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Secretive accountability?

Greens/EFA deplores plans to question Cañete “in camera”

Next week, on Tuesday 12th July, EU Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete is set to appear before the European Parliament's legal affairs committee to respond to EU Parliamentarians' (MEPs) questions about his impartiality and independence, following a series of questionable revelations that have cast doubts upon his integrity.

- [Serious doubts raised about Cañete's potential conflicts of interest and involvement in corruption cases in Spain: A list of salient cases](#)

However, the conditions under which he will respond to MEPs' questions are insufficient to achieve proper accountability. Since there is no established process for the European Parliament to assess EU Commissioners after they are appointed in office, the whole procedure is being made up on the spot, and the Greens/EFA group is concerned to ensure that this ad-hoc and questionable process with Cañete will not set a precedent for the future.

Our position is that Cañete should appear before the full European Parliament plenary, in a transparent procedure allowing for proper debate and thorough scrutiny. However, the current format will be behind closed doors, only in front of a selected group of MEPs from the Legal Affairs Committee, and with no record taken of the responses that Cañete provides.

In addition, the political groups have been required to send a maximum of 3 written questions in advance of the hearing, whereas Cañete will respond only orally during the one-hour hearing (leaving little if no time at all for follow-up questions). The written questions were scanned by the legal affairs committee for “eligibility” and some were almost rejected outright – until a group of MEPs including all parties except for the EPP (Christian Democrats, centre-right), ECR (Conservatives) and ENF (far-right) complained that this was going too far.

Since only Members of the Legal Affairs Committee are supposed to attend the meeting, several groups are having to temporarily replace their official members with Spanish members, as they are more familiar with Cañete's background and with the current context in Spain.

This process clearly shows that there is an urgent need to reform the Commissioner's Code of Conduct and to ensure that the European Parliament can properly investigate and avoid any potential conflicts of

interest: both before a Commissioner is appointed, and also if possible conflicts of interest or other allegations arise once the Commissioner is in office.

What we need for proper accountability

In the table below we summarise what's being proposed for the meeting with Cañete, and we compare that to what would actually be needed in order to ensure full accountability.

What is the Greens/EFA group going to do now?

We will attend the meeting with Cañete in order to witness how he will answer the MEPs' questions and will brief interested journalists afterwards. We have managed to ensure that at least one of our Spanish MEPs, Ernest Urtausun, can replace our usual legal affairs committee member given that access is closed to only a select few.

In terms of the integrity system for Commissioners, Greens/EFA MEP Pascal Durand will draft a report in the EU Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee's which will propose solutions for how to ensure that the European Parliament properly scrutinises EU Commissioner's declarations of interest. While the aim of the report is not to single out any particular case, the Cañete example is unavoidable when the failings of the current integrity system are examined. [See here for more information on the upcoming report](#)

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Contact person



Pam Bartlett Quintanilla

Team leader - Outreach and campaigns

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