Interinstitutional relations: how the European Parliament approves the European Commission

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Andrew DUFF (ALDE , UK) on guidelines for the approval of the European Commission. The report laid down the criteria for assessment of candidates and the arrangements for the conduct of the hearings by the EP's committees and subsequent evaluation. It also established the procedures to be followed in the event of a change in the composition or disposition of the Commission during its term of office. The aim was to incorporate these criteria and arrangements into the Rules of Procedure - which had hitherto contained no such guidance on the actual organisation of the hearings - in order to ensure a uniform approach by the committees and a coordinated procedure to ensure horizontal scrutiny of the result of the hearings. The key points of the report were as follows:

- Parliament may seek any relevant information regarding the Commissioners-designate in order to evaluate their aptitude, including full disclosure of information pertaining to financial interests;

- the hearings will take place in public, "in circumstances and under conditions whereby Commissioners-designate enjoy an equal and fair opportunity to present themselves and their opinions", including through "a pluralistic political dialogue" with the MEPs;

- Parliament will have special regard for gender balance and may express itself on the disposition of portfolio responsibilities by the President-elect;

- an indexed video recording of the hearings should be made available for the public record within 24 hours;

- the committees should meet without delay after the hearing, in camera, to make their evaluation, stating whether the Commissioners-designate are qualified both to be members of the college and to carry out the particular duties for which they have been nominated. If a committee is unable to reach a consensus on both these points, its chairman can put the two decisions to a vote. The statements of evaluation shall then be made public;

- the President-elect of the Commission shall present the whole college of Commissioners at a sitting of Parliament. This will be followed by a debate and possibly a motion for resolution. Parliament will then vote on whether or not to give its consent to the appointment of the Commission as a body, deciding by a majority of the votes cast, by roll call;

- in the event of a change in the composition of the Commission during its term of office (when a vacancy is caused by resignation, compulsory retirement or death or in the event of the accession of a new Member State), the new candidate will be invited to participate in a hearing under the same conditions;

- if there is a substantial reshuffle of portfolios, the Commissioners concerned will be invited to appear before the relevant committees before taking up their new responsibilities.

Finally, in order to facilitate consultations between Parliament and the Council before a candidate for Commission President is proposed, as well as the approval process of the Commission in general, the committee called on the Council to bring forward the period of the next parliamentary elections from June to May 2009.