

## EU urged to create ‘citizens’ commissioner’ as von der Leyen prepares to unveil team

Written by Martin Banks on 10 September 2019 in News  
News

The European Commission is being urged to create an EU “citizens’ commissioner” to fill the seat on the executive left vacant by the British.



**Ursula von der Leyen** | *Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

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The demand comes on the day Ursula von der Leyen, the Commission President-elect, will officially announce the 27 new members of her Commission, including 13 men and 12 women, as well as their portfolios.

Nine of the nominees are from the EPP, nine are from the Socialists and Democrats, five are from Renew Europe (formerly Alde), one is from the Greens and one is from the ECR political party.

Romania has nominated both a woman and a man.

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On Tuesday, the Council formally adopted the list of nominees who, if approved in upcoming hearings in the European Parliament, will take up office in early November and stay in place until 31 October 2024.

Much of the focus in the run-up to the announcement of von der Leyen's team has been about achieving a gender and geographical balance among the 27 commissioners.

However, the idea has now been mooted of an EU citizens' commissioner to fill the vacancy left by the UK which, as it is still due to leave the EU on October 31, has not put forward a candidate to replace its current commissioner, Sir Julian King.

According to those proposing it, the idea of an EU citizens' commissioner would be to prioritise the role of civil society and to "recognise the importance of strong, active citizenship in making the EU more resilient both at home and abroad."

"An EU citizens' commissioner would allow the EU to tap into the huge potential of European civil society" **Roger Casale, New Europeans**

A citizens' commissioner's remit would include civic education, civic venture capital for civic entrepreneurs and to produce better policy implementation.

The idea has been suggested by EU strategy expert Verena Ringler and Roger Casale, of the UK-based citizen's rights group New Europeans.

Ringler, who is also a former Deputy Head of Press and Communications for the EU Council team in Kosovo, told this website, "The EU needs the participation of citizens and of contemporary civil society initiatives like never before. People are the best barometer that the EU and Member State governments have to anticipate deep societal trends."

"A strategic approach led by an EU citizens' commissioner would make sure the EU gets its approach right across the board, starting with research and development."

Ringler went on to say that "the field of citizen participation is now rich in prototypes but poor in impact as well as financing across the EU. Decision-makers should recognise that drawing on the "wisdom of the crowd" from the beginning of any process leads to results that are high in quality and

broad in acceptance.”

Casale said, “An EU citizens’ commissioner would allow the EU to tap into the huge potential of European civil society.”

The idea of an EU citizens’ commissioner has received support from organisations such as Europe’s People’s Forum and Alliance4Europe and the initiative is being pushed by New Europeans in the context of the Finnish presidency of the EU.

“A strategic approach led by an EU citizens’ commissioner would make sure the EU gets its approach right across the board, starting with research and development” **Verena Ringler, EU strategy expert**

The campaigners argue that methodologies for engaging citizens have been tried and tested but they are not being used enough by policymakers to actually frame policy.

Casale said, “It is not good enough simply to inform citizens about decision-making processes. We want to see a deepening of the democratic involvement of citizens.”

“An EU citizen’s commissioner could help by promoting and resourcing that as well as by sharing examples of good practice. The legacy of Brexit could be that strengthening democratic participation should become a new strategic priority for Europe.”

The following people have been proposed for appointment as commissioners:

Helena Dalli (Malta), Valdis Dombrovskis (Latvia), Elisa Ferreira (Portugal), Mariya Gabriel (Bulgaria), Paolo Gentiloni (Italy), Sylvie Goulard (France), Johannes Hahn (Austria) , Phil Hogan (Ireland) , Ylva Johansson (Sweden) . Věra Jourová (Czech Republic) , Stella Kyriakides (Cyprus) , Janez Lenarčič (Slovenia) , Rovana Plumb (Romania) , Didier Reynders (Belgium), Margaritis Schinas (Greece), Nicolas Schmit (Luxembourg), Maroš Šefčovič (Slovakia), Kadri Simson (Estonia), Virginijus Sinkevičius (Lithuania), Dubravka Šuica (Croatia) , Frans Timmermans (Netherlands), László Trócsányi (Hungary), Jutta Urpilainen (Finland) , Margrethe Vestager (Denmark) and Janusz Wojciechowski (Poland).

Parliament’s former president Josep Borell Fontelles (Spain) has also been appointed High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to replace Federica Mogherini.

## **About the author**

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