



Weekly Briefing

Slovakia political briefing:
The New 2019 European Commission
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The New 2019 European Commission

On September 10, 2019, Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, presented her new team. If approved by the European Parliament, they will take over from the Juncker Commission on November 1, 2019. The new President of the Commission was confronted with the same problem as her predecessor: each Member State sends a Commissioner to Brussels, but there are not 27 substantive portfolios to dole out. President von der Leyen has only slightly modified the Commission's structure, and focused on restructuring the various Commissioners' competences to fit her "political guidelines"—the new Commission's policymaking priorities. One of the important members of this new team is Maroš Šefčovič, the long-time European Commissioner for Slovakia, who remains the vice-president of the European Commission in the next five years.

The procedure to take office for members of the 2019 European Commission:

Unlike the EU Council and the European Parliament, where members are directly elected, the members of the European Commission must follow a complex procedure to take office. After the European elections in May 2019, the EU parliament elected Ursula von der Leyen to replace Jean-Claude Juncker as the leader of the European Union's executive branch.

Von der Leyen is the first-ever woman president of the Commission. She is set to take office on 1 November 2019 for a five-year term with a team of 26 EU commissioners. The Finnish EU presidency's deadline for commission nominations elapsed on August 26, 2019. However, not every candidate proposed or interviewed will eventually form part of the final team that the President-elect will present to the EU parliament. Von der Leyen's target of having at least 13 female commissioners (including herself) became possible when France announced Sylvie Goulard as its nominee, bringing the total of female candidates to 12.

Before the new European Commission can take office, the EU parliament organized public hearings to evaluate the candidates from September 30 to October 8, 2019. Each candidate must attend a three-hour long hearing in front of the parliamentary committee or committees responsible for the portfolio they have been assigned. These proceedings can lead occasionally to the withdrawal of a candidate or a change in their portfolios. Following the

hearing, the responsible committees send their evaluations to the president of the EU Parliament, David Sassoli.

Once the hearing process is finished, the full "college" of 27 new commissioners, including the vice-presidents and high-representatives of foreign affairs and security policy, will be approved in a single vote of consent by the EU parliament, during its October session in Strasbourg. If the EU parliament does not approve the commission, changes need to be made before voting takes place again.

However, in practice the parliament does not vote the endowment (of the new commission) unless there is absolute certainty that it will succeed. If during the hearings, there is a problem accepting any of the commissioner's candidates, the changes will be requested at that time. Once parliament has given its consent, the European Council officially appoints the European Commission by a qualified majority - 72 percent of member states representing at least 65 percent of the EU population. Normally a month later, all members of the European Commission are required to swear an oath at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg pledging to respect the treaties of the EU.

The Commission's work is steered by a team of 28 Commissioners - one Commissioner from each EU country (this time only 27 Commissioners due to Brexit). This team, officially known as the College, is led by the Commission President. Commissioners are members of project teams, which are led by Vice-Presidents. These teams focus on particular policy areas.

The role of the Commissioners: Though there is one Commissioner from each EU country, their job is to defend the interests of the EU as a whole – rather than national interests. Within the Commission, they are the decision-makers. For example, collectively they:

- make decisions on the Commission's strategies and policies
- propose laws, funding programs and the annual budget for discussion and adoption by Parliament and the Council.

The composition of the College:

- The President
- The first Vice-President
- The Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security Policy
- 4 Vice-Presidents
- 21 Commissioners

Ursula von der Leyen's possible administration:

European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has unveiled who will do what job in her administration, insisting hers will be a “geopolitical Commission”. Nominees are now being grilled by Parliamentary committees ahead of a final confirmation vote by MEPs in October.


Von der Leyen's Commission will have three executive vice-presidents in Frans Timmermans, Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis. They will also serve as regular Commissioners, not just coordinators. There will also be five regular vice-presidents: Josep Borrell, Věra Jourová, Margaritis Schinas, Maroš Šefčovič and Dubravka Šuica.

Parliamentary hearings began on September 30, 2019, with the three executive VPs set to conclude proceedings on October 8, 2019. A vote on the entire Commission will be held on October 23, 2019. Time has already been allotted for more hearings before that date if candidates are rejected or more questions have to be answered.
























The Commission President-elect confirmed she wanted it to be a well-balanced, agile and modern Commission. This team will now have to gain the Parliament's confidence. But, it is not certain that it will be an easy path to confirmation. As it was mentioned the Parliament would conduct hearings and vote on the commissioners before they can take office.

Von der Leyen, who will replace the outgoing Jean-Claude Juncker, was elected by a slim majority in the European Parliament: 383 MEPs voted in favor of her nomination to 327 against and 22 abstentions. Now it's up to the European Parliament to vote on the college of Commissioners and evaluate their fitness for the job.

 **2019-2024 European Commission**

 **Germany - President-elect Ursula von der Leyen**

List of Commissioners-designate

| | |
|---|--|
|  Austria - Johannes Hahn |  Italy - Paolo Gentiloni |
|  Belgium - Didier Reynders |  Latvia - Valdis Dombrovskis |
|  Bulgaria - Mariya Gabriel |  Lithuania - Virginijus Sinkevičius |
|  Croatia - Dubravka Šuica |  Luxembourg - Nicolas Schmit |
|  Cyprus - Stella Kyriakides |  Malta - Helena Dalli |
|  Czech Republic - Věra Jourová |  Netherlands - Frans Timmermans |
|  Denmark - Margrethe Vestager |  Poland - Janusz Wojciechowski |
|  Estonia - Kadri Simson |  Portugal - Elisa Ferreira |
|  Finland - Jutta Urpilainen |  Romania - Rovana Plumb |
|  France - Sylvie Goulard |  Slovakia - Maroš Šefčovič |
|  Greece - Margaritis Schinas |  Slovenia - Janez Lenarčič |
|  Hungary - László Trócsányi |  Spain - Josep Borrell |
|  Ireland - Phil Hogan |  Sweden - Ylva Johansson |



Source: European Commission Official Website

The way how the European Parliament votes in a new Commission is the following. The 26 commissioner candidates, one per EU member state excluding the UK, have to face EU parliamentary committees based on their portfolio subject.

Before the hearings started, the legal affairs committee scrutinized the commissioners' financial declarations and could ask for more information about potential conflicts of interest. The picks for commissioner also answer written questions on issues like their competences and European commitment (At the end of September, the legal affairs committee blocked two proposed commissioners — Romania's Rovana Plumb and Hungary's Laszlo Trocsanyi— because of inconsistencies in their financial statements. The Committee on Legal Affairs held an extraordinary meeting on September 30, 2019 to assess Plumb and Trócsányi's "actual or potential conflicts of interest").

Each commissioner then attends a public hearing with one or more parliamentary committees to assess whether or not they are fit for the job. Each three-hour hearing is streamed live and each candidate makes an opening statement. The parliamentary committees can request

more information in writing and eventually evaluate the candidate, sending summary letters to committee chairs.

Based on these evaluations, the Conference of Presidents, made up of political group leaders and the president of the European Parliament, decide whether or not to close the hearings or request further action. The European Parliament then votes on the college of commissioners as a whole.

The hearings started on September 30, 2019 and the first hearing was in the constitutional/legal affairs committee for the Slovakian commissioner-designate Maroš Šefčovič.

Maroš Šefčovič from Slovakia continues as vice-president of the Commission:

Maroš Šefčovič, the long-time European Commissioner for Slovakia, will remain the vice-president of the European Commission in the next five years. However, Šefčovič will no longer deal with the energy union portfolio. In the Commission of Ursula von der Leyen, he will cover the portfolio of interinstitutional relations and foresight.

Nearly three months after Maroš Šefčovič lost the presidential election in Slovakia to Zuzana Čaputová, he had a reason to celebrate. The Slovak government agreed on Šefčovič, who has served as the European Commission Vice-President for the Energy Union, to be Slovakia's nominee to the European Commission again.

Even Maroš Šefčovič, Slovakia's European Commissioner for the past two terms, had an ambition to become the president of the European Commission this year. He declared his intention to seek the nomination of the Party of European Socialists (PES) as lead candidate for the position of the Commission President. He later withdrew his nomination to endorse the outgoing Commission's First Vice-President, Frans Timmermans (PvdA, the Netherlands), as the party's lead candidate. Although Maroš Šefčovič did not become the president of the European Commission, he may still play an important role in the next term of the Commission as one of its commissioner.

Slovak Prime Minister, Peter Pellegrini, made a similar statement after his meeting with the future European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, on September 4, 2019. Slovakia supports Maroš Šefčovič and since he is one of the most successful commissioners, the Slovak political leaders believe this nomination is good not only for Slovakia, but also for the European Commission itself. The Slovak Prime Minister considers Šefčovič to be an

experienced diplomat and professional, whose work has been highly appreciated and respected. Slovakia has high expectations of the new European Commission and believes its work will be beneficial for each EU member states, including Slovakia.

Maroš Šefčovič will be Vice President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight. The President of European Commission in her mission letter to Šefčovič asked him to lead on implementing the new “one in, one out” policy for regulatory measures that she announced alongside her new team. He will also coordinate the Commission’s work on the European Battery Alliance (with the Internal Market Commissioner)—his legacy from the Juncker Commission.

In continuation of recent initiatives, Maroš Šefčovič is expected to support the Commission President in further strengthening the 'special partnership' with the European Parliament, including ensuring that the 2010 Framework Agreement between the two institutions is upheld and the 2016 IIA implemented. He is also charged with leading 'interinstitutional discussions on annual programming'. Maroš Šefčovič will be in charge of relations with national parliaments, and is expected to work closely with other Commissioners on Parliament resolutions calling on the Commission to submit legislative proposals. Further, he is entrusted with coordinating the Commission's work on better regulation, including ensuring respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has charged the Vice-Presidents with a steering and coordinating function. Maroš Šefčovič will work under the President's guidance, and will be supported by the Secretariat-General in his coordination work.

Maroš Šefčovič in the European Commission:

2009-2010 European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth,

2010-2014 Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Administration,

2014-2019 Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Union,

2019-2024 Vice President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight.