

ECB Executive Board: Van Rompuy letter “worrying”

By Manon Malhère

The nomination of Yves Mersch, governor of Luxembourg’s Central Bank, to the European Central Bank’s Executive Board has been stalled. Coordinators of the political groups within the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) at the European Parliament have confirmed that a hearing, initially set for 26 September, has been postponed, since no women have been nominated for the position, and if Mersch was appointed the ECB board would be entirely male until 2018.

The EP has gone against the grain on this issue of gender equality, a principle enshrined in the EU treaties. In May 2012, the chair of the ECON committee sent an official letter to the President of Eurogroup, Jean-Claude Juncker, to raise awareness on the subject. Nonetheless, at the end of the Ecofin Council of 10 July, ministers still decided to recommend Mersch’s nomination. The final decision, however, rests with the European Council.

In a recent letter to the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy says that “no nomination was received from any member state for a female candidate”. This is a “worrying” response,

which ignores the EP’s request, says MEP Sylvie Goulard (ALDE, France), calling on member states to take political responsibility for the matter.

What is your reaction to Van Rompuy’s answer about the balance between men and women on the ECB Executive Board?



Goulard: “An error of judgement”

Since the hearing, by the European Parliament, of the candidate to sit on the Executive Board of the ECB [European Central Bank] was adjourned sine die because the minimum gender balance has not been respected, Herman Van Rompuy has sent a letter to Schulz, which is a cause for concern. Van Rompuy more or less admits that women and

democracy can wait. And yet a real issue was brought to the attention of the Council in good time (May 2012): the representativeness of a key EU institution. Its response does not tackle the question. It has ignored our request. The fact that Mersch’s hearing was postponed was confirmed after the last meeting of the coordinators of the political groups of the ECON committee, on 26 September.

Why this battle?

The ECB is not just an agency, but a major EU institution: its decisions have an

extremely important impact on citizens and the member states. The fate of entire countries partly depends on its action. Its Executive Board – whose members do not represent the states – must therefore be made up of competent people representing society in its diversity. Parliament cannot legitimise the choice of candidates on the basis of arrangements that flout the Union’s fundamental principles – namely gender equality. Moreover, the argument that the gravity of the crisis does not leave room to tackle gender equality at the moment is not valid. If we do not take it into account for the nominations, we shouldn’t then be surprised that the citizens do not feel close to the Union. This case shows once again the gap between talk and action: this is the reason why I am fighting for a women to be at the ECB now, and not in the future – as the next renewal is scheduled for 2018!

But is the EP sufficiently united to fight this battle?

Originally, in May, the political groups unanimously agreed – like in August on the postponement of the hearing. There is still a strong majority in favour of it, with only the EPP having withdrawn its support. But this can change. Your question relates to the way certain MEPs work: do they address Europe’s interest or are they trying to preserve the Council’s biased and national arrangements?

What do you expect from the Council now?

I trust Jean-Claude Juncker, who is a true and important European. The Council has made an error of judgement by underestimating the importance of the subject. It can perfectly well go back on its decision and choose a woman. All the while respecting some geographical balances, regardless of nationality. Legally, Parliament cannot block the procedure. The ball is in the member states’ camp and their political responsibility is at stake. Either they ensure an equilibrium between men and women, or they choose to consider that this whole issue is not very important and that women should just keep quiet. ■



The ECB’s Governing Council consists of the six members of the Executive Board plus the governors of the national central banks of the 17 eurozone states