Basic information

2015/2040(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Procedures and practices regarding commissioner hearings, lessons to be taken from the 2014 process **Subject** 8.40.01.06 Committees, interparliamentary delegations 8.40.03 European Commission	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
AFCO Constitutional Affairs	CORBETT Richard (S&D)	04/12/2014
	Shadow rapporteur PREDA Cristian Dan (PPE) MESSERSCHMIDT Morten (ECR) PAGAZAURTUNDÚA Maite (ALDE) DURAND Pascal (Verts/ALE)	

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
EMPL Employment and Social Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	PATRICIELLO Aldo (PPE)	09/02/2015
ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
TRAN Transport and Tourism	CRAMER Michael (Verts/ALE)	19/01/2015
JURI Legal Affairs	CAVADA Jean-Marie (ALDE)	24/02/2015

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Secretariat-General	TIMMERMANS Frans

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
12/02/2015	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
17/06/2015	Vote in committee		
19/06/2015	Committee report tabled for plenary	A8-0197/2015	Summary
07/09/2015	Debate in Parliament		
08/09/2015	Decision by Parliament	T8-0287/2015	Summary
08/09/2015	Results of vote in Parliament		
08/09/2015	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2015/2040(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFCO/8/02754

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE549.154	12/02/2015	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE554.817	14/04/2015	
Committee opinion	TRAN	PE549.387	17/04/2015	
Committee opinion	ENVI	PE549.460	11/05/2015	
Committee opinion	JURI	PE551.952	11/05/2015	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A8-0197/2015	19/06/2015	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T8-0287/2015	08/09/2015	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary

Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2015)748	24/02/2016	

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.

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

2015/2040(INI) - 08/09/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 517 votes to 168 with 23 abstentions a resolution 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 and 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. The hearing process gives

Parliament and EU citizens the opportunity to discover and evaluate the candidates' personalities, qualifications, preparedness and priorities as well as their knowledge of their designated portfolio. The practice increases the democratic legitimacy of the European Union institutions and brings those institutions closer to European citizens.

Whilst having demonstrated its effectiveness, the hearing process can always be improved, particularly by means of more flexible and dynamic exchanges between the Commissioner and members of the committee responsible for the hearing.

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 designate by the Committee on Legal Affairs should be improved by including family interests covering family members living with them in the same household since the current scope was too limited. Parliament felt that confirmation by the Committee on Legal Affairs of the absence of any conflict of interests, based on a substantive analysis of the declarations of financial interests, constituted an essential precondition for the holding of the hearing by the committee responsible. It invited the Commission to revise its rules on this as soon as possible. The Committee on Legal Affairs should issue guidelines in the form of a recommendation or initiative report, with a view to facilitating reform of the procedures relating to Commissioners' declarations of interests.

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;
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- 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;
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- the rule should be changed to refer to 24 hours after the evaluation, given that some evaluations are completed only following further procedures