

European elections 2019: EU Parliament votes to maintain 'Spitzenkandidaten' system

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News

MEPs insist that they will reject any contender for Commission President who is not nominated as a lead candidate ahead of the [2019 EU elections](#) [1].



Jean-Claude Juncker was the first Commission President to be selected under the 'Spitzenkandidaten' system | Photo credit: Press Association

In a vote in plenary on Wednesday, Parliament voted in favour of a resolution that rejects any “back-door deals” among EU leaders on who to choose to lead the Commission for the next five years.

The so-called ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ - German for lead candidate - process, in which European political parties designate one candidate each for the post of president, ahead of the [European elections](#) [1], should not change, ruled MEPs.

This system was first used in 2014, to select current Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who supports the same system being used to find his successor.

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Parliament effectively said it will reject any candidate for Commission President who has not been nominated in this way.

The outcome of the vote was welcomed by EPP group leader Manfred Weber who, in a tweet, said the choice of Commission President should be “an election, not a selection.”

Polish MEP Danuta Hübner said there should be “no way back” to the days when the choice of Commission President emerged from “back door deals”.

By establishing a link between the choice of Commission President and the outcome of the European elections, MEPs also said they consider that the 2014 ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ process was a success and that it should be repeated next year.

In a report adopted in Strasbourg, MEPs also approved proposed changes to the framework agreement on relations between Parliament and the Commission by 457 votes to 200, with 20 abstentions.

The proposed changes mean that serving European Commissioners will also be able to run as “lead candidates” ahead of EU elections. The Commission President will have to inform MEPs of measures taken to ensure that commissioners standing in electoral campaigns for the EU elections respect rules on independence and integrity. In addition, Commissioners will be banned from using the human or material resources of the Commission for any activities linked to electoral campaigns.

Parliament’s rapporteur on the dossier, Esteban González Pons, said, “The EU has to be more democratic, more transparent, or it simply will not be. The fact that citizens know the candidates for President of the European Commission before the elections is an important step in the right direction.”

The suggested changes to the inter-institutional agreement are the result of negotiations between Parliament’s Conference of Presidents (the President and political group leaders) and the Commission.

Further comment came from Parliament’s President, Antonio Tajani, who said, “The choice of Commission President through the Spitzenkandidaten method used in 2014 is a milestone for a more democratic and more political Europe. We should not go back on this. We should strengthen this process and continue to work to bring Europe and its institutions closer to its citizens, also be involving them in the decisions affecting their future.”

The Italian deputy added, “The vote of the people choosing their own representatives, based also on a candidate for the European executive, reinforces citizen participation. This also strengthens the political scrutiny of parliament on the Commission, as is central to all parliamentary democracies.

“Our citizens want the Union to be guided by politics not by a bureaucracy. They favour an open and transparent competition between political parties and candidates rather than agreements behind closed doors,”

Juncker, who was chosen as a ‘Spitzenkandidat’ candidate in 2014, addressed MEPs on Tuesday and asked them to support this “tiny piece of democratic progress” and warned against creating a conflict between Parliament and the Council.

Juncker, who is not expected to seek re-election, said, “We have to be sure we can bring about the success in 2019, ensure that we wrap things up for 2019. We need to be standing by our Spitzenkandidaten system: It is about the democratic fabric of the EU.”

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About the author

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