, at a time when – although there have been some difficulties over the weekend – we do have relative calm, people do not mistake that relative calm for some form of long-term security across the area, but rather see it as an opportunity to now move forward with the process. We need to find ways in which we can re-engage.

I have mentioned that tomorrow Senator Mitchell will be here, Tony Blair will be here and the so-called ‘Paris Group’ is meeting. All of these meetings will be very important in helping me work through how best we can help give this region the impetus to end up living in a peaceful and secure way.

1-033

Bastiaan Belder (EFD). – Mijn tweede vraag gaat over de betrekkingen tussen de EU en Israël. Acht u het niet opportuun, of eigenlijk urgent, om op zo kort mogelijke termijn een top EU-Israël te organiseren? Een dergelijke ontmoeting op het hoogste niveau zal naar mijn overtuiging immers bijdragen tot de intensivering en

opwaardering van de onderlinge relaties. Als de Europese Unie zo graag een constructieve rol, die ik ondersteun, wil spelen in het Midden-Oosten in deze periode - u sprak over een relatieve kalmte - en om vertrouwen te wekken bij de staat Israël en ook bij de huidige regering van Israël, acht ik het hoogst opportuun om een top EU-Israël te organiseren en te komen tot een opwaardering van de onderlinge relaties, die momenteel in een impasse verkeren. Graag uw reactie.

1-034

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – There is no proposal for a summit at present.

I think the underlying issue that you raise about the importance of strong relationships across the region is absolutely right, and that means with all countries there.

There are clearly roles that some of the nations surrounding the area have played that are going to be critical for the future. Our job is to develop the relationship sufficiently so that our own contribution can be as effective as possible. Members will have far greater knowledge than I of the specifics of what we have been seeking to do over the years.

For my part, I commit myself to trying to use the resources that we have on the ground, the approach that we have taken, as constructively as possible, to support overall the proposals as we move forward, to try and get a peaceful settlement as swiftly as possible and to enable the region to be enriched and grow economically, politically and in terms of the people who are actually there.

1-035

Barry Madlener (NI). – Ik wil het even met u hebben, mevrouw Ashton, over de schurkenstaat Iran en zijn pogingen een kernmacht te worden, wat een enorme bedreiging zou vormen voor het westen en ook voor Israël. Kunt u dit Parlement de belofte doen dat u er tijdens uw mandaat alles aan zult doen - en ik bedoel alles wat in uw macht ligt - om ervoor te zorgen dat Iran met Ahmadinejad geen kernmacht zal worden? Bent u bereid die belofte hier te doen?

1-036

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – I think it is highly regrettable that Iran did not accept the agreement that was proposed by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Honourable Members know that this is a country that is steeped in history, and I think it has made mistakes. It feels misunderstood, of course, as well, but there are international rules that we have, and, if the country wants to be treated as I believe its history, its geography and its people deserve to be treated, then it has to work with us. I deplore all the violations of human rights that we have seen and, of course, I want to be ready for dialogue. But it is not an excuse to play for time.

Over the last six years, as honourable Members know, this process has been going on. Lots of patience has been shown. We have made positive moves. High Representative Solana, in his capacity, had meetings. We have made proposals. So we need to be prepared to have dialogue, but only dialogue based on the principles that we have set out. You are right that we have got to make sure that, as we move forward, we are clear about the outcome that we want to see. That is why we have meetings coming up for the E3+3 in New York, when they will come back to us with their views, and of course the Council will make its own views known as well. So we are very clear about what we want to see for Iran for the future.

1-037

Barry Madlener (NI). – Het doel dat we willen bereiken, ik denk dat dat helder is: namelijk dat Iran geen kernmacht zal worden. Kunnen we het eens zijn over dat doel, dat Iran dus nooit kernwapens in handen zal krijgen? U spreekt over internationale regels, maar wat als Ahmadinejad en Iran lak hebben aan internationale regels, zich niet houden aan afspraken - bent u dan bereid om harde maatregelen te treffen tegen Iran, samen met onze NAVO-bondgenoten en Israël?

1-038

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs. – The issue that will be being discussed in the E3+3 is what we call the ‘twin-track approach’, which has been the dialogue which we must always be ready to have in the context as I have described it, and also to look at what other measures – economic, particularly – would be appropriate. That is the context in which we will be taking forward our discussions, and those will be the discussions at the Council in the context of the future as well.

Can I just say, as I have mentioned before to Mr Tannock, that there is the Non-Proliferation Treaty conference coming up later in the spring and early summer, which is going to be significant in itself but also thinking about the broader questions of non-proliferation across the world.

1-039

Heidi Hautala (Verts/ALE), Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights. – Baroness Ashton, since our first exchange of views here in the Parliament you have with some vigour restated your belief in quiet diplomacy as the way for the European Union’s voice to be heard in the world. Now how do we know that this is not just a way to avoid raising important human rights issues in situations where you need to be very clear and vocal? And you know that Parliament’s tradition is to be clear and vocal when needed, because we need to address the public in our countries and in the countries where we perceive severe violations of human rights.

I would like to test you a little bit. Would you for instance be willing and prepared to go and meet different kinds of human rights defenders in the countries you

visit – representatives of different ethnic and sexual minorities, people who are in danger? Would you do that in public?

1-040

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Let me explain what I meant and then answer your question directly.

When I talked about quiet diplomacy, that does not mean that I myself am necessarily very quiet. What I meant was that there are many occasions when talking to people without the full glare of publicity can be more effective; where giving others the credit for the ideas that are generated can be more effective; allowing the space, in political terms, for the conclusions to be reached. I meant quiet in the sense that sometimes – and I am not suggesting for one moment that this has happened to my predecessors – being heard loudly across the international stage does not get you the effect that you want.

My interest is in outcomes. My interest is in making sure that, at the end, we have actually achieved what we want to achieve. You will know better than I do that across the world there are different approaches to human rights issues that can be more effective in particular countries. What I was trying to do was simply to say that I want to differentiate the most effective approach for different countries and think through how effective we have already been and whether the strategy we are pursuing is the right one.

That is what I mean. It does not mean that I would for one moment renounce or turn away from my commitment on human rights. It is why I did all the things that I have done all my life. It is an absolute 100% commitment that I give you. The issue is really the methodology.

In terms of meeting other organisations, the first thing I want to do is to talk to the NGOs in Europe on human rights. Again, perhaps, I can look to you to help me in this. I know some of them very well – for example Liberty in the United Kingdom, extremely well – but I want to talk to many others across Europe in order to get their expertise and advice on what we might do, and of course meet others outside as appropriate.

1-041

Arnaud Danjean (PPE), *président de la sous-commission "sécurité et défense"*. – Madame Ashton, vous aurez en charge la politique de sécurité et de défense commune, dont la crédibilité et l'efficacité reposent, au-delà des institutions et des opérations qu'elle conduit, sur les efforts en matière capacitaire.

Des objectifs ambitieux sont régulièrement posés, mais les résultats sont pour le moins inégaux. Cela vaut aussi pour les programmes industriels menés à l'échelle européenne. Vous allez présider l'Agence européenne de défense et, en tant que vice-présidente de la Commission, vous serez particulièrement bien placée

pour avoir une vue sur les enjeux transversaux auxquels sont confrontées nos industries de défense, en matière de concurrence, en matière de politique commerciale et en matière de financement des questions de recherche et de développement. J'aurais donc aimé connaître vos vues sur ce sujet.

1-042

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy* – Two thoughts on that. First of all the European Defence Agency and the importance of its role in the kind of coordination that we have already seen – helicopter missions and so on – but perhaps thinking more about the research and development issues across Member States and the opportunity, which I think we want, to see how we can add value, if you like, by economies of scale in the best sense of the term. Not taking something away from Member States but looking at how we can collaborate and coordinate. It is quite clear to me, from what I have seen and from the discussions I have already begun, that there is more to be done on that.

Purely from the Commission side, we have within the Commission responsibilities on research, on education and so on that I think could also play into a broader thinking about what we might do in terms of ensuring that we have the capabilities and the capacity and that we are strategically – again, that word – thinking about what we want to do in fields of operation.

Finally, as I have said before, I want to strengthen and develop our relationship with NATO and the Secretary-General appropriately, to see how that would best fit for the future, bearing in mind that we need to make sure that it is an appropriate relationship in all cases.

So those are the sorts of things that I have been thinking about: how to get greater collaboration, particularly on research and development, and the role of the Defence Agency and whether we need to strengthen that. Certainly we need to look at it properly and see how it can be made more effective.

1-043

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (PPE). – Cuentan, señora Ashton, que el maestro del campeón de ajedrez Bobby Fisher un día le quiso dar una lección al campeón, tirando todas las fichas del tablero de ajedrez, y le dijo: «Ahora, con el tablero vacío, ¡diseña la gran jugada!»

Ver lo que no se ve y anticipar el final antes de empezar es una cualidad que se tiene que predicar no sólo de un campeón de ajedrez sino también de una mujer o de un hombre político.

La pregunta es muy sencilla, señora Ashton: ¿tiene usted la capacidad de tener una visión estratégica para que la Unión Europea disponga de una política exterior que sea coherente con nuestros valores, visible y, sobre todo, eficaz para evitar hechos tan lamentables como el que se produjo en el mes de diciembre, cuando el candidato

européenne al puesto de Presidente de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas perdió por un solo voto, habiendo votado en contra varios Estados miembros?

Y si tiene esa capacidad, como yo espero, ¿cuáles serían las limitaciones personales, materiales y presupuestarias para llevarla a efecto?

1-044

Richard Howitt (S&D). – There are obviously some sour grapes concerning Baroness Ashton's nomination. For the British Conservatives – for Members who are barely Members of this Parliament – to drag up allegations from a time when Britain was barely a member of the European Union, simply shows where they would like to take Britain back to.

(Intervention from the floor)

Baroness Ashton, I also want to welcome what you said in response to the questionnaire about making human rights a priority, as well as the fact that, in your answers today, you have said you will fully uphold the Treaty on Human Rights. However, I should like to add something on this question.

You talk about different approaches on human rights, but human rights are universal. How do you reconcile those approaches, and how do you explain the fact that, while our guidelines and obligations under the Treaty are clear, our implementation is far from clear and far from successful? How do you intend to improve that?

1-045

Dominique Baudis (PPE). – Madame la Vice-présidente, d'après vous, quel rôle doivent jouer l'Union européenne et l'Union pour la Méditerranée dans la recherche d'une solution à la crise du Proche-Orient? Si l'on ne veut pas continuer à laisser les États-Unis intervenir seuls, et finalement sans grand succès, l'Europe doit exercer ses responsabilités dans la crise israélo-palestinienne. Quelles initiatives envisagez-vous pour favoriser la création d'un État palestinien avec Jérusalem-Est pour capitale?

1-046

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mrs Salafranca, having the one vision is very important. It is not about taking all the chess pieces off the board, because the work done by my two predecessors was extraordinary. They achieved a huge amount and created strong reputations for themselves, on behalf of the European Union, across the world. I pay enormous tribute to them.

I am therefore building on a strong base. However, they would be the first two people to say that we now need to bring together that expertise and experience into one service and – if you like – one person, but one person acting as a team with many, many others. I would describe it like this: whoever speaks it should be with the same voice – 27 foreign ministers, the European Commission, the President of the Council, the President

of the Commission, the Members of this House and me. That is one voice; that is Europe, speaking from a strategic perspective which makes sense. This is our greatest goal.

In terms of budget, I am realistic. I am realistic about what Member States have got and I am realistic about the future. I want to try, as far as I can, to live within what we have. I will come back and reflect further on this, but that gives you the essence of what I feel.

Mr Howitt, human rights are indeed universal. You are completely right. I merely say that achieving those universal rights sometimes requires different approaches, because of different cultures and different nations and different ways to go forward. That has certainly been my experience historically.

Our delegations and services on the ground – our External Action Service – have a critical role to play in making sure that they become, in a sense, the people who pull together that thinking, that strategic work, on the ground. I hope that we will be able to work together to describe that, and to make it a real part of what the Service should actually do, which makes it unique, and different from Member States, but builds on what Member States are doing.

Mr Baudis, in terms of the Union for the Mediterranean, this is an important body but it has had a difficult time because of the blockage from the Arab nations, which effectively meant that through 2009 not much was able to be achieved. The Quartet is significant as well, and most recently there has been a proposal from Russia, which is of great importance, that the Quartet principals should meet in February. So we have a combination of what the Quartet does and the role of the European Union – and I hear what you say about the need for strength in that relationship and strength in our role – but we can also look, for example, to the Mediterranean, where you have over 40 states coming together, with the whole of that region in a sense able to play a role. We have to put to work everything that we have to try and find a way of reaching a settlement, and I feel that the Council conclusions are a good place to start in terms of what we want to achieve.

1-047

Véronique De Keyser (S&D). – Madame Ashton, vous avez, dans votre exposé, rappelé à quel point vous vouliez avoir une politique centrée sur les résultats. Et vous avez eu des paroles très courageuses au mois de décembre, en rappelant les conclusions du Conseil à propos de Jérusalem-Est et en disant très clairement que le temps était venu de passer à l'action et de mettre en pratique les conclusions du Conseil.

Je reprends la question de M. Baudis: comment allez-vous faire, compte tenu de ces conclusions du Conseil qui concernent Jérusalem-Est, qui concernent Gaza, qui concernent quantité de domaines, pour obtenir des résultats? Vous dites: "Je vais voir M. Blair." Mais M. Blair a été nommé par M. Bush comme représentant

spécial au niveau du Quartet. Vous, et je l'espère en tant que socialiste femme, vous serez nommée par nous. C'est absolument différent. M. Blair n'a pas obtenu de résultats. Nous attendons des résultats dans ce domaine, et je voudrais bien savoir quelles sont vos pistes.

1-048

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE). – Commissioner-designate, according to the European Parliament, energy security is a foreign policy issue. My question is: how do you intend to compel or convince Russia not to use energy supplies as a foreign policy instrument vis-à-vis Member States? How do you intend to protect our eastern neighbours and partners from political pressures through energy deliveries?

1-049

Norica Nicolai (ALDE). – I have a concrete question and I hope that we can have a concrete answer. My question is related to Afghanistan, and is inspired by your written answer. What are the next steps in your vision for Afghanistan?

1-050

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Mrs De Keyser, you are absolutely right to say that what you are looking for now is results. I sense the frustration, not just from you, but also in this House and elsewhere, over what is an incredibly difficult situation in the Middle East.

The Council conclusion was significant because it brought us together in saying very clearly what we thought. For me the next steps are to work on establishing precisely what we think is working, within our work in the area, and where we think we can do more by bringing things together – which is of course part of it – but also to think through the politics and policies that need to flow from that.

I am not trying to position Mr Blair in any way other than the fact that, because he is here tomorrow, I will see him – I have not seen him before – and I will see Senator Mitchell. I have seen Mark Otter, who is our special representative, and I will see him again. I think he is in town this week. I have already had the beginnings of a conversation with Secretary of State Clinton, which I will pursue.

However, what I am not going to do is rush into trying to give you a solution when I do not yet know where we have been most effective, where we could be most effective and where we now need to put our energies. What I am absolutely clear on is that I intend to make sure this is what we do.

We will no doubt come back to this subject time and again in Parliament – and rightly – as we begin to work this through. I have begun the conversations, I have begun to talk about what we can do and I am much more familiar with where the issues and problems will be, but we still need to pull together the solutions. That is going to be of great significance for the money that we are

putting into the area, for the work that we are doing with the Palestinian Authority, in particular, and the work that Egypt and others are beginning to do as well.

Mr Saryusz-Wolski, you asked me about Russian foreign policy and about energy. There are a number of points here. First of all, we have to have a strong relationship with Russia. Secondly, we have to have a clear energy strategy that will also allow us to diversify our energy needs, aware that we currently rely on Russia for 50% of needs but, if you project forward, that this will rise, potentially, to 70%. In terms of energy diversification, both in terms of the use of different kinds of energy, such as wind power and solar power – for some Member States this is about nuclear power too – and of course of the building of different pipelines – I have actually got a map showing the pipelines with me – and looking at what we might do, it is very important that we recognise that some of the issues have been political issues and not economic ones and that we exert pressure to make sure that Russia does not see them as political. There is a lot we can do with Ukraine on that, which I will come back to because I am about to run out of time.

On Afghanistan, the next steps are going to be very important. We really need to come back to this after the conference. We have had some really good successes. The amount of change in primary health care – from 2002, when there was 7% delivery, to 85% delivery now – is really good. However, there is a huge amount still to do on the ground. What I want to do is provide some really strong concrete results for the people of Afghanistan through what we do.

1-051

Mario Mauro (PPE). – Signora Ashton, in merito all'ipotesi da più parti ventilata di poter ottenere per l'Unione europea un seggio comune all'interno del Consiglio di sicurezza dell'ONU, quale delle diverse possibilità evocate dagli Stati membri lei ritiene la più adeguata, e soprattutto, in ogni caso, quale strategia intende perseguire come Unione europea per conseguire questo obiettivo?

1-052

Vincent Peillon (S&D). – Madame Ashton, vous êtes déjà revenue deux fois sur l'Union pour la Méditerranée, dont la présidence espagnole a dit qu'elle ferait une priorité. Mais comme vous le savez, il y aura au mois de juin une rencontre importante au cours de laquelle le plan biennuel de fonctionnement de l'Union pour la Méditerranée sera décidé.

J'aimerais savoir quelles seront les initiatives concrètes que vous allez prendre pour faire en sorte qu'après tous les blocages, il y ait déblocage. J'aimerais en même temps savoir quelles sont vos priorités par rapport à ce plan biennuel. Et, enfin, j'aimerais savoir – vous connaissez la position du Parlement, qui ne veut pas que l'on finance l'UPM en prenant sur les fonds déjà existants pour le partenariat – ce que vous avez prévu concernant les moyens financiers.

1-053

Werner Schulz (Verts/ALE). – Lady Ashton, ich wünsche Ihnen viel Erfolg für Ihre wichtige und schwierige Aufgabe und gehe davon aus, dass Sie trotz der Kompetenzbescheidung in der Nachbarschaftspolitik für die Beziehungen zu Russland noch voll und ganz verantwortlich sind. Ihr Landsmann und Vorgänger Chris Patton hat unlängst festgestellt, dass hier die größten Defizite in der EU-Außenpolitik liegen. Deswegen meine Fragen: Werden Sie der Orientierung des Parlaments folgen und den Begriff strategische Partnerschaft durch Modernisierungspartnerschaft austauschen? Werden Sie die Schwerpunkte außer Energiesicherheit und neue Qualität beschreiben können? Setzen Sie sich dafür ein, dass ein spezielles Kapitel Menschenrechte aufgenommen wird, wie die Sacharow-Preisträger unlängst in Straßburg gefordert haben?

1-054

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. My answer to that question is very simple: I do not know. The reason for that is that in the five weeks – two of which were Christmas – I have actually been dealing with issues, this has not even crossed into my thinking. I am afraid you have caught me out – well done – on an issue which I do not know about.

Certainly, I know from what you say, and without any further thinking, that there will be a variety of different views across the European Union on this.

What is very important, of course, is that the European Union, in the form of our staff members in the Security Council, spoke this week on this. I will myself be speaking in the Security Council at an appropriate moment.

In terms of seats, we will have to see, but if I may I will come back to this. I am being very honest with you.

As I see it, the Union for the Mediterranean, which is of course built on what used to be the Barcelona Process, has a large number of interesting and interested countries working with it, and its biggest potential is in some of the regional work that has already gone on to provide resources, finances and so on for some very interesting projects in education and other fields, as you know.

We will have to wait and see how it evolves. Obviously, with the end of the French joint chairmanship, there are some discussions to be had about what happens next. For example, because it operates at head of state level, whether there is a role for the President of the Council, and how we should take that forward. We have not had those discussions yet.

What I am keen to do is to make sure that it actually is as effective as it should be. If we are going to have it, it needs to work effectively. It has had a very difficult year

which now seems to be getting better, but we need to take it forward.

It also needs to fit within the broader neighbourhood policy that we have. All of these very important ways of working – such as the Union for the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership – are very significant, but also need to fit within that broader policy. I think it does fit, but we just need to reinvigorate that a little bit and make sure that we are as clear about it as we could be.

Mr Schultz, in terms of ‘overlap’, I would not describe this as overlap. I think it is about working collaboratively together, rather than overlap. I know that on the few occasions I have been at summits with Russia, and with President Medvedev in particular, there have been the beginnings of a conversation about this partnership of the future. We are in the middle of trying to review/revise the association partnership agreements. There is a lot of work to be done on that, and we are not making very good progress in some areas, but certainly the human rights questions you would expect from this House become, and always have been, in a sense, part of what we do.

Returning to my earlier answers, it is about finding the appropriate ways of raising issues and finding the appropriate mechanisms we want that will get us the results that we want. That is what I really want to focus on. The end results we want are absolutely clear. What I need to think about is how we get there.

1-055

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). – Baroness Ashton, as you now have responsibility for running military missions of the European Union, I wonder if you have ever even visited a military unit – apart from Greenham Common, that is!

In your written answer you say that the EU is committed in Afghanistan with its military force. Do you actually understand that the European Union has no military force in Afghanistan? It is, however, spending a lot of money there. Do you know how much money is being spent each year by the EU in Afghanistan? What steps have been taken to ensure that funds are not misappropriated and that ineffective missions such as EUPOL are reconfigured?

1-056

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE). – Baroness Ashton, if there is a clear conflict of opinions between the Council and the Commission, where do you stand? Where is your first loyalty?

I will give you two examples. Iraq: what is your opinion on the war? Is it justified or not? There are different opinions in the Council. The second is the Charter on Human Rights. Two Member States did not ratify it. How do you pursue it? What is your opinion on that?

1-057

Pier Antonio Panzeri (S&D). – Signora Ashton, immaginando che la politica estera e la politica di

vicinato siano davvero parte integrante di una strategia europea unitaria, volevo evidenziare che nelle relazioni tra Unione europea e paesi del Maghreb un passo importante è stato segnato dall'adozione del documento congiunto che stabilisce lo statuto avanzato con il Marocco.

Il documento stabilisce un percorso da seguire per lo sviluppo delle relazioni bilaterali e approfondisce l'attuale accordo di associazione, ma soprattutto prevede la creazione di un *summit* UE-Marocco.

A quali nuovi sviluppi potrà portare il summit nel contesto avanzato di questo statuto avanzato, e soprattutto, ritiene che quella dello statuto avanzato possa essere una strada proponibile per altri paesi del Maghreb, a partire dalla Tunisia?

1-058

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Mr Van Orden, I think what we are trying to do in Afghanistan is really significant. The question of understanding why we are there at all is very important. I think it is absolutely critical that the European Union is playing its part in that process. We do spend a lot of money. I do not have the exact figure for this year in front of me, but I have been looking at all the figures – not only for this year but where we might go in the future – and, most importantly, looking at the results we have had. I have already mentioned one of them, which concerned primary health care.

I want to look at EUPOL. We set ourselves a target of 400 police officers. We do not have that many but there is a great deal of evidence to suggest it is becoming more and more effective as an operation in what it is seeking to do. But there are lots of other issues that we need to address. For example, many of the local offices – for example in the local government of Afghanistan – do not even have telephones on their desks. There are huge amounts of potential for where we might be able to add value.

That is the approach I am going to take. It is about recognising that there are military issues, which are linked to economic and political issues. Our role as the EU may not be military but the role certainly is in terms of our Member States and the objectives we set ourselves for making sure that we counter terrorism and that we collaborate effectively together. That is what I will seek to try to do.

Mrs Oomen-Ruijten, regarding my first loyalty – that is a great question to ask – the issue for me is not to be in that position. The issue for me is about bringing together the Council and the Commission – with your help, might I add – in order to be able to establish this strategic and common policy in the right way. My experience of being on the Council as a justice minister for three years and my experience as a Commissioner is that there is enormous goodwill to try and reach conclusion. I have already witnessed that in both the Foreign Affairs

Council and in terms of the Commission. People want to try and find a way through it. My job is to try and steer our way through so that we come up with a common policy, but – as I said when I came to discuss this informally with you – around the highest common factor, not the lowest common denominator. It is very important that we do the very best we can to achieve that.

In terms of issues like the Iraq war, we are where we are. I was a British minister at the time the Iraq war began. I believed it was the right thing to do, based on what I knew at that time. There we are.

The question now is: how do we make sure that Iraq, in terms of the future, is a stable, prosperous country? In terms of how we look at the future in all the work that we do, it should be clear that our objective should be that we try to support stability, prosperity, peace, human rights – the things that we believe in – where we operate in the world. That should be the guideline for what we do.

1-059

Michael Gahler (PPE). – Baroness Ashton, seit zehn Jahren gibt es eine Europäische Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik, und seit 2003 haben wir eine Europäische Sicherheitsstrategie, die 2008 aktualisiert wurde. Auch unsere zivilen und militärischen Planungsstäbe wurden 2009 fusioniert. Trotzdem erleben wir oftmals nationale Alleingänge, die die Wirksamkeit gemeinsamer Politiken unterlaufen. Wie stehen Sie in diesem Zusammenhang zur Forderung des Europäischen Parlaments nach einem Weißbuch zur Europäischen Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik?

Und weil Sie schon etwas zum operationellen Hauptquartier gesagt haben: Meinen Sie nicht, dass es sinnvoller wäre, zivile und militärische Planungen, die hier erfolgen, auch mit einem solchen eigenen Hauptquartier umzusetzen, anstatt zu hoffen, dass ein Hauptquartier in einem Mitgliedstaat unsere Planungen genauso gut umsetzt?

1-060

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – Spoštovana kandidatka, drugega decembra sem vas v imenu ALDE vprašal o vašem videnju prihodnosti Bosne in Hercegovine in vloge Evropske unije. Zelo ste bili redkobesedni in zelo zadržani. V mesecu dni so se razmere zelo poslabšale. Vodja vašega urada v Sarajevu Valentin Incko poziva k preventivnemu delovanju. Čas se hitro izteka. Konsenza za ustavne spremembe ni. Napoved in konkretni koraki za izvedbo referendumu o samostojnosti Republike Srbske grozijo z realno nevarnostjo razpada Bosne in Hercegovine. Razpad Bosne in Hercegovine pa bi drastično poslabšal razmere v širši regiji. Kaj in kdaj nameravate predlagati in storiti na področju kriznega upravljanja v Bosni in Hercegovini? Naj vas spomnim: letos bo 15. obletnica genocida v Srebrenici in to je dodaten element, ki ga moramo upoštevati.

1-061

Χαράλαμπος Αγγουράκης (GUE/NGL). – Κύριε Πρόεδρε, κατ' αρχήν θα ήθελα να εκφράσω και εγώ την αντίθεσή μου στην υποψηφιότητα της κ. Ashton γιατί ακριβώς εξυπηρετεί την πολιτική της Λισσαβώνας για την οποία εκφραστήκαμε αρνητικά πολλαπλώς. Η απάντηση της κ. Ashton στο ερωτηματολόγιο του Κοινοβουλίου, και μάλιστα στο σημείο 3, μας δικαιώνει πλήρως. Θέλω να μου πει η κ. Ashton γιατί δεν είναι διατεθειμένη να παρέχει στο Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο πληροφορίες και έγγραφα σε ίση βάση με το Συμβούλιο. Σε αυτήν την ερώτηση η κ. Ashton δεν απάντησε. Επίσης θα ήθελα να μου πει τι προτίθεται να κάνει ώστε να αλλάξει η απαράδεκτη κοινή θέση της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης απέναντι στην Κούβα ώστε να υπάρχουν ομαλές σχέσεις με αυτή τη χώρα. Θα ήθελα γενικά να σημειώσω ότι η κ. Ashton - κατά τη γνώμη μου, ευτυχώς - δεν τοποθετήθηκε καθόλου στο θέμα των σχέσεων με τη Λατινική Αμερική.

1-062

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – I am going to start with Mr Panzeri, because I completely failed to answer him, and I apologise. I just got my notes mixed up.

Morocco summit: we do not have a plan, but you are absolutely right to point to the engagement we need with the Maghreb countries, and in some of the thinking that we need to do around the neighbourhood strategy and beyond, that will be a part of it. I again apologise that I did not answer you properly.

Mr Gahler, on the civil and military staff, I do not know much about the white paper at this point. I am sure I will get more information on that. Going it alone: I think what we have got to be clear about is that Member States have responsibility in their own defence issues too, so I do not really know what you are referring to in terms of going it alone.

What I am interested in is, where we have decided to work together and to make that a part of what we do, we should do it. In terms of the commands so far, if you take, for example, the command that happens to be in the UK at Northwood under Admiral Hudson, that has been a very effective way of using resources of individual Member States effectively rather than trying to put resources into our own command structure. What I was trying to suggest was that I remain to be convinced that that is the best use of resources at this particular time, and that remains my answer on that.

In terms of Bosnia, Mr Kacin, you are absolutely right. There are some real issues, and indeed we have had several meetings. Valentin Inzko and I have met several times, most recently last week, with others, to talk through the strategy. It is quite clear to me that this is one country with different communities that need to coexist – with pride in themselves, but they need to do so. They can have as many referendums as they like, but in the end this is about one country coming together. But

how it does that is an issue that we need to debate and discuss.

I am very interested, as the elections come forward in October, that we make sure, in these months that lead up to it, that the benefits and recognition that – I think it was Lord Ashdown that used to say that the prospect of EU membership was the glue that held it together.

Valentin Inzko tells me that that is still the case, that we are out there explaining why being part of Europe and why the opportunities for the future of what Europe could give could have such an important benefit.

I feel we need to reach beyond these political leaders, much more into where the people are and actually be explaining to them the benefits, because most people in this country want to live in peace and want to live together in a way that works for them, and that is what we have got to seek to do.

I will go to the region. We have not yet quite set the date for that, but I am in touch with Valentin Inzko. He has my number; we speak a lot to make sure that we are also giving him the support that he needs at the present time.

And, in terms of the number of questions that were asked, you did not ask me one, you asked me four – I am glad you are not against me. If you want to be against the Lisbon Treaty, that is up to you, but, guess what, in terms of information and documents, I am a person who supports freedom of information, but I am also very conscious of being clear about what we can give and what we cannot give and when, and we need to think about that.

On Cuba, I am really worried about the human rights situation in Cuba; let me say that very clearly. As far as I am concerned, we have had 13 years of a strategy. We need to look at whether that is working effectively. But I take nothing away from the real and significant problems that exist within the country.

1-063

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE). – Unia Europejska jest oczywiście zaangażowana w wiele konfliktów międzynarodowych, które toczą się w różnych regionach świata. Moim zdaniem jednym z priorytetów powinno być nasze zaangażowanie w te konflikty, które toczą się na terenie kontynentu europejskiego. Wspominaliśmy tutaj już o sytuacji na Bałkanach, inni koledzy o tym mówili, ale mamy jeszcze nierozwiązane konflikty w Gruzji, której integralność terytorialna została naruszona, mamy konflikt w Górnym Karabachu, mamy konflikt w Nadniestrzu (części Mołdowy, która jest pod kontrolą separatystów). Jak Pani widzi zaangażowanie Unii Europejskiej i Pani osobiście w te konflikty? One mają pewny wspólny mianownik, to jest również stosunek Rosji do tych terytoriów i do tych konfliktów. Jak Pani zamierza przekonać Rosję, aby porzuciła politykę pewnej sfery wpływów, na którą tylko ona – jej zdaniem – ma mieć wpływ?

1-064

Ana Gomes (S&D). – Many of us believe that, if there is not a radical recalibration of the Iranian regime's attitude to the nuclear file, the UN partners will need to be smart and impose targeted sanctions which do not cripple the people of Iran but neatly hurt the regime. Since this is also directly linked to the human rights situation in Iran, I would like to ask you what you think about the role of the EU. Should the EU do its utmost to assist those who are fighting for democracy and freedom in Iran, namely with a view to breaking the regime's stranglehold on information in the media? Are you keeping up with the Commission's plans to finance a new TV channel in Farsi?

1-065

Γεώργιος Κουμουτσάκος (PPE). – Κυρία Αντιπρόεδρε, δύο από τα σημαντικά νέα στοιχεία που έφερε η Συνθήκη της Λισσαβόνας στον τομέα της κοινής εξωτερικής πολιτικής και της πολιτικής ασφάλειας και άμυνας είναι δύο ρήτρες: η ρήτρα αμοιβαίας υποστήριξης ("mutual assistance clause") και η ρήτρα αλληλεγγύης ("solidarity clause"). Συγκεκριμένα όσον αφορά τη ρήτρα αμοιβαίας υποστήριξης, το άρθρο 42, παράγραφος 7 της Συνθήκης αναφέρει ότι, εάν ένα κράτος μέλος υποστεί στρατιωτική επίθεση στο έδαφός του, οι εταίροι του στην Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση θα πρέπει να του παράσχουν βοήθεια και υποστήριξη. Πώς αντιλαμβάνεστε την ουσία, το πνεύμα και την πρακτική αξία αυτού του άρθρου; Πιστεύετε ότι αυτή η ρήτρα αμοιβαίας συνδρομής θα πρέπει να επηρεάζει, και πώς, τη στάση της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης και των μελών της και στην περίπτωση που μια χώρα εκτός Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης έχει ως επίσημη ξεκάθαρη και διακηρυγμένη πολιτική της την απειλή πολέμου κατά κράτους μέλους; Και δεν μιλάω θεωρητικά· η περίπτωση υπάρχει στα νοτιοανατολικά σύνορα της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης.

1-066

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr Lisek, concerning the context in which you describe the particular issues in Moldova with Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, all of these are absolutely the reason why I said in my opening statement that our neighbourhood strategy and what we do in our neighbourhood are so significant and so important.

First of all, in Moldova we are working very closely. They are the second highest recipient – EUR 16 per head, I am told – of support for trying to do things, to build confidence between the major cities. That is going to be very significant in resolving matters. In Nagorno-Karabakh, it is quite interesting watching what Turkey is doing and the Armenian issues for Turkey, in terms of opening up and developing that relationship. Looking at what they are concerned about in terms of energy is also significant.

So I am beginning to sketch out where we are in these particular areas; what the issues of conflict are and what the relationships should be. Russia is the common theme, either because these are countries that have come

away from the former Soviet Union or because Russia is still active and often proactively engaged in a positive way in some of the issues. So I think that we have to develop that relationship. That will be what I am seeking to do when I go to Moscow: develop a proactive positive relationship with Russia to solve the problems, not to create any different ones.

Mrs Gomes, in terms of sanctions for Iran and what we do further, as I said earlier, I am very keen that we support all that we can in terms of human rights in Iran. We now need to have discussions about where we believe Iran has got to. Sanctions are something that will come up in the discussions on E3+3 and also within the European Union. Wait and see where the Council goes on that, but I think they have already expressed the view that the approach we have to take is dialogue, of course within the principles I have mentioned, but we also have to recognise that, if the rules are not kept to, then we have to take action in some form.

In terms of the solidarity clauses in particular: I have Article 42(7) open in front of me, and it says that there is 'an obligation of aid and assistance by all means in their power' from other Member States 'in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter'. I do not yet have a view about how we are going to translate that.

Now that we have the Treaty, one of the things that the Council has got to do, one of the things the conversations with the Foreign Affairs Council have to address, is the need to examine the practical implications, the practical action which needs to flow from the elements within it. The truth is that this is a fairly general call for support. It needs to be translated partly depending upon the circumstances which might arise and partly depending on where the Council believes it wants to focus its energy in that connection.

1-067

Eva Joly (Verts/ALE), présidente de la commission DEVE. – Madame la Vice-présidente, au nom de la commission du développement, j'aimerais vous demander qui sera le ou la commissaire responsable de la programmation de l'instrument de coopération et de développement et des fonds européens de développement. Quel sera le rôle du service d'action extérieure? J'aimerais également que vous nous donniez des exemples des mesures concrètes que vous proposeriez pour faire assurer le respect de l'article 208 du traité de Lisbonne, qui exige de l'Union qu'elle tienne compte des objectifs de la coopération au développement dans la mise en œuvre des politiques qui sont susceptibles d'affecter les pays en développement. Comptez-vous mettre sur pied, au sein du service d'action extérieure, une unité qui serait spécialement affectée au respect de ladite disposition? Allez-vous vous opposer à l'accord de libre-échange avec la Colombie?

1-068

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – In terms of development, let me

begin by saying that development is absolutely at the core of the work that we need to do in our relationships outside the European Union. It is quite exciting to see how third countries have become very excited that we are actually able to bring this together in the most appropriate way.

I am very keen that the way we do this is to respect and recognise that it is a very important aspect of policy that needs the attention of the Council, and also of the Commission. I am delighted that the Commissioner-designate is Andris Piebalgs, who has already been talking with me about how we can make this work effectively.

The way I see it working is this: development desks will sit within the External Action Service in order that we deliver on the ground. Clearly, the Development Commissioner will remain responsible for EDF money, within the strategic framework that we are going to work out together for a common foreign policy. In other words, development is significant. The EDF will remain the responsibility of the Development Committee and the Development Commissioner, but we are going to put it in a framework that makes sense. I do not think that will be at all difficult. It is going to be a very practical way of approaching things. I hope and believe that we will be able to make that real for Parliament as quickly as possible. I am delighted that Andris and I will be working together on that for the future.

In terms of the FTA with Columbia, where we are at the present time – as I understand it, because of course I have relinquished my responsibilities – is that the discussions have got to a particular point where it has been decided that we should halt and pause because the new Commissioner is coming in, Parliament will wish to adopt its view under the Lisbon Treaty on this issue, and the new Commissioner will have to come forward to Parliament. It seemed inappropriate to us to be moving, in this interim phase, to any further conclusion on this issue, bearing in mind how important it is for Parliament.

1-069

Carlo Casini (PPE), *Presidente della commissione AFCO*. – Una domanda molto semplice, anche se invece nel corso del tempo bisognerà che la mia commissione si occupi a fondo della situazione per cui lei è incaricata dalla Commissione ed è contemporaneamente mandataria del Consiglio, questo è un grande problema.

La domanda è soltanto questa: in una delle sue risposte scritte lei ha detto che la sua prima priorità sarà dar vita a un servizio europeo per l'azione esterna efficiente e coerente, che sia un fiore all'occhiello dell'Unione e un motivo di invidia per il resto del mondo.

Bellissimo. Mi domando, e le domando: le sembra opportuno, come noi riteniamo, che sia istituita, e che lei possa proporre, una scuola di diplomazia europea, magari avvalendosi delle istituzioni che già esistono in Europa, affinché escano da questa scuola persone con

una capacità di approfondimento non solo della storia e del funzionamento dell'Unione europea, ma anche delle procedure dei consolati e delle delegazioni in materia di diplomazia e relazioni esterne?

1-070

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy* – The simplest questions are often the most interesting, in many ways.

We may end up, at the end of my mandate, in a position where we have got some kind of training facility that exists for the Service. At the present time, what I am looking for is two things. One, what is already available, for example through the Commission, in what it provides for delegations currently and, two, what could be available from what Member States currently do to try and bring a training regime into being that will give and equip people both in the Commission delegations currently and in the services that will come into being, and of course the Member States' delegates, the knowledge that they need to conduct this work properly.

There have been criticisms – I know because I have read them – about whether we do sufficiently well on training at the present time. I know the College in Bruges does quite a lot for European civil servants and it may be that there is some work that we can do collaboratively with it. I intend to go and explore that.

What I am quite clear about is that this Service is a unique body, and we will need to have training for our diplomats in order that they recognise that it is a different service – either from where they have come or from what they are going into. Whether that turns into a training facility or not, I am not yet sure.

1-071

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), *Voorzitter van de commissie CONT*. – Mevrouw, de collega's Brok en Neyts stelden u tijdens de eerste ronde expliciete vragen over de Europese dienst voor extern optreden. Het operationeel maken van die dienst wordt een van uw belangrijkste taken dit voorjaar. U hebt in deze hoorzitting gezegd dat u volledige verantwoording wilt afleggen aan het Europees Parlement. Heb ik het dus goed begrepen dat u eigenlijk expliciet toezegt dat het Europees Parlement het begrotingsrecht en het begrotingscontrolerecht ten volle zal kunnen uitoefenen? Zegt u met name toe dat de dienst voor extern optreden een aparte sector in de begroting wordt, dat deze een aparte categorie wordt waarop de kwijtingsprocedure voor de volle 100% van toepassing is en waarop de Rekenkamer toezicht zal kunnen houden? Zegt u toe dat daar waar nodig OLAF zal kunnen optreden en het Europees Parlement volledige politieke en ook financiële controle op deze dienst zal kunnen uitoefenen?

1-072

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – I hope I can be quite brief because I think what I said to Mr Brok covers what you

want, which, as I explained earlier, is that there are two different ways you can approach this. On the one hand there are those who say it should be part of the Commission, on the other there are those who say *sui generis* means a separate body.

My preference at the moment is to see it as *sui generis* because that is what I think the Treaty is telling me. Parliament will be involved, and the ES will be subject to full scrutiny whatever its final structure in the context of the financial regulation.

It seems to me that, whichever way you look at this, I have to set the budget. The budget is part of the overall budget which you are responsible for in the way that you currently are, and I have to be responsible for the discharge.

The question we have to think about, and I very much welcome the conversations we have had, is what role I play in the discharge. I am absolutely clear that we need to make sure that senior staff take responsibility in the way the Committee on Budgets wishes, but I think there will be some issues that you will want to talk about with me.

I am very open for that. One of the things I have got to look at is to make sure I put the structure in place to make sure that the money is well looked after. I do know the significance and importance of that.

Can I just say too that one of the things that is going to be really important in this is to make sure that we have the right flexibilities within the budget, not to evade control but simply to recognise what we have already seen most recently, so that the situation changes in terms of where we believe we need to put our energy.

If you think about where the Yemen situation came from in the last few weeks, I am looking more closely at what Yemen will be in the future. I will be at the meeting to discuss Yemen with others, mainly from the region, to be held in London the day before the Afghanistan conference, but that may affect the way in which we want to put it together.

I am absolutely certain about the role of Parliament in this. I hope that is as clear as it can be, and I hope you are happy.

1-073

Vital Moreira (S&D), *Chair of the Committee on International Trade*. – I am replacing Mrs Muscardini, who is the vice-chair of my committee and who was chosen to represent my committee here. She was unable to join our proceedings in time due to flight problems. So I am going to read the questions prepared by Mrs Muscardini.

Baroness Ashton, as you were previously Commissioner for Trade, you know that trade is an important dimension of the EU's external policy. How do you foresee the implementation of your new role with regard

to coordination and cooperation with the new Commissioner on international trade?

Secondly, one important element of the new European External Action Service concerns converting the current Commission delegations into EU representations to third countries and organisations. The vast majority of Commission delegations have a trade department which is run according to the purely supranational logic of the EU's trade policy.

How do you envisage the organisation of the EU's trade representation in the future European External Action Service and its EU embassies? Are you committed to preventing any intergovernmental contamination of those areas in the EU's external representation which are governed within the EU by supranational decision-making procedures? In this regard, would you...

(The Chair cut off the speaker.)

1-074

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – It is very nice to see you. I anticipate working closely with Karel De Gucht, who is the Commissioner-designate. We have already had discussions about how we want to collaborate. Trade is a Commission competence. It is very important that it remains as it should be in that way. The relationship seems to work pretty well on the ground. When I visited delegations as Trade Commissioner, we seemed to have a very good approach to them being a component part, though distinct, in terms of working collaboratively, and I hope we will be able to continue in the way that seems to be working very effectively now. I have no desire to disturb that unless we think we can do it better.

I think, too, that I do not underestimate how valuable and important trade is in terms of our broader strategic partnerships and relationships across the world. They are often the driving force that enables us to be able to collaborate better and provide economic support. Countries who want, for example, in our neighbourhood, to have a strong relationship with us. Moldova: we have got the delegation going out to look at the preparedness, the potential for a trade agreement in the next few months. Ukraine: it has been a big and significant part of them, thinking through what they want to do. It is something that countries come and ask us for for the future, and it needs to be seen in the context of that – being part of the strong relationship that we want in the future. But I am very clear where it sits. It sits alongside, and distinctly so, and it fits within the Commission in that overarching way, again, where the Commissioner for Trade will be part of the thinking that goes on, but obviously directly responsible through the Commission.

1-075

Norbert Neuser (S&D). – Lady Ashton, Sie haben eben bei der Beantwortung einer Frage zu Afghanistan gesagt, dass Sie konkrete Resultate für die Menschen in Afghanistan einfordern. Ich denke, Sie haben mit dieser

Forderung die breite Unterstützung des Europäischen Parlaments. Dies muss aber auch Zielsetzung für die Ende Januar beginnende Afghanistan-Konferenz in London sein. Vor diesem Hintergrund frage ich Sie, welche konkreten Maßnahmen die EU unter Ihrer Verantwortung ergreifen wird, um die zivile Mission und die Arbeit der Nichtregierungsorganisationen in Afghanistan besser mit der Nato und mit den Vereinten Nationen zu koordinieren. Wie schätzen Sie die Forderung vieler Nichtregierungsorganisationen ein, getrennt von militärischen Aufträgen in Afghanistan arbeiten zu können?

1-076

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Baroness Ashton, from your December hearing I got the impression that common EU policies can be built upon existing bilateral agreements with third parties. Are you sure that our common foreign and energy policy can be built upon Putin-Schröder type agreements that are struck behind the backs of other interested EU Member States and tend to isolate them? What would you suggest to prevent such bilateral deals happening again and to introduce into future agreements with third parties the energy solidarity clause which the European Parliament proposed almost three years ago on the initiative of Mr Saryusz-Wolski?

1-077

Pino Arlacchi (ALDE). – Baroness Ashton, I disagree with my British Conservative colleagues who are criticising you for your past engagement on nuclear disarmament, first of all because I do not want to back the picture with the dilemma, and secondly, more seriously, because I believe that this is the best part of your CV.

My question is very simple. We now have a historic opportunity. In a few months from now we will have the review of the TNP in the United Nations. What about having the European Union take the lead in calling for a ban on nuclear weapons, following the call of President Obama? He has just done exactly that.

1-078

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr Neuser, in terms of the Afghanistan meeting, there will, I think, be 70 countries or organisations that have been invited to participate and I know that different themes are being worked on at the present time. There have been meetings with American officials. I have talked to the British Foreign Office, because they are hosting it, about what it is they want to achieve, and certainly one of the questions will be: how do we move towards better coordination?

It seems to me there are a number of things here. One is being able to pull together and look at whether we bring our representation, our delegations together into one, so there is one clear voice on the ground.

Second there is examining what we do and seeing how effective that is at the present time and what more we can do – whether we need to change what we do. In that

sense, let us look afresh at what needs to happen, but use the conference as a chance to coordinate better with others what we do in the future.

Mr Kelam, on energy policy, as I said earlier we need to have a strong policy on energy security and that means diversity of energy in terms of where we get it, the type of energy – wind power, solar power and some nuclear power etc. – and what we do in terms of the energy coming into the European Union.

As you know, there are different proposals currently under way – Nord Stream, South Stream, Nabucco – that bring energy in different ways. What is critical is that we act as a European Union. That might mean on occasions that the pipes move in both directions, if I can put it like that, and the opportunity to provide support. So we need a security policy in terms of energy, and I will be working with the Energy Commissioner to try and achieve that.

In terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, when you mentioned my background, somebody shouted ‘unilateral’. I will go back to what I said before: at the time you looked at the position on nuclear weapons differently. What we have to do today is see what President Obama has said, which is significant. We know that individual Member States in the European Union have got strong views and we need to work effectively towards that.

My commitment is like the commitment of everybody in this House. We want to make sure that we have dealt with the problems, that we are aware and conscious of the dangers of the future, either because in some parts of the world we see nuclear power turning into nuclear weapons and rich uranium or because we see a lack of security around nuclear power, which is a significant issue, too, in terms of the potential for terrorism. We need to look at what we are doing to achieve the reductions in nuclear weapons that we are already beginning to see in the world.

At least my background provides a commitment that I am interested in those issues. I will do my best, and I will try and do it in a way that brings everyone along with me.

1-078-500

Reinhard Bütikofer (Verts/ALE). – Frau Kandidatin! Seit Ihrer Nominierung haben Sie viele Bekenntnisse zur Bedeutung der transatlantischen Beziehungen abgegeben, so auch heute. So weit, so gut. Aber gibt es außer Lyrik auch Projekte, Prioritäten und institutionelle Instrumente? In einer im Herbst veröffentlichten Studie renommierter amerikanischer Thinktanks heißt es, ich zitiere:

1-079

‘The world that created the transatlantic partnership is fading fast. The United States and Europe must urgently reposition and recast their relationship as a more effective and strategic partnership.’

1-079-500

Angesichts erheblicher Differenzen, die wir mit den USA hatten – ich erwähne nur die Rolle der Menschenrechte für globale Governance oder Energieversorgung und Klimapolitik –, frage ich: Welche Projekte, Prioritäten und institutionelle Ziele setzen Sie für ein „Recasting“ der transatlantischen Beziehungen?

1-080

Konrad Szymański (ECR). – You mentioned the specific – and probably crucial – role of the European Union in human rights issues in the world. One of the basic human rights that is attacked more and more frequently in the world is religious freedom. We have had a lot of very critical incidents. We have had very cruel, usually bloody, incidents in Egypt, in Vietnam and in Pakistan, where Christians are being attacked more and more frequently. We even have such incidents in democratic India. We have legal limitations on Western Christian denominations in Russia and in Belarus, and also in China.

This is a world human rights issue that is becoming more and more crucial. I would like to ask you whether you are going to change a situation in which the European Union is completely silent about religious persecution in the world.

1-081

Andrey Kovatchev (PPE). – Baroness Ashton, you disappointed us when you said you were not convinced of the need for hearings for the senior EU diplomatic positions on the grounds that this might become a long process or a complicated Senate-style procedure. I assume you also have the same view regarding the appointment of European Union special representatives. Please could you clarify this?

In the interests of transparency and democratic accountability for the EU citizens whom these persons will represent, are you ready to consider hearings with the relevant European Parliament committees, especially for representatives to countries which you identified as strategic, such as the United States, China, Russia, India, Brazil and Japan? I hope that you will address this point later this year in your proposal for the EEAS.

1-082

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – When you said ‘so far, so good’ on USA policy, I was tempted to say, ‘Then I will stop there!’. You are absolutely right to raise the fact that we have an opportunity to look at how effective our strategic relationships with the United States are.

We have some of the instruments in the dialogues that currently exist – the Transatlantic Economic Council, the Energy Council and so on. There are a number of ways in which, particularly from the Commission side, we come together, and of course we have regular summits with the United States – I think the next one is in May. However, we can do more. I do not yet really know what instruments I have available to do that. What

I am quite clear about is that I need to develop and strengthen the relationship that we have with people at my level, and also enable the Commission and the President of the Council to be able to strengthen the relationships at their levels.

This is about trying to see where we best fit together. One tiny example from my trade life comes from working together on trade facilitation in Africa, where we have a common goal to support African states on development. This was something we began to think about then. There is much we can do, and you were right to point to it as something that needs to be thought about.

In terms of religious freedom, the Convention on Human Rights, as translated into the Human Rights Act in the country that I know best, was very clear on the right of freedom of expression and religious thought, and it is for me quite simply a fundamental part of human rights.

I am sorry that you feel the EU has been silent on this. It is for me part and parcel of what we have to be considering in terms of our relationships across the world.

Finally, on the issue of special representatives, I am again sorry to disappoint, but I do feel that, while I am not planning to have lots of special representatives for lots of different countries, I need to be able to demonstrate that I have thought about and chosen the right people, and to be held accountable by Parliament myself.

I am not against their coming to Parliament. I am just really not convinced that inviting them to come and have to go through a process – which is not in the Treaty – will work.

We need to talk about this further because there may be, as there often is, a way that we can find a method where you feel that you have actually had the chance to talk with people as they take up their jobs, but I think that is quite different from the idea that the decision-making move away from where it currently is. Can we think about that?

1-083

Marek Siwiec (S&D). – Takie przesłuchania odbywają się według formuły takiej, że my chcemy się wszystkiego dowiedzieć, a Pani mówi bardzo ogólnie. Mam nadzieję, że tej ogólności będzie coraz mniej. Poprawność polityczna to jest coś ważnego, ale w pewnym momencie ona musi zostać zastąpiona bardzo jasnym i otwartym językiem.

Chciałbym Panią zapytać, czy jest plan dla Ukrainy dzień po wyborach ukraińskich? Będzie wybrany nowy prezydent. Czy Unia Europejska ma plan jak zachować się wobec tego kraju, jak wesprzeć nowego prezydenta? Ukraina trwa w politycznym chaosie, mam wrażenie, że bardzo wielu ludziom w Unii Europejskiej to odpowiada. Oni się nie mogą dogadać, to my nic nie

robimy. Czy jest plan, jak zakończyć negocjacje w sprawie stowarzyszenia? Czy jest plan jak wprowadzić ułatwienia wizowe? Czy zaczniemy mówić językiem tego, na czym nam zależy, a nie językiem tego, czego oni nie potrafią?

1-084

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE). – El Parlamento Europeo afirmó en una resolución, en la primavera pasada, que las relaciones con los Estados Unidos constituirían la asociación estratégica más importante de la Unión Europea.

Y, además, dicha resolución contenía propuestas concretas sobre mecanismos o instrumentos adaptados, nuevos, en su caso, para mejorar esa relación. Por ejemplo, dos cumbres anuales en vez de una, también la creación de un consejo político transatlántico, en el que usted, Señora Alta Representante y Vicepresidenta, podría sentarse y hablar regularmente con la actual Secretaria de Estado, Sra. Clinton —como se acaba de mencionar, y usted misma lo ha hecho— en el marco de instrumentos ya existentes, como el Consejo Económico Transatlántico, precisamente para impulsar el mercado transatlántico —lo que antes se ha evocado en una pregunta—, o también el Consejo Energético, el consejo de la energía entre los Estados Unidos y la Unión Europea.

Pero me gustaría saber qué opina usted respecto de estas propuestas del Parlamento: dos cumbres, un consejo político transatlántico y un refuerzo del diálogo de los legisladores.

1-085

Doris Pack (PPE). – Frau Ashton, auch im Namen des Kollegen Posselt möchte ich Ihnen gerne eine Frage stellen. An Ihre Position sind so viele Hoffnungen geknüpft! Wir wollen eine Außenpolitik aus einem Guss. Es gibt ganz viele Hoffnungen, und wir reden mit einer Stimme. Können Sie vielleicht damit beginnen zu erklären, wie Sie die Länder der Europäischen Union, die Kosovo bis heute noch nicht anerkannt haben, dazu zu bringen wollen, dass sie sich einreihen in die Reihe derer, die dies getan haben? Ich bitte Sie herzlich darum, denn dadurch könnten Sie ganz leicht und sehr bald beweisen, wie sehr unser Handeln aus einem Guss sein wird!

1-086

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Thank you, Mr Siwiec. I was not in any sense trying to be politically correct nor be too general, but as you will appreciate I am also very keen to make sure that, as I develop my strategies and plans, I talk to Parliament in a way that demonstrates to you that I have spent time and energy on the issues.

Ukraine is a very good case in point, with 17 January, followed by 7 February, set for the elections. It is interesting that we do not know who is going to win. That is actually quite significant. Perhaps that is a really strong indication of democracy at work.

There are real concerns that we have to address immediately after the elections. One is what the relationship with Russia will be depending on who wins and depending on how they take things forward. Also, there is the question of how we support Ukraine on, specifically, issues that we have already worked together on – judicial issues, the rule of law – and where we go in terms of moving forward the trade agreement, which has begun, but on which a huge amount of work remains to do and there are huge expectations in terms of what Ukraine needs to do. Then, of course, there are all the issues around energy and issues relating to the pipeline, where we may be able to give Ukraine support too.

It is not that I do not have clear ideas of the areas that we need to discuss with them, nor indeed that I do not plan to go and do so quickly, but I feel we just have to wait until the elections are over before we can do that, and not pre-empt the conversations that we need to have with them either.

In terms of what has been said about the United States already, I have had the privilege of already having one conversation with Secretary of State Clinton when she came to NATO. We met one-on-one. I have been invited to Washington. That visit is being set up. I will spend time with her. I have already met with Richard Holbrooke and spoken to him on the phone. We will meet again, of course, as we are both in London for the upcoming conferences.

I am very keen to strengthen the political dialogue and I know that one of the issues for the Transatlantic Economic Council was making sure that parliamentarians had the opportunity to do so as well. Let me just say, without prejudging the paper from Parliament or the discussions we have had, that as Trade Commissioner I spent a lot of time in Congress. I spent a lot of time meeting with the chairs of the committees and the committees themselves, because I knew it was really significant to recognise the importance of Congress in the United States system.

I hope that we will see America recognising the role of the European Parliament, and I hope too that we will get a stronger dialogue between the legislatures in the future. Perhaps that too is something we can take forward in the future.

You have great hopes for me, Mrs Pack, so thank you very much. In terms of getting recognition for Kosovo, those Member States have very specific reasons, and I will not dwell on them now. For me, the most significant thing is that the EULEX area of activity is working well and that it has the conviction and commitment of the European Council.

I am realistic about what I can achieve, especially in the short term, but I am very comfortable that what we have got is a working proposition that can help in what is a very difficult area at the moment.

1-087

María Muñiz De Urquiza (S&D). – Se ha referido usted ya, señora Ashton, a Cuba y a Colombia, pero la relación estratégica entre la Unión Europea y América Latina trasciende con mucho estos dos casos y merece una atención más profunda que la que —creo— ha dado usted hasta ahora.

De la Sexta Cumbre Unión Europea/América Latina y Caribe, y de las cumbres bilaterales con Chile, con México y con América Central se van a derivar un plan de acción y un programa de trabajo que determinarán las prioridades del diálogo entre ambas regiones.

¿Cuál es el valor añadido que va a suponer su mandato para el relanzamiento de las relaciones entre la Unión Europea y América Latina, más allá de la conclusión de los acuerdos de asociación y comerciales en curso?

1-088

György Schöpflin (PPE). – Rather over an hour ago, Lady Ashton, you said in the reply to Mrs Hautala, and I quote: ‘My interest is in outcomes’, in achieving ‘what we want to achieve’. Yes, but foreign policy is constantly faced by dilemmas: for example we know that one of the EU’s potential strategic partners executes people; another ignores the murder of investigative journalists. Which will you prioritise – the economic dimension of the partnership or human rights?

1-089

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE). – Lady Baroness, Lissabonin sopimuksen mukaan Euroopan unionin päämääränä on edistää rauhaa ja ihmisten hyvinvointia. Euroopan integraatio onkin lisännyt vakautta ja rauhaa Euroopassa. Valitettavasti väkivallan ehkäisy, sovittelutoiminta ja rauhantoiminta eli konfliktien ehkäisy eivät ole vieläkään EU:n politiikan ydintä. Näkisittekö Te, että EU:lla olisi mahdollisuus hakea uutta roolia sovittelijana ja vakauden edistäjänä ja korostaa omaa profiiliaan tässä suhteessa?

1-090

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Ms Muñiz De Urquiza, I agree that there is more to be done in Latin America. We need to think about what that relationship should be. I think during the Spanish Presidency there is a great deal of interest in that as well, which is very positive. One of the reasons for the Commissioners who are working closely with me to put regional aspects as part of one of the portfolios was very deliberately to recognise that you cannot just think about individual countries. Often these countries do come together in some form of regional grouping. It is specifically to assist me in making sure that we have a regional strategic approach, which is what we will try to do in that area and develop that. Of course, all the input from Members of this House will be very welcome.

In terms of economic versus human rights, I think what we have to do is develop precisely what we call the strategic approach. Human rights are absolutely fundamental to who we are. They are the fundamental

building blocks of the European Union, and economic relationships are part and parcel of how we develop the relationship we want to have with countries across the world. We have our own values and our own views. We wish to make those known and to make those clear. We also want to see the development of other nations to enable them also to collaborate with us on some of those issues. So it is not ‘either/or’, it is ‘both/and’. We have got to work collaboratively to achieve that.

Mrs Jäätteenmäki, I think what we have to do is think about peace-building as well as peacekeeping, and this is an issue that I think is also of great importance for the UN. We need to focus our attention on what we might do to ensure that we promote and recognise our role in the prevention of conflict.

Let me give you just one small issue that I have been very aware of in the post-Copenhagen thinking. When I was looking at some of the reports about stability across the world, it was quite clear to me that there are many states that will have difficulties and problems because of climate change, in terms of it either directly or indirectly causing problems and potential chaos in their countries. That could in some circumstances lead to issues of conflict. So one of the things we need to think about for our role across the world is: how do we support the stability that needs to come in order to deal with issues of climate change? It is one small example: please do not take it as the only example. But it is just one example where I think peace-building, the opportunity to provide countries with the kind of support we can – which is based on our values, based on our views – says: this is how we can help you prevent conflict. This is how we can help you, economically, politically – if necessary militarily – to be able to resolve those issues. If we can do that, I think we will have succeeded in what this role has been set up to do.

1-091

Boris Zala (S&D). – Aj moja otázka smeruje k ľudským právam. Európsky parlament udelil Sacharovovu cenu ruskej organizácii Memorial. Vieme, že znovu došlo k incidentom, pri ktorých boli porušené základné ústavné práva a pri ktorých bola zatknutá aj jedna z predstaviteľiek tejto organizácie.

Ako chcete, pani Ashton, riešiť to dlhotrvajúce napätie v rámci Európskej únie medzi hodnotami, na ktorých je Európska únia založená, a medzi záujmami, ktoré Európska únia má napríklad v oblasti obrany, v oblasti energetickej bezpečnosti alebo v otázke Iránu. Ako riešiť toto napätie medzi hodnotami a záujmami tak, aby sme Rusko netlačili k tomu, aby sa vzdalo od európskych hodnôt, ale opačne, aby sa k európskym hodnotám viacej približovalo.

1-092

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – Pytanie o stosunek do partnerów na wschodzie, w szczególności wobec Rosji, Białorusi. Ostatnio, kiedy Panią Wiceprzewodniczącą pytałem, odpowiedziała Pani, że odpowie na to pytanie później. Oto to pytanie: jaka ma być polityka wobec Białorusi, w której ciągle mamy do czynienia z

więziami sumienia, gdzie prawa człowieka nie są przestrzegane? Jednocześnie jak włączyć Białoruś w proces zmian? Pytanie zresztą podobne: czy stosunki i interesy gospodarcze, czy prawa człowieka u partnerów na wschodzie? Mam podobne pytanie, jeżeli chodzi o Kubę. Czy chciałaby Pani pójść drogą proponowaną przez prezydencję hiszpańską, czy też widzi Pani inaczej ułożenie stosunków Unii Europejskiej z Kubą i ułożenie jej stosunków wewnętrznych?

1-093

Alf Svensson (PPE). – Eritrea har utvecklats till en regelrätt polisstat och landet är idag i detta avseende jämförbart med Nordkorea. Detta lyfts enligt mitt förmenande fram alldeles för sällan.

EU har biståndsrelationer till Eritrea vilket det inte är så många länder som har. En hel del miljoner euro i EU-bistånd går till Eritrea. Jag undrar hur Catherine Ashton vill använda EU:s kanaler till Eritrea för att successivt förbättra situationen för mänskliga fri- och rättigheter i landet.

Enligt uppgift sitter fler journalister fängslade i Eritrea än i Kina. Det säger väldigt mycket eftersom Eritrea är ett så befolkningsmässigt litet land.

Jag skulle vilja att Catherine Ashton redogör för hur EU:s biståndsförbindelser med Eritrea kan nyttjas för att motarbeta de oerhört grova och fasansfulla metoder som den eritreanska regimen använder mot sina medborgare.

1-094

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr Zala, I did not know that somebody had been arrested, I think the only thing I would say is that you asked what I would do. I think the question is what will we do, because I am very conscious that, in trying to offer support for organisations, Parliament has an important role to play in this, but also that the European Council does and that the Foreign Affairs Council does.

These are all issues that we have to develop together: what it is that is going to make a difference; what kind of strategy there should be for the future, building on what has been successful in the past but also reviewing where it does not work. That is exactly the approach that I want to take. I do not have a solution to that problem at this moment. What I do have is a clarity that we have got to find the ways in which the levers that we use are most effective in that sense.

Mr Grzyb, you are absolutely right: I did not answer you properly on Belarus last time. You will know better than I that what we are looking at now are the elections that are taking place in 2010 and 2011. I have discovered something since we last spoke, because I was conscious that I knew very little about the relationship with Belarus other than the strategic relationship that Russia was looking for with them in terms of its customs union and the implications and impact that that was having from a trade perspective.

I know that we began the human rights dialogue with Belarus in June in Prague and I gather that that was an interesting and useful occasion. I have not yet had the feedback to tell me what we ought to do next and where that ought to go, but I am very clear that it is a good thing that it has begun. That is also what we have got to support.

We also need, though, to be aware that we have got the renewal of the visa ban and the need to see Belarus move further on liberalisation. That will need to be a discussion in the Council to see where people want to move in terms of renewing the visa ban and looking further at what more we can do.

It will also depend, of course, on what happens next in terms of where Russia goes on the customs union and how Belarus is on that. So those are the elements of what I call the jigsaw puzzle of what our relationship ought to be that I have now begun to put in place.

You also asked me about Cuba. We have had, as I said before, a very clear policy. It will require unanimity for any change of that policy in the Council, and that policy has been pursued for 13 years. I know that for some Member States there have been concerns of late about issues of human rights again.

The only issue I would say that we always need to be mindful of is looking at whether there are additional things we can do or changes we need to make along the road of the policy that we want to pursue in order to be as effective as we might be. That is why I mentioned that we have had a policy for 13 years. Is it as effective as it could be? Does the Council want to think what more or what else it could do? But it is a unanimity decision and at the present time the policy remains.

1-095

Eduard Kukan (PPE). – My question concerns the region of the Western Balkans, which is very important for the future enlargement of the European Union. You mentioned it briefly in your introductory remarks and also while answering the question of my distinguished colleague, Jelko Kacin. Still, I would like you to share with us your thoughts on what would be, in your opinion, the most important and effective measures for including this region in the euro area in a way that contributes to the strength and unity of the euro. What realistic timeframe do you see for the conclusion of the process? Do you intend to engage the External Action Service, and if so, how?

1-096

Roberto Gualtieri (S&D). – Signora Ashton, lei ha giustamente citato tra le sue priorità la Somalia, un teatro di crisi drammatico (sono in corso violenti combattimenti proprio in questo momento al confine con l'Etiopia), che vede l'Unione europea impegnata in una delle sue più importanti missioni militari. L'Unione europea sta poi avviando la progettazione di una missione di formazione delle forze di sicurezza somale, si discute della formazione dei guardacoste.

Qual è la sua visione della crisi somala, delle sue prospettive, dell'impegno europeo?

In particolare, può spiegarci se il recente emendamento deciso dal Consiglio all'azione comune su Atalanta circa il monitoraggio delle azioni di pesca significa che la missione Atalanta sarà anche quella della protezione dei pescherecci europei, oppure del controllo della pesca illegale?

1-097

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate to the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – In terms of the Western Balkans, I think the assessment that we have all made is that the future lies in the relationship with the European Union and the opportunity to be part of the future of Europe.

For some countries in that area the process is already under way. There are some countries who are ready to begin that dialogue and with whom we are comfortable to begin.

The one that I focused on earlier, namely what is happening in Bosnia, is the one that I am most concerned about. How do we deal with the issues that are occurring there?

A broader dialogue is needed to achieve the results that we want, because, 14 years on from the Dayton Agreement, the key players are still there, particularly the United States, for a dialogue about what we might do; and you will know from the Swedish Presidency that Carl Bildt was very active in talking with the Americans about what we might do in the Butmir process and so on. So there is a lot that we can do there.

I am being general rather than too specific because we are just at the point where we are looking at how far the process which we have in place with the 5+2 is as effective as it might be and how far we need to do more.

What I am very clear about is that the result of that needs to be a country with respected groups within it, with a strong relation with Europe, that benefits its people economically, and the time frame will need to be set down so that we can make that achievable.

What I am also clear about is that we cannot stay where we are and that the political situation demands that we do something in the next short while to move the process along. But I need to be very clear about quite how that is going to work, by talking to the most involved people in the region, not least of course, our representatives.

To complete the point, I think the External Action Service has a very important part to play in developing the dynamic, single voice in the area and in working collaboratively with the other players in the area, particularly in Bosnia where you have Turkey, Russia and the United States; that is going to be very significant too.

In terms of Somalia we have to deal with issues around Atalanta, which is very important and proving its worth.

I take the point about illegal fishing, and I do not know the answer – I will check that, because it is clearly a point about whether and how far they are able to identify what is what. Very clearly it is a very successful mission but we need to make sure that the ability to take the people that we have caught and prosecute them is as effective as it can be. I have begun some conversations in the region about what we might do to enhance that possibility.

You are right too that we also need to think about what we are doing on the land, because if we are going to solve the problem it will be via the potential development of the land, and one of these issues is whether we should be doing the training programme which is currently being discussed in the committees.

1-098

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – Baroness Ashton, you were one of four paid employees of CND and then treasurer. I do not apologise for bringing this up because it was not disclosed on your personal details. If your views, and those of your CND pals, had prevailed, eastern Europe would not now be free. On the most important foreign affairs and security issue since the Second World War, your judgement has been hopelessly and demonstrably wrong.

Are you the Edith Piaf of the Commission – ‘Nothing, nothing, I regret nothing’ – or are you going to recant these views and formally also apologise to those people that you misled?

1-099

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – My employment record is a matter of public record. It has been published all the way through my career. The choice of what goes out on individual CVs is usually pertinent to the jobs that one is doing in hand. If you look over all the records, and you can look probably in *Debrets* – which for you will be significant, though not for many others – you will probably see my employment record there too. I have never hidden what I did. I am not ashamed of who I am or what I have been.

When I was a young person, I marched because I believed we should abolish nuclear weapons. You can argue against how I did it, but you cannot argue against what I was seeking to achieve. Part of what we did was to make sure that we make connections with all of the freedom movements across the East. I never visited Eastern Europe, but I felt very passionately and we wanted to see a Europe that was free, and here we have it.

One of the reasons I want to do this job is to take the values I have held all my life and use them to support the principles that this House is founded upon.

1-100

Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL). – Frau Kandidatin, Herr Vorsitzender! Im Unterschied zu Kollege Tannock will ich ganz ehrlich sagen: Ich freue mich, und ich hoffe, dass Sie sich Ihren jugendlichen Schwung von damals erhalten haben, wenn es um Abrüstung geht. Insofern ist – wie Sie dies sagen – die Nichtweiterverbreitung einer Ihrer vier Schwerpunkte. Dann müssen wir die Frage stellen, die heute in der Fragestunde schon verschiedentlich aufgeworfen wurde, was konkret getan werden kann, damit die achte Überprüfungskonferenz für die Nichtweiterverbreitung von Kernwaffen im Mai in New York nicht das gleiche Schicksal erleidet wie der Klimagipfel in Kopenhagen. Denn das führt zum Verlust von Vertrauen in Politik und in der Folge auch zum Abwenden der Menschen von der Politik. Insofern müssen wir die Tatsache auch sehr ernst nehmen, dass die Überprüfungskonferenz keine Chance haben wird, wenn nicht das START-Abkommen auf den Weg gebracht wird. Damit verbinde ich die folgende Frage: Welches konkrete Projekt können Sie nennen um sicherzustellen, dass die Überprüfungskonferenz – auch mit der Stimme der Europäischen Union – ein Erfolg wird? Und wie soll das mangelnde Vertrauen als eine der Ursachen dafür, dass noch keine wirklichen Schritte auf dem Weg zum START-Abkommen unternommen wurden – was unter anderem seinen Grund in der Nichtratifizierung der KSE-Abkommen durch eine Reihe von Nato-Staaten hat – ...

(Der Vorsitzende entzieht dem Redner das Wort.)

1-101

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – I, like every Member of this House, have enthusiasm to make sure that we have nuclear disarmament – what did you think I was going to say?

(Laughter)

I have enthusiasm to see the reduction of nuclear weapons. We might argue about how, but we agree with what we are seeking to do. I think the statements of the American President, as I said earlier, are very significant.

I do not know yet how we are going to approach the conference because I need to discuss that with the Member States and to see if we can have a very strong, clear voice in that. What is clear is the significance of the conference – and you are right to point to it in two different ways. One is that there is strength of feeling that, in some instances, we need to be able to do better in a multilateral way.

I am not sure I would describe Copenhagen as a flop – many of you will, but I actually think good things came out of it and it will be seen, when we look back, as an important stepping stone. We need clearer ideas and to get better at the work we do beforehand if we are going to engage in a multilateral conference. It is very difficult to do this when you have a large number of interested

parties all able to operate; it is very important to do a lot of work beforehand. I am not saying that was not done, but am simply saying that we need to get better and better at it all the time. One of the things concerning the whole question of the conference that I was interested to raise is that we need to start that work early in order to be able to do it.

I am encouraged by the actual reduction of weapons we have seen, but also the way in which it is being approached strategically. The big question will be: what is happening in some states across the world? As I said earlier, the issues and difficulties – not only about conversion of civil use of nuclear power into nuclear weapons but also the safety and security around nuclear power – have got to be a part of what we have to think through for the conference itself.

1-102

Paweł Robert Kowal (ECR). – Miesiąc temu obiecała Pani przygotowanie odpowiedzi na to pytanie – czy Pani zdaniem gazociąg północny Nordstream (pytał o to wówczas poseł Landsbergis, pytałem też ja) spełnia kryterium solidarności energetycznej w Europie?

Teraz główne pytanie – czy widzi Pani jakiegokolwiek elementy niestandardowych wpływów Rosji na terenie Ukrainy i Gruzji i innych państw partnerstwa wschodniego? Czy mogłaby Pani takie wskazać? Wreszcie, to co odnosi się do Pani miłego zaproszenia do współpracy z Radą (też o to pytałem miesiąc temu, nie dostałem wówczas odpowiedzi), chciałbym zapytać, czy szefowie lub przedstawiciele delegacji, w moim przypadku UE – Ukraina, ale też UE – Rosja i innych delegacji, mogą liczyć na to, że Pani jako wiceprzewodnicząca będzie zabiegała o to, byśmy zostali zaproszeni na kolejne szczyty np. Unia – Ukraina, itd.?

1-103

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – You did indeed ask me lots of questions a few weeks ago. I think it was on my second day in office, so let me say a little bit more as I am now in week five, or whatever.

In terms of Nord Stream, I know there are a variety of opinions and views on the approach that has been taken on Nord Stream, but I have been looking at all the pipelines. I have a map here, but I have been looking at all the pipelines in terms of energy security. It really goes back to what I said before: that we need to have a diversity of supply and a diversity of energy if we are going to meet the needs for the future in the way that we want to. It is one of the critical security issues that we face and the Energy Commissioner, when he has been approved by Parliament, will obviously have the most significant role to play in that.

I also said to you that the importance of the European Union operating as a Union is critical. I think I described it rather simplistically, saying that the pipe needs to move in both directions and that the opportunity to make

sure that we are together ensuring our energy security and keeping our people warm is going to be absolutely at the core of what we do.

That is my approach to it. It will obviously be for the Energy Commissioner to take that further forward but it is significant in terms of our strategic relationships with countries like Russia for the future.

I have said a bit about Ukraine already in terms of what we need to look for and seeing who ends up winning the elections and also the support. I am pleased that Ukraine has been able to pay the bills. We have been watching that very carefully over the last few days, and so far so good on that. The IMF is very heavily engaged with them – there is more to be done in terms of ensuring that that approach works – but really in a sense we are waiting for the elections now, to be able to engage again on a number of these different issues.

On Georgia, the next meeting is in Geneva, I think also on the 28th, and Pierre Morel, our Special Representative, will be there. We have a really important role to play. We are the only international people still there, if you see what I mean. We have an important role in terms of the monitoring that we do. We also have an important role in terms of the inter-lateralisation of the process, if you like, because we are there and all the key parties are there having the dialogue and conversation.

That needs to continue. Geneva is really significant in terms of where we go forward with Georgia, but of course there are implications for the relationship with Russia for Georgia as well. Again, that is where we have to keep an eye on things.

1-104

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – Frau Ashton, Sie haben in einigen Ihrer Punkte Dinge vertreten, die auch mir und uns von der Fraktion Grüne/EFA sehr wichtig sind, nämlich dass Sie Menschenrechte als ganz zentralen Teil der Außenpolitik und auch der Handelspolitik sehen und dass Sie das Europaparlament in Haushaltsfragen ernst nehmen und in den Mittelpunkt stellen wollen. Aber lassen Sie mich zum Ausdruck bringen, dass sich in meiner Fraktion eine gewisse Enttäuschung darüber breitmacht, von Ihnen nichts Konkretes über Ihre Visionen und darüber gehört zu haben, was Ihre persönlichen Kriterien und Ziele für diese nächsten fünf Jahre sind, damit Sie tatsächlich die europäische Außenministerin werden, die wir haben wollen, damit Sie diese Führungsrolle spielen, die wir brauchen. Wir wollen Sie nicht nur als Botschafterin der 27 Außenminister und Außenministerinnen, wir wollen Sie als eine engagierte Frau für europäische friedenspolitische Außenpolitik, bei der Konfliktprävention im Vordergrund steht. Wie wollen Sie das in den nächsten fünf Jahren erreichen? Wo sind Ihre Kriterien und Ziele? Das fehlt mir leider noch.

1-105

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – I hoped that I could set some of

this out at the beginning. Let me describe things in one context alone, which is the External Action Service, and see whether it gives you a sense of me.

The theme that is in my mind around this is security, and I mean that with a small 's' as well as a large 's'. If you look at what we have to do as Europe across the world, it is about working with and in third countries to have a sense of security. It is about climate change security, which I have already raised. It is about economic security, and that partly brings alongside it the work that the Trade Commissioner and the Trade DG is doing to support trade, as a big element. It is about development. It is about the security of countries being able to grow and achieve that economic growth that enables them to support, for example, the education of their children, and enables them to support their population more effectively.

It is about that breadth of opportunity and the way we work that says that, when you walk into a European delegation, embassy – whatever we call it – in a country, then what you see is Europe collaboratively supporting that state, representing its values in that state and working towards ensuring that we have the most stable world we possibly can. So it is exactly about conflict prevention. It is exactly about recognition of some of the security questions, whether they are about counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics or whether it is about climate change. All of these are big questions that much of the world is grappling with.

In doing that, we are working alongside the strategic partners who are sometimes able to make a bigger contribution than us politically – certainly bigger contributions occasionally economically and often militarily – but doing it in a partnership where that works, so that we are supporting populations across the world to be as free, and to have as open societies as we have ourselves.

1-106

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE). – Herr Vorsitzender! Wir sind ja jetzt in der Schlussrunde, die Befragung ist an ihrem Ende. Sie sind besser mit Ihrem Themengebiet vertraut als noch im Dezember. Das stimmt uns alle hier zuversichtlich, das finden wir gut.

Eines aber macht mich nachdenklich, und ich glaube, das gilt für mehrere Kollegen: Wir hier wollen für Sie als europäische Außenministerin mehr, als Sie für sich selbst wollen. Wir wollen einen starken Europäischen Auswärtigen Dienst, der die Nachbarschaftspolitik einschließt. Sie glauben, es hilft Ihnen, dass der Präsident entschieden hat, das Herrn Füle zu geben. Wir wollen die europäischen Vertreter Europas in der Welt politisch dadurch aufwerten, dass wir hier Anhörungen im Ausschuss durchführen. Das lehnen Sie ab. Sie sagen, Sie wollen bei der Erarbeitung der Strukturen des Auswärtigen Dienstes eng mit dem Parlament zusammenarbeiten, aber kein Parlamentarier ist in Ihrem Lenkungsausschuss vertreten, der diesen Dienst erarbeiten soll. Warum eigentlich nicht?

Stimmen Sie mir nicht zu, dass Ihnen als erster Amtsinhaberin eine besondere Rolle zukommt, dass Ihr Amtsverständnis prägend sein wird für die Rolle des Hohen Vertreters/Vizepräsidenten, des Außenministers der Europäischen Union? Und bedeutet das nicht, dass gerade Sie in den institutionellen Fragen besonders ehrgeizig sein müssten – auch jetzt schon? Hier beziehe ich mich auf Ihre schriftlichen Antworten. Sie sprechen auf Seite 4 Ihrer schriftlichen Antworten von den Streitkräften der Union, die in Afghanistan engagiert sind. Das war mir bisher nicht bekannt, dass wir da Streitkräfte haben, aber mich freut das sehr. Sind Sie dafür? Ich bin jedenfalls sehr dafür, dass wir eines Tages gemeinsame europäische Streitkräfte bekommen.

1-107

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – I have tried to answer the questions about the relationship between the External Action Service and neighbourhood policy before, but let me try again. It is not that it has moved away from me, it is because it is so important that it needs Commission resources in terms of a commissioner as well. The neighbourhood policy rests within the External Action Service: it is not separate from it. That is how it will work.

But I think it is a positive that we have a Commissioner-designate who will take responsibility for trying to be there much more than, frankly, I will be able to be there and will take an interest in all the countries in the neighbourhood, when I expect Parliament could give me a list of the priorities that they would wish to have, which would leave out some countries that, nonetheless, are significant and important. So I am not trying to do anything other than be as ambitious as I possibly can. But in that ambition I am trying to be realistic, to be realistic about physically what I can do.

The expectations of this House, and of the Commission and of the Council, luckily, are roughly the same; but there are also great differences, too. I have to try and drive a new service, brand new in that sense, to working up and bringing together our policy structures in the different aspects and responding to all of the different things that happen every single day that you would expect me to be at least interested in and, occasionally, to be extraordinarily active in very quickly.

That is a huge challenge: I need as many people working with me as possible, and, if I can get the Commission working collaboratively with me and 27 foreign ministers and Members of this House, then I have far more chance that the one voice I want us to speak with will be heard across the globe, which is actually very important.

The steering group are the people who actually have to do the work – it is not some high-level political grouping, it is people who have to deliver the financial changes for the Parliament to discuss: the regulation and

the staffing regulations. They are delivery people: they are not making big decisions about strategic thinking, and I will come to Parliament before we take any proposals to the Council. So I do think we will resolve that.

I have made my explanations on the heads of delegations and, as I said, I am sorry if I disappoint you. But I know that I will, from time to time, think that I need to move in a slightly different direction. As I have already said, I am trying to do that in a way that also recognises the real strength of collaboration I want to have.

1-108

Adrian Severin (S&D). – I am here and I am following this hearing, not to check your knowledge on different topics but in order to understand on what basis and in what direction we could further cooperate.

Would you agree with me if I say that, in our external relations, we need not only to be reactive but active, and action needs vision, and vision requires clear goals, and clear goals require a clear consciousness of our values and of our geopolitical identity?

So, if you agree on that, would you be ready to work with us in order to shape this vision before the policies related to it are enhanced, so that we can work in advance and not only in retrospect?

1-109

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Yes!

(Laughter)

1-110

Adrian Severin (S&D). – Finally, a very straightforward answer. This is what I wanted to prove: that you can give a straightforward answer!

1-111

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – I do not try and avoid making straight answers. Can I just say that sometimes the nature of the way the questions are phrased make it almost impossible to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and very deliberately so, because you are all politicians! I know precisely when I am being manoeuvred into a ‘yes’/‘no’ question, which is very difficult. So forgive me if I try and manoeuvre myself out of them!

Let me just elaborate, though, because I have got time to. This belongs to all of us. This Parliament is really important to me. I am trying to express this, and I hope the Chair of the Trade Committee will agree that in my work with that committee I really wanted to be as responsive as possible.

I have to try and make all of this fit together, and I will do my very best to achieve that. I have disappointed some of you a little today – and maybe some of you a lot today. That will happen, because as we try and put this

together, we have got to try and make it work as effectively as possible for all of the institutions.

My commitment is genuine and real. There is a huge amount of expertise in this room. There is a huge amount of political will in this room, and you are democratically elected and I am not. So I have a responsiveness to you which is born of your role in our society and in Europe, and I absolutely respect that.

1-112

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – Madame le Commissaire, au nom du groupe PPE, après consultation avec plusieurs membres, nous pouvons vous dire que nous apprécions beaucoup plus votre présence aujourd'hui que celle de décembre, et nous vous remercions pour votre ouverture.

En tout premier lieu, nous apprécions votre ouverture quant au contrôle budgétaire et à la décharge budgétaire, et nous aimerions bien vous entendre préciser à nouveau ces choses-là pour qu'elles constituent clairement une conclusion de notre réunion. Par contre, nous sommes effectivement un peu déçus concernant la question des auditions des responsables des différentes missions, vu qu'il s'agit là d'une question de logique institutionnelle. Si l'on peut vous auditionner vous, il est tout à fait normal que l'on puisse voir vos collaborateurs. Cela participe d'une logique institutionnelle très claire. Et finalement, si vous me le permettez, j'aimerais quand même vous poser une question concernant la collaboration entre vous et nous dans les prochaines semaines. En d'autres termes, nous aimerions savoir comment, très concrètement, vous entendez impliquer le Parlement européen dans l'œuvre préparatoire du service d'action extérieure avant la publication d'une décision formelle, d'une proposition du Conseil. Donc, d'une manière très concrète, quelles sont les étapes pour qu'on puisse faire un agenda?

1-113

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr Preda, thank you for your kind words. On discharge, I have said I am ready to be fully accountable to Parliament in line with the Treaty. It is very simple. As I have said, we need to work out what that means in terms of what you expect from me so that I make sure that I fulfil this.

I have already indicated the importance to me of the involvement in Parliament. I understand there is a proposal that we have a discussion in March; I think some dates are being looked at. There is a question of whether or not we involve national parliamentarians as well. I think that has come from you. I am in your hands.

The Council decision has to be made in April. It is quite a short timetable so I am in your hands as to what works for you and then we will get ready as quickly as we can to present it. There is an open door. We just need to find the right dates which work for everybody. I hope that will be a very useful and important occasion.

1-114

Presidente. – Se vuole fare un commento finale su tutta l'audizione, ha facoltà di intervento, naturalmente, sig.ra Ashton.

1-115

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President designate of the Commission, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – I want to do a number of things.

First of all I would like to thank all those who have asked questions – and I mean all of those who have asked questions – because it is of great importance to me that my hearing was one where you felt you had asked me everything and you had received, maybe not all the answers that you want, but as good an answer as you would expect from me at this time.

Secondly, I reiterate my commitment to Parliament, which I hope has been made clear today, but which I also hope my year as Commissioner has also made clear. I do expect to be held to account by Parliament and I will do my very best to be available as often as I can within what has been said about the limits of time.

Thirdly, the collaborative approach that the President of the Commission has shown with the other Commissioners should be seen for what it is, and not seen as some kind of – I think it was described as – a 'land grab'. It is certainly not that. It is a collaboration between us all and I am thrilled to be given the opportunity to work closely with other Commissioners in this way.

Fourthly, I am very conscious of the importance and value of the work with the Council and the extraordinary expertise I have in the 27 Foreign Ministers, many of whom have great experience in different parts of the world and who I intend to work with closely to ensure that they are able to offer me that assistance, and also to represent what we are doing effectively across the world.

Finally, strange as it may seem, that I am looking forward to the next occasion. The more that we are able to continue the dialogue, the more I understand what you are looking for from me, the more I understand the issues that are of greatest concern to me. But it really matters that, in between these occasions, you do feel that you have the ability to come to me, to talk with me about the issues of concern in groups – either in political groupings or through other means – and I hope that you will always find my door open to do that.

Thank you for your time. Some of you struggled through incredibly bad weather to get here as well. I am very conscious of that. Thank you very much. It has been an important occasion for me and I hope you will find that it was a useful and important occasion too.

(Applause)

1-116

Presidente. – Ringraziamo, a nome di tutti, la sig.ra Ashton, oggi è stato un momento particolarmente significativo per i lavori della nostra commissione.

Vi ricordo che il 26 gennaio mattina, qui a Bruxelles, ci sarà la votazione che riguarda le nomine proposte dal Presidente Barroso, tra cui anche la vicepresidente della Commissione che oggi abbiamo ascoltato.

La seduta è tolta.

Alle ore 18.00, ufficio di presidenza allargato ai coordinatori.

(La seduta è tolta alle 16.00)