



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

2015/2040(INI)

11.5.2015

OPINION

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

for the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

on procedures and practices regarding Commissioner hearings, lessons to be
taken from the 2014 process
(2015/2040(INI))

Rapporteur: Aldo Patriciello

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Acknowledges that public hearings of Commissioners-designate are an important element in European democracy which, although not provided for by the Treaty, are a well-established practice developed over the last 20 years and represent an important opportunity for Parliament and EU citizens to assess the skills and priorities of each candidate and their suitability for the role;
2. Emphasises that, as far as opening statements are concerned, it would be preferable, in line with section 1(b)(7) (Hearings) of Annex XVI to the Rules of Procedure, to give all candidates the same amount of time, so that all Commissioners-designate enjoy an equal and fair opportunity to present themselves and their opinions;
3. Considers that it would be desirable for each Member State to put forward at least two candidates – one male and one female – for consideration by the Commission President-elect;
4. Considers that it would be useful, for practical and political reasons, to set a deadline by which all Member States have to put forward candidates;
5. Notes that the 2014 hearings generated more media and public interest than previous hearings, partly because of the evolution of social media; believes that the impact and influence of social media is likely to grow in the future; considers that provision should be made to use social media and networks to include EU citizens more effectively in the hearing process;
6. Recommends that section 1(b)(7) (Hearings) of Annex XVI to the Rules of Procedure (Guidelines for the approval of the Commission) provide that questions ‘may’, rather than ‘shall, where possible’, be grouped together by theme; believes that such a change would be consistent with the need for political groups to set their own political priorities in questioning and would enable greater flexibility in arrangements for the increasing number of joint committee hearings (involving two or more committees);
7. Considers that the lack of follow-up questions to Commissioners-designate during the 2014 process arguably enabled some candidates to avoid responding to more sensitive issues; considers that, having regard to the democratic function of the hearings, their structure should be altered to enable members to put supplementary, targeted follow-up questions to a Commissioner-designate so as to allow better evaluation of the candidates; underlines the importance of allocating political groups the maximum possible amount of question time, particularly in the case of joint committee hearings;
8. Considers that it should be possible to extend the hearing of Vice-Presidents and Commissioners-designate with extensive powers beyond three hours, given their enlarged competences as compared with ordinary Commissioners, not least so that all the committees involved are able to properly assess the candidate and their preparedness in

relation to all the topics in their portfolio;

9. Recalls that section 1(a)(1) of the abovementioned annex provides that ‘Parliament shall evaluate Commissioners-designate on the basis of their general competence, European commitment and personal independence. It shall assess knowledge of their prospective portfolio and their communication skills.’; suggests, however, that prior professional experience and conduct be considered as supplementary suitability criteria; notes further that under paragraph 1(a) Parliament is entitled to seek any information relevant to its reaching a decision on the aptitude of the Commissioners-designate, including in particular, where applicable, information concerning activities performed, or offices held, in any European institution and the declarations of interest submitted in that connection; considers that an assessment by the Committee on Legal Affairs of the compliance of a declaration of financial interests can only be a formal check and cannot replace a political assessment of the candidate’s independence on the basis, *inter alia*, of their declaration of interests; considers that the scrutiny of the declaration of financial interests of Commissioners-designate should be broadened to include their wider family if possible;
10. Stresses that Members of the European Parliament should have the possibility of obtaining a full and exhaustive reply from Commissioners-designate;
11. Recommends that Commissioners-designate be given the option of submitting a written statement within 12 hours after the hearing is declared closed, in cases in which they have not succeeded in giving a full and exhaustive reply to a question;
12. Stresses that committee coordinators should endeavour to reach a consensus on the evaluation; considers that, where they are unable to do so, they should be able to act on the basis of a decision by coordinators representing the majority of the component members of the committee; stresses that, given the limited time available to reach a position, coordinators should, where appropriate, limit their comments to those covering the criteria outlined in section 1(a)(1) of the abovementioned annex; considers further that groups which dissent from the majority view should be able to request an appropriate reference in the evaluation letter; recalls that, in any event, the Rules of Procedure also allow a political group to request that the Chair convene a full committee meeting, including a vote on the evaluation of the candidate;
13. Notes that methods and practices in respect of the post-hearing evaluation vary between committees;
14. Believes, as regards the deadlines applicable to the evaluation statements, and in order to make the process clearer and avoid any kind of confusion which may arise from an interpretation of section 1(c)(6) of Annex XVI to the Rules of Procedure, that the Rules of Procedure should explicitly provide for the statement of evaluation to be adopted as soon as possible, and to be made public on Parliament’s website within 24 hours after the end of each individual hearing; calls for the strict and uniform application of this rule across all committees.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	6.5.2015
Result of final vote	+: 60 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Marco Affronte, Margrete Auken, Pilar Ayuso, Zoltán Balczó, Ivo Belet, Biljana Borzan, Lynn Boylan, Nessa Childers, Birgit Collin-Langen, Mireille D'Ornano, Miriam Dalli, Angélique Delahaye, Jørn Dohrmann, Ian Duncan, Stefan Eck, Bas Eickhout, Eleonora Evi, José Inácio Faria, Karl-Heinz Florenz, Iratxe García Pérez, Elisabetta Gardini, Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, Jens Gieseke, Sylvie Goddyn, Françoise Grossetête, Jytte Guteland, György Hölvényi, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Jean-François Jalkh, Josu Juaristi Abaunz, Karin Kadenbach, Kateřina Konečná, Giovanni La Via, Peter Liese, Norbert Lins, Susanne Melior, Miroslav Mikolášik, Massimo Paolucci, Gilles Pargneaux, Piernicola Pedicini, Pavel Poc, Marcus Pretzell, Michèle Rivasi, Daciana Octavia Sârbu, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Davor Škrlec, Dubravka Šuica, Tibor Szanyi, Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu, Damiano Zoffoli
Substitutes present for the final vote	Renata Briano, Nicola Caputo, Mark Demesmaeker, Esther Herranz García, Merja Kyllönen, James Nicholson, Aldo Patriciello, Gabriele Preuß, Bart Staes
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Arne Gericke