

30. September 2019

Manon Aubry and Martin Schirdewan

Co-Presidents of the GUE/NGL
in the European Parliament

To:

Ursula von der Leyen

President-elect
of the European Commission

Dear President-elect von der Leyen,

As the Hearings of the Commissioners-designate begin, we write to you in an effort to contribute to a transparent and public debate, which could lead to changes in the way the future Commission is set to function.

First, we would like to raise our serious concerns about the excessive complexity of the scope of the new portfolios and the fragmented division of tasks and policy areas among the different Commissioners. We believe that this fragmentation will not only be counterproductive and ineffective in the future but will also obstruct the right of the European Parliament and citizens to scrutinise the Commission.

Do you consider restructuring the new Commission in a way that would simplify the configuration and allow for more efficiency and better accountability?

We also have serious concerns about the choice of several of the Commissioners-designate as some of them lack ethical or political legitimacy, either due to their involvement in judicial proceedings and investigations against them, or due to their political choices in the past. The process of examination of conflicts of interests among Commissioners-designate has proved to be extremely flawed and politicised: the limited scope of examination, combined with the absence of capacity for investigation, and a lack of time, hinders the efficiency of the process. For example, it is paradoxical in the extreme that a person that could not hold the position of Defence Minister in his or her own country is eligible to become Commissioner with responsibilities over a significant portfolio.

The imbroglio surrounding the process of examination of conflicts of interest underlines the need for reform. In the context of growing distrust between European citizens and EU institutions, the establishment of an independent ethical body to conduct thorough and transparent examinations of conflicts of interest is of utmost importance.

Finally, there is another horizontal issue and it concerns the principle of “one in, one out” that you have introduced. We do not believe that rules obliging Member States to guarantee and ensure basic rights and standards in areas such as environment, labour or health policy are “bureaucratic burdens”. On the contrary, having been achieved with great effort, we consider them as providing the minimum in terms of required safeguards. Using the pretext of alleviating burdens for the Member States, removing any kind of legislation that protects these rights, and ensures those high standards, would be yet another step in the wrong direction, away from what Europe should represent for its citizens and the world.

Do you consider withdrawing this proposal?

On the concrete proposals for new portfolios, we see a series of “good will” offers on critical issues without actual guarantees on how they will be implemented and without ways to measure tangible results, such as the European Green Deal, the Sustainable Development Goals, or tackling tax evasion and fraud. Despite your announcements, portfolios that could reinforce work to strengthen social policies, the fight for tax justice, or the democratization of the EU are missing. We also see four problematic issues that we ask to be corrected:

1. PROTECTING OUR “EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE”

As already expressed numerous times, we strongly oppose the “Protecting our European way of life” portfolio title as it endorses far-right identitarian rhetoric. Taking into account the responsibilities allocated to this portfolio and the values that should be put forward, we suggest that the job title be changed to “For a Europe of Diversity and Solidarity”, explicitly including responsibility for a civilian search and rescue body.

On the content of this and other related portfolios, we regret that the idea of “security” is detached from “justice” and we regret that there is no strong commitment towards a fair and sustainable common asylum system.

2. NEOLIBERAL RHETORIC: AN ECONOMY FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET?

We believe that Cohesion Policy and Economic Governance have different and contradictory objectives that should not be linked. Therefore, we object to the inclusion of the “Reform Support Programme” and the “Budgetary Instrument for Convergence and Competitiveness in the Euro area” in the portfolio of the Cohesion Policy Commissioner. By no means, should the latter be implemented or even financed to the detriment of cohesion policy or cohesion policy conditioned upon economic reforms.

Education and Culture have disappeared as a distinct portfolio and are not at all accorded their rightful place and visibility. Rather, they are part of the wider ‘Innovation and Youth’ portfolio which is linked more to the needs of industry and the private sector. Skills and adult learning which were included previously in the “Education, Culture, Youth and Sport” are swallowed up in the ‘Jobs’ portfolio, a clear orientation towards the labour market rather than social inclusion or personal development. We find these developments unacceptable and we urge you to restore the portfolio of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

We regret that there is not a special portfolio for fisheries especially in view of a possible reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. We fear that overall policy orientation would further support large industrial fishing activities instead of contributing to small scale and traditional fisheries.

3. GENDER EQUALITY

Content: We remain highly concerned about the description of the portfolio for Equality, as there is not a single reference to the importance of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (access to contraception, safe and legal abortion, and sexuality education). In addition, Gender and Equality are mentioned separately in different parts of the text but not in combination. We believe that the portfolio should be renamed as EU strategy on Gender Equality and we urge the Commission to deliver a document that is binding and composes all areas of women's rights and gender equality.

Commissioner: We are also very worried by the choice of Commissioner-designate to be in charge of the newly created "Democracy and Demography" portfolio. As an EPP MEP in the previous term, the Commissioner-designate regularly proposed or supported amendments against sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially women's access to safe and legal abortion. The fact that her position is linked to demography is rather alarming.

4. ETHICAL NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Militarization: We strongly criticize that the portfolio for the Internal Market will be equipped with a new DG on "Defence Industry and Space". We believe that a portfolio that mixes digital economy, industrial policy and internal market together with defence industry and space, will serve the further militarisation of the EU and the interests of the defence sector over the interests of European citizens.

Personal data: On top of the division of digital issues over several portfolios, we regret how the human rights dimension seems not to be considered as playing a prominent role in the development of new technologies. The Commission intends to work to ensure European "digital leadership", but it should not forget that if there is a field in which the EU has started to show a sort of global leadership - due also to the decisions of the CJEU - and that is the domain of privacy and the protection of personal data.

We do not have illusions, we know that the whole architecture of the EU is problematic and this is why we are, and will be, here, together with the people, fighting for social, economic and environmental justice, fighting for another Europe. Moreover, knowing that Europe will either be social and ecological or it, simply, will not be at all, we urge you, even at this very last moment, to take the above into consideration and proceed with changes that would be for the benefit of the peoples of Europe and the Planet.

Sincerely yours,

Martin Schirdewan and **Manon Aubry**

Co-Presidents of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left
in the European Parliament

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