

Sylvie Goulard,
MEP ALDE

The appointment of a new European Commission is underway:

Which men and women will lead Europe?



The appointment of a new European Commission for 2014 - 2019 is underway

The new European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, must select his college of Commissioners **between now and the end of October** by assigning portfolios to the candidates proposed by each Member State. **The consent of the European Parliament is obligatory**, with a two-step procedure which is not widely known about by the general public: **each candidate will take part individually in a hearing** organised by the competent parliamentary committee, to verify their competences and to detect any possible conflicts of interest. If a candidate is rejected by the committee, which has already been the case in the past, then the relevant Member State must propose a new candidate. **The college of Commissioners is then collectively subject to a vote of approval by the European Parliament, in the plenary, and requires a majority of the votes cast.**

The European Commission - an essential institution

Generally speaking this institution is criticised to an even greater extent than its role is misunderstood. As the only institution with the right to make legislative proposals, it can provide Europe with a decisive impetus; it also has significant power in the fields of competition policy or international trade negotiations. It is precisely for these reasons that it needs to be a strong and respected institution. **Its members are independent, not representatives of their respective countries**; on the contrary, they are supposed to promote the **general European interest**; however the fact that the college now contains 28 members (one per Member State) often leads to a misunderstanding concerning this point.

The challenge to achieve parity

To date, the **Member States which have already nominated their candidates have overwhelmingly proposed men** (19, coming notably from Germany, Spain, France and the United Kingdom); only a handful of women have been nominated, by Italy, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria (at this stage all the candidates are not yet known). As a reminder: the outgoing Commission contains 9 women, and obviously competent women can be found in all the EU Member States.

Parity is important for multiple reasons:

- **the law:** as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states, "*equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay*", without excluding measures "*providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex*" (article 23)¹. The Commission, responsible for ensuring that the Treaties are respected, must lead by example.
- **performance:** mixed teams achieve better results, as the example of companies engaged in the fight for diversity illustrates. According to the OECD, in general promoting parity can have a positive effect on growth² which is not insignificant.
- **representativeness:** at a time when the EU is considered to be "distant" and "disconnected", the team of Commissioners should better reflect the diversity of society and go beyond "old white men in grey suits". For

¹ The Treaties also state that the EU "*shall promote equality between women and men*" (article 3 TEU) and that "*in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women*" (article 8 TFEU).

² See notably the works of the Italian NGO Valore D (www.valored.it) or the Association française des managers de la diversité (www.afmd.fr) and Closing the gender gap – OECD <http://www.oecd.org/gender/closingthegap.htm> - December 2012

this same reason, it is a great shame that none of the proposed candidates come from a migrant background.

- **Europe's international credibility:** gender equality is now a global issue. The European Parliament gave the Sakharov Prize to Malala Yousafzai who is fighting for girls to have access to education. Words spoken by Europeans will carry more weight if, in Europe, the issue of equality has already been translated into acts, from the classroom through to exercising responsibilities.

- **a level playing field with the private sector:** most Member States, including France, have established binding rules for companies (for example quotas concerning the number of women on the board of directors); governments cannot avoid their responsibilities in the political sphere. The evident delay in the political world compared to the private sector concerning human resources should lead the private sector to question political representatives.

What next?

There is little chance of parity being achieved if each government selfishly proposes their candidate, without any reflection about the final team as a whole.

National leaders believe that they are appointing their representatives; **this misunderstanding about the nature of the Commission has serious consequences, because no-one is taking responsibility to ensure that the best "Team Europe" possible is created.**

A simple solution would be to require **each Member State to propose two candidates, one male and one female**, leaving the responsibility to the President of the Commission, accompanied by the final vote by the Parliament, to find an appropriate balance³. Jean-Claude Juncker has already expressed his desire for more female candidates; he has also promised that he will give the most important portfolios to women. This is a second-rate solution. On the contrary, competent men should not be discriminated against because the nomination procedure is absurd.

MEPs will soon decide upon a strategy.

- **It could consist of refusing to hold the hearings in the specialised committees, while inviting Jean-Claude Juncker to request two names (one male/one female) per Member State.**

- **If no progress is made then it could lead to the plenary rejecting the college⁴.**

The President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, (Socialist, Germany) and some parliamentary groups, notably the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (through the voice of Guy Verhofstadt), have made it known in advance that they will not vote in favour of a European Commission which does not respect the balance between men and women.

This is not an inter-institutional dispute, nor a question only for women but rather a battle for a modern European society which is fairer and performs better.

Sylvie Goulard Députée européenne ADLE
For further information visit my website www.sylvie-goulard.eu
Press contact Pierre-Jean Verrando +32 4 71 34 59 64

³ MEPs from different political groups and Member States (Giegold, Goulard, Karas, In't Veld, Mosca) have already called for it – see Les Echos, le Corriere della Sera, The European Voice and Der Standard, 26.06.14

⁴ For the appointment of a member to the ECB's executive board, in 2012, the European Parliament voted negatively in the plenary, thus voting against a candidate, in the name of gender equality.

