

Committee on Constitutional Affairs, 20.06.2018

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Honorable Mrs. Hübner,
Honorable Members of the European Parliament,

It is a pleasure to be again at the AFCO Committee. When we were here 6 months ago, in January, Bulgaria was starting its first rotational Presidency and I shared with you that it takes place during **interesting and exciting times**, when **complex but at the same time inspiring decisions had to be taken regarding the future of the European project**. Overall, we worked on more than 180 files, on many of them together with you, the Members of the European Parliament, and we succeeded to implement most of the objectives we had set in our Presidency Programme.

My intervention today consists of two parts. First, I will touch upon the important areas where progress was achieved and second, I will focus on the AFCO files and the results in terms of the AFCO committee.

Let me just highlight a few of the most important areas where progress was achieved:

- **The area of Digital Europe** – Digitisation opens the door towards numerous opportunities, but to take full advantage, we need to prepare our industry, adapt our policies and create the necessary telecommunication infrastructure. Thanks to the political agreement on the Audio Visual Media Services Directive, the European Electronic Communications Code and BEREC, now **we are a step closer** to completion of the Digital Single Market.
- **The area of Social Europe**, where an important agreement was reached on the **posted workers directive** in the services sector. This will bring EU legislation up to date with the new developments on the labour market and in the context of the Future of Work (as you know the existing legislation was from 1996). Together we realized our common objective to improve the protection of workers and at the same time to guarantee the freedom to provide services in the Single Market. We worked intensively on the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and COREPER has now adopted a general approach, to be submitted to the EPSCO Council tomorrow, on the key dossiers of **Work-Life Balance, Regulation 883**

(Social Security Coordination) and the **Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive**.

- **The area of the Banking Union**, where the Bulgarian Presidency achieved a major breakthrough by brokering a deal on the **Banking package**. We now have a general approach on the measures to reduce risk in the banking sector, which will guarantee that EU banks are stronger and better supervised.
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- **The area of Defence Union**, where we now have an agreement between the co-legislators, endorsed at Ambassador level, on the **European Industrial Defense Development Program**, which is a first of its kind initiative and a pilot programme for launching of the **European Defence Fund**. This will pave the way towards an ambitious European Defence Industrial Development Programme under the next MFF post 2020 and the further security and defence of the European Union itself..
- **Let me also mention the European Perspective and Connectivity of the Western Balkans** - the specific priority of the Bulgarian Presidency and the one our Presidency will be remembered for. Our objectives with this priority were to reaffirm the European perspective of the region and to launch concrete and visible initiatives to improve physical and human connectivity for the benefit of the citizens and the business of the EU and the region. I believe that through its **Sofia Declaration** and the **Sofia Priority Agenda** the **EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia** accomplished its goal to motivate each Western Balkans partner to continue its steady progress and to feel the support for their European path according to the merit-based approach.
I am happy to say that it will remain a **long-term and joint priority** with our colleagues from Austria, Romania and Croatia.

When we started, we had a very dynamic agenda in front of us. Therefore, we very much relied on the good inter-institutional relations and the open and collaborative approach. And with the strong support by you, the Members of the European Parliament, we succeeded to realise the commitment of the Bulgarian Presidency to deliver concrete results for the European citizens.

In terms of the AFCO files, we also had a lot of files on our table. Despite of the fact that at first sight, those dossiers are very **technical and legally complex**, we have to underline that they have **major impact on the participatory democracy** of the Union and on the **democratic legitimacy** of its policies. They are actually the key instruments for achieving our main goal: a **citizen-focused and citizen-driven Europe**.

We shouldn't miss the opportunity to communicate enough, that **the real added value** of those legislative initiatives, is what they mean to our citizens.

Today, let me use this possibility to highlight this important added value, when taking stock of the developments under the Bulgarian Presidency on the dossiers that can be organized in **3 main chapters or directions: the forthcoming EP elections; citizens' involvement and general institutional issues:**

Let me start with the files related to the forthcoming EP elections. We closed the 4 key files in this area, which has enabled us to **focus on the essence** in the forthcoming elections – dialogue, a real debate, discussion with citizens on EU policies, addressing their concerns and expectations.

Concerning the Statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations: We succeeded to finalize the negotiations.

This was an important and timely reform. Together, we worked to ensure that EU funds are to be allocated to European political parties with distinct political agendas, corresponding to the European citizens' needs.

The new rules can be implemented as soon as the European political parties will start **applying for funding** for the next financial year.

I am sure that the regulation would bring more fairness in funding and contribute to increasing transparency and limiting irregularities, ahead of next year's European elections.

When it comes to the **Composition of European Parliament**, the decision is expected to be officially adopted by the European Council at the end of this month.

In such a way, we will make sure that after Brexit, there will be a reallocation of seats, **which is fair; which follows objective principles; and which respects the Treaty.** We have guaranteed the principle of **no loss of seats** for any Member State. At the same time, together we have provided the opportunity for those countries which are under-represented to balance their representation in the EP.

As for the Date of EP Elections, the date of the next EP elections has been set to 23-26 May 2019. The Council decision reflects the preference of EP.

This decision allows for timely and effective preparation of the elections in all Member States, in accordance with their respective constitutional arrangements, and gives clear timeframe for preparation and conduction of electoral campaigns focused on the objective of bringing citizens closer to the EU.

On the **Reform of the EU Electoral Law**, let me recall the discussion we had on this topic in February in Strasbourg. As I shared during the plenary debate, we were fully aware of the urgency related to the forthcoming EP elections. At the same time, I expressed our commitment to seek agreement in the Council on those issues on which agreement seemed most likely.

So it wasn't an easy task, but I am pleased to say that the update of the Electoral Law was **agreed with unanimity** in COREPER.

The Bulgarian Presidency's compromise, based on the work achieved by several presidencies, covers measures: to enhance citizens' participation in the EP elections; to raise awareness of their European character; and to prevent irregular voting.

We believe that the proposal contains a meaningful package of improvements. It enables us to **enhance the effectiveness of the system for conducting European elections**.

We hope that the European Parliament will give its consent so that the changes can be applied for next year's European elections.

Moving on to the files which contribute to increasing citizen participation and citizen oversight:

First is the European Citizens' Initiative. It is a great pleasure for me to announce that our compromise proposal on the European Citizens' Initiative gained **unanimous support** in Coreper on 7 June. Next Tuesday, the ministers will adopt a general approach in the General Affairs Council. You know that this was one of the priority dossiers in the Joint Declaration and we are therefore very happy with this development.

But the list of good news is not yet exhausted. Today your Committee voted on the report of Mr Schöpflin and I am very happy that we, by the end of our Presidency, both institutions will have the positions which will allow us to start negotiations. This will not be in our hands anymore, but I am confident that our successors from the Austrian Presidency will continue on the constructive path, with the aim of reaching an agreement by the end of the year.

As we had the pleasure to mention during the discussion with Mr. Schöpflin, on the occasion of ECI Day in April, this tool is important for bringing citizens closer to the EU. That's why improvements are needed to make it more user-friendly and more accessible for citizens.

The revised regulation will provide **a real opportunity for citizens to strengthen their ownership of Europe, to express their vision of Europe, and to build the Europe they want.**

Second is the **Transparency Register**. At the very beginning of our Presidency in January, we started the negotiations between our institutions, at technical and political level.

In the spirit of cooperation, the Presidency explored the possibilities to further enhance the level of engagement of the Council, while respecting the will of the 28 Member States in the mandate given. As a result, we have been able to **advance** from **encouragement** of the MSs towards a **political commitment through the elaboration of a draft political declaration**, which was supported by a **vast majority** of the Member States.

Despite the difficulties, we have found a constructive tone at the political meeting in Strasbourg last week. During the next steps, we would be happy to achieve a legally sound solution, taking into account the specific nature of the three institutions. And I am certain that our Austrian colleagues will continue to work constructively towards a possible completion of the negotiations later in the year.

I am now moving to the dossiers in the area of the General Institutional Issues

On the **adaptation of legal acts referring to the Regulatory Procedure with Scrutiny to Articles 290 and 291 of the Lisbon Treaty** (RPS Adaptation), the Council has adopted a partial general approach on each of the two proposals. The kick-off triologue is planned to take place at the end of the term of the Presidency.

As concerns the **delineation criteria between Delegated and Implementing acts**, the Bulgarian Presidency engaged in intensive negotiations on the delineation criteria and good progress has been made on a number of points. Our Austrian colleagues will continue to work on the file.

Regarding the EP Right of Inquiry, on 14 June, we had a fruitful meeting with you Mrs Hübner, and Mr Jauregui Atondo. The rapporteur presented his non-paper. I can assure you that the Council will continue to work constructively on the dossier. As I said before, it is a very legally complex and politically sensitive file, which deserves an in-depth examination. I am sure the incoming Austrian Presidency will deploy strong efforts to make progress on that file.

In conclusion, let me say that our achievements show that we did our best to move the agenda forward during the last 6 months. But we all know very well that **no Presidency can succeed alone**. Therefore, we are grateful for the strong **Parliamentary dimension** of the Bulgarian Presidency and the good relations with the European Parliament.

I would like also to take this opportunity to thank my team – in Sofia and in the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the European Union – and to express my gratitude to you Mrs Hübner – and all the members of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs – for your positive approach, understanding, openness and cooperation, which are corresponding to the spirit of **our Presidency motto** “United we stand strong”.

Thank you for your attention.