

COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT

INVITED COMMITTEES:

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

HEARING OF JOZEF SÍKELA

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE

(International Partnerships)

WEDNESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2024

BRUSSELS

1-0002-0000

IN THE CHAIR:**BARRY ANDREWS***Chair of the Committee on Development*

1-0003-0000

(The hearing opened at 14:30)

1-0004-0000

Barry Andrews, *Chair of the DEVE Committee*. – Welcome, everybody, especially to Commissioner-designate Síkela. Mr Síkela, you are proposed for the portfolio of International Partnerships. The Committee on Development is in the lead on this, and therefore I have the task and the honour of chairing the meeting today.

We also have four other committees with a stake in the proposed portfolio, and they are invited to this confirmation hearing: the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. I welcome all the Members and also all those following us here in the room or online, as this is a public meeting.

Allow me to recall a number of essential issues regarding this hearing. In preparation, the Commissioner-designate has replied to the committee's questions in writing, and the answers are publicly available. The Committee on Legal Affairs assessed the conflict of interests, and has raised no objection to the holding of the confirmation hearing of Mr Síkela.

The structure of the confirmation hearing is the following. The Commissioner-designate will make an opening statement of 15 minutes, and closing remarks of five minutes. Questions from Members will be structured in four rounds and speaking time has been distributed among political groups. MEPs questions are always limited to one minute. The answers from the candidate Commissioner can be one or two minutes long, depending on the round.

All speakers have been informed about speaking slots, so I won't repeat the details. We have three hours for this confirmation hearing and I will have to be strict with the timing. I have the possibility to cut the microphone if needed. I hope to avoid that outcome. I ask you to stick to your time and to speak clearly, but not too quickly, in ease of the interpreters – we have interpretation in 23 languages.

Before we start with the specificities of the candidate's portfolio, I would also like to address the ongoing negotiations on the revision of the Framework Agreement between Parliament and the Commission. It is essential that the Commission upholds its role as an honest broker in all legislative procedures and interinstitutional negotiations, ensuring equal treatment of Parliament and of the Council. We count on the Commission's full cooperation to inform our committees in advance of all upcoming proposals and to ensure transparency, enabling Parliament to exercise its prerogatives effectively.

On behalf of the Development Committee, we are determined to make the equal partnership between the EU and developing countries a reality. Our compass in this endeavour is the UN's Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals. The policies in pursuit of eradication of poverty, which is the primary objective of the European Union's work in developing countries,

deserve continuous democratic scrutiny. This is all the more true in times of paradigm shifts in the EU's approach, exemplified by the Global Gateway Strategy.

The confirmation hearing today is an important step in our scrutiny of the Commission, and with this in mind I now pass the floor to Mr Síkela. You have 15 minutes.

1-0005-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much. Honourable Chair Andrews, honourable members of the European Parliament. Ladies and gentlemen, dear all. I am honoured to appear before you today as Commissioner-designate for International Partnerships.

I believe strongly in parliamentary democracy and, if confirmed, hope to build a close working relationship with you. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen once stated: 'human development is about expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy, it is about increasing their choices and their ability to act on their own behalf'. Today, I firmly believe that we, the European Union, are uniquely positioned to offer the people of the world the means to achieve exactly that: the universal ability to act freely on one's own behalf.

The European Union is a remarkable project. It has brought lasting peace to our countries devastated by conflicts. It has fostered sustainable prosperity for hundreds of millions, and has always served as an inspiration to those who long for freedom and development. I can attest this personally, having been among those who fought for freedom in my own country while dreaming of a European future.

Our first post-Communist president, Václav Havel, a true freedom fighter, spoke of Europe not just as a geographical or political entity, but as a shared spiritual and cultural space, a community bound by common values and destiny. He once wrote: 'Europe's task today is to rediscover its conscience and its responsibility, not only for its own political architecture, but also for the world as a whole'. Today, I echo this sentiment: we need to defend these values and that shared destiny.

Our partners want to work more with Europe, and we need to show them why Europe's offer is unique: common values and a better future instead of a future with assertive actors lacking democratic values and regard for human rights. And we have to change how we communicate our offer by reaching new a audience. This offer is embodied in the Global Gateway Vision, a vision rooted in the business of equals, partners sharing the same values and rights, fairly distributing the benefits of collaboration.

Today I share my vision of how we can realise this ambition if I have the privilege to serve as Commissioner for International Partnerships. We also need our partners in this multipolar world as it is undergoing a fundamental economic transformation, requiring new raw materials abundant in some countries. This makes these regions a focus for many global powers. Those who come with the best offer will gain an edge in achieving decarbonisation and sustainable growth, benefiting economically from this process. And I am confident that the European offer to the world is the best because it aligns economic objectives with human dignity, equality and sustainability.

This alignment forms the basis for cooperation that fosters not only economic development, but also social progress and stability. Our Global Gateway is the most effective and unique offer, bringing us closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Over the past weeks, engaging with many of you has convinced me that we share this belief. Our goals are the same, now let's discuss how we will reach them.

Let's look at human history. Sustainable economic growth has always been the driving force behind human development. By fostering robust economies, we generate resources needed to invest in infrastructure, education, health care, the pillars that uplift societies. Sustainable development requires balance between profits and principle, ensuring that economic gains do not compromise future generations or marginalise vulnerable populations. If I am confirmed, these principles will shape my decision-making and the global case for implementation.

There is a lot of work ahead of us, we need to build a global strategy that strengthens both our partners and us. Throughout my professional life, challenges have motivated me to achieve better results. I want to focus on six concrete fields. First of all, the Global Gateway is built on a commitment to mobilise up to EUR 300 billion in investments by 2027 across critical sectors like digital transformation, climate and energy, transport, health, education, infrastructure or research.

To achieve this, we must leverage private-public partnerships, de-risk investments and attract private capital. Examples include economic corridors like the Lobito Corridor in Africa and the Trans-Caspian Corridor in Central Asia. We are investing in renewable energy projects, hydropower, solar, wind to provide electricity and diversify energy supply chains while creating local jobs and on digital infrastructure like high speed internet in rural areas.

Second, we must make the Global Gateway more flexible. We must ensure sufficient funding for quick project implementation. If confirmed, I will focus on improving cooperation with European public development banks like the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Stable public funding simplifies securing private investments. By designing projects that offer predictability and stability, we can combine public and private resources effectively.

This will also help us to implement a Team Europe approach involving European Union Member States, European credit agencies, development finance institutions and the private sector. We must also address global issues multilaterally with partners like the United Nations, IMF or World Bank, pressing for more financing and debt relief for developing economies.

The business of equals assumes cooperation based on mutual respect, shared values and equitable benefits, focusing on capacity-building and skills transfer. Initiatives like the Great Green Wall involve local communities in combating desertification, creating sustainable agriculture, jobs, and access to electricity. This requires engaging civil society organisations in planning and in implementation.

Third, we must make sure our strategy tackles the root causes of irregular migration. With Global Gateway projects, we can address the drivers of irregular migration by working on poverty eradication, climate resilience, and sustainable business development. We must also create opportunities to support people to build a better future by investing in economic development, education, skills, health care by creating jobs.

We can enhance people-to-people relations through education and work. Programmes like Erasmus+ support education and skills development. By working together with partners, we can take immediate action to enhance border management and dismantle human trafficking networks and strengthen cooperation on readmission.

Fourth, to be truly successful in this matter, we must focus on conflict prevention and good governance, working with partner countries to strengthen institutions and promote the rule of law.

Special attention must be given to the fact that each of our partners has specific needs and possibilities. That is why we must maintain a differentiated approach and focus especially on the least developed countries, as well as fragile countries and communities. Twenty-three per cent of the world's population lives in fragile contexts. We must stay engaged in countries like Afghanistan, Yemen and in the Sahel to provide basic services. Effectively, we focus on their vulnerabilities and promote their resilience.

Fifth, we must make sure that cooperation with our partners is mutually agreed upon with clear frameworks. We must strengthen our partnership with Africa by working towards the joint vision for 2030 agreed at the EU-Africa Summit. We will enhance our partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean. Central Asia will also be a priority, offering opportunities in sustainable transport, for example. Additionally, if confirmed, I aim to increase the EU's impact in South and East Asia and the Pacific, where we share common agendas on climate change and digital connectivity.

And finally, sixth, our policies must be consistent with and reinforce our development objectives with sustainability at the core. All external actions must align with the EU Green Deal objectives to ensure environmental sustainability, for example supporting programmes that promote sustainable consumption. Politically, we will ensure all projects respect human rights, supporting initiatives like the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism. Socially, we will promote social rights, women's rights and gender equality.

To underscore these efforts, we will better utilise the inequality marker, which helps ensure that every development initiative contributes to reducing inequalities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. By promoting environmental and social sustainability, we can ensure our investments benefit the most disadvantaged, fostering inclusive growth and social justice.

As I said, our partners need more from Europe. However, lately they have been receiving more interest from assertive actors, with aggressive approaches bringing little development and few clear benefits. This is something we have a chance to change. If confirmed, I bring to the international partnerships portfolio extensive experience as a minister of industry and trade and in the banking sector, particularly in managing large-scale financial projects and investment opportunities.

I will make sure that our resources are allocated effectively, risk minimised and financial instruments used to maximise returns. Part of this effort will include an emphasis on cooperation with the European Parliament. In the last few weeks I have been meeting many of you to introduce myself and to listen to your opinions about the portfolio and its main challenges. It is clear that you have much to offer to our common agenda, and I want to use this input.

What I have also realised is that all of us in this room believe that we, Europe, can bring positive change into the lives of tens of millions of people while making Europe stronger, more independent, more sustainable and safer. Through the Global Gateway we can do exactly that. Thank you very much for your attention, I look forward to your questions and engaging with you.

1-0006-0000

Barry Andrews, *Chair of the DEVE Committee*. – Thank you very much, Mr Síkela, for your opening comments. We will now go to the first round of questions led by the coordinators for the different groups, with a one-minute question, and two-minute answer, and then a one-minute follow-up and one minute answer.

We start with the EPP.

1-0007-0000

Lukas Mandl (PPE). – Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Commissioner-designate, for your speech today and your presentation. I frequently quote a former American president, maybe we are all keen to hear about these days, Ronald Reagan, who once stated that the best social program would be a job. And I'll try to paraphrase him stating that the best development aid would be business cooperation.

You elaborated in your speech already very clearly on business, private-public partnerships, as you also quoted. So I want to go deeper into that and ask why public money is crucial for development aid – public money alone will never be enough to bridge the funding gap. Private investments, especially from European companies, are crucial. How do you intend to address this challenge? What measures will you put in place so European companies can benefit from partnerships?

1-0008-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – I think we have to be very open and you said, in a very right way, that public money won't be enough. When we see the confirmed funding gap only in the area of the Sustainable Development Goals, we are talking about around USD 4 trillion. Just to give you a rough economic feeling, the market capitalisation, the global one, amounts to USD 100 trillion, and only the biggest asset managers on this planet manage more than USD 10 trillion. The only single body of wealth. So, without attracting the private money in the game we will basically not be able to close the gap.

I think the combination of public money and the involvement of institutions like EIB or EBRD, which is giving more security to the private business, is one of the ways how we can help to close the gap. I have pretty good experience in working with private institutions, but also with already-mentioned bodies like the EIB or EBRD, and I hope that I will be able to contribute to this effort.

1-0009-0000

Lukas Mandl (PPE). – Commissioner-designate, thank you very much. I personally also think we should rather encourage European companies to invest than to hold them back from that via supply chain rules and other fields which are not part of your portfolio.

In my follow-up question, I want to address migration, which is clearly connected with our scope, as the World Food Programme and other important organisations time and again emphasise. Do you commit to addressing irregular migration in all its dimensions, not just the root causes? What more can be done through international partnerships to achieve this? How will you guarantee that European infrastructure investment creates jobs for the local population so they don't feel the need to migrate? Are you in favour of conditionality of development cooperation related to migration? You elaborated thankfully already on migration in your speech, maybe you can go deeper into detail here.

1-0010-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – I think irregular migration is one of the most important issues we have to talk about. If you look on the World Economic Forum risk report, it is ranked in the two years of horizon as the eighth biggest threat globally. The figures in irregular border crossings we are facing currently are by far the highest since 2016, so basically this requests the whole of the Commission and the whole of the root approach. Basically we have to, of course, start with better border management. We have to basically fight against smuggler routes. But in the mid-term perspective, the most important issue is basically not to give young people a reason to risk

their lives and the lives of their children to move. So where I see my primary responsibility is to focus on projects, which will basically prevent these people to decide to take this very risky ways and I'm...

(The President cut off the speaker)

1-0011-0000

Udo Bullmann (S&D). – Welcome, Commissioner-designate. With all due respect to my colleague, the EPP coordinator, I do not exactly know whether tens of thousands of children in the mines of Africa would agree with Ronald Reagan on the quote that it's only about whatever kind of job to make a decent future.

I read your introductory remarks that you would like to marry a forward-looking economic perspective with the primary goal of the EU's development cooperation, and I quote: 'the reduction in the long term, as well as the eradication, of poverty'. I understand that, I appreciate.

My question is: how do you design? How do you implement the Global Gateway in a better way? We have studies that put in question whether we have reached this goal. Let us talk like engineers talk. How do we do that to achieve exactly what you want?

1-0012-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – Honourable Member, *sehr geehrter Herr Bullmann*, the implementation is basically something I was responsible for for my entire banking career. Of course, there are certain rules: to be present, to have hands on, to use basically the state institution if they are available on spot but, of course, to cooperate with NGOs and civil society organisations, which can help us not only to identify the proper way, but to control if the things we are doing, we are doing right.

So, of course, there should be a certain measurement and I already mentioned in my opening speech the inequality marker. But I am always ready to discuss how we can basically improve the measurement. But, I suggest – and this is also something I want to follow in the future – that like a social, environmental and economic impact study is something that we will always do in order to understand the things we want to achieve are also realistic from all three aspects I mentioned: social dimension, environmental dimension and economic dimension.

1-0013-0000

Udo Bullmann (S&D). – Additional question: we have a study of the European Parliamentary Research Service on our desks which ranks the critical uncertainties of the Global Gateway strategy as far as they can identify. They had communications with the leading thinktanks of the European Union. They say the major risk is a lack of responsiveness to the needs of our partner countries in the design of our projects.

My question is: how would you like to enhance our listening capacities and our communicative skills so that the needs of our partner countries are on board when we enhance our activities with Global Gateway?

1-0014-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I am always ready to listen – and this is something what I will do also in the future if confirmed – but I already mentioned one of the possibilities, and this is closer contact to local authorities and local civil society institutions.

As already said, we are talking about the relationship of equals. So, to listen and to react on the needs of our partners, in the case that we want that they also respect our values, is something we have to do on a daily basis. Thank you, thanks to you, I got the opportunity to look at the study.

On the other side, when I look on the result of inequalities monitoring, we are not as bad. But, of course, there is always a risk that basically we might defer from our plans, therefore not only like impact studies in advance, but also permanent monitoring of activities is needed.

1-0015-0000

György Hölvényi (PFE). – Dear Mr Commissioner-designate, really one of the major long time criticisms of the European Development Corporation is the low efficiency and funding. The Global Gateway, which you mentioned already, as well as other colleagues, is a possible instrument to make change, to provide more transparency and more efficient use of EU resources. This is already a journey started where you will need to continue.

In the current international competition we cannot allow to continue as business as usual. How will you secure that the proper updated information on the EU's development-related spending will be available for Parliament? And the second question would be what expectation do you have to enhance the cooperation on the scrutiny of development funding in order to make better use of EU taxpayers' money?

1-0016-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for the question. As I already said, efficiency is one of my main targets if I am confirmed. We are by far the biggest donor and by far the biggest supporter of development activities worldwide. On the other side, you mentioned a certain inefficiency of financing. The question is what we understand under inefficiency, because financing is something what should be a returnable. We have to measure this from the point of view that we basically grant the money which is then repaid, because otherwise we are just a pure donor, and we have to split these two activities.

There will also be a lot of discussion about the risk uncertainty, because one thing is basically to avoid the risk, and the second thing is to steer the risk. It is fair to have a discussion with the involved bodies, mainly with the EIB and the EBRD, on how they can help us to achieve our targets in the third countries and if basically a too risky, prudent approach is the right way. On the other side, we see the results of activities of our rivals, where basically debt granting is used as a weapon by basically granting the loans where they know that they will not be repaid, and in order to restructure or relieve the loan they ask basically for easing of the conditions on the business side. So, as I said, the efficiency of usage of the money of the European taxpayers is something I want to focus on.

1-0017-0000

György Hölvényi (PFE). – One of the Commission's main priorities was, as you know very well I hope, to boost access to education. That was an absolutely priority. Do you commit to continue on it? At the time, you know, it was fixed that 10 % of the development budget will target education in development countries. What do you think about this 10%? It's interesting.

The focal point of the economic context, efficiency, is how we reach the local population and find the right partners. We all know the challenges of weak governance and corruption and so on. In this context, the most efficient way would be to cooperate with a lot of local actors and inclusive of the churches and faith-based organisations. We are providing more than 40 % of the education in the sub-Saharan region as frequent loan providers.

How do you plan to make better use of the expertise of these actors in order to boost the efficiency of development cooperation?

1-0018-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – My first sentence is very short: yes, I do. Yes, I commit. Because we see historically, in development, that basically investments in education are the basis for future economic growth. We should focus on all levels of education – the elementary one, the middle one, but also know-how exchange and university education.

I think on the higher level, for example, the Erasmus+ is a very good platform. You are right, in some of the areas we need a very close contact to locals, to use basically NGOs, civil society, but also faith-based and religion schools in case they are ready to respect our principles and our values.

1-0019-0000

Małgorzata Gosiewska (ECR). – Szanowny Panie Komisarzu! Organizacje społeczeństwa obywatelskiego i organizacje pozarządowe, w szczególności te z siedzibą w mniejszych, niedawno przyjętych do Unii Europejskiej państwach członkowskich, ale też organizacje wyznaniowe, kościoły, misjonarze, to kluczowi partnerzy na rzecz rozwoju, którzy blisko współpracują ze społeczeństwem w terenie i dlatego są w stanie najlepiej poznać ich potrzeby. To bliski kontakt – o którym już tutaj wcześniej była mowa – ze społeczeństwem lokalnym, ale też mniejsza korupcja i mniejsze koszty obsługi takiej pomocy.

Wspominał Pan o swojej otwartości na takie organizacje. Mam pytanie: jakie konkretnie będzie Pana wsparcie dla takich organizacji, biorąc pod uwagę trudności, z jakimi dotychczas przychodziło im zmagać się w uzyskaniu dostępu do środków unijnych?

1-0020-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think I already partially responded to the questions in the previous part. However, I think that the fact that we are basically increasing the support of the NGOs, when we see on the previous budget period, should grant that basically we will have enough pieces of information on spot because as I said, the locals can very much help us not only to identify the right opportunities, but to alert us when something is going wrong.

Of course, to identify where is some corrupting behaviour involved or not is not easy, this is something that we know also from our countries. However, they are basically the right bodies which can navigate us in order to do the things right. So basically, the education and the cooperation with civil societies organisations is something I am ready to commit to.

1-0021-0000

Małgorzata Gosiewska (ECR). – Panie Komisarzu! Przydzielono Panu zadanie wzmocnienia strategii Global Gateway, której celem jest między innymi współpraca między Unią Europejską a Afryką w ramach pakietu inwestycyjnego wspierającego projekty infrastrukturalne. W jaki sposób,

Pana zdaniem, ta strategia mogłaby pomóc w tworzeniu miejsc pracy w krajach rozwijających się, a tym samym też w zwalczaniu przyczyn pierwotnych migracji?

1-0022-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think that if we understand our duties in the area of official development assistance, I can say this is just the oil which should serve to lubricate the engine. The engine is basically our sustainable development goals because we have to focus on creating jobs, on shaping sustainable economies, investing in projects which will help developing and least developed and middle-income countries to become a part of global trade – to allow them to add value, not by basically letting the foreigners just to get the raw materials and to add value somewhere abroad and to sell it, but simply to allow them to add value on the spot. It starts with job creation, it starts with very small businesses. I think in Africa we are doing a lot. I am ready to commit to talk to my fellow Commissioner for Trade, Maroš, in order to...

(The President cut off the speaker)

1-0023-0000

Charles Goerens (Renew). – Monsieur le Président, je crois qu'il serait abusif de dire que nous avons une très bonne image en Afrique pour l'instant. Pour le dire avec des mots très simples: la Russie est présente en Afrique, la Chine est présente en Afrique, la Turquie est présente en Afrique. D'autres encore et l'Union européenne sont présents en Afrique. Cela ne veut pas dire que l'Afrique appartient aux Russes, à la Chine, à la Turquie et à l'Europe. L'Afrique, comme disait Ki-Zerbo, un grand sage burkinabé: «L'Afrique, on ne la développe pas, l'Afrique se développe elle-même».

Respectueux des principes d'autonomie de l'Afrique, nous sommes quand même des stratèges et dans la stratégie que nous menons, nous devons faire l'inventaire des obstacles qui s'opposent à son développement. Et je commencerai par la dette, qui prend des dimensions inquiétantes. Ma question est de savoir si vous, en tant que commissaire, entendez lancer une initiative susceptible de convaincre le Conseil, les États membres, le Parlement européen et tous les acteurs enclins à ce faire, à prendre l'initiative d'annuler partie ou totalité de la dette, à condition que la Chine, notamment, en fasse de même.

1-0024-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Member, thank you very much for your question. I think this is a very important question. In which language would you like my response, because I know you speak perfectly German or in English? English? Okay.

On Africa you are right. We are doing a lot in Africa. We are the major trade partner. The trade balance is almost in equilibrium - so close to EUR 150 billion exported and EUR 142 billion from Africa. The least-developed countries are enjoying the general system of preferences. This is something where we can start simply to better promote the things we are doing, because the neo-colonialism is not coming from Europe. The things which we are experiencing: Chinese and Russian activities in the Sahel are not nice.

So we just come with a better offer, and we also have to sing about how we can help more, how we can maybe open the access to the general system of preferences not only to the least-developed countries, but also to the others simply to ease access for them to world trade.

When it comes to that relief, I think I already mentioned at the beginning that sometimes the funding is being weaponised. Simply, you come, you grant the loan knowing that the receiver, the

borrower will not be able to repay the loan. And then you come with the proposal: either bailout, insolvency or 'you basically do what I want', and this is something we have to avoid.

So we have to have a conversation within Team Europe, because I think we can start to discuss debt relief, but we also have to engage with other partners from G7 because they are also major lenders to this continent. And if we have alignment with our allies, then we can propose and we can force, for example, China to follow.

1-0025-0000

Charles Goerens (Renew). – Monsieur le commissaire désigné, vous le savez sans doute, sinon vous allez l'apprendre assez rapidement, notre politique de développement est sujette à beaucoup de convoitises. D'aucuns voient dans la politique de développement un moyen de résoudre leurs propres problèmes, plutôt que de résoudre les problèmes de nos partenaires. Cette tournure un peu plus utilitariste me cause beaucoup de soucis. Allez-vous résister, fermement, comme nous le souhaitons tous ici au sein de cette salle, à donner de l'ampleur à ce mouvement utilitariste qui risque de dénaturer très sensiblement la politique d'aide au développement?

1-0026-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – I think we have to continue even in the most critical and fragile areas, because currently the official development assistance amounts to approximately EUR 200 billion. And half of the official assistance is granted by the European Union.

So we basically represent half of this, and I think this is one of our core duties. We committed ourselves to reduce and, in the medium-term, to fight against poverty. And we have to seek the smart way, which is to support the people in their basic needs.

But I'm not sure if I am correctly responding to your question.

1-0027-0000

Barry Andrews (Renew). – Commissioner-designate, you don't have an opportunity to follow up to MEP Goerens. The next speaker is from the Greens.

1-0028-0000

Ana Miranda Paz (Verts/ALE). – Mr Síkela, welcome to the European Parliament. The Sustainable Development Goals and the goal for eradication of poverty are no longer a priority for the current European Commission. Are they for you?

Global Gateway embodies a paradigm shift on the new agenda, with a focus on large-scale infrastructure projects. You are an expert in trade and banks, but we are very worried about the promotion of Global Gateway and the private sector in developing countries and promoting destructivism. We are also very concerned about the impact of human rights defenders and the opacity and lack of involvement of the European Parliament as a co-legislator.

How will you reinforce the role of the European Parliament over the implementation of Global Gateway projects? Transparency and accountability is one of the great demands from civil society actors.

1-0029-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Member, thank you very much for the question, but I'm not sure what you mean about the eradication of poverty. When I read my mission letter and the basic articles of the EU Treaties, the eradication of poverty is basically the priority of the European Union and I do not see a contradiction.

I said that development aid should be used as a oil to lubricate the engine, but we know that the engine does not work without oil. So, I see this as two connected activities where basically development assistance is creating the base. However, the Global Gateway is creating sustainable economic growth, jobs and, by public earnings from the taxes being paid by employees and by companies, also the space how to become self-sufficient in some of the areas.

When it comes to more controlling mechanism, I am ready to use all the official but also the unofficial ways in order to discuss where you see the urgency, where we can become even more transparent. I am coming from a regulated industry. The highest transparency of all the things I am doing is perfectly fine with me because this is also protecting me. So, whenever you will have a need to discuss a certain issue, whenever there will be doubts, I am always ready to come and to discuss the things.

However, even the current audits – and during the preparation, I was also seeking for plenty of information – my feeling is, and it was also awarded, that the Global Gateway is one of the ten most transparent institutions with the highest possible scoring.

So, I currently do not see a lack of transparency in the activities, but I am very ready to listen to your arguments and to check it afterwards.

1-0030-0000

Ana Miranda Paz (Verts/ALE). – As a standing reporter for indigenous people of the European Parliament, I had the opportunity to meet some indigenous communities, like the Maasai in Africa, and another from Latin America, that shared the concerns about the impact of the Global Gateway strategy, the COP26 and knowledge on the vital role of indigenous people on climate action and inclusive and sustainable development, as well as the importance of securing their land and resource rights.

What does the Commissioner-designate intend to do to prevent land grabbing and protect the rights – including customary land rights – of indigenous people and local communities? Are you ready to ensure full and effective participation of indigenous people, notably in the development of strategic projects related to critical raw materials and energy, in the remit of the Global Gateway, and seek their free, prior and informed consent, as enshrined in the United Nations declaration of indigenous peoples and local communities?

1-0031-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much for your question. I understand the concerns. However, in my authority as a Minister of Trade, I was travelling a lot and visiting basically all the continents – with the exception of Antarctica and Australia – and I got a slightly different feeling, because in some of the countries there is a huge disappointment from Chinese activities – and not talking basically about Russian aggressivity, about the marionette regimes and the activities of the Wagner Group.

So, I basically got a message like a strong call for more Europe presence. In certain areas we are really doing a lot and we need to increase our visibility. But, as I already mentioned, basically touch to civil society and development aid, and as I see on the figures, despite the fact that basically the resources are stretched, so we do not want to compromise mainly on the development aid, we simply have to offer better solutions.

1-0032-0000

Isabel Serra Sánchez (The Left). – Señor Síkela, yo también quiero preguntarle por el Global Gateway, porque en sus primeras declaraciones públicas sobre las competencias a las que aspira dijo: «Esta responsabilidad me permitirá concentrarme en el fortalecimiento de la seguridad económica de la Unión Europea, diversificando nuestros proveedores de materias primas críticas y abriendo nuevos mercados para las empresas europeas».

Yo insisto en la pregunta de si cree usted que la prioridad del Global Gateway es posibilitar la inversión de la Unión Europea a nivel global o luchar contra la pobreza y la desigualdad en el mundo. Ya le he escuchado decir que no ve contradicciones. Yo le pregunto, porque yo sí que creo que hay contradicciones en algunas ocasiones o en general. ¿Cómo aborda usted la prevalencia del interés de las poblaciones de los países en desarrollo en los casos, en los proyectos, en los que sí que hay contradicciones?

1-0033-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you for your question, but I really do not see the controversy. When we look at the development in some of the continents, we see that the countries which managed to leave the group of the poor countries and to move to a developed or emerging countries are the countries where the investments were rightly focused on sustainable development, on economic growth and education.

If I take some examples, like the Chinese activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the area of cobalt, where basically if we fail then China will control by 2030 more than half of the world deposits of cobalt – this is nothing we want to follow. So with our values, with our approach, with basically the partnership and business of equals, with our strive for bringing the least developed countries more to the benefits of world trade and to let them add value is not the area where I see the contradiction.

Official assistance is fine, however we simply have to help them to stay on their own feet. So simply assist them to create the jobs to become sustainable in the economic area.

1-0034-0000

Isabel Serra Sánchez (The Left). – En primer lugar, dentro del Global Gateway hay muchos proyectos relacionados con combustibles fósiles y con proyectos de gran huella ambiental, por ejemplo, de hidrógeno. Es el caso de cuatro de los trece proyectos intensivos en agua del Global Gateway que están planificados en países con alto estrés hídrico.

En segundo lugar, aunque se diga que se promueven y garantizan los valores democráticos y los derechos humanos, se está llegando a acuerdos con países caracterizados por violaciones de derechos humanos y se está interviniendo en estos. Por ejemplo, el acuerdo de materias primas firmado entre Ruanda y la Unión Europea en una provincia rica en minerales de la República del Congo, donde está interviniendo Ruanda en un conflicto armado y hay riesgo de escalada de ese conflicto armado. Y, aunque digan que las empresas incluso hacen negocio para beneficiar a Europa, yo dudo incluso de que beneficien a los ciudadanos europeos. Desde luego, no lo hacen con los

países en desarrollo, cuando estamos hablando de empresas como Acciona, Orange, Siemens, TotalEnergies, Volvo, Iberdrola, MöllerGroup, Suez o BioNTech.

Yo creo que es evidente que el Global Gateway es una arquitectura para favorecer los intereses privados de un proyecto neocolonial extractivista. Pero le pregunto, insisto, si aquí no se vulneran los derechos humanos.

1-0035-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think we have a mechanism where basically, – because I fully respect the rule of law and order, and to respect the rule of law and order means also to keep the promises – *Pacta sunt servanda*: the agreements are to be fulfilled in the case that the other parties are not violating basically their obligations. We have the mechanism when we can go out of the agreements in the case that we identify, for example, the violation of human rights.

I am always ready to check the examples you are giving to me, however I want to turn back to this cobalt and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where basically, with the promise to invest 4 billion, investing only 800 million, having 25 000 children working, having a big environmental impact by water, a heavy health impact on the involved population – this is the Chinese example, these are the things how they are doing it. This is nothing we want to follow. On the other side, we have to be very frank that we need also raw materials for development in Europe...

(The President cut off the speaker)

1-0036-0000

Marc Jongen (ESN). – Vielen Dank, Herr Síkela. Sie legen in der Entwicklungspolitik ja Wert auf den Begriff der Partnerschaft, die also für beide Seiten – auch für Europa und die europäischen Unternehmen – Vorteile bringen soll. Das würde dringend Not tun. Laut UN-Entwicklungsprogramm wird in den Nehmerländern zehnmal so viel Geld durch Korruption verschwendet, wie sie an Entwicklungshilfe erhalten. Die ESN-Fraktion begrüßt es grundsätzlich, dass die Global-Gateway-Strategie jetzt mehr auf Eigenverantwortung und öffentlich-private Partnerschaften setzen will. Doch viele klimaideologische Projekte machen uns skeptisch, ob europäische Steuergelder hier wirklich sinnvoll eingesetzt werden. Die Misserfolge der Klimapolitik in Europa lassen auch fragen, ob diese Politik wirklich so nachhaltig ist, wie behauptet, und ob sie in der Welt als Vorbild wahrgenommen wird. Welche Maßnahmen sehen Sie vor, um den Einsatz der Mittel strenger zu prüfen – vor allem die ökonomische Nachhaltigkeit auch zu evaluieren – und insbesondere den Nutzen für Europa sicherzustellen?

1-0037-0000

Jozef Síkela, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Sehr geehrtes Mitglied des EU-Parlaments! Vielen Dank für diese Frage, ich versuche sie in Ihrer Muttersprache zu beantworten. Sie haben Recht, wenn man sich das Niveau der offiziellen *development assistance* und Korruption ansieht, wo zehnmal mehr Geld verschwindet. Wobei, wir müssen ehrlich sein: Es ist auf anderen Kontinenten nur ein bisschen weniger, da ist es siebenmal so viel ungefähr. Selbstverständlich müssen wir versuchen, und das ist im Grunde genommen ein Grundsatz meiner Arbeit in meinem ganzen Leben ... das Geld, das mir anvertraut wurde, egal ob es jetzt in einer Bank war oder als Mitglied der tschechischen Regierung, also Steuergelder, das ist nicht mein Geld. Und mein Prinzip ist, mit diesem Geld sehr vorsichtig umzugehen.

Das heißt, wir werden alle Maßnahmen setzen, um zu identifizieren – ich habe darüber schon gesprochen. Wir haben gewisse Assistenz vor Ort, wir haben unsere Präsenz, wir haben unsere

106 Vertretungen, wo wir einfach versuchen können, vorab zu identifizieren, wo eigentlich Korruptionsaktivitäten oder -verhalten identifiziert werden kann – oder nachträglich. Und wenn wir das nachträglich identifizieren, dann müssen wir halt raus. Aber selbstverständlich sind da nur die klassischen Kontrollmechanismen: Audit, ganz einfache Übungen. Wir sehen, wie viel wir investieren wollen, wie viel da investiert wird. Das alles kann irgendwie bewertet werden. Und wenn wir dieses Know-how nicht haben, dann müssen wir es entweder bekommen oder wir müssen es uns von außen holen.

1-0038-0000

Marc Jongen (ESN). – Vielen Dank für Ihre Antwort in deutscher Sprache. Meine nächste Frage zum Thema „Migration“: Sie haben es ja ausgeführt, Sie sehen hier einen positiven Effekt der Entwicklungspolitik. Also eine höhere Entwicklung soll die Lebensqualität in den Herkunftsländern verbessern und dann dazu führen, dass weniger Migranten in Richtung Europa aufbrechen. Das wäre sehr zu begrüßen, denn wir müssen die Massmigration dringend eindämmen. So einfach ist der Zusammenhang aber nicht. Besonders viele illegale Einwanderer kommen ja gerade nicht aus den ärmsten Ländern der Welt wie dem Tschad, sondern aus Staaten mit einem etwas gehobeneren Einkommen, etwa Marokko, Nigeria oder Pakistan. Mehr Wohlstand heißt leider eben auch oft mehr Geld für die Schlepper. Der Zusammenhang wurde ja von der Wissenschaft, wie Paul Collier und anderen ausführlich beschrieben. Sehen Sie diesen Zusammenhang auch? Und wenn ja, wie wollen Sie sicherstellen, dass die Entwicklungspolitik wirklich zu einer Reduktion illegaler Migration führt und nicht etwa den gegenteiligen Effekt hat? Ist das bloß eine Sache des Grenzschutzes oder gibt es genuin entwicklungspolitische Mittel, die das sicherstellen können?

1-0039-0000

Jozef Síkela, designiertes Mitglied der Kommission. – Ich habe, glaube ich, vorher schon erwähnt, dass dies einen *whole-of-route approach* verlangt. Also wir müssen uns eigentlich auf die ganze Route fokussieren. Das fängt mit einem besseren Schutz der Grenzen an und geht weiter mit einer engeren Zusammenarbeit mit den Transitländern. Das heißt, die können auch einen Teil davon abfangen und einen Teil dieser Leute integrieren. Aber selbstverständlich müssen wir uns primär darauf fokussieren, den Leuten nicht den Grund zu geben, ihre Heimatländer zu verlassen und dieses gefährliche Abenteuer zu unternehmen. Auf der anderen Seite ist hier selbstverständlich auch die Frage berechtigt – und ich bin wirklich bereit und ich sehe es auch als meine Verpflichtung, mit meinem Kollegen Magnus Brunner hier wirklich diese Sache komplex zu diskutieren –, was wir europaintern machen können und was wir im Ausland machen müssen.

1-0040-0000

Barry Andrews, Chair of the DEVE Committee. – Thank you very much, Commissioner-designate. And that concludes the first round of questions from coordinators. So now we move to the second round, and this will be a one-minute question with a two-minute response from the Commissioner-designate. So to begin this second round, I give the floor for the EPP to MEP Bentele.

1-0041-0000

Hildegard Bentele (PPE). – Sehr geehrter Herr Kommissar, ich mache auch in Deutsch weiter. Die Präsidentin der letzten und dieser Kommission hat das Schließen von internationalen Partnerschaften im gegenseitigem Interesse, vor allem im Interesse der Unterstützung der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung und der Sicherung und Schaffung von Arbeitsplätzen, in den Vordergrund unserer EU-Außenpolitik gestellt und deshalb vor drei Jahren auch die *Global Gateway Initiative* ins Leben gerufen, mit der wir als EU, als öffentliche Hand, zusammen mit dem Privatsektor und unseren internationalen Partnern gemeinsam Projekte umsetzen wollen.

Ich möchte Sie fragen: Auf welche Vorhaben – mit welchen Partnern – wollen Sie sich zuerst konzentrieren? Bei welchen Projekten sehen Sie das größte *Scale-up*-Potenzial und auf welches Niveau wollen Sie diese Projekte bis Ende der Legislatur bringen?

1-0042-0000

Jozef Síkela, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Vielen Dank für die Frage. Sie ist nicht einfach zu beantworten, denn selbstverständlich müssen wir entscheiden, ob wir uns auf die unten hängenden Früchte konzentrieren oder ob wir uns mehr mit den Problemen beschäftigen. Und mein Ansatz ist, immer dort anzufangen, wo es die größten Probleme gibt. Und selbstverständlich ist daher Afrika nach wie vor ganz im Vordergrund unserer Interessen. Aber wir sollten nicht unterschätzen, dass zum Beispiel in Zentralasien – die ehemaligen Sowjetunion-Staaten – wirklich eine große Nachfrage nach mehr Europa ist, denn sie haben eine historische Erfahrung und sind teilweise auch von der anderen Seite, aus China, bedroht.

1-0043-0000

Robert Biedroń (S&D). – *Vítejte v Parlamentu*. As you know, the Parliament is not adequately involved in the further development of Global Gateway. There is a dramatic difference. The Council is involved in co-design, while Parliament has only two observers. How do you intend to change this in order to involve the Parliament more closely in co-legislation on Global Gateway in the governance structure?

Secondly, the Parliament has a right and an obligation to ensure it scrutinises the EU budget, but it cannot work if it does not have the necessary information. Do you commit to making all details of Global Gateway projects and their funding available to the Parliament, and to setting up a scrutiny structure for Global Gateway, as we have, for example, for NDICI? This means, at least, with all projects, how much from which budget line and in which modality? As you understand, we are asking for information that the Commission must already have and you could share it easily with us. Thank you very much.

1-0044-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – *Dziękuję bardzo*, thank you very much for your question, honourable Member. I have already committed myself, in the area where I can decide as a stand-alone Commissioner, to have a very close contact. So I do not have a problem with the scrutiny and with basically reporting all the things I can report without violating the EU interest.

On whatever will be available, let's just discuss the format, how we can exchange and which level of granularity is needed for you to have the best feeling that the things we are doing we will continue to do in a very transparent manner.

1-0045-0000

Barry Andrews, *Chair of the DEVE Committee*. – Just for clarity, Commissioner-designate, you have two minutes for the response, but you're you're free to be as short and succinct as you wish! Thank you very much. There is no right to follow up – I'm sorry, Mr Biedroń. The next speaker is for the EPP.

1-0046-0000

Rosa Estaràs Ferragut (PPE). – Señor comisario propuesto, como sabe, en España se han producido acontecimientos devastadores. Una DANA en España —en Valencia y en otras regiones— ha ocasionado más de 200 víctimas mortales, desaparecidos y pérdidas incalculables.

En la República Checa tuvieron hace poco inundaciones, ustedes pidieron ayuda a la Unión Europea y, por esto, solicito su ayuda —porque fueron un ejemplo— para que España solicite la ayuda de la Unión Europea, porque es absolutamente urgente dar respuesta a todas las personas y a todas las situaciones que se están produciendo en mi país y España, en estos momentos, no ha pedido la ayuda europea.

Me centro también en los temas de las crisis humanitarias. Se han producido múltiples crisis humanitarias. Mi pregunta es en relación con las personas con discapacidad. Las personas con discapacidad sufren de dos a cuatro veces más la mortandad cuando hay una crisis humanitaria y, por eso, necesito solicitarle que garantice que la ayuda humanitaria va a llegar directamente a las personas con discapacidad, de tal manera que esta ayuda pueda satisfacer sus necesidades en estos tiempos de crisis. También le recuerdo la necesidad de tener datos específicos sobre discapacidad en estos conflictos.

1-0047-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – *Muchas gracias por la pregunta*. It is a very sad event, and I would like to express my condolences to all Spanish people and to all affected families. The Czech Republic was also affected, and the number of victims was lower. For me, it was the night where basically I was talking with President von der Leyen about my future role here.

I think what I can promise, and here European solidarity and unity are very important, is that in case that Spain will ask for urgent assistance and maybe for, I would say, a faster approach, as was basically granted in certain areas to the Czech Republic, Poland and Austria, I am ready to vote for it and to assist.

When it comes to disabled people, I think we have to protect them; they are basically the more vulnerable parts of the population: women, children, disabled people. So here again, I see that this is basically a part of our values that the first aid and assistance should be granted to the most vulnerable parts of the population.

1-0048-0000

Tiago Moreira de Sá (PFE). – Senhor Comissário indigitado, considerando as suas experiências anteriores no setor público e privado, qual é a sua opinião sobre a eventual criação de um novo banco de desenvolvimento da União Europeia que possa rivalizar com o Banco Mundial e o Novo Banco de Desenvolvimento dos BRICS, operando com maior agilidade e eficácia em países em desenvolvimento e diferenciando-se do que o Banco Europeu de Investimento e o Banco Europeu para a Reconstrução e Desenvolvimento atualmente fazem?

Este banco também poderia gerir fundos da UE, incluindo aqueles que hoje estão sob a gestão da rede EDFI, e funcionaria como uma instituição financeira multilateral alinhada com os objetivos de desenvolvimento mais amplos da UE.

Qual é a sua visão sobre este eventual novo banco e como garante que, sendo criado, poderá evitar as ineficiências burocráticas das instituições existentes?

Noutro plano, de uma forma muito rápida, como pensa que as políticas de cooperação e desenvolvimento da União Europeia podem ajudar a combater a imigração ilegal, um dos grandes problemas dos nossos dias de hoje?

1-0049-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Honourable Member, thank you very much for your question. If appointed, the first thing I will do - or one of the first things I will do - is talk to Nadia Calvino, the newly appointed Chairwoman of the EIB.

We have our existing institutions, and the first thing we have to do is, basically, to better utilise the instruments we already have. We sometimes underestimate the power which is available, because when I am talking about the available equity, then the EIB is many times bigger than the three biggest Asian development banks. So my first step will be basically to focus more on the existing instruments.

The discussion about a, basically, completely new entity - simply to create a new bank - is definitely a fair one. However, this is a long-lasting process. What I would rather propose is basically to better utilise the Team Europe approach and to onboard much more the local development banks, like the country development banks. Because in some of the big countries they are really very powerful. Simply to team up in Team Europe for more and bigger activities and, partially, to collaborate more with G7 countries and development banks.

1-0050-0000

Kristoffer Storm (ECR). – Det er dejligt at se dig igen. Velkommen til Parlamentet. I alt for mange år har rigtig mange af EU's udviklingsprojekter gået til nogle lidt tvivlsomme projekter i Afrika, som ikke ligefrem har skabt en tilstand eller en økonomi, der har fået den afrikanske befolkning til at afholde sig fra at migrere mod Europa. Samtidig kan vi se, at flere og flere afrikanske lande ser mod Kina og Rusland, når de skal finde nye økonomiske samarbejdspartnere. Så jeg syntes, det er fair at sige, at vi simpelthen ikke har fået nok ud af de mange milliarder euro, vi har brugt på udviklingsbistand til Afrika igennem de seneste mange år. Ligeledes så står vi over for en stor migrationskrise, hvor rigtig mange af de mennesker, der ønsker at migrere fra Afrika mod Europa, reelt set ikke har noget beskyttelsesbehov, fordi de er økonomiske migranter. Jeg ved godt, at du allerede har svaret på en del spørgsmål om migration, men alligevel vil jeg gerne spørge dig, om du ser en mulighed for, at vi betinger udviklingsbistand fra EU til Afrika på, at de laver en aftale om hjemsendelse af migranter i Europa eller ligeledes har en aktiv politik om at fastholde deres borgere i deres egne lande. Tak for ordet.

1-0051-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Well, you are right, and thank you for the question. We are doing a lot in Africa, and we are less visible than our rivals.

I was asked in my mission letter basically to bring the Global Gateway from start-up to scale-up. If you see the basic rules on what to do with a start-up in order to have a scale-up, on the third place you will find 'better communication and marketing'. So it starts that we have to talk more about the things we are doing, about the things we are doing right, to maybe finish certain showcases where we can achieve that basically the receiver states will become our ambassadors and to maybe even make a comparison with our rivals' approach.

On the other side, yes, there is a strong call to be more efficient, and this is something, this is the environment, in which I'm used to work. So basically really to measure on the social dimension, as I already mentioned, on the environmental, but also on the economic dimension, if basically our targets are realistic upfront and, afterwards, if basically we invested properly and if the outcome is giving us what we expected.

1-0052-0000

Abir Al-Sahlani (Renew). – Thank you and welcome to the Parliament. We see a growing backlash globally when it comes to gender equality in general and to sexual and reproductive health and rights in particular. It is more important than ever that the empowerment of women and girls remains a top priority for the EU and its international development policies. The anti-gender movement, on the other hand, comes to the EU well-organised, well-financed and well-coordinated, working step-by-step against human rights of women and LGBTIQ communities.

Do you, under your leadership, commit to put gender equality and SRHR in your top priorities in your portfolio? Do you commit to put forth a new Gender Action Plan that follows up on GAP III? At the same time, do you also commit to finance organisations that work with women and girls in conflict areas like the DRC, Sudan, and not the least Gaza?

1-0053-0000

Jozef Sikela, Commissioner-designate. – Honourable Member, this is a very important question and I think there are obligations we have to fulfil – these are basically already given to me by my mission letter and there are basically arrangements and programmes which are already approved and you have my full commitment that I will basically follow the already... We have positive examples in very fragile countries like to women from women in Afghanistan, where basically the direct aid is provided by women to affected women on the receiver side. We want to continue with this approach because I already mentioned in the question concerning disabled people that we have to protect the most vulnerable parts of the population.

When it comes to gender equality, this is a lot about promotion, about education, about argumentation, because in some of the regions we will face religious obstacles, and we will also face that if we have a certain conditionality that basically the countries can go for an alternative offer because this is not a ringfenced standalone game.

What is important, really, is to come with our values, to have our feet in the door, and sometimes I am saying that the most successful way how to progress is implement now, perfect tomorrow.

1-0054-0000

Barry Andrews, Chair of the DEVE Committee. – Sorry, there's no opportunity to follow up – I am really sorry that I can't do that. Sorry. You know I would love to hear more from you, but unfortunately, I can't do that, so I'm going to have to move the floor to the next speaker.

MEP Laurent, the floor is yours for one minute, thank you.

1-0055-0000

Murielle Laurent (S&D). – Monsieur le Président, Monsieur le Commissaire désigné, dans votre lettre de mission et dans vos réponses écrites, les références faites aux objectifs de développement durable sont très rares. L'échéance de la mise en œuvre des objectifs de développement durable est dans six ans. Or, à ce jour, seulement 17 % des objectifs sont en passe d'être atteints. Que ferez-vous, concrètement, pour faire en sorte que l'ensemble de ces objectifs soient atteints d'ici à 2030? Et comment comptez-vous garantir l'absence de retombées négatives de nos actions dans les pays du Sud global?

Autre question: il y a un mois, l'Union européenne a apporté son soutien au pacte pour l'avenir, adopté à New York lors du sommet de l'avenir. Depuis longtemps, le Parlement européen plaide en faveur d'une stratégie globale de l'Union pour réaliser le programme 2030, en s'assurant d'une

cohérence entre ses politiques internes et externes. Quelles actions concrètes comptez-vous entreprendre pour traduire les résultats du sommet de l'avenir, à savoir le pacte et ses annexes, dans vos travaux futurs? Répondrez-vous à la demande de longue date du Parlement européen?

1-0056-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – When it comes to the first question, we are aware that, when it comes to fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, the world is lagging behind because less than 20% of them are realistic to be. So if we achieve what you mentioned – 70 or even more – it will be a huge success.

Of course, I already stated that where I want to focus: these are the problems. So if confirmed, I will start where we see the biggest gap, and in order to identify where we can speed up, where we can provide a change in order to be even more successful. However, 100% perfection is nice, but sometimes unrealistic. We are much more successful in our achievement of our sustainable development goals than the rest of the world. This is the reality. However, I commit myself to do everything to come as close as possible to deliver our targets. I am really sorry, but I didn't catch properly your second question.

1-0057-0000

Barry Andrews, *Chair of the DEVE Committee*. – I will, on this occasion, allow you ten seconds to elaborate your second question to the Commissioner.

1-0058-0000

Murielle Laurent (S&D). – Cela concernait le soutien qu'avait apporté l'Union européenne au pacte pour l'avenir. Quelles actions concrètes comptez-vous entreprendre pour traduire les résultats du sommet de l'avenir, qui a eu lieu au mois de septembre?

1-0059-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Basically I partially responded. I have to look at a gap analysis. I have to see where we are in line with the plans, where we are out of what is realistic to be delivered, what is not realistic. This is what I can offer.

1-0060-0000

Niels Geuking (PPE). – Herr Vorsitzender, Herr designierter Kommissar Síkela! *Global Gateway* ist das europäische Angebot an künftige Partnerländer zu einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit in Konkurrenz zur chinesischen Seidenstraße. Und da grenzt jetzt meine Frage: Wie wollen Sie verhindern, dass die europäischen Steuergelder am Ende nicht doch bei chinesischen Firmen landen können und damit letztlich beim chinesischen Staat im Rahmen der zu finanzierenden Projekte und damit unser politisches Ziel konterkariert wird? Und wie stellen wir als EU, insbesondere Sie als möglicher künftiger Kommissar, auch sicher, dass unsere EU-Projekte in den Partnerländern wirtschaftlich und substanziell die Selbstständigkeit vor Ort stärken? Darum muss es eigentlich ja gehen, damit die Perspektive von Millionen Menschen und Familien in Form von guten Jobs – und darum muss es gehen, gute Jobs – überhaupt möglich ist und letztendlich nicht dann doch sich Menschen auf den Weg machen.

1-0061-0000

Jozef Síkela, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Das ist eine sehr gute Frage und danke dafür, weil sie wichtig ist. So habe ich erfahren, dass teilweise in Projekten dank der gültigen *Procurement*-Regeln es passiert, dass wir Projekte finanzieren, wo letztendlich chinesische Lieferanten ausgewählt sind,

was noch schlimmer ist als zum Beispiel lokale Sublieferanten oder Lieferanten. Aber wir müssen bei gewissen Institutionen die *Procurement*-Regeln ändern, denn es kann nicht sein, dass zum Beispiel nur der niedrigste Preis das einzige Kriterium ist, wenn wir das aus den Geldern der europäischen Steuerzahler finanzieren. Der beste Weg, um das zu verhindern, ist, das beste Angebot zu haben. Aber da sind wir leider derzeit nicht imstande, die Angebote zu aggregieren. Normalerweise passiert es, wenn die europäischen Bewerber kommen, dass sie preismäßig von Chinesen geschlagen werden. Daher müssen wir mehr anbieten. Wir müssen Konsortien kreieren, wir müssen Service anbieten. Wir sollten darüber nachdenken, dass zum Beispiel Ersatzteile dann in dem Land produziert werden. Ich rede jetzt über ein konkretes Beispiel und das sind die Elektrobusse in Costa Rica. Wir müssen über Training zum Beispiel für die *women driver* reden. Und das Ganze müssen wir im Rahmen von „Team Europa“ auf der europäischen Ebene aggregieren. Und dann werden unsere Angebote besser sein als die Angebote von Chinesen. Aber grundsätzlich müssen wir verhindern, dass von aus Europa finanzierten Projekten letztendlich dann chinesische Firmen profitieren.

1-0062-0000

Mounir Satouri (Verts/ALE). – Monsieur le Commissaire désigné, vous nous avez dit, tout à l'heure, ne pas vouloir vous inscrire dans le modèle chinois de partenariat, qui débouche sur des violations de droits fondamentaux. Monsieur le Commissaire, je suis partisan de ce principe, mais dans les faits, la Commission a passé un accord avec le Rwanda pour que celui-ci nous fournisse des matériaux dont il ne dispose pas. Par conséquent, l'armée rwandaise va en RDC chercher ces matériaux, ces matières premières. Cela a un prix, Monsieur le Commissaire: des violations des droits humains. Ce prix, ce sont des crimes de guerre commis par l'armée rwandaise. Ce prix, c'est l'utilisation d'enfants soldats.

Monsieur le Commissaire, va-t-on enfin relier les valeurs aux pratiques? Allez-vous mettre un terme à cet accord avec le Rwanda? Allez-vous chercher un autre type d'accord avec le Rwanda? Allez-vous enfin reconnaître que le prix de notre autonomie stratégique, ça ne peut pas être la violation des droits de l'homme, ça ne peut pas être la complicité dans les crimes de guerre?

1-0063-0000

Jozef Sikela, Commissioner-designate. – Honourable Member, thank you for your question. However, the pieces of information I have available are basically saying something different. Rwanda is one of our most prominent partners in Africa. We are developing here a lot of successful projects. If there is a case of violation of human rights or other things, I will have a look on it and I will respond back to you.

But my level of information is not as dramatic as you told me now. So, I'm not able to react immediately because when it comes to projects in Rwanda, I think this is one of the good cooperations we have in Africa.

1-0064-0000

Fulvio Martusciello (PPE). – Signor Commissario designato, la domanda si articola in due punti.

Il primo: come garantirà l'approccio strategico dell'Unione europea alla connettività in regioni di interesse geopolitico fondamentali per l'Unione europea, come l'Asia centrale? Nella lettera di incarico si parla di questo obiettivo, dell'Asia centrale; Lei è capace di distinguere all'interno di questa macroarea la differenza fra i singoli paesi? È indiscutibile che nell'Asia centrale, per esempio, ci sia anche il Turkmenistan, dove è vietato Internet e dove le violazioni dei diritti umani sono costanti e continue.

E poi la seconda domanda: si impegna a guidare la missione del Team Europa nei paesi partner, invitando anche i parlamentari europei a partecipare?

1-0065-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I will start with your second question: yes, I will. So basically my offer is – this a practice I introduced also to the Czech Parliament Members – to be present on the missions, because it helps. It is about more scrutiny, this is about more transparency and this is also about feeling on the spot how we are developing, what are the things we are doing. So we just need to talk about how to arrange this.

Back to your first question: Central Asia is really a region where, when it comes to interconnectivity and transit, we have big plans and the Trans-Caspian Corridor should be a very tangible outcome of our activities. There are a lot of other projects in the area of hydrogen production, in the area of renewable resources.

And the interconnectivity – taking into account that I was initially talking about the World Economic Forum's risk report 2024 – the highest risks currently in the two years horizon are misinformation and disinformation from the business point of view. So interconnectivity is also something which can help against the hybrid war, against the troll farms, and to simplify the access not only for the economy, but also for the population to the right pieces of information.

1-0066-0000

Damien Carême (The Left). – Monsieur le Commissaire, ces dernières années, nous avons constaté un manque de transparence effectif, et par conséquent de contrôle démocratique, sur la part des fonds allouée à la migration dans le cadre de l'instrument européen pour le voisinage, le développement et la coopération internationale, le fameux IVCDI – Europe dans le monde. Ces fonds ont parfois permis de signer des accords fumeux sous lesquels des violations flagrantes des droits humains ont été commises.

Comment comptez-vous assurer que l'aide publique au développement sera consacrée à l'éradication de la pauvreté et ne sera pas source d'un odieux chantage «aide publique au développement contre contrôle des frontières»? Comment comptez-vous améliorer la transparence sur l'utilisation de ces fonds et l'implication du Parlement?

Deuxièmement, vous engagez-vous à créer une base de données publique de tous les projets du IVCDI – Europe dans le monde et à fournir au Parlement des informations détaillées sur les dépenses de ce fonds en matière de migration?

Troisièmement, seriez-vous prêt à procéder à des évaluations ex ante appropriées pour déterminer les implications et les risques éventuels des actions en matière de droits humains?

Et enfin, jugez-vous opportun de développer un cadre pour la suspension des actions en cas de violation des droits humains?

1-0067-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – As I already mentioned, we have some legal clauses in our agreements which are allowing us to step out of, or to terminate, our agreements. We have these clauses in order to exercise them if needed because agreements usually are used in the case that there are problems – because if there are no problems, then you do not need to look back on the

agreements. So we have certain legal possibilities to terminate the agreements in case that things like human rights violations happen.

When it comes to transparency, as I already said, I want to be as transparent as possible. However, from the business point of view, the most valuable things are pieces of information. In the past, as a member of the Security Council of the Czech Republic, when I wanted to learn something about the activities of Russia or China in some of the continents, it was needed to basically ask the intelligence services.

So, we have to agree on a certain level of transparency in the way that we also protect the interests of the European Union. But, as I said, the level of transparency we will agree on, including participation on the missions, are pretty fine with me.

1-0068-0000

Marco Tarquinio (S&D). – Insisto – mi perdoni – sul tema della trasparenza e dei diritti umani, perché il Global Gateway ha anche un problema di reputazione globale verso le opinioni pubbliche dei nostri paesi, anche dei paesi con i quali siamo in relazione.

Ho fatto il giornalista per molti anni. Ad esempio la risposta che ha dato al presidente Satouri, della sottocommissione per i diritti dell'uomo, non mi ha soddisfatto; il Ruanda è sulle pagine di tanti giornali, compreso quello che io ho diretto a lungo, per violazioni dei diritti umani e per la questione della guerra nella Repubblica democratica del Congo.

A proposito della questione dei diritti umani, nella lettera di incarico che Le è stata consegnata si indica il tema della misurazione degli impatti e dei risultati, in particolare su diritti umani e libertà politiche.

Le chiedo, signor Commissario designato, può impegnarsi a creare uno strumento specifico su questo punto nei primi 100 giorni del suo mandato? E può anche impegnarsi a condividere i risultati con ricercatori qualificati?

1-0069-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – Honourable Member, thank you very much for the question, I was partially responding. I just need to, basically, compare the information that I'm getting with your suggestion that to continue collaboration with Rwanda is something that is also negatively affecting Europe from the point of view of human rights. Because, as I already said, we have Rwanda on the agenda as one of the, I would say, rather promising developments when it comes to Global Gateway projects.

But of course I am ready to basically work on proposing how to increase transparency and, basically, the markers which will alert us of such negative things as those you are describing to me.

1-0070-0000

Thierry Mariani (PSE). – Monsieur Síkela, vous avez dit que, selon vos informations, l'accord avec le Rwanda était un accord exemplaire. Je pense que nous n'avons pas les mêmes lectures. Je me permets de vous rappeler le rapport publié en juin dernier, c'est-à-dire il y a cinq mois, par l'Organisation des Nations unies. Que dit ce rapport? Ce rapport dit que, tout simplement, les troubles dans la région du Kivu sont financés par le Rwanda pour voler des matériaux, matériaux qu'il nous revend. C'est-à-dire, en clair, que, sans le vouloir peut-être, on finance un receleur et un criminel. Alors ma question est très simple. L'accord dit que l'on garantit la traçabilité, mais on ne

garantit rien! La traçabilité, c'est simplement déclaratif. Monsieur Síkela, je vais voler votre montre, puis je vais la revendre et je dirais: «cette montre, elle est à moi». C'est exactement ce que fait le Rwanda! Il n'y a strictement rien de sérieux. Je vous demande donc simplement si vous êtes prêt à modifier cet accord pour garantir, enfin, une traçabilité pour faire peut-être que ces troubles en Afrique, qui ont déjà fait des milliers de morts, s'arrêtent.

1-0071-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – As I already promised, I am ready to have a look at it and to become familiar with the issue. You are talking about crimes – so then we have to evaluate them and if basically there is a reason to terminate or change the agreements, then we should do so. In the case that this is the case, I am ready to present basically the issue to the College, if confirmed, and then we will decide how to deal with it.

1-0072-0000

Mariusz Kamiński (ECR). – Szanowny Panie Kandydacie! Chciałbym zapytać o kwestie partnerstw, porozumień i przekazywania pomocy rozwojowej do krajów rządzonych przez reżimy autorytarne. Większość organizacji w tych krajach jest powiązana z systemem, jak na przykład na Kubie, gdzie Komunistyczna Partia Kuby reguluje całe życie w kraju, wolność zrzeszania się nie istnieje, a prywatna działalność gospodarcza jest niezwykle ograniczona. Jakiego kroki zamierza Pan podjąć, aby fundusze unijne nie trafiały do takich reżimów?

I pytanie konkretne: czy Pana zdaniem umowa o dialogu politycznym i współpracy z państwem takim jak Kuba, biorąc pod uwagę fakt przetrzymywania więźniów politycznych, nie powinna zostać zawieszona? Niedawno w Strasburgu, w Parlamencie, przyjęliśmy rezolucję potępiającą niedemokratyczne metody postkomunistycznego reżimu kubańskiego, a jednocześnie środki unijne dalej są przekazywane reżimowi.

1-0073-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – The example you mentioned is really a very sad example. I have personal experience and the level of poverty in Cuba is really horrible. I think it should be basically part of our governance that in case of juntas, hostile regimes, dictatorships, we limit our aid to basic needs, where basically the possibility to misuse or reroute this kind of aid is hardly possible.

This is not true that there are only NGOs. There is a possibility also in Cuba basically to find a way with some people and institutions, how to target the minimum level of the aid we are basically obliged to offer to the most vulnerable people in these countries now.

1-0074-0000

Barry Andrews, Chair of the DEVE Committee. – The next speaker is myself, Commissioner-designate, so somebody had better hit the hammer when I've reached a minute!

My question is on the Global Gateway. As you know, it hasn't been fully evaluated for impact yet, which is reasonable. However, I'm sure you've carefully looked at the European Fund for Sustainable Development and its successor, the EFSD+ – with your background in banking.

I'm wondering what is your assessment of it, given that it is based on the same idea of leveraging private finance through, in this case, external action guarantees, and what lessons can be learned from the operation of EFSD+?

Secondly, we are told that Global Gateway is 93 % compliant with the definition of ODA by OECD-DAC, and yet we are hearing from DG INTPA that we are moving away from ODA. So again, how do you reconcile these two statements?

Finally, you have reasserted your commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, which has as its core reaching the furthest behind first – and yet our funding to LDCs has dramatically fallen over the last decade?

1-0075-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you, honourable Chairman, for the question. I will start from the second part. I do not have a feeling that we are moving away from official development assistance, because basically the amounts remain basically the same. Of course, there is a shortage of resources, and the issue will start if we ask for more, because then basically there is a discussion among Team Europe about how basically to fund it. So the case that we promote more Global Gateway compared to official development assistance is because we simply believe that properly-targeted economic investments can help to achieve more on the Sustainable Development Goals.

On the first question, when it comes to guarantees and basically the possible funding, I already mentioned that, without the involvement of private capital, some of the targets will be impossible to reach. However, private capital needs assistance mainly in high risk areas in the form of, for example, guarantees, co-funding and these things. Proper collaboration can help not both, because both means Team Europe plus the private sector, but also the receiving countries.

1-0076-0000

Ondřej Kolář (PPE). – Mr Síkela, as a Commissioner for International Partnerships you will be responsible for quite a large development aid budget. My question is very simple, though I know it pertains to a very complex issue: what mechanisms will you establish and use to ensure that EU development money does not end up in the wrong hands? It was already asked here, but I will enhance this question.

Our development aid usually goes to regions which are subject to, I would say, enemy hybrid operations from the side of China and Russia. They are home to various terrorist organisations and also there are very high levels of corruption. Therefore, my question is how do you plan to prevent this? How do you plan to make sure that EU taxpayers' money doesn't end up in the wrong hands and would be used against us, but it's rather used by those who are internationally renowned for their approach.

1-0077-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – This is about a certain risk management mechanism, because usually you start with evaluation of the probability that the money can be misused. Of course, we need to properly measure what is the amount we want to grant and how it will be used. Usually, if you have good financial people, they are able to identify the risk unprompted. What is of course needed is a very strong control of the purchase, how the money will be used. What is definitely, in my eyes, not possible, that we send the amount and, basically, then without a control there will be decided how it will be used.

Of course, in the most fragile regions, the local assistance is needed and the control starts mainly with the form, like for example, nutrition support or like medication, other things. Of course, to finally prevent that it will not be used for the army, partially occupation army, is very hard, however,

here the assistance of some local non-governmental institutions is needed where they can guide us. But 100 % control that each and single penny will end within the hands of people in need I cannot grant because this is in some of the regions simply not possible. But what I can commit me is that if I know that our money will be misused then I will act.

1-0078-0000

Marit Majj (S&D). – Thank you Chair. And thank you, dear Commissioner-designate. As you mentioned, the aim of European development cooperation is achieving the SDGs and to eradicate poverty in equal partnership. And too often we have a Eurocentric and a paternalistic approach. So I would like to underline 'equal partnership'.

In that fight to eradicate poverty, for our group it is important that the use of the inequality marker continues, expands and improves. Therefore, the following questions: will you commit to undertaking distributional impact assessments for all projects where EU money is involved, and making the results available? Can you further commit to a higher number of projects with inequality reduction as the principal objectives? Can you commit to the application of the marker to the EFSD projects, pushing for SD with the EIB and the EBRD? And, as poverty often has the face of a woman, to enforce the implementation of binding targets for gender equality, such as the 85% of ODA going to programmes where gender equality is the significant component.

1-0079-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – This is about a scale. Usually the auditors, when they work, they focus on 80% of the materiality in order simply to achieve the the highest control level. And where the materiality is not given, there might be not a 100%, but for example, an 80% control.

So I will definitely follow this principle that I will start with the most material issues. I have to see the granularity and the capacity, but what I'm ready to commit myself to is that we will, basically, measure and evaluate and audit the things we are doing.

And your second question, sorry, I didn't mark it. There is no such aim, I checked basically. Of course, there will be a big discussion on the next budget and on the next multiannual financial framework. However, when it comes basically to the current usage, with the exception of the certain cuts, there is not the aim to reduce this amount.

1-0080-0000

Tomas Tobé (PPE). – Thank you, Chair, and a warm welcome, Commissioner-designate. I remember in 2019, when this committee together confirmed the outgoing Commissioner Urpilainen, we all made one thing very clear and that is yes, we will of course scrutinise the Commission, but we actually want to work with the Commission and with the Commissioner. I must say that I warmly welcome your approach here today and look forward to this kind of cooperation between this committee and the Commissioner.

My question will come back to the issue that we have touched on a couple of times, and that is the geopolitical competition that we see. I think the crucial question is: how can we actually make sure that the European Union will be the preferred partner? I think that is really the question that we together, of course, need to work on, but what is your view? What can we do better to make sure that we will be the preferred partner?

1-0081-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much for the question. We are back on how to move from start-up to scale-up. Usually when you talk about a start-up, you are talking about a newly-born product or service. Usually, the magic is simply to be better than the others, but also to communicate properly, to convince basically the partners that your offer is better.

We are good in doing things in the right way, but we are not as good in our communication. So, you start with a new level of financing. This is something which I think is my area. So, new financial instruments, more cooperation in Team Europe. You have to bring your product and your service to the next level. I was talking about project management, about basically a concentration of the offers and services, like an umbrella approach, so packaging all the things we want to offer.

The third tool is marketing communication. Of course, the change of the management – if I confirm this – is also coming, but I see really we have to improve the communication and we have to better communicate why our offer is better and maybe also point out the negative examples and negative experience from the regions where we want to become successful.

1-0082-0000

Marieke Ehlers (Pfe). – Thank you, Mr Síkela, for being here today. As you are well aware and as you've mentioned yourself earlier, the European Union is the largest donor of development aid in the world. However, we have seen little return on investment, and the situation in these countries is rarely improved, in large part due to systemic corruption. At the same time, these are the same countries who refuse to cooperate when it comes to returns and readmission. In fact, for some countries, the effective aggregated return rate is as low as 3 %.

Overall, only 1 in 5 illegal migrants in the EU are effectively being returned following a return order. In your answers, you have mentioned various measures that you think would be able to address migration, including a 'whole-of-route' approach, border management, preventing human smuggling, dealing with the issue in the country of origin, but I have not heard you on returns and I also don't think you've answered my colleague's question regarding linking development aid to effective cooperation on returns. Therefore, again, the question and I would really like a clear answer on this: to what extent do you agree that it is the highest time to make development aid conditional upon successful return and readmission cooperation by third countries? Thank you.

1-0083-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much for the question, but I think I already repeatedly mentioned that I am in favour of the whole-of-route approach, and the whole-of-route approach also requires a very fair discussion on respecting our values and on how we deal with returns. Of course, the whole-of-route approach means that we are discussing not only with countries of origin, but also with transit countries, about closer cooperation and how they can integrate and assist us in both keeping the migrants there in a migration way, or finally to receive them in case of forced return.

I think that, again, conditionality might turn against us, but what might be one of the possible ways is a layer approach, to offer cooperation and to add some extras in case they will be willing to assist us in this case.

1-0084-0000

Carla Tavares (S&D). – Senhor Presidente, Senhor Comissário indigitado, irei falar na minha língua, o português.

O Sul Global está a pedir reformas profundas na arquitetura financeira internacional, na qual não se sente representado, aliás, já aqui hoje foi referido, apesar da sua crescente importância na economia mundial. O Sul Global está já a criar iniciativas e estruturas alternativas para enfrentar os seus desafios comuns, como o Novo Banco de Desenvolvimento e o Acordo de Reserva Contingente.

A ajuda da União Europeia é destinada cada vez mais a países de rendimentos médios e, em 2023, pela primeira vez, os fluxos financeiros líquidos para os países em desenvolvimento tornaram-se negativos. Isto significa que estes países estão a pagar mais em dívida do que recebem em ajuda e outros fluxos de capital.

Pergunto, no contexto da Conferência das Nações Unidas sobre o Financiamento ao Desenvolvimento, no próximo ano, em Sevilha: a União Europeia irá comprometer-se em defender uma posição em apoio a um quadro jurídico multilateral para o processo de reestruturação da dívida soberana? Quais as medidas que tomará para reverter essa tendência, de forma a que a política de desenvolvimento da União Europeia não contribua para a crise da dívida nos nossos parceiros?

Segunda questão: além disso, a Organização das Nações Unidas está a iniciar negociações para a Convenção Tributária da ONU. Apoiaria essas iniciativas e de que forma?

1-0085-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – There are different levels of assistance and the normal aid assistance is returnable. This is the money we are giving without the aim to get it back because we are doing it by the purpose due to our values, due to our commitments to help the people in need and to eradicate the poverty. In case that we decide to lend or to grant guarantees, there is a normal risk assessment needed because we should not grant the loans where we in advance know that they are not repayable. So we have to split, basically, these two activities. In the past – and basically if we are looking in the history, there were a lot of those releases.

However, now we are facing the situation that, basically, our rivals are weaponising the lending as, basically, a playing field for their interests, by granting the loans and then asking for some deliveries in case that they should be restructured or released. So, basically, the idea is to get an advantage, simply to have a look at which countries are in the main troubles, mainly in Africa, and to align with the democratic part of the world where we, together with Europe and the G7 countries, are ready, basically, to write off the debts and to force in that way, basically, either the Chinese to do the same or, basically, together like better possibilities to assist these countries for the future with sustainable development.

1-0086-0000

Lukas Mandl (PPE). – Thank you very much, Commissioner-designate. In the very beginning of your speech, you said, literally, 'our goals are the same, let's see how to reach them'. So having been here already for seven years as a Member of the European Parliament, I experienced different approaches of members of the College how to interact with the Parliament, and especially in your field of international partnerships. I very much like this expression and that's why we as the DEVE Committee have invited committees here with a very, very broad scope. You have a lot of knowledge, experience and, especially, a lot of complementary approach, which are all constructive in the sense of 'goals are the same'. Hopefully they are the same or at least similar, as you said.

So my question would be a rather methodological one. What's your way to deal with the 'citizens' Chamber', the only elected body of the European Union, the European Parliament, and especially their respective parliamentarians dealing with the issues of your portfolio?

1-0087-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I already said that the input I was receiving from you during our meetings was extremely valuable and was extremely helpful also for my preparation because it helped me, basically, to identify the pain points, the doubts the most important issue across the political spectrum. And I said that this input will remain valuable, and therefore I already said not only that I am ready to follow the official structures, but I am usually used to have plenty of unofficial meetings and contexts in order to better understand the matter, to better understand the problem. And this is basically my offer. Whoever believes that there is something that needs to be discussed with me then I am ready to react, and sometimes I will come alone in order to ask your views before I will take my decisions.

1-0088-0000

Isabella Lövin (Verts/ALE). – Commissioner-designate, the EU has a great responsibility to make sure its actions don't contribute to the destruction of habitats of the nature or harm biodiversity in poor countries.

Now since the Global Gateway aims to facilitate access to minerals and raw materials and create a more business-friendly environment to the EU private sector, and the Draghi report states that the EU should explore the potential of deep-sea mining, does the Commissioner-designate agree with the promotion of a global moratorium on deep-sea mining?

What key actions will you take to ensure policy coherence on development so that the EU's economic interests do not override the need, for example, to protect coastal communities and extremely vulnerable marine ecosystems?

And lastly, there's been some questions about the inequality marker, which has been successful. Does the new Commissioner intend to take similar steps regarding climate and biodiversity markets, taking into account that it tremendously impacts the developing countries and is linked to various SDGs in the Agenda 2030?

1-0089-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you for the question, but in my mission is clearly stated that we support projects which are sustainable and environmentally friendly investments in digital technologies, renewables, transit and environmentally friendly exploration of raw materials, because, of course, the new methods are offering much more environmentally friendly approaches. And for some of the affected countries, the raw materials, this is something which, basically, this is their wealth, this is what they can offer to the world and we have to help them to develop these industries in an environmentally friendly manner.

Other possibilities, like to get these raw materials, and the shortage of raw materials, is pointed as one of the biggest threats in the 10-year horizon of the World Economic Forum. So when it comes to deep-sea exploration, I think that basically my targets are not contradicting with basically the aim to support only environmentally friendly projects.

1-0090-0000

Paolo Inselvini (ECR). – Signor Commissario designato Síkela, il governo italiano, come saprà, sta portando avanti con successo il piano Mattei per l’Africa. Le chiedo quindi, come ritiene sostenere questo progetto anche a livello europeo e quali strumenti pensa di attivare per continuare su questo percorso?

L’approccio italiano, infatti, fatto di rispetto, di sviluppo, di creazione di opportunità e di una visione seria e non ideologica nei confronti dell’immigrazione, crediamo possa essere la strada giusta da seguire.

Un tema molto importante, inoltre, che spesso viene trascurato, è quello dell’accesso al cibo: cibo nutriente, di qualità e naturale per le popolazioni africane. Riteniamo strategico, infatti, che l’Europa si faccia promotrice di un piano di azione che renda autosufficienti tutti quei paesi in via di sviluppo e quindi Le chiediamo, come ha intenzione di muoversi a riguardo?

E infine un tema molto importante: come legherà la cooperazione alla difesa della dignità dei tanti, dei troppi cristiani ancora perseguitati in giro per il mondo?

1-0091-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – Thank you very much for your question. I think you are talking about the Mattei report. I have to say that all the three reports from, like, ‘Made in Italia’, are extremely interesting reading and extremely inspiring. And I warmly welcome the activities, and we have to strive to team up, basically, the Italian activities in Africa because, basically, the basics are the same. And if we are able to invent it and to develop it in the way of the global gateway targets, as I said, there is a lot of inspiration. So basically some of the things are very similar to global gateway initiatives.

The second question, of course, we already discussed the protection of the most vulnerable parts of communities, and in some areas, the protection of the Christian communities and minorities is of utmost importance and we have to continue to do whatever we can in order to protect them.

1-0092-0000

Vlad Vasile-Voiculescu (Renew). – Commissioner-designate, a couple of policy areas of the EU International Partnership focus on supporting health systems and health infrastructure in our partners from around the world. Now, the health sector is one of the five priority areas under the Global Gateway and yet projects in this area represent merely 10 % of the total initiatives supported through the Gateway, with some partners benefiting more than others do. To me, this means that we need more money and, as you indicated throughout your written answers and in the introductory speech today, Team Europe needs to mobilise more private investment and innovative financial tools.

Now, as a former banker, and I totally appreciate that as we were colleagues in Erste Group some years ago, my questions to you are what is your strategy when it comes to mobilising private sector investment and institutional partnerships to further strengthen particularly healthcare capacities around the world? And how do you plan to leverage the NDICI and Global Gateway to fast-track the implementation of the EU Global Health Strategy?

1-0093-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – I think when it comes to health support there are some very promising projects, and I think there are a lot of lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. And

we have seen that basically we have to change the approach and allow the access of the developing world to more vaccines and to more health because their dependency is ultimate: 99 % of vaccines and above 90 % of other medical tools. And therefore some of the projects of Global Gateway are directly dedicated to development of the healthcare in most affected countries, mainly in vaccine production like, for example, Senegal and other parts, other countries in Africa.

When it comes to mobilisation, there is always a shortage of resources and the magic is to work with the available amounts in the most efficient way. Of course, to activate more public finance means, you know, to ask basically Europe to support the increase of the contribution and we see a certain relaxed stance here in some of the Member States. So I already said that, you know, to attract the private capital is basically a conditional precedent in order to be able to move forward and to come close to fulfilment of our targets.

What is good is that they are aware that this is not about the short term profits, but this is about the regional stability in many of areas. And I am turning again back to this risk report of the World Economic Forum, in the ten years horizon, the fourth biggest threats for the global economies are of environmental nature. So their readiness to invest in other areas in basically sustainable things is increasing.

1-0094-0000

Marc Jongen (ESN). – Ich komme noch einmal auf das Thema „illegale Migration“ zurück. Sie haben davon gesprochen, zur Bekämpfung der Schleuserkriminalität alle zur Verfügung stehenden Mittel einsetzen zu wollen: Diplomatie, Visapolitik, Investitionsanreize, auch Grenzschutz. Die Eindämmung der Migration scheitert regelmäßig, nicht nur am mangelnden Durchgreifen gegen die Schlepperei, die von zahllosen NGOs leider auch noch gefördert wird, sondern auch daran, dass Herkunftsländer abgelehnte Asylbewerber nicht zurücknehmen. Jetzt sagten Sie vorhin, es muss quasi Belohnungen geben für solche Länder, die hier kooperativ sind. Aber müssen wir nicht einen Schritt weitergehen und die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit auch wirklich beenden, sowohl mit den Herkunftsländern, die illegale Migranten nicht zurücknehmen, als auch mit den Transitländern, die nichts gegen illegale Migration tun? Warum wollen Sie die Mittel der Entwicklungspolitik nicht einsetzen, um Herkunftsländer auch durch Sanktionen zur Rücknahme illegaler Einwanderer zu bewegen und auch sonst beim Thema „Migration“ besser zu kooperieren?

1-0095-0000

Jozef Sikela, designiertes Mitglied der Kommission. – Wenn wir diese Länder alleine lassen, werden sie mit unseren Gegnern, *rivals* und Feinden kooperieren. Das heißt, wir müssen mit denen reden. Wir müssen wirklich versuchen – durch Abmachungen, durch Verträge –, sie dazu zu motivieren, dass sie ihren Zugang ändern. Wenn wir das *Sahel example* sehen, also primär Mali, dann sehen wir, dass eigentlich die illegale Migration teilweise als eine Waffe genutzt wird. Und wir sehen auch die Beispiele in der Ukraine, wo eigentlich Energiezentren, Zugang zu Trinkwasser attackiert werden, ganz absichtlich, um die Leute sozusagen von dem Land wegzutreiben, um eigentlich auch sozusagen die Unterstützung ... um die Bevölkerung gegen unsere Absichten zu wenden. Das heißt, was ich sagen will, es bleibt wirklich nichts anderes übrig, als mehr zu reden, aktiver zu sein, mehr zu zeigen, dass Assistenz mit uns zusammen, also gebunden an gemeinsame Projekte, sich für diese Länder lohnt, statt einfach zu sagen: „Das ist nicht unsere Absicht“. Es gibt auch Länder, ich habe Afghanistan erwähnt, wo wir trotzdem die Basishilfe behalten, obwohl wir da mit nicht besonders schönen Regimen zu tun haben.

1-0096-0000

Carolina Morace (The Left). – Signor Commissario designato Síkela, a tutt'oggi, come è già stato detto, in troppi paesi le donne sono più povere, vengono escluse dallo studio e dal lavoro e non vivono pienamente i propri diritti sessuali e riproduttivi.

Quello che ancora non è stato detto oggi è che, allo stesso tempo, è aumentata la violenza contro le persone a causa del loro orientamento sessuale, costringendo molte di loro a vivere di nascosto i propri sentimenti che non abbiamo alcun diritto di giudicare. Alcuni fondi europei sono destinati all'uguaglianza di genere e ai diritti LGBTIQ+, ma spesso non sono efficaci.

Le chiedo dunque: ritiene che gli obiettivi di finanziamento del terzo piano d'azione per le pari opportunità e del nuovo quadro finanziario pluriennale debbano essere rivisti?

Come intende strutturare i partenariati con i paesi terzi per rafforzare l'inclusione e la protezione dei diritti delle persone LGBTIQ+? Sarà questa una Sua priorità, visto che l'inclusione è uno dei principi cardine dell'Unione europea?

1-0097-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – I think there will be always a battle of priorities, and what I want to is to keep – because I said there is basically a shortage of resources – the amounts on the level where they are currently, because in all the areas we will see requests for increases, and these requests should be funded.

Of course, when we are successful and able to attract private money in the game, then we can propose the changes for the next Multiannual Financial Framework. But for the time being, re-prioritisation means something where we increase, we should cut somewhere else. But of course, this agenda has a priority, and this priority should be kept in the way that we fulfil the commitment which is already granted.

1-0098-0000

Barry Andrews, Chair of the DEVE Committee. – That concludes the round of questions. We now move to the invited committees. There are four advisory committees here. Again, these are three-minute slots – a one-minute question and a two-minute follow-up. So to begin, we have the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, MEP McAllister.

1-0099-0000

David McAllister, Chair of the AFET Committee. – Thank you very much for having invited the Foreign Affairs Committee to this hearing. As chair of AFET, let me ask you the following: human rights, freedom and democracy around the world are faced with unprecedented challenges and severe pressure from authoritarian regimes. At the same time, the European Union, within its external action, must define and pursue common policies and actions to consolidate and to support democracy and human rights according to Article 21 (2) of the Treaty on the European Union. So, Commissioner-designate, I ask you, what role will human rights, democracy and good governance play in the EU's international cooperation in the future under your leadership?

1-0100-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – The answer is very simple, the most important. We have Article 21 of Treaty on the European Union, where we committed us to foster economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty. We have Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and we have the

commitment to do it in the way that we promote democracy, equality and sustainable development and respecting all the social and environmental and human rights aspects. This is for me a given.

1-0101-0000

Lina Gálvez, *Chair of the FEMM Committee*. – Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for inviting the Women's Rights Committee to this hearing. As you know, women, we make up half of the population, including children, girls, including women with disabilities, among others, so we cannot be treated as a minority. And that is why gender equality should continue to be central in our external actions.

So my questions are: will there be a follow-up to Gender Action Plan (GAP III) after 2027? Will women's empowerment continue to be a priority in the European Union's external action? If there will be a GAP IV, which areas will be strengthened? Will universal access to sexual and reproductive health rights be ensured? Will you increase transparency regarding the European Union's spending to make visible how much funding the European Union provides to promote sexual and reproductive human rights?

And two very small questions: how are you planning to support the implementation of GAP III in the European Union delegations? And finally, do you intend to propose a European Union international initiative, such as the European Union-United Nations Spotlight?

1-0102-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think the first thing I can say is that, of course, I will take care that all the commitments from the Gender Action Plan III are fulfilled. Of course, there will be a big discussion about how to approach the future Gender Action Plan IV, and I will be keen to listen to proposals across the political spectrum. So, yes, full support from my side.

This is also a lot about education on spot, because in some of the areas we are facing, like historical obstacles or religion, but this is about communicate, communicate, educate, educate. And with, basically, the increased level of education, usually, things are developing in the right way.

1-0103-0000

Bernd Lange, *Vorsitzender des INTA-Ausschusses*. – Erst mal herzlichen Dank für die Zusage, das EP stärker an der *Global Gateway* zu beteiligen. Ich hoffe, das gilt auch für den Internationalen Handelsausschuss.

Global Gateway: Sie haben eine ganze Reihe von Projekten genannt, unter anderem auch grünen Wasserstoff. Müssten wir hier nicht stärker einen Schwerpunkt setzen angesichts der Notwendigkeit, 2030 zehn Millionen Tonnen zu importieren und auch in unseren Partnerländern die Energie stärker umzustellen?

Sie haben in den Antworten häufig die Wiederaufnahme von Staatsbürgern genannt. In dem allgemeinen Präferenzsystem, das wir gerade mit dem Rat verhandeln, möchte der Rat eine verbindliche Konditionalität dafür in das allgemeine Präferenzsystem einbauen. Wie sehen Sie das, und welche Möglichkeiten der intensiven Zusammenarbeit von Handel und Entwicklung, gerade gegenüber Afrika, sehen Sie?

1-0104-0000

Jozef Síkela, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Wasserstoff-Initiativen – es gibt viele. Wir haben über Zentralasien gesprochen. Wir haben über sehr viele sehr interessante Projekte in Afrika gesprochen, wo wir involviert sind, denn Afrika hat ein wirklich noch nicht so geöffnetes Potenzial. Sie haben, was die *renewables* anbelangt, 60 % der Kapazitäten. Das Problem mit Wasserstoff sind derzeit noch die Produktionskosten und im Grunde genommen der Preis, weil er selbstverständlich nicht so einfach transportierbar ist. Das ist eine ganz andere Angelegenheit als *LNG*.

Wir müssen auch schauen, dass wir das erfüllen, was wir den europäischen Haushalten und Firmen versprochen haben, dass wir auf die Energiepreise schauen. Aber selbstverständlich, *hydrogen* ist die Zukunft und wir müssen in diese Projekte investieren. Aber wirklich, da spielen die Transportwege und die Distanz eine Rolle. Aber diese Projekte sind bei uns wirklich ganz hoch in der Agenda.

Und was die *preferential treatments* anbelangt – ich habe schon gesagt, dass ich mehr Zugang zu dem *world trade* für die afrikanischen Länder als eine der Möglichkeiten für das *development*, also dafür, die Entwicklung dieser Länder zu beschleunigen, sehe. Ich werde mich sicher mit meinem *dear fellow* Maroš Šefčovič treffen und diese Angelegenheit diskutieren – inwiefern wir noch mehr helfen können, um die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung, insbesondere bei den Mitteleinkommen und in den ärmsten Ländern, noch zu beschleunigen.

1-0105-0000

Marina Kaljurand, *Vice-Chair of the LIBE Committee*. – On behalf of LIBE, I would like to ask about your work on building comprehensive partnerships. You addressed it already to some extent, and I would like to ask you to elaborate on the following questions.

How will you address the root causes and key drivers of irregular migration, and fight the network of smugglers? What key drivers do you see as crucial to be addressed? Which regions will you prioritise? How will you guarantee proper oversight of the expenditure? How will the partnerships be monitored, and how will you measure their mutual benefits?

Also, I would like to ask about your cooperation and collaboration with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, knowing that there has to be convergence in your cooperation and approach to partnerships with third countries.

1-0106-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I think that tackling the root causes – and thank you for your question – is the basic. When we see the streams of irregular migration, there are two main sources currently: Afghanistan in Asia, and Mali and parts of the Sahel in Africa. Usually people decide to risk their lives and to move if they don't see a future. Partially, they are pressed out – in the case of Mali by military regimes – in order to worsen the situation in the neighbouring countries.

So we have to start with the basic assistance. We have to basically also approach the neighbourhood countries to help them tackle the situation through them, because they can help us in this 'whole-of-route' approach and partially integrate them. However, of course, in the case of unfriendly and hostile regimes, it is difficult for us to implement, basically, the economically-driven projects. Here we basically have to leave the food on the door and wait for better conditions.

Where we can help to tackle the root causes are basically countries where the governments and public authorities are ready to cooperate with us and where we can create an economic base – in the healthcare area, education, sustainable economy – in order to offer these young people the

future. What we have to avoid is the brain drain, because, of course, they will also need the best people. So we have to create the conditions so that the young generation have a reason to stay in their home countries and to help them to develop.

As to the second question, I have a very cooperative approach, and I basically see the next College as really a 'whole of the College' agenda and, of course, mainly with Dubravka, with Hadja, with Maroš Šefčovič and other Commissioners. I will have not only frequent interaction during the College days but, believe me, I do not hesitate to walk down or to walk up – taking into account the corridor, rather to walk up – and to talk directly to them and to discuss the most hot issues and most urgent things.

1-0107-0000

Barry Andrews, *Chair of the DEVE Committee*. – Thank you, Commissioner-designate. So we now reach the final round and we are in good time – so I have a little bit of latitude on the timing. So now we go back to the coordinators and now, in reverse order again, it's a one-minute question and a two-minute follow-up.

1-0108-0000

Marc Jongen (ESN). – Thank you, Mr Síkela, my last question in English. The Republic of South Africa is the European Union's strategic partnership country in Africa. From 2021 to 2024, the EU funded South Africa with EUR 129 million of the Global Gateway programme.

Meanwhile, the Boers in South Africa are persecuted because of their European ancestry. Politicians such as Julius Malema incite their supporters to genocide against white people and 3 000 farmers have been murdered so far. In addition, there is legal oppression by the state. For example, a law from this September against schools that teach Afrikaans, the language of the Boers.

Do you consider reviewing EU funds for South Africa in the face of that violation of human rights and of basic human values?

1-0109-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I will definitely address these issues and elaborate on this topic because things like this are against the values we are representing, and I will not hide that. We have also a cooperation with South Africa. We have currently on the table the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) issue.

We supported South Africa in its health development and vaccine production. So we have to address this issue. We have to talk to the local authorities and, basically, try to prevent things like this from happening again.

1-0110-0000

Isabel Serra Sánchez (The Left). – Señor Síkela, se estima que los países de ingresos bajos y medianos-bajos pierden alrededor de 45 000 millones de euros anualmente debido al abuso fiscal transfronterizo por parte de corporaciones multinacionales y personas adineradas. Contrarrestar estos abusos requeriría el establecimiento de sistemas fiscales justos, progresivos y orientados a las personas, en total coherencia con las políticas de desarrollo sostenible. Además, es urgente poner fin a prácticas fiscales perjudiciales, a los paraísos fiscales o a la competencia fiscal a la baja. Le pregunto si trabajará para asegurar la coherencia de las políticas para el desarrollo sostenible en temas de fiscalidad y justicia de la deuda.

1-0111-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Definitely, I will. Thank you for the question, but we have a huge discussion on the tax equality even within the European Union and, of course, the tax issues are slightly out of my responsibility, but we will definitely address these things not only within the EU, but also when it comes. But this is partially a trade agenda and definitely we should discuss it also from the business perspective. Yes, we will address these issues and we have to basically try to solve all the inequalities.

However, basically, we see on some of the examples, and I was already mentioning the examples coming from China that, for example, like a debt restructuring is partially linked to unequal taxation of our rivals. The European companies should not be involved in this game.

1-0112-0000

Erik Marquardt (Verts/ALE). – Mein erster Punkt ist zu Ruanda. Es wurde ja schon darüber geredet. Sie haben am Anfang des *hearings* gesagt, dass aus Ihrer Sicht dieses Abkommen sehr gut funktioniert, haben dann so ein bisschen gesagt, „Na ja, wenn es da so Vorwürfe gibt, muss man sie angucken“. Und ich habe die konkrete Frage, ob Sie uns hier zusagen können, dass Sie diese Vorwürfe untersuchen und dem DEVE *committee* dann die Ergebnisse dieser Untersuchung vorlegen?

Zweite Frage zu Migrationspartnerschaften: Also, Sie wollen das Parlament mehr einbinden – das hat auch schon Ursula von der Leyen gesagt. Aber können Sie für Ihren Bereich zusagen, dass Sie bei jeder Migrationspartnerschaft vorher das Parlament konsultieren werden, zumindest bevor diese Partnerschaften geschlossen werden?

Und drittens: Wenn es Vorwürfe von Menschenrechtsverletzungen im Rahmen dieser Migrationspartnerschaften gibt, können Sie uns zusagen, dass Sie dann auch Untersuchungen einleiten und das Parlament über diese Ergebnisse informieren werden? Sehr leicht, weil das alles Ja/Nein-Fragen sind, da können Sie ganz kurz antworten.

1-0113-0000

Jozef Síkela, *designiertes Mitglied der Kommission*. – Vielen Dank für die drei Fragen auf einmal. Was die erste Frage anbelangt: Ja, selbstverständlich, ich werde mir die Sache anschauen, und ich habe überhaupt kein Problem, zurück zum DEVE *committee* zu kommen, zu informieren und mit Lösungsansätzen zu kommen. Was die anderen *Governance*-Fragen anbelangt: Ich bin mir nicht sicher, dass sie in meiner vollen Zuständigkeit sind. Das heißt, wie gesagt, alles, was ich anbieten kann, ist wirklich, dass ich jederzeit zur Verfügung stehe und jederzeit bereit bin, die Fragen zu beantworten, die Sachen anzuschauen, bei denen Sie das Gefühl haben, dass sie angeschaut werden sollen, und selbstverständlich mit einem Feedback zurück zu den zuständigen *committees* zu kommen. Allgemein, die *Governance*-Fragen sind dann im Grunde genommen in den Händen der offiziellen Strukturen – entweder des Kollegiums, der Frau Präsidentin oder auch in den Händen des Parlaments.

1-0114-0000

Charles Goerens (Renew). – En juillet 2025, il y aura la quatrième conférence sur le financement du développement. Lors des deux premières, la plupart des États membres avaient promis de consacrer 0,7 % à l'aide publique au développement. Lors de la troisième, à Addis-Abeba, ils avaient tous promis d'arriver au niveau de 0,7 %. Or, pour réaliser cet objectif des 0,7 % d'allocation par rapport au produit intérieur brut, il faut deux choses: premièrement, en faire la promesse et deuxièmement, il faut tenir cette promesse. Pour ce qui est de la faire, la promesse, ça va plutôt bien.

Mais pour la tenir, ça ne va pas du tout. Au contraire, non seulement la plupart des États membres n'ont pas accru leur aide publique au développement, mais ils l'ont même réduite, peu de temps après avoir laissé la Commission faire ladite annonce à Addis-Abeba.

On peut avoir une lecture optimiste de ces faits et dire qu'on est arrivé à 50 % de l'objectif, qu'on a fait la moitié du chemin. Qu'allez-vous faire pour convaincre enfin les États membres de tenir cette promesse qui a été faite et refaite? On commence vraiment à en avoir marre! Nous comptons donc sur vous pour obtenir des 27 États membres, notamment ceux qui ne l'ont pas encore fait, qu'ils respectent enfin cet engagement toujours renouvelé. Ça devient une arlésienne, un événement toujours annoncé mais qui ne se produit jamais.

1-0115-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – Thank you very much for this difficult question. I have a certain experience on how to convince 27 Member States to act in a united and solid way thanks to the Czech presidency in the second half of '22, where I was personally chairing certain committees in different councils. Usually the best way how to convince the Member States to act in unity and solidarity is convince them that this is also beneficial for them and this is basically the approach I want to use. However, I am not able to commit me for the things which are out of my responsibility. So of course we have to talk to our Member States and basically rely on the principle that the promises should be fulfilled. So if they are commitments from the past, there must be a really extraordinary reason why they should not be covered or delivered. This is my holy principle – keep the promises. And this is something where I will try also to convince the Member States.

1-0116-0000

Małgorzata Gosiewska (ECR). – Ofiarami wojen, klęsk żywiołowych oraz biedy padają przede wszystkim kobiety, dzieci oraz osoby niepełnosprawne. Gdy stan taki się przedłuża, gdy pomoc nie dociera, wpadają w taki zamknięty krąg, powiedziałabym, i coraz trudniej je też z tego wyrwać. Jakie działania podejmie Pan jako komisarz, aby skuteczniej wykorzystać pomoc rozwojową dla poprawy sytuacji osób w najtrudniejszej sytuacji, szczególnie w krajach rozwijających się? To jest moje pierwsze pytanie.

I drugie: pan poseł Kamiński poruszył bardzo ważny temat krajów rządzonych przez reżimy autorytarne w kontekście europejskiej pomocy rozwojowej. Wymienił Kubę. Otóż pragnę tylko przypomnieć o świetnie działających organizacjach kościelnych, które prowadzą szkoły, dożywają, leczą, uczą zawodu, wręcz uczą życia. Są blisko i pomagają. Pomóżmy im my, skuteczniej dopuszczając do środków europejskich. I to jest moja prośba, Panie Komisarzu.

1-0117-0000

Jozef Síkela, *Commissioner-designate*. – I fully agree – and thank you for the question – that we have to use all the possibilities we have to help these people. And I already also said that faith-based partners are warmly welcomed to assist us if they are ready, basically, to act in line with our values.

How to ensure that, basically, the help will address people who are in need is very difficult. I was having a very extensive discussion of the chairman of People in Need, one of the partners in Czech Republic. And basically, I am ready to continue this discussion on how to use most effectively the money in order, basically, to deliver them only to the people to whom it should be addressed and how to prevent that the pot of money is being lost on the way. But as I said, in some of the countries, simply to ensure that any single penny will be delivered there where it is needed is difficult, and we cannot act here without close cooperation with the NGOs on the spot.

1-0118-0000

Jaroslava Pokorná Jermanová (PřE). – Vážený pane exministr a pane designovaný komisaři, měl byste prostřednictvím Global Gateway zajistit podporu dlouhodobých investic a obchodu v oblasti třetích zemí. Česká vláda, jejíž jste byl donedávna členem, však čelila a čelí kritice právě kvůli nefunkční podpoře inovací a investic. Jak toho chcete docílit, když se Vám nedařilo ani v České republice? V rámci Global Gateway budete v těsném kontaktu také s bankovní a byznysovou sférou, ve které jste podnikal a máte na ni silné vazby. Ty se například projevily, když jste jako ministr průmyslu a obchodu pro stát koupil zadluženou a skomírající firmu NET4GAS za předražených osm miliard korun. Zajistil jste tak splácení velkých dluhů této firmy, zejména u bankovních domů, mimo jiné i Erste Group, z peněz daňových poplatníků, a to na dlouhá léta dopředu. Dokážete se oprostit od těchto vazeb? Nepovažujete je za konflikt zájmů a dokážete zaručit, že se něco takového nebude opakovat i ve Vaší nové pozici?

1-0119-0000

Jozef Síkela, Kandidát na komisaře. – Vážená paní poslankyně, dovoluji mi, abych reagoval ve Vaší a mojí mateřštině. Chtěl bych zdůraznit, že já jsem v bankovním sektoru nepodnikal. Já jsem byl najatý manažer, to znamená, musel jsem být *fit and proper* jednak u Evropské centrální banky, u národních regulátorů stejně jako u regulátorů ve Spojených státech, Velké Británii a Hongkongu, kde moje bývalá banka měla svoje aktivity. Byl jsem jako najatý manažer v této oblasti velmi účinný a úspěšný. Co se týká akvizice páteční plynové sítě čtyř tisíc kilometrů plynovodů, kterou jsme jako vláda ČR odsouhlasili a odkoupili od privátních investorů, jednalo se o strategickou investici k zajištění energetické bezpečnosti. Finanční situace té firmy tak, jak ji popisujete, je na hony vzdálená tomu, co nám řekly tři znalecké posudky od nezávislých poradců, od Citi a londýnské kanceláře Ernst & Young. To znamená transakce, kterou jsme provedli, byla transakcí komerční, byla hodnocena nezávislými poradci a já ji pořád považuji za významný příspěvek k zajištění energetické bezpečnosti nejen České republiky. A pokud jde o ty informace, které jste uvedla, že jedním ze zvýhodněných subjektů byl můj bývalý zaměstnavatel, pak je potřeba se podívat na strukturu dluhů té společnosti, protože tam sice tato instituce figuruje, ale nikoliv jako nejvýznamnější věřitel. Navíc je potřeba rozlišovat bankovní úvěry a tzv. *private placement*, to znamená bondy, které nakoupili soukromí investoři, kde zmíněné banky tu distribuci těch bondů pouze manažerovaly.

1-0120-0000

Udo Bullmann (S&D). – Commissioner-designate, allow me to come back to two questions which I regard to be institutional ones. If the co-budget authority tells the executive: 'look, we are not on equal footing with the other co-authority when it comes to the development of your instruments,' this is a dangerous situation for the executive, because the experienced executive knows very well that, in the long run, there is no legitimacy without participation. And I totally believe you personally that you will do everything to give full transparency and full communication as Commissioner, but I would appreciate if you could confirm the understanding of this conversation that this House is waiting for an institutional offer to change a situation which is neither in line with our treaty obligations to scrutinise the money that we oversee, nor with our democratic duties.

1-0121-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – As I said, I fully understand, and we've discussed this topic personally, the urgency of your call of, I think, more involvement in the decision making, and I can promise that I will basically address this call in the college.

1-0122-0000

Hildegard Bentele (PPE). – Seitens der EU steht eine große Ankündigung, ein großes Versprechen im Raum. 300 Milliarden EUR wollen wir als EU zusammen mit dem Privatsektor mobilisieren, um in strategischen Bereichen wie Energieinfrastruktur, Digitalisierung und Gesundheit Arbeitsplätze zu schaffen bzw. zu sichern. Arbeitsplätze, lieber Udo, die Menschen erlauben werden, nicht nur kurzfristig im Rahmen eines Entwicklungsprojekts, sondern langfristig ihren Lebensunterhalt zu sichern. Arbeitsplätze, die Menschen eine echte Entwicklungsperspektive geben, Arbeitsplätze, die zu Sicherheit, Würde, Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung führen, so wie wir es in der EU auch kennen.

Sie haben uns vor allem vor Ihrem beruflichen Hintergrund dargelegt, dass Sie die große Zahl von 300 Milliarden anspornt. Sie wollen Mittel akquirieren, auch große Projekte anschieben, Risiken minimieren und Effizienzen voll ausschöpfen und damit unseren Partnern glaubhaft zeigen: Ja, die EU möchte mehr internationale Zusammenarbeit zu beiderseitigem Nutzen und ist dafür mit der neuen Kommission und mit Ihnen *in persona* auch gut aufgestellt.

Ich würde als Letztes gerne noch fragen: Wohin wird Sie Ihre erste Reise als EU-Kommissar für internationale Partnerschaften führen und wen werden Sie gegebenenfalls auf diese Reise mitnehmen?

1-0123-0000

Jozef Síkela, designiertes Mitglied der Kommission. – Danke für die Frage. Ich bin da sehr... Also ich habe nicht einmal angefangen, nachzudenken, wo ich wohnen werde. Ich habe auf den heutigen Nachmittag gewartet, um sozusagen Aktivitäten zu vermeiden, die möglicherweise in der Zukunft keinen Sinn haben. Aber ich kann Ihnen versprechen, dass die erste Sache, die ich mache, wenn ich bestätigt werde, ist: Ich setze mich mit meinem Team zusammen, und wir werden einen ordentlichen Plan machen, wohin und wann, um selbstverständlich die wichtigsten und die brennendsten Sachen abzudecken. Ich habe da irgendetwas im Kopf, aber ich muss es noch mit DG und anderen Kollegen verifizieren. Was ich erreichen möchte, ist, dass wir diese Zuständigkeiten im Rahmen des *college* teilen, dass wir besser koordinieren, wer wann und wohin fährt, dass wir nicht auf einer Seite haben, dass alle irgendwohin fahren und dass gewisse Regionen oder Länder dann nicht abgedeckt werden. Weil die persönliche Präsenz – und das hat sich nach Covid gezeigt, dass der Traum, dass alles online wird, ... – das ist irrsinnig wichtig, insbesondere für die Partner, wo wir was erreichen wollen.

1-0124-0000

Barry Andrews, Chair of the DEVE Committee. – Excellent. So we're into the final part of this hearing, and I now give the floor to the Commissioner-designate to give his concluding remarks.

You have 5 minutes, Commissioner designate. The floor is yours.

1-0125-0000

Jozef Síkela, Commissioner-designate. – Vielen Dank, thank you once again, honourable Chair, honourable Members. I want to thank you for the opportunity to engage with you during this hearing. I have listened carefully to your questions. I was making a lot of notes and I was carefully listening to respective positions and I really appreciate that it confirmed my previous opinion. We all strive for a strong, secure and sustainable Europe with a positive impact on the rest of the world. I will not repeat what I have said, but I want to respond to your points. So, let me conclude by making several commitments, and please remember I am always very cautious in making promises because the ones I make, I fully intend to fulfil.

First, my commitment to working with you. I intend to permanently cooperate with you on the responsibilities that fall under my portfolio and to engage with you on regular dialogues, including through high-level geopolitical dialogue. If confirmed, I commit to work with all Members of Parliament by holding regular meetings with the committees in different formats and invite MEPs to missions in partner countries.

Second, I commit to lead international partnerships in full compliance with the EU Treaties in all partner countries. Like eradication of poverty, I intend to ensure that the investment choices we are making on the Global Gateway fully contribute to the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. I have also heard your call, which I very much welcome, to have a stronger role in the governance of Global Gateway, and I will work closely with the EP standing rapporteurs.

Third, working with my fellow Commissioners, I commit to strengthening the policy coherence of our internal and external actions. We will need to work together to better factor in the external impacts of our internal policies and engage with partners at an early stage of the legislative process, and I also count on your support in this.

Fourth, you have my commitment to continue to tackle inequalities, including concretely through the broader use of the inequality marker. I have also heard your call to look at how we can better measure the impact of our Global Gateway projects and I intend to engage with you on this. Furthermore, I will maintain at least 13 % of development funding dedicated to education during the current MFF. I also intend to ensure full implementation of the Gender Action Plan III and to timely design the new Gender Action Plan IV. Throughout my mandate, I will ensure continuous engagement with young people as we shape our future policies.

Fifth, many of you have underlined the importance of dialogue in the EU and in partner countries, with a specific focus on engaging with civil society organisations. I will take this forward and ensure that funding of CSOs remains at least at the same level.

Sixth, I intend to work with my fellow Commissioners on stepping up our efforts to address the migration challenge. It means taking immediate action to address illegal migration, including the fight against migrant smugglers and traffickers, while at the same time investing in tackling the root causes to ensure that citizens in our partner countries have a future prospective in their own countries. I want to work with all of you across the political spectrum to adopt a common approach.

Finally, I fully recognise the concerns that many of you have expressed on the cuts to funding. I commit to be the staunchest defender of the development aid budget. As today's hearing has shown, supporting partners worldwide is in our own strategic interest. If we were to fail in our international partnerships with developing countries and emerging economies, we'd not just be failing our partners, but also ourselves. We therefore must ensure that the future EU budget takes fully into account the geopolitical importance of development policy.

I hope that today I have gained your trust and support, both on our common goals and how we can reach them together. There is so much to do and I am eager for us to get started on delivering on these missions. So let me conclude by thanking the Chair, all the chairs of all the committees and all of you for your commitment to this remarkable democratic process. A very special thanks to the interpreters and other staff, and definitely also to my team, and hopefully also to my new team who have made this meeting possible. Thank you very much once again.

1-0126-0000

Barry Andrews, *Chair of the DEVE Committee*. – I just want to make some concluding remarks. Remarkably, we finished on time. Mr Lange, I learned it all from you in the last mandate.

But you're right – it is a remarkable democratic process. Without prejudicing the outcome of the evaluation meeting, I'd like to say that we are really grateful for your oral efforts today, for the work that you put into engaging with us, for your written responses, for your bilateral engagement with us and your specific commitments today on, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals – which are dear to the heart of so many members of this committee – your commitment to policy coherence for development, overseas development assistance as well, and the remarkable soft power of development as a cornerstone of European external policy.

So with that, I thank everybody for their engagement – the interpreters, the staff – and our evaluation meeting will take place at 18:30. Thank you.

1-0127-0000

(The hearing closed at 17:31)