
JUNCKER TOO TIGHT IN HIS EU SUIT

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Relaxed, humorous, sometimes scathing, and in the end stopping short of laying out a clear vision of what his function should be. Jean-Claude Juncker, the self-described head of a "political" European Commission, delivered a press conference on Wednesday that could serve as an illustration of his entire mandate.

"A Europe that delivers: Commission presents ideas for a more efficient European Union," the commission said in a press release about Juncker's presentation, in its often used ready-made language.

Juncker was more lively during his 45 minutes on the podium, even asking for more questions when his chief spokesman wanted to put an end to the exercise.

But he balanced between the aim of becoming a modern EU 'founding father' and being a day-to-day politician looking at the state of the power play around the EU table.

He said he was "not an anonymous bureaucrat or a putschist who would have forced the doors of the Berlaymont," but a politician with a "triple legitimacy" - from the voters, the EU leaders and the European Parliament.

As such, and as a seasoned EU politician who attended his first EU meeting in the 80s, Juncker, in small strokes, has been describing in recent months what a European Commission president should be in the long run.

He said on Wednesday that his "dream" was that "within the foreseeable future we will be able to ensure that we have a bicameral system", formed by the parliament and the member states in the Council of the EU.

In that ideal construction, Juncker added, the presidents of the council and the commission would be "elected by direct vote".

'Asking too much of member states'

But instead of elaborating, and maybe proposing ideas to go towards this "dream", Juncker cut it short: "Of course that is not the topic that we are here to discuss today."

He said, once again, that he wanted his successor to be picked through the so-called

'Spitzenkandidat' process, with public debates in all 27 member states.

Building on his own self-reflected profile, he noted that "former prime ministers, if they have been prime ministers for long enough fulfil all the necessary requirements." But he added that "of course that doesn't mean there is just one profile."

He said again that it would "make sense" to merge the positions of commission and European Council presidents, but he admitted that "it cannot be done before 2019".

He raised the question of the number of commissioners, leaving "a lot of food for thoughts" but not providing answers, "because it's up to the head of governments and states."

He expressed sympathy for the idea of transnational lists for the European elections, but noted that that they were "unlikely this time round".

He insisted that it was "urgent" to take decision on the EU budget for after 2020, but let his commissioner, Guenther Oettinger, lay out the commission's vision of how it should look.

"We'd be asking too much from member states," the EU executive chief said at one point of his press conference - a statement that could apply to many issues and suggested a frustration in his job.

Leaving a footprint

Juncker, who at 63 is entering the last phase of his political and European career, would like to leave a footprint on the EU when he leaves.

That is why, last year, he published five scenarios for the future of the EU and suggested the 'road to Sibiu' process - a series of EU leader meetings, culminating in the Romanian city just before the 2019 elections to take decisions.

That's also why he came to the commission's press room for the first time in two years - if we put aside press points with EU leaders.

But instead of delivering an articulate vision of what the commission and its head could be in the future, he floated ideas and convictions that he himself said were not going to fly.

Maybe that is why he snapped at an Italian journalist, saying people talked nicely to him in Italy because they don't read the journalist's newspaper. Or why he told a French journalist that he wrote too often and was "plotting" against him, or why he told a Swiss journalist that the Swiss media conveys "an image of [him] that has no bearing with reality".

Juncker sounded like a politician who has a faith but who feels too tight in the suit that EU leaders have tailored for him - the suit of an institution head with limited powers.