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# Confirmation of Commissioners-designate Raffaele Fitto and Olivér Várhelyi Postponed



**The European Socialists and Democrats (S&D) oppose both the Italian Raffaele Fitto and the Hungarian Olivér Várhelyi as European Commissioners, following days of stalled negotiations.**

Following the postponement of the confirmation meetings of the Vice-President designate for Cohesion and Reforms, Raffaele Fitto, on Tuesday 12 November, several EU leaders have tried to find a solution to the impasse, fuelled by tensions and political power struggles, while the European People's Party (EPP) - chaired by German MEP Manfred Weber - has stepped up attacks on the Vice-President designate for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, Spain's Teresa Ribera (S&D).

*'If the stability of the European project and the future European Commission is in danger today, only one person is responsible [...] the EPP and Manfred Weber,'* an S&D source told Euractiv.

The leaders of the EPP, S&D and Renew groups, the main pro-European political forces, met on Wednesday 13 November in Brussels to negotiate an agreement to confirm the new European Commission, but no solution was found. The timetable for the evaluation meeting of the six vice-presidents-designate therefore remains unknown.

The delays could now have an impact on the entry into force of the new Commission.

**Indeed, if it is not approved at the next plenary session in Strasbourg in the week of 25 November, its date of entry into office could be pushed back to 2025.**

## **It's a no for Raffaele Fitto and Olivér Várhelyi**

One of the S&D's red lines has always been the award of the vice-presidency to the Italian candidate Raffaele Fitto (*Fratelli d'Italia*, European Conservatives and Reformists), with the Social Democrats firmly opposed to the award of a key position to a "far-right party" that did not support the election of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, last July.

*'He [Raffaele Fitto] will not have our support,'* an S&D source confirmed to Euractiv.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who appointed her minister to the role last August, has strongly criticised the pressure to remove him from the executive vice-presidency for Cohesion and Reforms.

*'Here are your left-wing representatives. [...] According to them, Italy does not deserve a vice-presidency within the Commission,'* Giorgia Meloni complained indignantly on X on Wednesday.

According to our information, the S&D group will refuse to negotiate a global agreement for the six vice-presidents because it strongly feels that Raffaele Fitto is not part of the pro-European forces.

*‘There is no room for negotiations beyond the agreement between the three [pro-European] political families,’* the S&D source explains.

The same position applies for Hungarian Commissioner-designate Olivér Várhelyi (Patriots for Europe), with the Socialist group having decided not to support his confirmation, even after a potential revision of his portfolio to remove his health competences, according to S&D group sources.



*Commissioner-designate Olivér Várhelyi*

The meeting of coordinators on the Hungarian candidate, initially scheduled for Monday, November 11, had been postponed to Wednesday, before being officially postponed until further notice.

Valérie Hayer, chair of the Renew group, urged the EPP and S&D, as well as Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, to resume negotiations to avoid *‘political collapse’* and ungovernability, calling for a political agreement before the group presidents meet on Wednesday.

*‘We denounce and regret the irresponsible action of all political forces that do not contribute to a responsible, valid and real solution,’* said the Frenchwoman.

While the European Socialists and Democrats group is no longer seen as an equal partner by the EPP, the conservatives are increasingly seeking to form coalitions with the right wing of the Parliament, notably the three far-right groups: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations.

## Spanish Partido Popular Blocks Teresa Ribera's Candidacy: European Commission Deadlocked



*Teresa Ribera during hearing*

Spanish centre-right party Partido Popular (PP) led a campaign to block Socialist Teresa Ribera from the position of Executive Vice President of the European Commission for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, just two days before her parliamentary hearing.

In a last-minute move, PP handed Manfred Weber, leader of the European People's Party group, a comprehensive dossier outlining negligence accusations against

Ribera for her mismanagement of the catastrophic floods in Valencia. They argue that her ministry failed to implement necessary flood prevention measures and issue timely warnings to regional authorities.

Weber agreed and withdrew EPP support from Ribera's candidature, thus rendering her nomination impossible. It worked. Though MEPs praised Ribera's patience during her hearing as she faced attacks, her approval was blocked— and with it, the entire process to greenlight the new Commission.

The EPP's move to withdraw support for Ribera triggered a domino effect: Socialist MEPs retaliated by halting the approval of EPP-backed candidates, while Renew Europe took a cautious stance, refusing to proceed without assurances from both sides.

Now, all 27 commissioners-designate are stuck in limbo, leaving von der Leyen scrambling to salvage her team. With hearings concluded and evaluation letters expected next week, the EU faces a political standoff that could delay the Commission's start until after the New Year, leaving it rudderless during a critical geopolitical moment.

# Hearing of Executive Vice-President-designate Raffaele Fitto



The Committee on Regional Development questioned Raffaele Fitto, Italian candidate for Commission Executive Vice-President responsible for cohesion and reforms.

In his opening remarks, Mr Fitto stated his intention to respond to demographic challenges and to give opportunities to everyone, and in particular young people, so they can stay and thrive in their home regions. He committed to using the so-called “place-based approach” to better address local needs and to working closer together with local authorities.



*Raffaele Fitto during the confirmation hearing 2024*

Answering MEP questions on the future of cohesion policy, Mr Fitto said that it needs to be simplified and more flexible, and that the administrative burden must be reduced. For the first time, the Commission has a dedicated portfolio for simplification, he added. However, simplification cannot mean reduced transparency or scrutiny, Mr Fitto argued. He underlined the important work of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the European Anti-Fraud Office OLAF in making sure that EU funds go where they are supposed to.

## **Strong role for local authorities**

Discussing the future of cohesion policy, MEPs quizzed Mr Fitto on whether simplification would mean centralisation. They asked if he will defend “cohesion policy as we know it”, where people and regions have a strong role. Mr Fitto committed to advancing solutions that leverage the specialised knowledge of local actors, and are flexible enough to accommodate different local needs. At the same time, he wants to develop targeted approaches to local industrial policy and leverage the potential of tourism.

In response to questions about efforts to strengthen rural regions suffering from depopulation and brain drain, **Mr Fitto underlined the importance of high-quality work, local administrative capacity, infrastructure - including digital - and public services in every region.** He further committed to supporting talent development and employment opportunities and to accelerating the implementation of the Just Transition Fund.

## **Solutions for island regions and cities**

On support for islands, Mr Fitto pointed to his record working on the topic as an MEP, and said that coordinated efforts involving transport, agriculture, fisheries and tourism policy will be needed.

Mr Fitto also announced his intention to develop a comprehensive policy agenda for cities, including housing, digitalisation and social inclusion. Citizens who live in the EU's eastern border regions also need the EU's maximum support, he said.

MEPs also raised the issue of the rule of law and Mr Fitto's previous record on Article 7 votes. Mr Fitto committed to respecting the rule of law as a fundamental EU principle, and said he has already contributed to the EU's rule of law dialogue in his previous role as an EU Affairs Minister.

## Hearing of Executive Vice-President-designate Stéphane Séjourné

**On Tuesday 12 November, four parliamentary committees questioned Stéphane Séjourné, French candidate for the Prosperity and Industrial Strategy portfolio.**

In his introductory statement to the Industry, Research and Energy, Internal Market and Consumers, Economic Affairs and Environment Public Health and Food Safety committees, Mr Séjourné announced a future pact on clean industry to lay the foundations "for an industrial policy suited to our time", **stressing that the EU will need to decarbonise and reindustrialise simultaneously. He advocated focusing on the strategic sectors with the highest potential and socioeconomic impact, promoting lowering energy prices, and developing thriving markets for products such as electric vehicles and heat pumps.**



**Mr. Séjourné promised to reduce bureaucracy for companies and pledged to introduce an SME passport to avoid firms having to constantly prove their legal status.** He emphasised that huge investments are needed to prevent the most innovative companies from leaving the EU. To win the global investment battle, the Commissioner-designate plans to set up an EU Competitiveness Fund and use InvestEU to increase public funding and create synergies between public and private investment.

Mr. Séjourné underlined his commitment to strengthening the single market, stressing that: "Right now we have 27 markets." The Commissioner-designate also promised that EU public procurements would take criteria such as quality, sustainability and resilience into greater account in the future.



## Support to the steel, automotive and aeronautic industries



*Stéphane Séjourné during the confirmation hearing 2024*

MEPs questioned the Executive-Vice-President designate on his plans to support the European steel industry, and asked whether the Commission would stick to agreed decarbonisation targets in the automotive sector. **Mr Séjourné replied that the steel industry may receive additional support from the European Investment Bank. He stressed that the automotive industry requires predictability and pledged to act on the**

**demand side to help carmakers meet their targets.**

MEPs also asked about possible support for the aeronautics industry. Mr Séjourné replied that the sector will be covered in the Clean Industrial Deal.

Several MEPs inquired on how to fill the annual investment gap of 800 billion Euro mentioned in the Draghi report. The Commissioner-designate pointed to the creation of a Savings and Investments Union and of new savings products to stimulate household savings. To improve SME access to finance, he committed to pursuing funds from capital markets instead of relying predominantly on banks.

**Other MEPs questioned the Commissioner-designate about protecting EU companies from unfair competition and EU consumers from below-standard goods made in third countries. In his reply, Mr Séjourné stressed the need to finalise customs reform to ensure better checks at EU borders**

## News from Our Members:

### French Budget 2025: UNAPL Deplores Cuts to Apprenticeships and Measures Supporting Liberal SMEs



Paris, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2024 | The National Union of the Liberal Professions (UNAPL) expresses its deep concern following the presentation of the *Projet de Loi de Finances* (Draft Finance Law) for 2025 in the Council of Ministers.

As a major player in the economy, representing one in three French companies, most of which are SMEs with 3 million workers, ***UNAPL deplores the undifferentiated measures announced, which will directly affect liberal enterprises through their ability to recruit and train young people.***

**In particular, UNAPL deeply regrets the reduction of public aid regarding the hiring of apprentices, a measure which weakens an essential tool for development and professional integration.**

Apprenticeships and contracts of professionalisation are pillars for promoting professions in the liberal sector. These systems allow not only for the training of future generations of professionals but also to support the longevity of liberal SMEs.

***UNAPL equally deplores the removal of exemptions and the reductions in certain social security contributions. This is a strong blow to liberal SMEs*** which risks slowing down the hiring dynamic in a sector which nevertheless contributes actively to local employment and to social cohesion.

Finally, despite its repeated requests, UNAPL cannot find in this draft budget the answer to its requests for clarification on the remuneration of liberal practices companies, which nevertheless constitute a challenge for fiscal simplification and fairness. This absence of specific measures to meet the needs of the liberal sector leaves a feeling of incredulity and disappointment.

UNAPL calls on the government to review these budgetary provisions and to re-establish strong support for apprenticeships and hiring within liberal SMEs. UNAPL remains available to engage in constructive dialogue in order to find concrete solutions adapted to the realities of the sector.



***Christophe Sans, President of UNAPL: 'The removal of aid to apprenticeships is a disastrous signal to young people, to liberal enterprises and to the future of our professions. These measures are essential in order to transmit our know-how and to prepare the next generation. Furthermore, the measures concerning the social security contributions will weaken a hiring dynamic that also contributes to the economic vitality of the regions. The government must absolutely hear our call and adjust its course before irreversible damage is caused to our enterprises. We are ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with it regarding these different subjects.'***



# Joint Delegation of Confprofessioni and APRI International Build Ties with Kenya



From the 18 to 24 October 2024, a delegation of Confprofessioni and APRI International led by **President Stella** and attended by Director-General and Senior Policy Advisor of CEPLIS, Prof. Dr Theodoros Koutroubas, were in Kenya, engaged in a busy schedule of meetings with representatives of local institutions, companies and professional firms in order to get to know the economic and cultural context of Kenya up close, facilitate mutual understanding of challenges and opportunities present in both Italy and Africa in general. The mission in Kenya intended to promote international relations and collaboration with African countries, according to the principles of the Mattei Plan; the main objective being to develop partnerships between Italian and Kenyan professionals, through the creation of international networks that will contribute to mutual progress and the growth of the professional communities involved.



*President Stella*



*Confprofessioni delegation was received by the Italian Ambassador in Nairobi*

Meeting with the Kenyan Minister of Labour, Shadrack Mwadime, the President of APRI International, **Luigi Carunchio** kickstarted a collaboration aimed at improving skilled mobility, offering qualified training and creating new job opportunities for Kenyan professionals. Expressing optimism on the potential outcomes of this collaboration, Minister Mwadime highlighted the positive changes it would bring to communities and the economy at large, stating:

*‘Together we can build a brighter future for all Kenyans’*

Mr Carunchio affirmed the mutually beneficial outcomes of intense collaboration, commenting that:

*‘This collaboration represents a concrete commitment to developing new avenues of professional growth and facilitating the internationalisation of the workforce. Through these synergies, Confprofessioni and ASPRI International aim to generate a tangible impact on Kenya’s workforce, thanks to projects linked to the Mattei Plan, ensuring that local talents are prepared to compete and thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.’*

## Unión Profesional Elects Dr Tomás Cobo Castro as its New President

Unión Profesional, which brings together more than 1,200 associations and territorial delegations, and 1,500,000 registered professionals in Spain, has announced that **Dr Tomás Cobo Castro** has been elected as the new president of the union following an extraordinary assembly on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024 in Madrid replacing the outgoing President, Professor Dr Victoria Ortega.

**Dr Cobo Castro is the first healthcare sector professional to be elected to this position;** a staunch defender of medical professionals with decades of experience working in healthcare and roles as President of the General Council of Medical Associations of Spain – Medical Association, Vice-President of the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS) and Vice-President of the Latin American and Caribbean Medical Confederation (CONFEMEL), Dr Cobo Castro will undoubtedly greatly strengthen the work of the Unión Profesional and bind the organisations representing Hispanophone liberal professionals in an even closer collaboration.



In his inaugural address, Dr Cobo Castro emphasised his commitment to ‘working hand-in-hand with all the professional sectors that are grouped together in the Unión Profesional,’ adding that he wished ‘to meet with each of the presidencies to carry out a process of active listening in line with the professional responsibility that characterises us.’

CEPLIS would like to take this opportunity to congratulate President Cobo Castro on his merited new position and his ceaseless service in the field of medicine. His advocacy for healthcare professionals and patients in Spain and beyond is an inspiration to us all. CEPLIS is looking forward to continue collaborating closely with President Cobo Castro and the Unión Profesional.