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Parliament and Commission in 2009

This section analyses in detail how the commission and parliament may appear at the end of the year. For the commission, the allocation of portfolios, appointment of commissioners and the reallocation of DG competences are all currently being speculated upon. In the Parliament section we map out how the Parliamentary committees and groups may look after the elections.

European Commission

The appointment of a new college of commissioners is expected before the end of this year. At the moment, the number of commissioners is not clear, as it will depend on the final adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. It seems, however, that the majority of commissioners will leave their position thus igniting rumours about their replacements.

For instance, German commissioner Günter Verheugen will step down and is likely to be replaced by Roland Koch, the recently re-elected Prime Minister of the Federal State of Hesse.

Commissioner Charlie McCreevy will not seek reappointment as Irish commissioner but his successor is still unknown. Former Prime Minister John Bruton who is currently the EU Ambassador to the U.S. said he would be interested in becoming a European commissioner but it seems unlikely as he is not member of the ruling party in Ireland. Discussions are therefore still ongoing.

The same could be said for Dutch liberal commissioner Neelie Kroes who is a member of the minority party in the Netherlands. However, some sources say that her experience and impressive tenure as commissioner, could land her a high-profile portfolio in the next commission and which would win her support from the opposition.

The allocation of portfolios may also influence Member States' choices for candidates. France, for instance has clearly expressed its willingness to have a significant portfolio in the next commission. As a result, Paris intends to appoint Michel Barnier as next French commissioner. Barnier gained his European experience, serving as commissioner for regional affairs between 1999 and 2004. He will replace Jacques Barrot who is the current commissioner for justice, liberty and security.

The reallocation of portfolios is also receiving a lot of attention. For starters, sources suggest a new DG will be specifically created for **climate change**. Environment commissioner Stavros Dimas has already expressed an interest in this portfolio.

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It is also expected that the **transport and energy portfolio** will be split into two separate DGs. At the moment, it is not clear whether energy will be its own DG or whether it will fall under the responsibility of the new climate change commissioner.

The Directorate-General for Justice, Liberty and Security will also be subject to modifications and could potentially be divided, given that its current remit appears too broad and ambitious to deal efficiently with all proposed issues. Moreover, if the Lisbon Treaty enters into force, the commissioner in charge of this portfolio will receive more competences on defence and security matters. A division of this portfolio would aim at a better re-allocation of the work and new responsibilities.

While some DGs are being divided up, rumours continue to spread about a merger between the portfolios of the consumer protection section of **DG SANCO and DG Internal Market**. One barrier to this would be the already large workload of DG Internal Market, especially within the current economic context.

However, shifting the two directorates of DG Internal Market dealing with financial services and financial institutions to DG Economic and Monetary Affairs could be acceptable. This would be in the context of the new financial architecture recommended by the Larosière report and endorsed by the Commission itself in which macroeconomic supervision of systemic risks will be coordinated with micro economic supervision.

In a nutshell, discussions on future commissioners' portfolios are ongoing and further information on the exact shape and administrative structure of the EU executive will be revealed in the coming months and will partly depend on the new president of the next European commission.

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European Parliament

Parliamentary reform

Recent developments in the European parliament suggest that the EP is also about to enter a phase of reform and adjustment. The need to better define the competences of certain committees has become more urgent as the number of inter-committee conflicts have increased (LIBE, IMCO, ECON and JURI are the committees with the highest number of conflicts). A combination of recent media reports and the work of the parliament's internal reform working party have set tongues wagging in Brussels as to how the EPs committee structure, could or should develop.

Structure: On the 12th and 19th March the Conference of Presidents adopted the following reforms proposed by the Parliament working party on reform. The changes, agreed in the conference of presidents, concern the operation of committees and inter-parliamentary delegations. Find below a summary of the changes:

- allow the use of joint committee meetings for complex legislative dossiers that cross committee boundaries;
- make it mandatory for the conference of committee chairs to give a recommendation to the conference of presidents on how to resolve any conflict of competences between committees;
- generally increase cooperation between committees, notably by enhancing the role of opinion-giving committees;
- rename 'temporary committees' as 'special committees';
- 'de-neutralise' the petitions and fisheries committees, whilst leaving the budgetary control and women's committees neutralised (see note below);
- increase the involvement of inter-parliamentary delegations in the work of committees and vice versa;
- make the memberships of joint parliamentary assemblies and the bilateral inter-parliamentary delegations for the countries concerned more coterminous;
- update arrangements with the commission to improve the operation of election observation missions.

Note: At present MEPs can generally be full members of only one committee and a substitute member of up to two others, but a few committees have a "neutralised" status, which means they do not count towards these limits.

Parliament committees

Aside from the aforementioned reforms, rumours persist as to how the committee portfolios could be adjusted for the next Parliamentary term.

Rumours are currently circulating on the possible separation of health from the current environment, public health and food safety committee to create a specific

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health committee. These rumours have found support amongst those who feel that these issues are currently being lost in the packed ENVI agenda.

The **IMCO** committee seems to have received most criticism for its poor track record with consumer issues. One suggestion is that the legal aspects of the IMCO portfolio could go to JURI with the industrial aspects going to ITRE.

The **LIBE** committee could lose some of its competencies to the JURI committee thus creating a committee on Justice. In order to relieve JURI of some of its issues some of its competencies could go to AFCO in order to create a committee on legal and constitutional matters.

One should note that information society issues, which are addressed by DG Information Society with some contributions from DG Internal Market, are covered by no less than four parliamentary committees: JURI (intellectual property), LIBE (data protection, ITRE (telecom), and CULT (TV content). A possible solution to this would be the creation of an Information Society committee.

However, committee competences can only be altered by changing Annex VI (outlining the powers of the different committees) of the rules of procedure. This would be done by a decision in the Conference of Presidents and although it is likely to happen just before or just after the elections, annex VI can in fact be altered at any time.

Parliament groups

MEPs form themselves into political groups according to their "political affinities". Elections and enlargements can alter this balance and can even result in the creation of new groups and disbandment of old ones.

National polls have indicated that if elections were to be held today the political balance within the EP would remain the same. Slight drops in membership of the three main groups, EPP-ED, PES and ALDE have been predicted but predictions are harder to make for the smaller groups which are made up of fringe parties and independent members. With a rise in far right supporters across the EU it is likely that a new far right group could be created. The new anti-Lisbon Libertas party could also do well and could threaten the survival of the current IND-DEM group. In the past, the success of smaller parties has been underestimated and with the current economic climate and the fact that the EP elections tend to favour radical parties, there could be a surge in the representation of these parties.

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EPP-ED

The announced departure of the UK conservatives from the group after the elections has created some uncertainty as to how the group will look at the end of the year. The conservatives are currently in talks to create a new group, rumoured to be called "European conservatives". Apparently the Tories are banking on the Czech Republic (Czech Civic Democrats) and Poland (Poland's Law and Justice Party) to form the new group and they also have high hopes for Italy and Sweden as well as the Danish People's Party which shares similar ideals. Support for the Danish People's party is currently 9 percent higher than in 2004 which could fair well for this new group, should they join.

ALDE

Liberals are likely to do well in Germany and France and Polls suggest that German Free Democrats will increase their support in the 2009 elections threefold this could mean that they take over the British Liberal Democrats as the largest national political party within the ALDE group. The ALDE group is also set to gain new members from the Irish Fianna Fail.

PES

The departure of the 27 UK conservatives from the EPP-ED group could contribute to making the PES group the dominant force in the Parliament. However, conservative sources have said that should this be the case, Conservative leader in the UK, David Cameron could easily back track on his decision to take his party out of the group.

PES parties are currently gaining ground in Sweden, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (the Smer party looks to double its representation) however, French socialists are reported to be down by around 13 seats. Also, the future of the Italian centre-left Partito Democratico, which sends MEPs to both PES and ALDE, is uncertain after its leader, Walter Veltroni, resigned last week.

End of the UEN group?

Current predictions suggest the possible disbandment of the UEN group after the elections: the Italian, far-right Alleanza Nazionale (currently UEN) is to be absorbed into the Popolo della Liberta (EPP-ED group). Irish party Fianna Fail will also leave the UEN and join the ALDE group. In addition to this the Polish members of the UEN are attached to parties which fared badly in recent elections at the national level, and are unlikely to be re-elected.