

UK must nominate EU commissioner if still in EU after Halloween

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News

The UK will have to nominate an EU commissioner if it is still in the EU after 31 October, the European Parliament has confirmed.



Photo credit: Press Association

Speaking at a briefing on Thursday, a Parliament spokesman said the UK will, by law, have to put forward a nominee to the Commission President-elect if it is still an EU member after Halloween, the date set by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson for leaving the bloc.

Despite saying that the UK will leave the EU on 31 October with or without a deal, Johnson is now bound by a recently-passed law that commits the UK government to asking the EU for an extension to Article 50 if no deal has been agreed by 19 October.

Replying to a question from this website, the Parliament spokesman said, “Yes, the UK will have to

put forward a candidate who would then go through the nomination procedure.”

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The UK's current commissioner is Sir Julian King, who is in charge of the security dossier.

The parliamentary spokesman was speaking at a briefing for reporters ahead of next week’s hearings for commissioners-elect.

From Monday afternoon until Thursday evening, MEPs will hold public hearings of 25 commissioners-designate in the parliamentary committees, to examine whether a candidate is qualified both to be member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out their assigned duties.

On Thursday, the legal affairs committee rejected two nominees from Hungary and Romania, citing concerns about their declarations of financial interests.

“The hearings are unique as we know of no other parliament where officials (commissioners) are questioned before they take up office” **European Parliament spokesman**

It means Rovana Plumb from Romania’s ruling Social Democrats and László Trócsányi from Hungary’s Fidesz party will not now take part in the hearings. The two countries are likely to be asked to put forward new nominees.

The hearings are set to last until 8 October and each Commissioner-designate will face a three-hour grilling in one or several committees related to their assigned portfolio.

MEPs will assess their suitability and willingness to address citizens’ concerns and deliver on the programme that president-elect Ursula von der Leyen presented to MEPs in July.

There will be six hearings a day and each hearing will be broadcast live and nominees will receive up to 25 questions each.

Each nominee has already completed written replies to MEP questions and, for the first time ever, the legal affairs committee has been able to “screen” nominees ahead of the actual hearings.

This resulted, on Thursday, in the nominees from Hungary and Romania being rejected at the first hurdle. It is thought to be the first time a nominee has been rejected at such an early stage of the ratification process.

In the hearings, a two thirds majority is needed in order to the nominee to be approved. Failure to win this means they will face further questioning by MEPs.

A parliament spokesman said, "The hearings are unique as we know of no other parliament where officials (commissioners) are questioned before they take up office."

Elsewhere in Parliament next week, the civil liberties committee will hold a public hearing on the Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean with Carola Rackete, captain of the Sea Watch rescue vessel, Ammiraglio Vittorio Alessandro, from the Italian coastguard "Guardia costiera" as well as representatives from the Commission, FRONTEX and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

The budgets committee, meanwhile, will adopt its position on next year's annual budget, the last of the current multiannual framework, to be confirmed in plenary on 23 October.

Thereafter, Parliament's negotiating team will strive to find an agreement with the Council before the end of the conciliation period on 18 November.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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