

## The new European Commission – when will its members be approved and when will it start working?

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“When” is the most frequent question when people speak about the new European Commission, its members, allocation of positions and EP hearings. The most pressing question remains – when will the new EC start functioning?

This is the topic of today’s feature [“Interacting with the European Parliament”](#) on Radio Bulgaria, a coproduction with the European Institute, EUROPE Gateway and the Center for Policy Modernization.

The European Parliament has approved Jose Manuel Barroso’s second mandate as EC President. Recently, he apportioned the respective positions of commissioners in the European Commission. Now, it’s EP’s turn to approve or disprove the offered list of commissioners. A series of hearings with the candidate-commissioners will be held in EP in order to verify their personal qualities, qualifications and experience.

**What are the expectations?** We are listening to Rebecca Harms, co-chair of the group of the Greens/European Liberal Alliance in EP.

“I cannot predict everything, but already next week we’ll have the first, very first formal hearing, some call it mini-hearing with Mrs. Ashton, because she will not only be high representative of the European Union, but also vice president of the Commission, so she belongs to the Commission. She will also be loyal to the parliament. So there will be a mini-hearing and then first judgment whether she has the capacity to be foreign minister of the European Union. We will see generally and we will do the same for all other nominees at the hearings. In the end parliament will say yes or no towards the whole commission. Last time – five years ago – consultations after the hearings of certain commissioners led to a situation that there have been changes. Mr. Buttiglione, who had to represent Italy, was withdrawn. There was a change of portfolios too, because the first nominee to become commissioner for energy was not accepted in parliament for not having the competences for this specific portfolio. So there can be very, very interesting debates during the hearings and afterwards, and parliament is normally quite strong during the hearings. In fact this is the very role of Parliament – to make sure from the very beginning that the right persons get the right places in the Commission.”

We asked David Kr6l, head of EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, **when he expects the new EC to start working** after EC President Barroso announced the allocation of portfolios.

“At the moment President Barroso has basically, announced the composition of the European

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Commission, including the distribution of the portfolios. This is mainly to give the Commissioners or the Commissioner-elects the possibility to prepare for the hearings in the European Parliament. I expect these hearings to take place in the course of January; and I expect the European Parliament, which will be basically the second body or the second take-holder to approve the Commission to take the votes probably at the end of January or February. So I think that's the realistic term for the new Commission to assume its term - probably around let's say the end of January in the optimistic scenario; half of February – in a kind of more realistic one perhaps.

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Will EC retain its role after the election of [Van Rumpoy and Cathrin Ashton](#)?

“Yes. I think it's quite difficult to give a clear-cut answer to that at the moment. Formally I would say that according to the Lisbon Treaty the role of the Commission does not change radically. I mean it's supposed to remain as the gatekeeper of European integration, the body that makes sure that member states comply with their obligations under European Union membership and the community law. But of course we cannot rule out the possibility that there would be a competition between let's say the President of the European Commission, which also still has a role in external representation and the new top jobs, that is the President of the European Council and the Foreign Minister. Of course as we have seen in the past, it always depends on at least two criteria. One is the strength of the President of the European Commission and the way he is able to run the College; and the second one is let's say the overall milieu in which the European Commission is working, that is you know how much confidence member states have in the College and also in the economic development, which for instance in the context of the economic crisis resorts to a more nationalistic rhetoric and less belief in the community matters; which could continue until some time in the future when the economic crisis is going to be over. And so, just to sum it up there is a lot of variables. Formally the role of the commission will not change but a lot would depend on how creative these new figures, these new top posts will be and how much the member states would be willing to lend the Commission the role of the real policy-driver of the European policy.”

Will Barroso's second commission be stronger or weaker from the first one?

“Now again, it's probably too early to say and I would say it would very much depend on the external actors, on the external milieu in which the Commission will be functioning. In terms of composition I haven't actually seen the final listing including the portfolios so cannot comment on

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that. For sure one thing that we can say at the moment is that President Barroso certainly has the experience; it is going to be his second term. There are a lot of lessons that he can learn from the first term in which he served as President of the European Commission. So I think that, I would expect that he could be kind of more self-reassured in this position of Commission President. There would be some substantial changes though, particularly in the external relations with the emergence of the European External Service – a new independent body which will be neither under the Commission nor the Council and the new Commission would have to find some kind of mode of communication, some kind of *modus vivendi* with this new body. So this would be a big testing case for the Commission. And then as I already mentioned the economic crisis which will probably play into the agenda of the new Commission for some time to come so there will be a big challenge for Barroso to see how he is, as the protector of the community method, able to stand up to the big member states. One concern that I have regarding the Commission seems the distribution of portfolios namely since now Barroso, being in his second term, seems to blow a bit more to the member states basically having distributed the strongest economic portfolios to the biggest countries basically all of them being the old member states, which is something that perhaps one would not necessarily have expected.”

Jose Barroso has entrusted to **Bulgarian nominee for European Commissioner Rumiana Jeleva** the office of International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response. Mrs. Jeleva said she was happy with the portfolio.

“It has identified humanitarian aid as an autonomous community policy and this has been written down in Article 214 Para 1.5 from the Treaty of Lisbon”, she explained. “The EU is faced with the task of creating a European Voluntary Corps for humanitarian aid. I believe that this office is among the portfolios in the future European Commission that will materialize directly the values of the Union as a global player on the international stage.”

**Ivailo Kalfin, MEP from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats** in the European Parliament, and former Bulgarian foreign minister disagrees. He has been disappointed with the portfolio given to Mrs. Jeleva.

“International cooperation and humanitarian aid policies are part of the obligations of the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, of the enlargement and home affairs commissioners. It will be a challenge for Mrs. Jeleva to take a niche for her own activity. Besides, we can see what portfolios have been given to other new EU member states. Romania gets agriculture, Hungary – social policy and Estonia – transport. The enlargement commissioner will be a Slovene. In this context Bulgaria’s portfolio is very, very disenchanting.”

What will be **the top priorities** of the new European Commission led by the new old President Barroso?

“The president will be the same, but there will be many new commissioners and more importantly, the EU will have a new treaty to comply with – the Lisbon Treaty. It alters a range of mechanisms in EU, transfers more rights to the European Parliament and to national parliaments, as well

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as to citizens &ndash; to initiate referenda and law-making changes. It also cuts the exclusive law-making powers of the Commission. This spells further democratization of the EU meaning that many more institutions will participate actively in its work. In this environment the European Commission should conduct European policies, but also take into account the sentiments of citizens, national parliaments and other institutions.&rdquo;

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