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## **BREXIT, VON DER LEYEN'S APPROVAL ASSERT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT KEY ROLE**

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Two crucial dossiers for the EUs future need to be rubber-stamped by the European Parliament in the next two months, the Brexit deal and the approval of the new EU executive. Parliament President David Sassoli, making his debut among EU-28 leaders, assured them the new assembly was not messy but taking its job seriously.

Those who thought the Parliament would stay behind the political scenes after its prime time in July, when MEPs voted on Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen, were quickly disabused after Parliament rejected three proposed Commission candidates.

And the Parliament will have the final say on the Brexit deal, concluding the ratification process in case the House of Commons gives its go-ahead at the weekend.

Sassoli expressed satisfaction with the deal on Thursday (17 October) but stressed the UKs departure makes him sad in comments to reporters after his debut speech before the European Council.

We have to study the text yet. However, as we know our negotiators, if there is a deal, it means that Parliaments prerogatives have been fulfilled, he said.

Sassoli did not comment on what Westminster could decide in the next days: I only hope that Johnson is right and that the deal is good also for UK lawmakers.

He committed with EU leaders to start the ratification process in due time and the plenary is expected to back the Brexit deal as it is, but surprises cannot be entirely ruled out, considering the current level of fragmentation within the political groups.

### **Next steps**

If UK lawmakers agree on the legal text and the Protocol of the new Brexit deal on Saturday, the ball will come back into the European Parliaments court.

While attending the European Peoples Party (EPP) pre-summit, Parliaments Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO) chair, Antonio Tajani, recalled the steps for European Parliaments approval of the Brexit deal at next week plenary session in Strasbourg.

First, he said, there could be a Brexit Steering Committee meeting, possibly as early as Monday

evening, for the last assessment of the negotiations, then the Conference of Presidents should decide whether a vote on the new deal can be scheduled for that week.

Once an MEP is appointed as rapporteur, possibly on Monday evening, the file can be scrutinised by the AFCO committee, the leading committee on the Brexit agreement.

The last step is a proper vote from the full hemicycle, which is not expected before Thursday, as AFCOs draft report needs to be translated into 23 languages.

We're now waiting for the decision in Westminster, then we will study the text and the documents and we will have a free vote on the deal, Tajani concluded.

### **Institutional crisis?**

With the Brexit file on the path to completion, the problem with the approval of the von der Leyen Commission persists. On Friday, von der Leyen will take the floor at the European Council to present the new Commission's strategic agenda to EU leaders.

Sassoli could not forecast when the final vote will take place. There are three candidates that need to be replaced and then we will put the Commission to block vote, he said and added that, if the Commission wants to take office on 1 December, the vote should be scheduled for November's plenary.

We now expect from the governments the designation of the three new Commissioner candidates and we hope that this will happen quickly, said Sassoli, referring to Commissioner-designates for Romania, Hungary and France.

But the highly fragmented majority that narrowly backed von der Leyen in July is now giving her a headache, as the spectre of a possible final veto of her Commission by the Parliament is still on the horizon.

Asked what would happen if the Parliament rejected the new Commission, a senior diplomat said: That's a legitimate question. This would be a huge crisis.

I don't think we have a messy Parliament but a real one that takes the procedures seriously and assumes its responsibilities, Sassoli said, deflecting criticism of Parliament's volatility.

[Edited by Zoran Radosavljevic]

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