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With Ursula von der Leyen, the Commission of “New Opportunity”

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The European Commission chaired by Ursula von der Leyen entered office on 1st December for a five-year term. After a month’s deferral of the original timetable due to additional Commissioner auditions by the European Parliament, the new college was approved by a wide majority of MEPs on 27th November[1].

For the first time in its history the Commission has one member less than the previous one, due the planned exit (except if something unexpected happens) of the UK. This unprecedented event is just one of the challenges facing Europe “in an unstable world in which too many powers are speaking of confrontation and unilateralism,” to quote Ursula von der Leyen. Since the end of the “poly crisis” which paralysed Europe for several years, its leaders are now aware that the Union must assert its place and interests in the world race. Calls for action in cutting-edge industries, defence and diplomacy find echo in the ambitions announced by the new President. In 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker started his term in office qualifying his Commission as being the “last chance”. Five years later the new Commission might be defined as that of “new opportunity”, for the revival of the community project with ideas and ambition for the future. “Our Union will embark together on a transformation which will touch every part of our society and of our economy” maintained Ursula von der Leyen on 27th November[2]. We should now analyse how she will implement her programme to achieve this.

A. A REFLECTION OF THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION

1. An almost equal team

The main feature about the new Commission is that for the very first time it is being presided over by a woman after 13 male presidents[3],

and it comprises 12 women in contrast to 9 in the outgoing Commission. Thirty years after the appointment of two women Commissioners, French woman Christiane Scrivener and Greek Vasso Papandreou in 1989, the choice of a woman to lead the European executive was both evidence of determination and a political message on the part of the heads of State and Government in response to the change in mentality in European societies and to breathe the spirit of renewal into the political class.

With three female Vice-Presidents (including one Executive Vice President) out of eight, Ursula von der Leyen lies on the threshold of parity in terms of her college of Commissioners. But she imposed it in the cabinets and promised to achieve parity at all management levels in the Commission before the end of her term in office.

2. A new balance

The Commission has 10 representatives from the European People’s Party (EPP), 9 from the Party of European Socialists (PES, represented by the S&D in Parliament,) 4 from the Alliance of European Liberals and Democrats (ALDE, represented by the Renew Europe group in Parliament), 2 independents supported by the ALDE, 1 Conservative (ECR) and 1 supported by the Greens. This herald a notable change in political balance in comparison with the previous Commission, 50% of which comprised the EPP (14), with the PSE only having 9 representatives and the ALDE, 3.

[1] The Commission won 461 votes 157 against and 89 abstentions, i.e. a majority of 65.2% of the MEPs present.

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/president-elect-speech-original_en.pdf

[3] A figure which takes on board the interim presidency of Manuel Marin, between March and September 1999.

This is the fourth term for the EPP as head of the European executive, after two terms by José-Manuel Barroso and that of Jean-Claude Juncker. In 2024 the centre-right party will have led the Commission for 20 consecutive years, and 35 of the 66 since the Commission's inception.

The composition of the college reflects the new situation in Parliament, where the EPP is still the party with the most seats, but in a hemicycle in which no group dominates and where the liberal group aims to assert itself as an influential force. It is also a reflection of the Member States' political colours, since the Commissioners are appointed by the national governments according to national rationale, independent of the European election results.

A major issue for the leaders of the Member States and the European political parties alike, the composition of the Commission in 2019 was, more than ever before, the subject of a political battle, the impact of which could possibly be felt for the entire mandate.

The most direct consequence is the structure of the college in which the president is seconded by three Executive Vice-Presidents, appointed by the heads of State and government. Frans Timmermans and Margrethe Vestager, former candidates for the Presidency of the Commission for respectively the PES and the ALDE, were recognised as “*primus inter pares*” regarding the other Commissioners, so that the PES and a share of the EPP would accept the designation of Ursula von der Leyen, who was not a

candidate for the post.

The president has avoided being drawn into a triumvirate. Hence, she raised Valdis Dombrovskis (EPP) to the rank of third Executive Vice-President. Responsible for economic and financial issues, he will be supervising, amongst other things, the work of the three social democrats: Paolo Gentiloni in economic affairs, Nicolas Schmit in jobs and social rights and Elisa Ferreira in cohesion and reforms[4].

3. Fewer leaders, more veterans

Political renewal has been relative also in terms of the Commissioners' profiles. Eight were members of the outgoing Commission. The rate of renewal is higher than in the outgoing college in 2014 (7 outgoing Commissioners of the 28) and identical to that of the second Barroso Commission in 2010 (8 outgoing out of 27).

For the first time since the departure of Jacques Delors in 1995 the Commission is not being presided over by a former head of government. The outgoing Commission comprised four former Prime Ministers (Jean-Claude Juncker, Andrus Ansip, Valdis Dombrovskis and Jyrki Katainen), it now only has two (Valdis Dombrovskis and Paolo Gentiloni).

[4] Ursula von der Leyen's tricky balancing act, Politico, 11th October 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyens-tricky-balancing-act/>

COMMISSION (2019-2024)			
Commissioner	Portfolio	Member State	Party
Ursula von der Leyen	President	Germany	EPP
Executive Vice-Presidents			
Frans Timmermans	European Green Deal	Netherlands	PES
Margrethe Vestager	A Europe fit for the Digital Age	Denmark	ALDE
Valdis Dombrovskis	An economy that works for people	Latvia	EPP
Vice-Presidents			
Josep Borrell	High Representative A stronger Europe in the world	Spain	PES
Vera Jourova	Values & Transparency	Czech Republic	ALDE
Margaritis Schinas	Promoting the European Way of Life	Greece	EPP
Maros Sefcovic	Interinstitutional Relations & Foresight	Slovakia	PES
Dubravka Suica	Democracy and Demography	Croatia	PES
Commissioners			
Phil Hogan	Trade	Ireland	EPP
Mariya Gabriel	Innovation, research, culture, education and youth	Bulgaria	EPP
Johannes Hahn	Budget & Administration	Austria	EPP
Nicolas Schmit	Jobs & Social Rights	Luxembourg	PES
Paolo Gentiloni	Economy	Italy	PES
Janusz Wojciechowski	Agriculture	Poland	ECR
Thierry Breton	Internal Market	France	Supported by ALDE
Elisa Ferreira	Cohesion and Reforms	Portugal	PES
Stella Kyriakides	Healthcare	Cyprus	EPP
Didier Reynders	Justice	Belgium	ALDE
Helena Dalli	Equality	Malta	PES
Ylva Johansson	Internal Affairs	Sweden	PES
Janez Lenarcic	Crisis Management	Slovenia	Supported by ALDE
Adina Valean	Transport	Romania	EPP
Oliver Varhelyi	Neighbourhood & Enlargement Policy	Hungary	Supported by EPP
Jutta Urpilainen	International Partnerships	Finland	PES
Kadri Simson	Energy	Estonia	ALDE
Virginijus Sinkevicius	Environment, Oceans and Fisheries	Lithuania	Supported by the Greens

Most of the Commissioners have ministerial experience”: three former foreign ministers (Frans Timmermans, Josep Borrel and Didier Reynders), four former Economy or Finance Ministers (Thierry Breton, Jutta Urpilainen, Margrethe Vestager and Virginijus Sinkevicius), two former employment ministers (Ylva Johansson and Nicolas Schmit), one former defence minister (Ursula von der Leyen) and one former European affairs minister (Helena Dalli).

The new college also includes a former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Stella Kyriakides) and a Vice-Governor of the Portuguese Central Bank (Elisa Ferreira). In addition to the 8 outgoing Commissioners, the college includes “specialists” of Europe. Nine are former MEPs, at one time Josep Borrell presided over the European Parliament (2004-2007)). Closer to “Brussels”, Margaritis Schinas, was Jean-Claude Juncker’s spokesperson and Janez Lenarcic and Oliver Varhelyi were Ambassadors to the European Union. In Thierry Breton the Commission finds a company head in its ranks, from one of the key sectors of its mandate, the digital economy.

4. In quest of an East-West balance

Whilst Central and Eastern Europe has been ill-served in the distribution of the EU’s “top jobs” posts, the president has tried to find a balance by attributing four of the eight vice-Presidencies to Commissioners from countries that joined the Union after 2004. Only Valdis Dombrovskis however has any direct authority over a Directorate General (DG), one of the most important levers of power.

There is also a geographic dimension to the distribution of posts. The portfolio deemed to be central to the Commission’s powers – the single market, competition, trade, the euro zone, to which we might add the green deal – have been given to Commissioners from the “old” Member States[5] except for Agriculture, Energy and Fisheries (Poland, Estonia, Lithuania).

5. The influence of the States and MEPs

Ursula von der Leyen was chosen by the heads of State and government on 2nd July, thereby following the Treaty to the letter, as it obliges them to “take into account of the elections to the European Parliament, and after having held the appropriate consultations.” Some of the MEPs deemed this choice illegitimate, because it did not follow the Spitzenkandidat system established by the European parties in 2014. Even though none of the Spitzenkandidaten – Manfred Weber for the EPP, Frans Timmermans for the PES, Margrethe Vestager, for the ALDE – would not have won a majority in Parliament.

But the political groups in Parliament, after having elected Ursula von der Leyen, by a 9-vote majority on 16th July, tried to reassert their power during the Commissioners’ auditions. Three of them were rejected; Laszlo Trocsanyi and Rovana Plumb were ruled out before they were even interviewed by the Parliament’s Legal Affairs committee on the grounds of their declarations of interest that MEPs deemed to be a problem. Sylvie Goulard’s candidature was rejected after two hearings, due to a legal affair, and a potential conflict of interest, but also because she was the candidate put forward by Emmanuel Macron, the craftsman behind the designation of Ursula von der Leyen.

The treaties give Parliament the power to elect the President of the Commission and to approve the college of Commissioners by a vote. But the MEPs are now demanding first choice via the lead candidate system and the list to select the members of the latter based on their criteria, for which the treaties do not provide. However, it has been difficult for the President of the Commission to satisfy Parliament entirely, because she only partially controls the appointment of the Commissioners. The latter are chosen by their government, according to more or less transparent procedures, which depend on internal political balances or the wishes of national leaders. Even if Ursula von der Leyen had been consulted, the procedure does not allow her to

[5] L’ambition de von der Leyen : forcer l’Union à repenser le monde, Contexte, 17th September 2019, https://www.contexte.com/article/pouvoirs/lambition-de-von-der-leyen-forcer-lunion-a-repenser-le-monde_105160.html

form her own team or one that is compatible with Parliament’s partisan games. The Union’s good governance of the Union would gain a great deal if thought were to be given to this procedure on the occasion of work planned in 2020 regarding the reform of the European elections.

B. A PROGRAMME FOR GLOBAL ACTION

The Commission’s programme focuses on six main priorities: the green new deal, a Europe fit for the digital age, an economy that works for people, new impetus for European democracy, promoting the European way of life and a strong Europe in the world. It is both the political continuation of the impetus already given by the European Council and the Commission, as well as an expression of the balance of power created by the political groups in Parliament.

Indeed, these priorities match those of the Strategic Programme adopted in June: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing our economic base; the future European model; building a carbon neutral Europe for the climate, which is green, fair and social; promoting the interests and values of Europe in the world[6]. In this sense the president falls in line with the consensus forged between the institutions since the British referendum in 2016 regarding the way the European project should be revived taking on board world developments.

Moreover, Ursula von der Leyen had to take rapid account of the sometimes-contradictory demands made by the European Parliament. Several of its projects were introduced into her programme to satisfy the S&D and Green groups in particular, whose support was vital to achieve a majority. The green new deal to launch within 100 days the transition towards carbon neutrality by 2050 is the main example, likewise the commitment to offer a legal framework for a minimum wage and a European unemployment insurance system.

Beyond the programme, the influence of the political parties, which supported the designation

and election of Ursula von der Leyen is perceptible in the organisation of the college and the names of the portfolio. The portfolio “promoting the European way of life” - which initially used the idea of “protection” - echoed an idea carried forward by the EPP regarding the European social and cultural model. The portfolio covering the single market, the industrial policy included in the digital dimension and the defence industry, adopting a new general direction, corresponds to the ambitions of the French president.

1. Climate and Digital Transitions

Two issues underpin a part of the Commission’s programme in both its internal and external dimensions, with repercussions on economic, industrial and social policies: the green new deal and digital transition, which will be “a source of change for all”.

Regarding the climate and the environment, the goal is to make Europe the “the first climatically neutral continent” by 2050. The president has made it a central point of her mandate. Her first initiative is planned before the European Council on 12th and 13th December, which is to discuss the Union’s climate goals, and during the UN Conference on the Climate (COP25) that will be taking place in Madrid until 13th December, which she plans to be a narrative framework for future work over the next five years. The measure introduced highlights the scope of the climate policy in the Commission’s work, with its economic stakes and the importance of its political guidance, at a time when this is turning into a societal and electoral stake.

The green deal was given to Frans Timmermans, who will be coordinating the work of five Commissioners: transport, energy, healthcare, environment and agriculture. The scope of climate reform will include the transition over to renewable energies, the extension of the emissions trading system (ETS) to the maritime and aviation sectors, industrial decarbonisation, a new action plan for the circular economy, as well as the alignment of the common

[6] From crisis exit to world challenges: The EU’s Strategic Agenda 2019
<https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0521-from-crisis-exit-to-world-challenges-the-eu-s-strategic-agenda-2019>

agricultural policy on climate and environmental goals.

The financial aspect of climate change will be supervised by Valdis Dombrovskis. He will be responsible for the introduction of an investment plan for a sustainable Europe (which should enable the leverage of 1000 billion € over the next decade), the development of green finance and the reorientation of the European Investment Bank towards “green” projects.

The operational strategy has been given to two executive Vice Presidents in an extremely political division of roles, which highlights the responsibility of the Fair Transition Fund attributed to Elisa Ferreira. This division of roles will require good coordination, but in theory it enables trans-partisan action on the part of the college and as wide a support as possible in Parliament.

The management of the digital policy follows the same schema with an Executive Vice-President, Margrethe Vestager, who is responsible for the coordination of two Commissioners in the single market and innovation and youth. These two portfolios cover extensive areas, from industrial policy to research and development, from artificial intelligence to creative industries, from the development of the digital single market to that of the defence industry and space.

Unlike the left-right balance on the climate, the main axis of digital action is liberal, to which a share of the portfolio such as employment, healthcare, and the economy has been added, as far as digital taxation is concerned.

Margrethe Vestager is the new person responsible for competition, a sign of the Commission’s determination to integrate economic upheaval in the field of one its traditional competences. She is also responsible for drawing up a strategy for the future of European industry with Valdis Dombrovskis.

2. Geopolitics

“*The world needs our leadership more than ever before*” maintained Ursula von der Leyen in explanation of why she wanted the Commission to be “geopolitical”, adding that the Commission “*will not be afraid to speak the language of confidence.*” Three Commissioners have been appointed to external affairs: enlargement and neighbourhood, international partnerships (instead of international cooperation and development) and the High Representative, responsible for the working group for “a stronger Europe in the world”. Janez Lenarcic, responsible for European civilian protection (in the Union and humanitarian aid (outside of the Union) has been included in this.

More than in the past the geopolitical specificity of the Commission is to associate the internal and external aspects of its work. Hence, the promotion of a European way of life, which also covers the link between internal and external security and the introduction of a new DG Defence and the European Defence Fund as well as a strategy for space.

The external dimension underlies most of the Commission’s priorities. Beyond the goal of carbon neutrality, Europe aims to play a key role in global climate transition. Industrial strategy, especially digital, aims to ensure Europe’s competitiveness and also the control of its technologies, infrastructures, and standards so that it is not dependent on other powers.

The trade policy has been reoriented, and is less focused on the conclusion of new free-trade agreements and more on the maintenance of the multilateral system, the fight to counter unfair practices and the strengthening of trade defence tools – notably with the creation of the post of European Chief Trade Enforcement Officer. Similarly, Margrethe Vestager is responsible for adapting the European competition policy, in particular to counter market distortions caused by subsidies and capitalism on the part of foreign States, mainly China – and to be able to adopt a more global

approach to the monitoring of the markets.

This new orientation goes together with stronger coordination on the part of the President who explains that *“to ensure our external action becomes more strategic and coherent, it will be systematically discussed and decided on by the College”*[7]. A new coordination group, called Exco, bringing together members of the cabinets of all of the Commissioners, will assess the internal impact of possible external action and vice-versa .

Defence Minister for five and a half years, Ursula von der Leyen supports the development of European Defence, whilst being fully aware of the reticence, in her country and in the East of the Union, to do this outside of the framework of NATO. Continuing the work started in 2017 the Commission is promising to take “further bold steps” towards a “genuine” Defence of the European Union. The High Representative is responsible for this in coordination with Margrethe Vestager and Thierry Breton, who will set up the new DG Defence.

To achieve her ambitions, Ursula von der Leyen will have to develop a European defence industry, particularly by using the European defence fund, which is due to receive a budget of 13 billion €, to reduce the duplication of equipment between Member States and which is based on the principle of European preference in terms of purchasing. At the same time she will have to extend the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) using the EEAS and the Member States, to new missions, both civilian and military to protect the Union’s economic and strategic interests far from its borders and occupy areas – at sea, in the air and in the cyber world – without the control of which the Union will never be able to guarantee its security.

3. Defending Democracy

The outgoing Commission will have been the first to trigger article 7 of the Treaty on European Union - against Poland - which addresses a “clear risk of a serious breach” of the Union’s values by one of

its members. The new Commission will aim to find a solution, to deal with the request of procedure against Hungary adopted by the Parliament and to prevent other States from breaching the rule of law.

The President is addressing the issue, illustrating openness and determination. *“The rule of law is our foundation and can never be compromised,”* she insisted as she spoke to MEPs saying that she will use all of the elements in the “toolbox” available to her. Moreover, she supports the consideration of the rule of law in the implementation of the budgetary framework 2021-2027. At the same time, she is planning to introduce an annual assessment of the rule of law in all Member States. This mechanism was requested by Poland, Hungary and others, like Romania which complained of the supposedly unrelenting attack made against Central and Eastern Europe. To highlight this balance, Ursula von der Leyen gave this task to Vera Jourova, Vice-President for a “new push for European democracy” and to Didier Reynders, one of those who inspired the annual assessment mechanism.

Since the procedure was triggered in December 2017 and, even more so since 2014, the Union no longer just faces breaches of the rule of law, but threats to its democratic system. These threats are coming from the outside in the shape of cyberattacks, disinformation and manipulation, but also from within, made by political parties that sometimes enjoy external support and by the electorate itself when they choose parties which challenge democratic values.

Even though the Commission is not competent in this area, it does intend to play a coordinating, vigilant role. Margaritis Schinas is responsible for the coordination of the fight to counter hybrid threats. Even more innovative is the creation of a “democracy and demography” portfolio given to Dubravka Suica, with the title of Vice-President. Her role will be “to address some of the deeper changes in our society that have led to a loss of faith in our democracy on the part of some people”.

[7] European Commissioners’ Mission Letter

The content of this new portfolio reflects concern about the Union’s demographic future, whose population is declining and ageing, and about territorial imbalances created by the desertification of some regions and the massive exodus on the part of some populations, notably in the East of the Union. But Dubravka Suica does not have a DG under her authority, and is the only Vice-President without a working group, which suggests that her portfolio is simply there for its own sake. She is also responsible for preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is due to be launched in 2020. But whilst the presidency of the conference has been set aside for a member of Parliament and that the Member States, particularly France and Germany, have already started to manage the process, her role seems somewhat uncertain.

4. Long term projects

Beyond the priorities that mirror topical issues, the Commission will have to move forward in several areas on which the unity and coherence of the Union depend.

Migration is amongst these major subjects, since it is dividing Member States and societies deeply and that it entails Europe’s mastery of its borders and its neighbourhood. In line with the consensus of principle established by the European Council, Ursula von der Leyen hopes to blend solidarity with responsibility, as well as internal (asylum) and external (cooperation with the countries of origin and transit). Margaritis Schinas and Ylva Johansson are responsible for drafting a new migration policy with the goal of “strengthening our external borders to allow us to return to a fully functional Schengen,” whilst Jutta Urpilainen has been tasked with “investing in our partnerships with countries of origin to improve conditions and create opportunities.” No real path of how to settle political stalemates has been defined for the time being.

Ten years after the financial crisis the Commission has defined a goal to complete the architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union, particularly

via Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. The room to manoeuvre remains limited however because the Member States are struggling to agree on the measures to be used to reach these goals and the pace at which they should be implemented. To reduce economic and social imbalances between the States a DG Structural Reforms will be created. Elisa Ferreira is responsible for implementing the reform support programme and the future budgetary instrument for convergence and competitiveness – the draft of the euro zone budget requested by France – as well as the strategy for towns and urban regions (in which $\frac{3}{4}$ of the European population is concentrated) and the outermost regions.

5. The test of Brexit

The most likely work hypothesis in both Brussels and London is the UK’s exit of the Union on 31st January next. For the Commission the multi-sectoral negotiation regarding the future relation will be a test of its ability to project itself long term and to find a balance between the defence of the Union’s fundamental principles and the necessary pragmatism to protect Europe’s economic and strategic interests.

With Michel Barnier in charge of the Task Force for Relations with the UK, created at the end of October will start the new negotiation in line with the one undertaken regarding withdrawal. But whilst the strength of the law and the existential threat represented by Brexit fostered the unity of the States behind the negotiator in chief and the Commission, the multiplicity of the issues at stake for the Member States – from fisheries to financial services, military cooperation to trade links – will be more complicated. The free-trade agreement, the responsibility of which is to be held by Phil Hogan, will certainly be a field of experimentation, but also of assertion of the Union’s determination to set new social, data protection and especially, climate standards in international relations.

A critical point will be reached in July when the Union and the UK decide to extend, or not, the

transition period planned to end on 31st December 2020. If the British government refuses to ask for an extension the Commission might find itself under great pressure to conclude an agreement on time despite the size and complexity of the goals to reach, whilst being forced as in 2018-2019 to update preparation for a no-deal.

C. INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES

1. Imbalance and Centralisation

Ursula von der Leyen again decided to organise the College in “project teams”, making this more explicit and more structured. In addition to the five Vice-Presidents there are three Executive Vice-Presidents the principle of which was set by the Council to satisfy the European political families. Their specific role has not been clarified however, except that it will introduce partisan bickering within the executive.

The distribution of competences between the Commissioners also seems unequal. Some of them have no authority over any DG, whilst Thierry Breton is leading three. The working group led by Vera Jourova on values and transparency only has two Commissioners, Didier Reynders and Helena Dalli. Two Vice-Presidents Maros Sefcovic and Dubravka Schinas are coordinating the work of four Commissioners in extremely different domains. These differences in treatment again raise the question of the number of Commissioners, the number of which is limited in the Lisbon Treaty to “two thirds of the number of Member States” but which the States have maintained at one per country[8]. It also raises the issue of the smooth functioning of collegial work if some Commissioners enjoy more political and administrative influence than others. In this regard cooperation between Frans Timmermans and Valdis Dombrovskis, each responsible for an important DG and a widened working group, as well as that between Thierry Breton and Margrethe Vestager will be decisive for the Commission’s success.

Whilst the global nature of some issues, like the climate, the digital economy and industry justify organisation in working groups and require horizontal work between Commissioners and between working groups, the organisation of the College might increase the role played by the Commissioners’ cabinets. In all events, it increases the power of the Commission’s Secretariat General, responsible for coordinating and supervising all of the departments and the centralisation in terms of the President’s cabinet.

2. A Restive Parliament

The process to approve the Commission showed that Ursula von der Leyen will not have the same relationship with Parliament as did Jean-Claude Juncker, who nurtured the “spirit of a parliamentary regime” with MEPs[9]. Some of them, including within the EPP, challenged her appointment, because she was not a “Spitzenkandidat”. Others consider her to be too far on the right or not ecologist enough.

The difficulty for the President will be to establish working relations with a fragmented Parliament that does not have a stable majority, but which is claiming a greater role in the legislative process. Since the European elections in May 2019 the grand EPP&SD coalition has not had a majority. Moreover, questions regarding economic, social and migration sometimes divide the groups themselves. To pacify her relations with Parliament she has promised MEPs the right to legislative initiative. This political promise goes beyond the treaty, which reserves the Commission the exclusive, but conditional, right of initiative. The adoption of a resolution will be necessary by a majority of MEPs, and not just the electorate, for the Commission to put forward a text, which itself should “fully respect the principles of proportionality, subsidiarity and “better regulation”. Some, particularly the President of the EPP group, Manfred Weber, would like to go further by committing the executive as soon as a resolution has been approved by a simple majority, but also by having the Parliament establish the Commission’s legislative programme[10].

[8] The British government did not want to appoint a Commissioner despite the requests made by Ursula von der Leyen.

[9] Review of 8th legislature of the European Parliament, European Issue n° 512, Robert Schuman Foundation, 23rd April 2019, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-512-en.pdf>

[10] Manfred Weber, Five ways to fix European Democracy, Politico, 26th November 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/five-ways-to-fix-european-democracy-eu-policy-making-parliament/>

One other criteria on which good institutional relations between the Commission and Parliament will depend, is the way the selection procedure of the President of the Commission will be reformed. Ursula von der Leyen has promised to improve the Spitzenkandidat system, to make it more visible, whilst defending the principle of trans-national lists which the Parliament rejected in 2018. The reform of the European elections and the appointment of the head of the executive will be discussed during the Conference on the Future of Europe and will therefore depend in part on an agreement between the Member States.

In theory, Ursula von der Leyen, the first German to lead the Commission in 50 years and the first woman President embodies Europe's desire for renewal and action. *"If we do our job well, the Europe of 2050 will be the first continent in the world to be carbon neutral. It will be a leading digital power. It will continue to be the economy that best manages to strike a balance between market forces and social concern. And it will lead the way on the great global issues,"* she maintains.

However, she is taking office at a time when the Union is hesitating over the means it should have to fulfil its goals. At the next European Council, the heads of State and government will hold their first in-depth discussion about the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework. Ms von der Leyen has warned that the budget "must be significantly

modernised". With Brexit and the loss of revenues that this will incur, discussions will be tighter than usual and in all likelihood the Commission will have to make do with a limited package.

To act and take up this new opportunity offered by the renewal of the institutions, Ursula von der Leyen will not just have to content herself with managing the acquis. *"She must relinquish the single comfort of the treaties and the rule of law to strike out into new areas of innovation. It must take risks and even put itself in danger. It must renew and explore new methods of action"*[11].

This will especially be the case since the Union's traditional driving force, the Franco-German engine, is still necessary, but is no longer enough. Germany and France will preside over the Council in 2020 and 2022 and at the same time will have to prepare for some major electoral dates 2021 and 2022. Whilst Europe will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration on 9th May next, Ursula von der Leyen might take inspiration in the pioneering spirit of the Founding Fathers to encourage both Europeans and their executives to follow her lead.

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[11] A new European Commission, to what purpose?
Jean-Dominique Giuliani,
25th November 2019,
<https://www.jd-giuliani.eu/index.php?lg=en>

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