

Von der Leyen Commission awaits green light from Parliament

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News

Parliament is expected to approve Ursula von der Leyen's new team of commissioners this week, paving the way for the executive to finally start work.



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

This comes after Parliament's Conference of Presidents, comprising its president David Sassoli and political group leaders, formally closed the protracted hearings process on Thursday.

However, the vote is not a foregone conclusion as at least one mainstream group, the left-wing GUE, will vote against the new team. It says this is due to the "potential for conflicts of interest that came to light during the Commissioner hearings process."

Most of the other groups are expected to approve the new Commission.

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Public hearings of the commissioners-designate took place in parliamentary committees from 30 September to 8 October and on 14 November.

A final vote on the new Commission will now take place during this week's plenary in Strasbourg on Wednesday. This will be followed by a presentation by von der Leyen of the College of Commissioners and their programme.

Sassoli admitted the process had been "difficult" but said he was pleased that the new team under von der Leyen had now been given the "green light."

The Italian MEP added, "During the last two months, the European Parliament has played its democratic role, scrutinising the performances of the proposed Commissioners closely. The hearings have been detailed, and sometimes difficult, but they provide a unique and transparent way for members to verify whether the Commissioners-designate are ready for the job ahead."

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"Over the next five years, Europe has many issues to face - from providing long-term solutions on migration and asylum to leading the world in the fight against climate change. We need a European Commission ready to act on the issues that matter to Europeans."

He added, "As the direct link with EU citizens, the Parliament will continue to hold the Commission to account and ensure it delivers on its promises."

He was speaking after an exchange of views with the Commission's three executive Vice-President-designate Frans Timmermans, Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis.

The meeting analysed the evaluation letters from the committees in charge and the recommendation of the Conference of Committee Chairs.

Speaking after the meeting, GUE/NGL co-leader Martin Schirdewan said: "In fear of losing the vote in plenary, the incoming Commission Vice-Presidents promised everything to everyone. That cannot be allowed. We demand transparency on how to finance all the big proposals for digital, social and ecological changes. However, these plans will be undermined if austerity continues."

“Without an impact assessment of the consequences on the labour market and social security systems, the Commission's plans are gambling with our future. And it is the European citizens who will have to pay the price - again.”

GUE/NGL co-leader Manon Aubry agreed, saying, “Von der Leyen hasn't learnt from Juncker's failures: the new Commission will neither work for the people nor the planet and will pursue the same neoliberal agenda.”

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“Most Commissioners have refused to make any commitments during their parliamentary hearings. European citizens are not asking for fancy speeches: they demand immediate and concrete action against climate change and rising inequalities.”

Speaking on the latest developments, S&D leader Iratxe García spoke about the composition of the new line up and also the various dossiers, some of which have been renamed after complaints by MEPs and others about the titles originally given by von der Leyen.

Garcia said, “Beyond the weight of our nine Commissioners, our Group managed to have a real influence over the new European Commission's programme. We can say that it clearly carries our mark.”

“Our main flagship initiatives and priorities will not only be included in the Commission work programme, but we have secured that they will be under the portfolios of the S&D Commissioners. We can also proudly say that this will be the first gender-balanced college, thanks to our political pressure.”

García listed some of the political achievements obtained during the negotiations with von der Leyen and commitments made by Commissioners-designate at the hearings.

She said, “Frans Timmermans will lead the European Green Deal and will make sure that there is a Climate Law proposal within the first hundred days in office. A major breakthrough is an ambitious strategy to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals through a revision of the current European Semester, and this will be coordinated by Paolo Gentiloni.”

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“On top of a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, we secured a Just Transition Fund, which will be designed and implemented by Elisa Ferreira. We have recovered the Social Pillar as part of Nicolas Schmit's responsibility and have introduced key demands, such as the European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme, a minimum wage and a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base.”

“Helena Dalli will not only mainstream the gender perspective in all proposals but will also deliver a real EU gender equality strategy. We have also ensured an inclusive approach to migration and

refugee flows, both on the content and in the name of Margaritis Schinas' portfolio, while Ylva Johansson will have a key role in developing this New Pact on Migration and Asylum."

She continued, "We have made sure that the rule of law will be strengthened with a new mechanism and we are determined that Member States comply with their own requirements on the rule of law, as ensured by Timmermans in recent years."

"The SDGs will also be at the core of the EU development policy under the responsibility of Jutta Urpilainen, while Josep Borrell will fight for a foreign policy based on values with sustainability, human rights and labour rights at the core of our trade policy."

"Borrell will also oversee the Enlargement and Neighbourhood policy, with a strong commitment to reaffirm the place of the Western Balkans in the European family."

She added, "We will continue to work with our Commissioners, and we count on Maroš Šefčovič to further strengthen the inter-institutional cooperation."

About the author

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