

## **Choosing the PES candidate for President of the European Commission:**

### ***A call for an open and transparent appointment process***

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One of the main reasons why the socialist and social-democratic parties lost the European elections in 2009 lies in the lack of interest of our citizens, and primarily traditional left-wing voters, for these elections. As the European Parliament is seen as devoid of any real power and as the Union as a whole appears to be dominated by conservative technocrats, those voters cannot get interested in an election whose stakes are considered unclear and insignificant.

In addition, despite our common “Manifesto”, left-wing voters were very aware of the diverse and sometimes conflicting approaches between social-democratic parties and of their inability to rally around a common candidate for President of the European Commission. And we do know that the appointment of a credible leader who could embody European socialism would be a major step in getting voters to regain interest in the European elections.

#### **DEFINING THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR THE PES CANDIDATE IN 2014**

It is thus indispensable to politicize the European Elections, in order to foster the appearance of clearly identified social, economic, societal choices for Europe and to provide the winner with the democratic legitimacy that will enable him/her to successfully defend and promote his/her programme in front of an overwhelmingly conservative European Council. In Prague, in 2009, the PES chose to resolutely adopt this approach, by deciding on a common campaign for the 2014 election, based on a common programme and a single candidate for President of the European Commission.

The forthcoming PES Council, in Warsaw, will have to define the appointment process for this single candidate. We wish to bring our contribution to the process, based on one simple idea: if we want to foster public debate and create well-identified European political choices, the message we’re going to convey to European citizens must be clear and meaningful. That is why we’re calling for an open and transparent appointment process for our common candidate. We truly believe the impact of such a process would by far exceed that of more confined internal procedures.

We consequently propose that the candidate’s appointment be carried out with the involvement of as many citizens as possible, rather than in the course of a PES Congress.

#### **VARIOUS OPTIONS FOR PRESELECTING AND APPOINTED OUR CANDIDATE**

Several options are possible, throughout the appointment process.

We first need to organize a weeding-out process between all potential candidates. A full roster of 27 candidates cannot be a credible option. Likewise, asking an electoral college –to be defined- to ratify the choice of a single candidate who would be appointed by party leaders,

does not answer the need for openness and transparency. Ideally, the process we wish for would imply competition between 4 or 5 candidates.

- The first option would be to devolve the weeding-out process to the party leaders' meeting. This pre-selection would then have to be ratified by a PES Convention. Such an option would offer the advantage of simplicity. However, it could also amount to the "neutralization" of potentially strong candidates, whose stature could overshadow heads of states and governments or party leaders, who could then favour a weaker European Commission.

- A second option would devolve the weeding-out process to a PES Congress. This might favour the emergence of stronger candidates, who could turn the PES into a political heavyweight. PES activists should also be given the possibility to elect delegates to such a Congress.

Regarding the actual candidate's appointment process, it is essential that the chosen procedure be clear to the eyes of the media and to the public opinion, so that they understand the high stakes of the European election.

- The most « visible » scenario would lead to opt for an open procedure, in which all socialist and social-democratic leaning EU citizens could take part in the appointment process. This would be the most effective way of creating a democratic "big bang". However, such a procedure could be hard to put in place and, at this stage, all PES members parties would probably not be willing to accept such an ambitious project.

- Option number two would involve all national card-carrying members, while respecting each party's traditions. We believe it's needed that all socialist and social-democratic party members be closely associated for the candidate's appointment, through a direct vote –which would be our preference- or through debates that would allow party members to choose the electoral college.

Leaving the choice of our common single candidate to party leaders and governing bodies is clearly not an option we consider. It would fail to raise interest in the public opinion and the media and to make this appointment process newsworthy. It is necessary to expand the electoral college so it can include the diversity of the schools of thought in each party.

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The PES and its leaders would have to make sure the process has the required visibility and impact. A multinational body, composed of independent and highly-respected qualified people and appointed by the PES Congress, could be in charge of making sure the voting process is valid.

The selected candidates would have to convince voters that their vision for Europe is widely shared and that they'd be able to implement it. At the end of the campaign, a PES Congress would be organized. National results would be tallied, usual PES balancing rules would be applied, the common candidate would then be appointed and all European socialists would rally behind him/her.

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He/she would by then be familiar to voters, could rely on a programme and on proposals vindicated during the appointment campaign. National parties would be fully prepared to manage the electoral campaign. The candidate would then be in a much better position to win the European election, against a European right which won't be ready to adopt such clear, democratic and transparent appointment procedures before long.