

New direction in the EU?

The possible new leaders of the EU have not received great reviews from the press and public commenting so far. The EU Heads of government took a long time to make up their minds who to recommend to the Parliament. Their decision dumped the Spitzenkandidat system they were meant to be following. Instead of recommending Manfred Weber, the leader of the EPP grouping in the Parliament to be EU Commission President, they recommended Von Leyen, the Defence Minister of Germany, who was not in the frame for such a post prior to the election.

The lack of direct democratic accountability of the Commission President is a worry for some supporters of the EU. That is why they invented the Spitzenkandidat system. Under this approach the leaders of the main party groupings contesting the European elections appear on public platforms and debate the future of the EU so the public can see what they would do if they won the European election and if their candidate became Commission President. Whilst it is not as good as making the post directly elected, it could provide more accountability than the behind closed door recommendation made after the election.

Von der Leyen is an unknown politician when it comes to the EU agenda. We are told she is an EU enthusiast who will presumably wish to support more steps to European integration. She is also a German conservative, who may not want to commit more German tax revenue to grants and transfers around the Euro currency union. She may find herself in disagreement with Christine Lagarde, the French former Republican, who is proposed to be the next President of the European Central Bank. Lagarde is also likely to be keen on more European integration, and may advocate a bigger EU budget with Germany making a bigger contribution to that budget.

Charles Michel, the former Belgian PM, becomes President of the Council. Known for seeking to reconcile opposites and to weld a coalition out of very different forces, he will need dark arts to construct alliances and coalitions for policies that can command majority support in the Council of Ministers and the Parliament.