



EU Institutional Developments: Re-Appointed President Barroso Outlines 'Political Guidelines' for the Next European Commission

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Summary: José Manuel Barroso has been re-appointed by Member States and the European Parliament as President of the European Commission for its next five-year term. However, he fell rather short of receiving overwhelming support from all political groups in the European Parliament. Prior to his re-appointment, he laid out a document of 'Political guidelines' for the next European Commission, which includes a considerable focus on addressing environmental issues such as climate change, agriculture and rural development, sustainable fisheries and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

Barroso re-appointed as European Commission President

At this week's European Parliament plenary session, MEPs voted to re-appoint José Manuel Barroso as President of the European Commission for a second five-year term. He was eventually backed by an absolute majority of MEPs (382 votes for, 219 against and 117 abstentions), following his nomination by EU Heads of State and Government. European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek stated that it was 'the right result for Europe', and Barroso expressed warm thanks to the Parliament for its 'enormous confidence', adding that the Parliament had signalled 'that it is fully involved in the ambitious programme I have for the next five years'.

Views of the European Parliament political groups

As can be deduced from the voting figures, however, Barroso's re-appointment was not universally welcomed by the Parliament's political groups. The President of the centre-right **EPP** group, Wilfried Martens, former Prime Minister of Belgium, was 'delighted' at Barroso's re-election and declared the EPP's 'full backing' for his five-year term, underlining the 'strong mandate' that it gives him and the 'new impetus' he will give to Europe. In a debate prior to the vote, however, the EPP's Joseph Daul stated that the group was not giving Barroso a 'blank cheque' and that he would 'have to fulfil our expectations'. The **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)** group, which includes UK Conservative MEPs, offered somewhat reluctant support for Barroso, with Michał Kamiński expressing support for his re-appointment whilst stating that 'there are many issues over which we disagree with Mr Barroso, but he is against national selfishness and that is why we support him'. The centre-left **PES** group's President Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, former Prime Minister of Denmark, bemoaned the Parliament's 'conservative majority, including eurosceptics' voting Barroso back in. He stated that his group will now 'focus on obtaining maximum

influence in upcoming negotiations’ and ‘insist on having the post of High Representative, or if the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, the European Council President’ as well as pushing for ‘high level PES representation in the European Commission’.

Leader of the liberal **ALDE** group Guy Verhofstadt, another former Prime Minister of Belgium, congratulated Barroso on his ‘solid backing’ from MEPs, but recalled that ‘a strong college of Commissioners’ now needs to be created along with a ‘clear and concrete work programme’. The group now ‘expect[s] the newly elected President to live up to his promises to us and be a strong, bold and energetic President’. Verhofstadt also called for ‘an ambitious and united position on climate change ahead of the talks in Copenhagen at the end of the year’. The **Greens/EFA** group leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit stated in a debate prior to the vote that his group ‘does not have faith’ in Barroso and that ‘we deserve somebody better’. The Greens’ call for the vote to be postponed to take into account the result of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty (a viewpoint shared by the **Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)** group, which includes the UK Independence Party) was, however, unsuccessful. Lothar Bisky of the group of the **European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)** outlined the need for a ‘social, peaceful and environmentally-friendly Europe’ and said Mr Barroso was the ‘wrong man for President if we want that kind of Europe’.

‘Political guidelines’ for the new Commission

Earlier in September, Mr Barroso outlined to the Parliament his priorities for the new European Commission in a document entitled ‘Political guidelines for the next Commission’. Although not an exhaustive catalogue of initiatives, the document can be seen as a declaration of intent for the future direction of the EU. Barroso’s vision is for a ‘transformational agenda ... We face a choice: either we collectively shape the new order, or Europe will become irrelevant.’

Barroso’s ‘Political guidelines’ state his belief in a Europe that (amongst other things):

- Promotes the development of the agricultural sector;
- Invests in modern infrastructure, research and development, and innovation;
- Paves the way for smarter, greener and more sustainable growth, promoting economic and social cohesion;
- Keeps world leadership in fighting climate change and promoting energy security, whilst pioneering the development of a low carbon economy; and
- Promotes higher social and environmental standards worldwide.

Leadership on climate change and developing new sources of sustainable growth are crucial elements of Barroso’s ‘EU 2020’ vision. ‘We need to start working now on a radical pathway to reaching a far more sustainable Europe by 2020’ he states. He feels that the political will already exists, and that the challenge now is to find the right mix of regulation, technological development and funding to ensure success.

Climate change leadership

Barroso argues that the current economic and financial crisis and scientific evidence of climate change show the need for greater investment in sustainability. Such investment will have the multiple benefits of ‘doing the right thing for the future of the planet’, enabling Europe to gain economically (in terms of jobs and growth) from new low carbon technologies, and enhancing the EU’s energy security. Steps are needed to decarbonise electricity supply and the transport sector, including shipping, aviation and road transport (the latter through clean and electric cars).

Barroso also intends to launch a ‘major initiative’ to adapt existing EU policies to climate change, stating that ‘each and every Community policy will need to be assessed and if necessary adapted in the light of climate change’, from water use in agriculture, to addressing coastal erosion, to managing fisheries.

Boosting new sources of growth and social cohesion

Barroso sees ‘turning the challenge of a sustainable Europe to our competitive advantage’ as one of the key challenges for the EU. He acknowledges that the EU ‘cannot rely forever on short-term stimulus. New sources of growth will have to take up the baton – sources of growth that are sustainable.’ This demands a fresh, modernised industrial policy with an emphasis on sustainability, innovation (for example in environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient technologies), human skills, and reduced administrative burdens. Barroso stresses that sustainability means maintaining the pace of reform, ensuring competitiveness, keeping up with social change, and ensuring that the economy can respect the need to protect the environment, the countryside, maritime zones and biodiversity. EU research policy must be made ‘one of the motors of our sustainable development’.

Barroso argues that Europe’s ‘long and proud history as an agricultural producer’ must continue through adapted agriculture and rural development policies. Agriculture is vital to Europe’s future development in terms of food security, preservation of the environment and the countryside, and addressing the climate change challenge whilst providing a fair standard of living for farmers and a thriving rural economy.

Barroso claims that the current Commission has brought about the first truly integrated approach to the maritime sector, but suggests that more needs to be done to further extend EU maritime policy. This will include placing European fisheries policy ‘on a sustainable footing’, developing maritime spatial planning, integrating maritime surveillance between Member States, creating a marine observation and data network, and making ‘motorways of the sea’ a reality.

Barroso’s ‘Political guidelines’ also include:

- Work towards a new European ‘super-grid for electricity and gas’;
- Assessing the added value of EU action in crisis and disaster prevention and reaction (including forest fires); and
- ‘Root and branch reform’ of the EU budget to support the various priorities.

References

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