Procedures and practices regarding commissioner hearings, lessons to be taken from the 2014 process

2015/2040(INI) - 19/06/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Richard CORBETT (S&D, UK) on procedures and practices regarding Commissioner hearings, lessons to be taken from the 2014 process.

Hearings of Commissioners-designate, first used in 1994, are now a well-established practice which **increases the democratic legitimacy** of the European Union institutions and brings those institutions closer to European citizens. These hearings are indispensable in enabling Parliament to make an informed judgement on the Commission when it holds its vote of confidence allowing the Commission to take office.

Whilst having demonstrated its effectiveness, the hearing process can always be improved.

Members suggested that it would be useful to set a **deadline** by which all Member States have to put forward their candidates, so as to leave adequate time for the Commission President elect to allocate the portfolios taking into account the work experience and background of the candidate.

With the aim of attaining Parliament's gender quality objectives, Members considered that each Member State should henceforth put forward at least two candidates – male and female on a footing of equality – for consideration by the Commission President-elect. Checks on declarations of the financial interests of Commissioners designated by the Committee on Legal Affairs should remain the competence of the Committee on Legal Affairs but should be improved. They should also cover family members living with them in the same household. Members stated that the current scope of **Commissioners' declarations of interests is too limited**, therefore, the Commission is invited to revise its rules on this as soon as possible.

Members made the following suggestions regarding the hearings:

- when a vice-president of the Commission has responsibilities which are primarily horizontal, the hearing could exceptionally be carried out in a different format such as a meeting of the Conference of Presidents or a meeting of the Conference of Committee Chairs;
- the written questionnaire sent ahead of each hearing should allow for 7 questions instead of 5, but that there should not be several sub-questions under each question;
- it would be better to have around 25 questions, but with each questioner allowed immediate follow-up, so as to enhance the effectiveness and inquisitorial nature of the hearings;
- the following guidelines should apply for the coordinators' evaluation meeting after the hearings:
- if the coordinators unanimously approve the candidate – letter of approval; (ii) if the coordinators unanimously reject the candidate – letter of rejection;
- if coordinators representing a clear majority approve the candidate – letter stating that a large majority approve (minorities may request that it be mentioned that their group does not share the majority view);
- if there is no clear majority, or there is a majority (but not a consensus) against the candidate, and if the coordinators consider it necessary: (i) first request additional information through further written

questions; (ii) if still dissatisfied – request for a further 1.5-hour hearing, with the approval of the Conference of Presidents; (iii) if there is still no consensus or overwhelming majority among the coordinators – vote in committee;
- a clear majority in this context should be coordinators who together represent at least two-thirds of the committee membership;

Furthermore, Members considered that:

- there should be a specific section of Parliament's website where the CVs of the Commissioners-designate and responses to written questions are made available, in advance of the public hearings, in all the official languages of the Union;
- there should be a specific and visible place on Parliament's website where the evaluations are placed within 24 hours;
- the rule should be changed to refer to 24 hours after the evaluation, given that some evaluations are completed only following further procedures.