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Making oversight work

The European Parliament may refuse to rubber stamp appointments to the European Court of Auditors

On Wednesday this week, the European Parliament will vote on 6 new candidates for the European Court of Auditors. Traditionally this has always been a rubber-stamping exercise, with Member States selecting candidates that the European Parliament has generally approved of.

This time, however, things may be different. During the hearings and vote in the Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee on 15 March 2016, MEPs raised doubts about the suitability of the candidates proposed by Member States for the post, and 3 out of the 6 candidates were actually voted down. This reportedly came as a total surprise to the candidates, who were under the impression that the hearing would only be a formality.

Should the full Parliament plenary tomorrow confirm the Budgetary control committee's line, this would be one of the first times that the European Parliament refuses to simply rubber-stamp candidates proposed by the EU Member States. All candidates have promised that, should the European Parliament not support them, they would withdraw their candidacy.

In fact, the impact of last month's vote in the budgetary control committee is already being felt - the Maltese candidate that the committee voted against has actually withdrawn his candidacy already, since questions were raised not only about his independence and competence, but about his alleged involvement in some sort of cocaine-related scandal in Malta.

The European Court of Auditors is the EU's independent external auditor which checks whether EU funds are correctly accounted for, raised and spent. To be nominated to the European Court of Auditors you must have a record of professional experience in management or control of the public finances and your independence should be beyond doubt. However, some of the candidates have almost no experience with auditing, and their ties to ruling political parties raised questions about their independence. This explains why the budgetary control committee decided to vote against their candidacies.

The Greens/EFA group is also concerned about the fact that every single candidate proposed by Member

States was male, particularly because the European Parliament has resolved to "take the issue of gender balance among the Court's Members very seriously". Currently the ECA is represented by only 5 women out of 28 members. We have calculated that if Member States' governments don't change their practice and start nominating women to the European Court of Auditors, then there will only be 3 women out of 28 by the end of the year.

We hope that the European Parliament will exercise real scrutiny over the candidates proposed by the Member States, and that it will take firm action to ensure that the EU institutions are as independent and free from fraud as possible. The vote in plenary on whether or not to accept the new candidates is due to take place on Wednesday 13th April.

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