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Is Culture & Education a Priority for the Commission?

Not 1, not 2, but 5 (!) different Commissioners will be in charge of the Committee of Culture and Education (CULT), from this November till 2029. CULT certainly pertains to several fields, including Culture, Education, Youth, Sport, and Media, but division raises questions about central common objectives.

Brussels Calling

The founding father of the European Union, Jean Monnet, is often quoted saying: “If I had to do it all over again, I would begin with culture.” We know that he [never said that](#), of course, but often people interpret the EU that way. Meaning, in principle, that Europe was founded on economic grounds, politics followed and culture was considered the last aspect, although for many people around the EU, it should have been the number one priority, the issue of utmost importance.

“I’m not happy that I have to be briefed by 50 people. I’m not happy that many of the issues we discussed, like lifelong learning, like youth unemployment, like skills, like upskilling, are scattered around the Commission.” This is an extract from former EU Commissioner/Vice-President-designate Margaritis Schinas, back in 2019, during the [Commissioner’s Hearings](#). And he is right. Did Ursula von der Leyen listen to him, though? Not really...

The Conference of Presidents (EP President and leaders of political groups) agreed on the calendar for the hearings of the Commissioners-designate. The hearings will start on Monday, November 4th and will take place until Tuesday, November

12th. The MEPs of the Committee of Culture and Education (CULT) will probably have to attend five different Hearings. FIVE (5)! The explanation that is constantly given by the officials is that the CULT Committee is covering a large variety of subjects:

- Culture
- Education
- Sports
- Youth &
- Media

However, this is NOT something new. Up to 2019, there was one main EU Commissioner for all the above, thus, using such arguments since 2019, is what many consider an excuse, due to “other priorities”.

Glenn Micallef from Malta and the Social Democrats, is supposed to be the main Commissioner-Designate for CULT, however, his portfolio has to do primarily with “Intergenerational Fairness” and then “Youth Culture and Sport”. Perhaps it’s a coincidence that he is the last one to be mentioned in the Division of Responsibilities provided officially by the [EU institutions](#)... Or perhaps he was placed there because he is the youngest?

Sources say that he will be asked to provide information on specific actions to ensure the continuation of political dialogue among Youth in the EU, to fight against extremism, online and offline. He will also perhaps need to address difficult technical matters, such as Artificial Intelligence integration with European Culture, as many believe that they might not be compatible under the current framework, especially linguistically. Finally, yet importantly, in terms of Sports, there will probably be a demand to focus on equality and access for people with disabilities. The 35-year-old former head of the secretariat at the Office of the Maltese Prime Minister Robert Abela lacks executive experience; hence, allegedly [not many people in Brussels would be shocked, should he be replaced](#) in the end...

Roxana Minzatu from Romania, and also from the Socialists and Democrats is to take the portfolio of the Vice-Presidency that has to do with People, Skills and Preparedness, “a major portfolio that will manage one-fifth of the EU budget, specifically 235 billion Euros,” as Romanian prime minister

[Marcel Ciolacu](#) claimed. Back in June, she was elected as a Member of the European Parliament, but before she even managed to... learn the names of the EP buildings, she will most likely move to the European Commission (EC). However, this is the first time that the Commission will not have a Commissioner specifically for Employment, and Minzatu will be the closest person for the job, downgraded however, or so it seems.

This will be a joint hearing between EMPL and CULT. Several issues will presumably be discussed at her Hearing, CULT-wise, including European University synergies and a possible common diploma, vocational education and training (VET), equality in access to education within the EU. Of course, Erasmus+, perhaps the most iconic and successful EU programme of all time.

Since the CULT Committee is the main Committee dealing with Media and the Audiovisual sector, they will also be invited to Henna Virkkunen -Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security, and Democracy — as well as Michael McGrath, Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, and the Rule of Law. Finnish Virkkunen (EPP) is about to become the first-ever executive vice president for Tech Sovereignty and has solid experience in tech and innovation files. Irish McGrath (Renew) is a former Finance Minister, however, he did not get the job of his predecessor Mairiad McGuinness, but a much different role. He is described often as a politician who “does not like to play games.”

In both cases, the CULT MEPs will most probably ask certain questions, regarding the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), to which CULT is the main Committee responsible. The aspects of protection of journalists and of editorial independence are very high up in the CULT agenda. Nevertheless, the challenges of the technological transformation of media is an issue that worries the MEPs who want solutions for their citizens.

Finally, CULT will be invited to the Hearing of Ekaterina Zaharieva, Commissioner-Designate for Start-ups, Research and Innovation. The Bulgarian EPP politician's nomination has raised some eyebrows in Brussels, as six years ago, she was allegedly involved in the “sale” of [Bulgarian passports](#).

As far as CULT is concerned, she will probably have to address issues regarding Research, such as the European University Alliances Initiative, or the European Education Area (EEA) and how the above could be more linked. However, it seems that she is one of the Commissioner-Designates, so her Hearing will not

be a walk in the park...

The CULT Committee has already met, exchanged views extensively and agreed upon its political priorities. Sources claim that aside from the issues that will be raised during the Hearings, mentioned above, these priorities include, among others:

- Safeguarding the major programmes (Erasmus, Creative Europe, Solidarity Corps, etc),
- Promoting common cultural heritage,
- Freedom of the arts and the press,
- Progress of EEA and a possible European Degree,
- Implementation of Audio Visual Media Service Directive,
- Following up on the European Year of Youth,
- Promoting Sports Diplomacy &
- Promoting more effectively the Lux Audience Award

Agreements and compromises towards these goals were made, because, as of now, there is a clear alliance in CULT of all the democratic and pro-EU groups. The far right is trying to constantly place hurdles towards diversity, towards inclusivity and more funding for cultural purposes. They are presumably looking at common culture and education initiatives as a threat towards either their EU scepticism or their anti-EU sentiments. One will have to be patient and see if the major democratic groups (EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA & The Left) will be able to find common ground as the mandate goes on, starting from the crucial decisions regarding the Hearings. One thing they do agree upon though is that the CULT Committee is not considered as a first-tier priority by Ms von der Leyen's Commission. This approach is generating more separation in the Cultural and Educational scopes. Does that serve the common EU vested interests? Time will tell

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