

Von der Leyen unveiling of commissioner portfolios met with mixed reactions

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News

Ursula von der Leyen, the first female European Commission President, has caused a stir in Brussels after announcing the composition and portfolio distribution of her College of Commissioners.



Photo credit: Fotolia

Von der Leyen's determination to achieve gender balance in the new Commission appeared to go down well with policymakers.

There are 13 men and 12 women nominated for the various roles. This excludes Romania who has nominated both a woman and a man. Parliament needs to ratify the selection in nomination hearings.

Speaking on Tuesday, President-elect von der Leyen said, "I am grateful to present my well-balanced,

agile and modern Commission that is led with determination, clearly focused on the issues at hand and provides answers.”

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Manfred Weber, leader of the EPP group, said her "first major achievement" was “surely that of a gender-balanced College.”

Weber, who himself was a candidate for the Commission presidency earlier in the summer, said, "The EPP promised gender equality before the elections, and now we are making good on that promise. The gender balance in the next college is a major achievement and an important signal for the rest of Europe and the world".

He added, "It is good to see that EPP commissioners-designate will have important responsibilities that focus on people’s concerns: strengthening and investing in the European economy, promoting free and fair international trade, protecting our European way of life, research, health and innovation, supporting our democracy and the future of next generations.”

On the procedure of the upcoming European Parliament hearings to evaluate the competences of the candidates, he said MEPs “will examine the Commissioners-designate, their competences and ability to work for a better Europe without any prejudice. All candidates will get a fair chance.”

“The gender balance in the next College is a major achievement and an important signal for the rest of Europe and the world" **Manfred Weber, EPP group leader**

“For the next five years, the EPP group’s priority, and that of a strong team of EPP commissioners, will be to make sure that Europe is able to deliver in the interests of European citizens. We need to strengthen our economies and our external borders, and better protect citizens in an increasingly unstable world. We will continue to fight for a more democratic Europe and a Europe that is closer to its citizens.”

Nine of the team come from the EPP with another nine from the Socialists.

A key appointment is that of Margrethe Vestager, another unsuccessful Commission presidency nominee, who will be responsible for digital affairs and competition.

The 51-year-old Danish liberal has spent the last five years as the EU’s competition chief.

Sylvie Goulard, from France, has also been given a key role, the internal market dossier, including

defence.

On this, von der Leyen said, "We have to make our single market fit for the digital age, we need to make the most of AI and big data. We have to improve on cybersecurity and we have to work hard for our technological sovereignty."

The new 27-strong Commission will boost its fight against climate change by making it a top portfolio to be handled by Frans Timmermans.

"The proposal of 'one in, one out' is very concerning. Obliging the Commissioners to scrap one regulation for every new regulation is 'better regulation' on steroids and there is a high risk that it will weaken consumer and environmental protection" **Philippe Lamberts, co-leader Greens/EFA**

Timmermans will be the executive's vice president for a new role, the "European Green Deal", von der Leyen told a packed news conference in Brussels on Tuesday.

Timmermans has played a prominent role in criticising Poland for perceived threats to the independence of its judiciary, and Hungary for flouting European agreements on accepting Syrian refugees.

On Timmermans' new role, Von der Leyen said, "The European Green Deal has to become Europe's hallmark. I want Europe to be the front-runner. I want Europe to be the exporter of knowledge, technologies and best practice."

Reaction to von der Leyen's announcement came from Wendel Trio, Director of Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, who welcomed Timmermans being allocated the climate post.

He said: "We look forward to Frans Timmermans leading the Commission's climate work. We are expecting him to deliver on his campaign promise to urgently increase the EU's ambition on climate. His first task is to put forward a proposal to rapidly and significantly increase the EU's 2030 climate target."

He added, "The youth climate strikes and ever more severe climate impacts created the momentum for the new Commission to finally make climate policy a priority. Today's announcement clearly shows that von der Leyen recognises the need for more climate action."

"Giving greater power to the Commissioner responsible for the climate, who will now oversee many other portfolios, is a real opportunity to increase climate action in all sectors of the economy. A comprehensive climate policy needs to go beyond energy to transport, industry, agriculture, health and more."

"We look forward to Frans Timmermans leading the Commission's climate work. We are expecting him to deliver on his campaign promise to urgently increase the EU's ambition on climate" **Wendel Trio, Director, Climate Action Network**

Elsewhere, Philippe Lamberts, co-leader of the Greens/EFA group, said, "The new Commission is a bit like a movie where we know all the casting but there's a lot of uncertainty around the plot, which is why President von der Leyen must present the Commission's work programme as soon as possible to

really know how the story will play out.”

“The proposal of 'one in, one out' is very concerning. Obliging the Commissioners to scrap one regulation for every new regulation is 'better regulation' on steroids and there is a high risk that it will weaken consumer and environmental protection.”

“It's very positive that Margrethe Vestager will be an Executive Vice-President and retain the competition portfolio keeping up the work she has been doing there in holding both large companies and countries to account.”

His colleague, Ska Keller, also co leader of the Greens/EFA, noted, "For the first time, we have a female President and a gender-balanced Commission where equalities play a role, which is a welcome step forward.”

“Von der Leyen has made the climate a priority of this Commission and it's good to have a heavy weight like Timmermans responsible for this portfolio. However, Executive Vice-President for the 'European Green Deal' is a huge undertaking and a lot of priorities for one person.”

The following people have been proposed for appointment as commissioner:

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 ŠUIČA (Croatia) , Frans TIMMERMANS (Netherlands), László TRÓCSÁNYI (Hungary), Jutta URPILAINEN (Finland) , Margrethe VESTAGER (Denmark) and Janusz WOJCIECHOWSKI (Poland).

Parliament's former President Josep BORRELL FONTELLES (Spain) has also been appointed High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to replace Federica Mogherini.

There will be six vice presidents.

About the author

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