WARNING TO EUROPEAN SAILORS: THICK FOG BETWEEN BRUSSELS AND STRASBOURG

We still don't know how the saga of the creation and entry into office of the new European Commission, which is not the 'Government' of the European Union, but which has long since ceased to be merely a technical body, as some people describe it, ignoring its growing political functions, will end between Brussels and Strasbourg.

If the new European Commission takes office on 1 December, six months will have elapsed since the European elections that took place at the beginning of June, a formation time that does not differ much from the long negotiation times that characterise the formation of Governments in some countries with multi-party systems such as Belgium, the Netherlands but also Federal Germany.

For those who are not familiar with the complex European procedures, it is worth remembering that **the formation of the European Commission takes place through no less than nine stages** involving the European political parties (1), the voters (2), the European Council (3), the European Parliament (4), the national Governments (5), the Council of the Union (6) the parliamentary Committees (7), again the European Parliament (8) and finally again the European Council (9) with a patchwork of majorities ranging from simple majorities of the MEPs in the European Parliament to qualified majorities in the European Council, including a 2/3 majority to approve or reject a candidate-commissioner in a parliamentary Committee.

The saga begins with the appointment of the 'leading candidates', namely the *Spitzenkandidaten* according to the formula invented in 2013 by the German SPD **Martin Schulz** in the not-so-secret hope of being able to win the seat of President of the European Commission by taking it away from the EPP by a method not provided for by the treaties, not integrated in the exclusively national European electoral procedures and not shared by the European Council.

After the 2014 European elections, the European Council, acting for the first time on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty that came into force in December 2009, appointed the Luxembourger **Jean-Claude Juncker** as *Spitzenkandidat* by the EPP who was elected with a large pro-European majority by the European Parliament and who took office with his own Commission on 1 November 2014.

In 2019, the European Council didn't accept the choice of *Spitzenkandidaten* made by the European Political Parties and proposed to the European Parliament - at the suggestion of **Emmanuel Macron** and **Angela Merkel** - the German EPP **Ursula von der Leyen** whose Commission took office on 1 December 2019 with a majority called '*Ursula*' that included not only the EPP, Socialists and Liberals but also the Polish conservatives of PiS and not the MEPs of Fratelli d'Italia with a vote that split the ECR group.

In 2024, four European Political parties (EPP, S&D, Greens and Left) elected their *Spitzenkandidaten* and the choice of the European Council fell by qualified majority on Ursula von der Leyen, candidate of the EPP on the basis of a negotiations conducted by the EPP Prime Ministers (**Donald Tusk** and **Kyriakos Mitzotakis**), Socialists (**Olaf Scholz** and **Pedro Sanchez**) and Liberals (**Emmanuel Macron** and **Mark Rutte**) not on behalf of their own Governments but of their political families, **Giorgia Meloni** having announced beforehand that she would act in the European Council not on behalf of her Government but of the European ECR Party she currently chairs with the aim of overthrowing the traditional great coalition between EPP and Socialists.

The '*Ursula*' majority, with the exclusion of the Polish PiS but with the support of the Greens, was consolidated in the election of Ursula von der Leyen by the European Parliament on 18 July with an absolute majority as an occasional pro-European coalition from which the three right-wing Euro-hostile groups (Patriots, Conservatives and Sovereigntists) but also the left-wing (Left and Non-attached) self-excluded.

On the basis of the suggestions made according to the Treaty by the member States but practically by the individual Governments and in agreement with Ursula von der Leyen, the Council of the Union adopted by qualified majority (but de facto unopposed) the list of twenty-six 'personalities' that it proposed to the European Parliament for approval in the new Commission.

As we know, the candidate-commissioners were heard by the parliamentary Committees between 4 and 12 November on the basis of the competences ('portfolios') assigned to them by Ursula von der Leyen in a distribution - which some have described as '*chaotic*' - negotiated in many cases with the national Governments.

With the support of a two-thirds parliamentary majority in the Committees hearings nineteen candidates have... passed the examination, but the agreement on the Hungarian candidate **Olivér Varhelyi** - who should have the human health and animal well-being portfolio - is still pending due to his contested positions on women's reproductive and sexual rights.

Above all, the six vice-presidential - so-called executive - candidates remain outstanding, including the Spanish socialist **Teresa Ribera** whose nomination and portfolio on environmental transition are contested by the EPP, which would like to offload onto her as vice-president of the Spanish Government the great responsibilities of the Governor of the Valencian Community **Carlos Mazon** for the serious physical and human damage of the recent flood.

Subordinate to the nomination of Teresa Ribera - which Socialists, Greens and Liberals consider crucial to confirm confidence in the entire European Commission - the parliamentary conflict also concerns the executive vice-presidency to **Raffaele Fitto**, whose portfolio of cohesion policy and regional reforms, currently in the competence of the Portuguese Socialist **Elisa Ferreira**, is however not in question, with the consequent

enlargement of the pro-European '*Ursula*' majority to the ECR group and the MEPs of Fratelli d'Italia, who on 18 July rejected the confidence in Ursula von der Leyen.

Faced with this conflict at once national (Spanish but shared by the EPP and in particular its group leader **Manfred Weber** who needs the support of the Partido Popular to be re-elected at the head of the EPP, who has been working for a long time inside and outside the EP to build a European coalition that isn't an occasional right-wing coalition already christened the '*Venezuela*' majority and who is also looking at this European affair from a German perspective in view of the German Elections on 23 February) and European linked to the possible confirmation of the '*Ursula*' majority, all scenarios are possible and it is impossible to make predictions today about what will happen in Strasbourg in the plenary Session starting on 25 November.

Regardless of the possible scenarios, it is instead important that the pro-European forces in the European Parliament immediately initiate the drafting of a **programmatic resolution** defining the priorities of the next legislative term 2024-2029.

Contrary to what has happened in the past when the European Parliament took only note and approved the Executive's work plan, this resolution must avoid a '*European gattopardo*' prevailing among the institutions and instead accompany and condition the vote of confidence in the next European Commission on the issues of **EU reform** and **enlargement**, **democracy** and **respect for the Rule of Law**, ecological conversion and digital transition, European welfare, **strategic autonomy** and the European Union's contribution to **peace**, an inclusive and welcoming **migration policy**, **cooperation with the countries of the Global South**, and a 2028-2032 **multiannual budget** financed by own resources and public debt that guarantees investment in **European public goods**.

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