

Nominations for Members of the European Court of Auditors: Belgium and Finland

Treaty provisions and appointment procedure

As set out in Article 285 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Court of Auditors (ECA) shall consist of one national of each Member State. Article 286 (2) TFEU further specifies that each Member State has the right to propose its candidate. The Council then adopts the list of Members as proposed by the Member States. Often, this is a partial renewal of the Court - only one or a few Members are appointed, as the mandates of the Members expire at different points in time. The Council can only act after consulting the European Parliament; in practice, the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) is responsible and the Member-designate of the ECA makes a statement before the committee and has to answer its questions. CONT then votes on the nomination and thus issues a recommendation to plenary, which votes within two (in practice sometimes three) months of receipt of the nomination. In case of an unfavourable opinion, the President shall ask the Council to withdraw its nomination and to submit a new nomination (Rule 129 of the EP's Rules of Procedure). However, Parliament's opinion is not binding for the Council.

According to Article 286 (1) TFEU, the potential Members of the ECA "shall be chosen from among persons who belong or have belonged in their respective States to external audit bodies or who are especially qualified for this office." In addition, their independence must be beyond doubt. The procedure according to which the Member States nominate varies widely between the Member States, with some of them having purely executive procedures in place while others involve their national parliaments in the process or use application procedures. Upcoming and recent nominations demonstrate a wide variety of procedures in different Member States.

Upcoming nominations¹

Belgium

The [Belgian Court of Audit](#) (BCA) is Belgium's supreme audit institution. It was established under [Article 180 of the Belgian Constitution of 1831](#) and is governed by the [Law of 29 October 1846 organising the Court of Audit](#). The body is fully independent of the Belgian government and parliament. It [audits](#) the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions, public service institutions depending on them and the provinces. In addition, the Court also has a jurisdictional task towards public accounting officers whose accounts are in deficit.

The BCA consists of a [college of twelve magistrates](#), assisted by staff. The members of the college are elected by the House of Representatives, the lower house of the Belgian Parliament, for a renewable 6-year term.

¹ This text has benefitted from the answers to request 4679 on 'National Nomination Procedures for Members of the European Court of Auditors (ECA)' launched through the ECPRD (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) network. The following national parliaments responded to the request: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic (lower house), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain (lower house) and Sweden. The authors wish to thank all correspondents.



The college has two chambers, one French-speaking and one Dutch-speaking, each with a president, four councillors and a secretary general. The senior of the two presidents is designated 'Premier Président' or 'Eerste Voorzitter' (Senior President). Since 30 May 2023, the post has been held by [Ms Hilde François](#).

For the European Court of Auditors, the government appoints the candidate. The Belgian Parliament has no role in scrutinising the nomination. So far, Belgium has had 7 ECA Members, one of whom has been female, namely the current member and candidate for renewal, Ms Annemie Turtelboom. She was [designated as a candidate on 22 September](#), when the Belgian Council of Ministers gave its agreement on the proposal by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Hadja Lahbib.

Ms Turtelboom has been an ECA Member since 1 May 2018, when she replaced Mr Karel Pinxten who had sought a third mandate, but was rejected by Parliament and ended his term on 30 April 2018.² At the time, following a [hearing with Ms Turtelboom in the CONT committee](#) on 20 February 2018 (starting at 10:25) and in line with the [report of the CONT committee](#) (20:2:0), the European Parliament had given a [favourable opinion](#) on her nomination on 1 March 2018 ([501:91:32](#)). The Council appointed Ms Turtelboom as ECA member in its decision of 19 March 2018.

Ms Turtelboom, whose statement before the CONT committee will take place on 7 November 2023, has been Dean of Chamber II of the Court "Investment for cohesion, growth and inclusion" since October 2022. Prior to the start of her ECA mandate, she was a Member of the Belgian Federal Parliament (2016-2018; 2003-2007) and Deputy First Minister and Minister of Budget, Finance and Energy in the Flemish Regional government (2014-2016). At the level of the federal government of Belgium, she was Minister of Justice (2012-2014), Minister of the Home Affairs (2009-2012) and Minister for Asylum and Migration (2008-2009). In 2008, she worked in the Office of the Prime Minister. Prior to her political career, she taught marketing at the Katholieke Hogeschool Leuven (1993-2001) and was Head of its Marketing Department (2001-2003). She holds a Master's in Economics (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; 1993) and a Teacher Certificate (Guardini Instituut Brussel, 1988).

Finland

The [National Audit Office of Finland](#) (NAOF - Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto) is the country's supreme audit institution, established in 1947. In 2001, it became an independent agency affiliated with the Finish Parliament (Eduskunta), in accordance with section 90 of the [Finnish Constitution](#) and the [Act on the National Audit Office of Finland](#) of 2001. It is responsible for the audits of the legality and productivity of Finish government finances and compliance. It also audits compliance with fiscal policy rules and oversees election-campaigns and political party funding. Its work covers the government and ministries, government agencies, off-budget funds, state enterprises and state-owned companies, subsidies and transfers by the central government and transfers of funds between Finland and the EU. In addition, it will be the keeper of the national Transparency Register to be introduced in 2024. It does not audit the finances of Parliament, funds under Parliament's responsibility, the Bank of Finland, the Financial Supervisory Authority or the Social Insurance Institution. Regarding its audit work, the NAOF is free to decide on the audit and oversight plan. Parliament can assign tasks to the NAOF only by law.

An Auditor General, elected by Parliament's plenary for a renewable six-year term, heads the NAOF; since 1 January 2022, Sami Yläoutinen has held the post. A management board provided for in the NAOF's rules of procedure supports him in his work. It comprises the Auditor General, two unit directors (there are three units in the NAOF, the Audit Unit, the Monitoring and Oversight Unit and the Shared Services Unit), two audit managers, the communications manager and the HR manager, all appointed permanently. Staff can elect their own representative to join the management board for a term of three years. The Auditor General can invite temporary or permanent experts if necessary.

² Please see this briefing for further details: Kowald, Karoline (2020): [Nomination to the European Court of Auditors: Role of the European Parliament in the appointment procedure](#). EPRS.

As for the European Court of Auditors, the Prime Minister's Office is responsible as per the Government Rules of Procedure. It prepares the nomination, taking into account the relevant Treaty provisions. The formal decision is taken at the General Session of the State Council, at which the Prime Minister's Office presents the matter. The Attorney General is also present for that meeting to ensure that the legal order of deliberation and existing regulations are followed. There are no legal provisions on parliamentary involvement. The Parliament's European Affairs Committee (Grand Committee) has in some previous cases heard the candidate in a normal committee meeting (closed session), but only after the election as a member of the Court. For the current nomination, no hearings have been planned.

So far, Finland has had 4 ECA Members, all of them male. The mandate of the current Finnish ECA member, Mr Hannu Takkula, expires on 29 February 2024; the Finnish government proposed, in accordance with the request of the new nominee, Mr Petri Sarvamaa, that Mr Takkula would stay in office until 31 May, with Mr Sarvamaa's potential mandate to start on 1 June 2024.

Mr Sarvamaa's statement before the CONT committee will take place on 7 November. He has been a Member of the European Parliament and the CONT committee since 2012, acting as coordinator for the EPP group since 2014 and vice-coordinator before that. Among other roles in the EP, he was also first vice-chair of the BUDG committee (2014-2019) and a substitute member of BUDG since 2019. Prior to this, he was the Director of Development for the recruitment service company Sihti (2011-2012). Between 1986 and 2010, he worked for The Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) as journalist in various capacities, including as USA Bureau Chief in Washington DC (2002-2006) and Duty Editor and Special Assignments Reporter (2007-2010). He holds a Bachelor of Political Sciences of the University of Helsinki.

Further nominations in the remainder of the legislature

For Italy and Sweden, the current mandates expire on 29 February 2024, and the nominations are likely to take place before the end of the EP's current legislature in 2024. The Portuguese post at the ECA is vacant since the death of Mr João Figueiredo on 30 June 2021, and the current mandate similarly expires on 29 February 2024. Moreover, with former Bulgarian ECA member Iliana Ivanova having become Commissioner, the Bulgarian seat is vacant, with the current mandate expiring on 31 December 2024.

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