

Europarties' choices—Who are the candidates for the presidency of the European Commission and how have they been selected?

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One of the biggest European Union's problems is the so-called "democratic deficit" (Norris, 1997; Majone, 2008; Katz, 2001). This is a political and, most importantly, a legitimacy-related problem. In other words, since within the European Union the classical democratic processes do not really work, why should we believe European decisions to be morally right and suitable, i.e., legitimate (Dahl, 1963, 72–73)?

EU politicians have decided to address this issue in an interesting way. Quoting the website europarlamento24,² "We are expecting [...] with an Italian-politics-related logic, that the candidate for the presidency of the European Commission, supported by the European party which will gain the highest number of seats within the European Parliament, will be the first to be considered in order to understand whether he/she will be available to obtain the support of the absolute majority of the European Parliament."

Who are these candidates? How have they been selected? This article will be devoted to answer these questions. I will use two dimensions of analysis devised by Hazan (2002) and by Hazan and Rahat (2010), i.e., the "candidacy" and the "selectorate." The first dimension will address the questions on who

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² http://www.europarlamento24.eu/elezioni-2014-sceglieremo-chi-guidera-la-commissione-europea/0,1254,106_ART_3549,00.html

can stand as a candidate and whether there are some conditions to present the candidacy. On the other hand, the second dimension will be related to the issue of who can select a candidate.³

European People's Party

EPP's candidate is Jean-Claude Juncker, former Luxembourg's Prime Minister. On his website,⁴ Juncker presents his five political priorities. First, devising reforms to create jobs and economic growth (for example, via the creation of a digital European market); second, implementing policies that will favour a European energy union, to deal with political troubles in some areas of the world and to foster the development of renewable energy production; third, negotiating a trade agreement with the USA; fourth, devising a Euro area reform that will limit ECB's powers, increasing the weight of the European Commission and of the Eurogroup⁵; moreover, Juncker wants to give more power to the Eurozone within the IMF; and fifth, it has been proposed to negotiate an agreement with the United Kingdom, in order to give more autonomy to English politicians, provided that they will not try to weaken single market's hallmarks and future Eurozone's reforms.

Candidacy – the candidate must have been prime minister. Moreover, he/she needed to get the support of his/her national party and at least of other two parties coming from different countries. Two people stood as a candidate: Jean-Claude Juncker and Michel Barnier, member of the European Commission.

Selectorate – EPP's congress, held in Dublin last March, selected Juncker as the candidate for the presidency of the European Commission. There were several congress delegates with voting rights, including the EPP national parties' presidents and delegates and also European Commission's and Council of Europe's members who were also members of the EPP.⁶ To summarise, there

³ Unless otherwise specified, information on candidacy and selectorate for each candidate is taken from this website: <http://europedecides.eu/candidates/european-political-parties/>

⁴ <http://juncker.epp.eu/>

⁵ On the alleged necessity to have an independent Central bank to avoid that monetary policy decisions are controlled by politicians' short-term electoral necessities, see Stiglitz (1998); Drazen (2002); McNamara (2002).

⁶ See also EPP's regulations, <http://dublin2014.epp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Voting-regulation-Dublin-2014-EN.pdf>

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were more than 800 people with voting rights (Piedrafita & Renman, 2014, pg. 5). Six hundred and twenty-seven votes were cast. Juncker obtained 382 votes while just 245 votes supported Michel Barnier.⁷

Party of European Socialists (PES)

PES has decided to present the candidacy of Martin Schulz. He has been a member of the German party SPD since the 1970s and has been a European member of Parliament since 1994. In 2012, he was also elected as president of the European Parliament. On his website,⁸ Schulz puts forward some proposals on minimum wages, on the devising of policies to fight unemployment and fiscal evasion in Europe and to support education.

Candidacy – parties and organisations that were members of the PES could present a candidate, who needed the support of 15% of full member PES' parties and organisations. Only Martin Schulz obtained the necessary support and, therefore, in November 2013, he became the “candidate designate” of PES.

Selectorate – within each PES national party, there has been a voting to confirm the “candidate designate,” according to national statutes and regulations. Results should have been ratified by each party's national board that had been democratically elected. PES' election congress held in Rome from 28 February until 1 March 2014 confirmed Schulz's candidacy.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)

The ALDE Party has presented the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt, who is a Belgian liberal politician and was a prime minister for 10 years before being elected as a member of the European Parliament in 2009 and, later on, as a president of the ALDE group in the Parliament. On his website,⁹ he puts forward a “Plan for Europe,”¹⁰ which is based on the following main points: de-

⁷ <http://www.epp.eu/jean-claude-juncker-elected-epp-candidate-president-european-commission>

⁸ <http://martin-schulz.eu>

⁹ <http://www.guyverhofstadt.eu/>

¹⁰ <http://www.guyverhofstadt.eu/uploads/pdf/Plan%20for%20Europe.pdf>

vising European economic reforms (such as the implementation of the banking union and the creation of a “European energy community”), protecting civil rights (thanks to the creation of a European privacy regulation, an anti-discrimination law and a European immigration policy), and reforming the European Commission.

Candidacy – people were required to present their candidacy within 20 December 2013, when ALDE Party’s congress would have ratified them. In order to stand as a candidate, a person needed either the support of at least two parties coming from more than one country or the support of 20% of ALDE Party’s delegates with voting rights.¹¹ It seemed that two people were ready to present their candidacy, Guy Verhofstadt and Olli Rehn.

Selectorate – ALDE Party’s election congress, held in Bruxelles in February 2014, was supposed to select the candidate, but an agreement between Verhofstadt and Rehn was reached. The latter renounced to the candidacy in exchange for a high-profile seat within European Union.¹² Therefore, the congress simply ratified the agreement between the two politicians.

Party of the European Left

The European Left’s candidate is Alexis Tsipras, leader of the Greek party SYRIZA. Despite his relatively young age (he was born in 1974), Tsipras has been a politician for many years. He was local councillor in Athens, and he has been a member of the Greek Parliament since 2009. On his website,¹³ we can find his electoral manifesto,¹⁴ based on many points, such as a radical change of European austerity policies, the elimination of the Fiscal Compact and the renegotiation of the treaties, the creation of a European Conference on Public Debt, the regulation of financial activities, the pursuing of full employment, and the change of immigration legislation in favour of migrants.

¹¹ <http://www.aldeparty.eu/en/news/alde-party-candidate-commission-president-be-announced-1-february>

¹² <http://www.aldeparty.eu/en/news/olli-rehn-and-guy-verhofstadt-reach-agreement-lead-candidacy>

¹³ <http://www.alexisstipras.eu/>

¹⁴ http://www.european-left.org/sites/default/files/final_platform_en_7.pdf

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Candidacy and Selectorate – In October 2013, the Council of the European Left's Presidents (made up of 30 people¹⁵) decided to present the candidacy of Alexis Tsipras to the Congress of the European Left. In December 2013, Tsipras was officially nominated as a candidate. The proposal of Tsipras' candidacy obtained the approval of 138 delegates out of 164.¹⁶

European Green Party

European Greens have decided to present a joint candidacy. The two candidates are José Bové (a French no-global leader and a member of the European Parliament since 2009) and Ska Keller (a German member of the European Parliament since 2009). The two candidates' manifesto¹⁷ is based on some key points: a reform of the financial services industry, a more equal taxation system, the development of a green industry, the implementation of an effective action against climate change, and, finally, reforming the food industry.

Candidacy – Perspective candidates needed the support of at least four and of a maximum of eight parties which were members of the European Green Party. Each party could support one candidate. Four candidacies were presented on 4 November 2013: José Bové, Ska Keller, Monica Frassoni (an Italian member of the European Parliament since 1999), and Rebecca Harms.

Selectorate – In November 2013, the Party decided to propose an online primary election. All European citizens who were at least 16 years old were entitled to vote. The primary election lasted for two months and a half and approximately 22,000 people cast a vote. Bové and Keller won the consultation.¹⁸

¹⁵ <http://www.european-left.org/about-el/council-chairpersons>

¹⁶ <http://european-left.org/4th-el-congress/tsipras-nominated-european-left-voice-denounce-policies-troika-european-commission> ; <http://european-left.org/positions/congress-motions/documents/4th-el-congress>

¹⁷ <http://campaign.europeangreens.eu/change-europe-vote-green-0>

¹⁸ <http://europeangreens.eu/news/press-release-greens-select-leading-candidates>

Conclusions

In this article we have analysed the choices of European parties regarding the candidacy for the presidency of the European Commission.¹⁹ It is interesting to notice that different methods were implemented to select the candidates. Some parties have presented to their selectorates a single candidate (therefore making the electorate's action a simple ratification of a decision taken somewhere else). On the other hand, European Greens have decided to give European citizens the power to select their candidate(s). Even if not so many people voted in the Greens' online primary election, this could be the first step towards the creation of European parties' primaries, partly compatible with American parties' ones.

2014 European election is becoming more and more attractive for European media, also thanks to the presentation of European parties' candidates for the presidency of the European Commission. This is something potentially important for European institutions because it could bring many people to the ballot boxes, avoiding a dangerous low turnout. Let us hope this expectation will become reality.

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¹⁹ Notice that the European Conservatives and Reformists and the European of Freedom and Democracy, coherently with their eurosceptic or even anti-EU stances, decided not to present a candidate.

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