

## **Tomorrow's Informal Summit**

### ***Charting the course for the future of the EU27***

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Tomorrow's Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the 27 EU Member States will have as its main focus two matters that need to be dealt with swiftly: institutional issues and the political priorities of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) after 2020. The MFF is the EU's long-term budget.

Needless to say, although Brexit is not one of the items on the agenda, it will be a significant factor to be taken into consideration given that, for example, one of the institutional issues to be discussed is the composition of the European Parliament (EP) after the 2019 European elections. There are currently 73 MEPs from the United Kingdom. Once the UK withdraws from the Union, the date set by the UK itself being March 30, 2019, it will automatically cease to form part of, or be represented in, any of the EU institutions. Likewise, the UK is one of the major contributors to the EU Budget and, therefore, the post 2020 MFF will either be smaller or have to secure additional revenue from the remaining 27 Member States.

On February 14, the European Commission presented a series of proposals on the future financing of the EU post-2020 (MFF) as well as ideas on institutional matters. They were published ahead of tomorrow's Informal Leaders' meeting and should serve as the basis for the discussion among the EU27.

The proposals regarding the institutions echo what had been announced by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in his State of the EU address (SOTEU) to the EP on September 13 of last year.

One proposal is that relating to the Spitzenkandidaten system as a result of which Juncker himself became President of the Commission. The 2014 European elections were the first to have been held after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. This Treaty introduced a clause whereby a candidate for President of the Commission would be proposed by the European Council 'taking into account the elections to the European Parliament'. The candidate would then be elected by the Parliament by a majority of its component members. Should the proposed candidate fail to be elected, the European Council would have to propose a new candidate.

What occurred in 2014 was that each of the major political groups in the EP selected its own Spitzenkandidat – translated into English as 'leading candidate' - and agreed that the candidate of the group that obtained the largest number of votes across the EU should become the next President of the Commission. The European People's Party (EPP) eventually won the most votes and the Member States went along with the EP and proposed the EPP's Spitzenkandidat – Juncker – as the new President. He was then elected by the EP, receiving 422 votes out of the 729 total cast in a secret ballot.

Although the Commission has come out strongly in favour of retaining this system in electing Juncker's successor, there appears to be some reluctance by a number of Member States. In proposing a candidate, the European Council must act by a qualified majority. Last week, the Commission proposed that political parties should be asked to choose their respective candidate before the end of 2018 allowing for an earlier start to the campaign. This, the Commission claims, 'would give voters more opportunity to identify with the candidates and the political programmes they stand for'. The European elections will take place in May of next year.

The European Parliament recently resolved to reject any candidate for Commission President who would not have been a 'leading candidate'. One should keep in mind, however, that the new President will be elected after the next European elections when the political configuration of the Parliament itself may be modified. The Treaty is not so clear about what is meant by 'taking into account the elections to the European Parliament' although it is very clear about the fact that it is the Parliament that elects him or her and that a successful candidate would require the support of a majority of its component members.

EU Leaders are also being asked to debate the composition of Parliament and the Commission after 2019. They must decide on what is to happen to the 73 seats currently reserved for the UK. Before the next European Commission is appointed, leaders need to decide whether to maintain the principle of one Commissioner from each Member State, or to make the Commission smaller. Another proposal is to have a single person holding the offices of President of the European Council and President of the European Commission.

As stated earlier, tomorrow's Informal meeting will also debate the political priorities of the EU's long-term budget post 2020. The European Commission will table its formal proposal for the next MFF in the coming months, at the latest in early May. In the meantime, the Commission has pledged to continue listening to all stakeholders, including via the public consultations on the priorities of the EU that were launched last month.

Any person or organisation wishing to contribute in the public consultations may access MEUSAC's website [www.meusac.gov.mt](http://www.meusac.gov.mt) where all the relevant information may be found. Further information may also be obtained directly from MEUSAC by sending an e-mail to [info.meusac@gov.mt](mailto:info.meusac@gov.mt) or by calling 2200 3300. MEUSAC is also a Europe Direct information centre (EDIC) operating from 280, Republic Street, Valletta, [edicvalletta.meusac@gov.mt](mailto:edicvalletta.meusac@gov.mt) or 2200 3316.