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European Parliament Secretary-General appointment shows it's "one rule for them and one rule for us"

Michiel van Hulten · Thursday, July 14th, 2022

In February 2018, when the European Commission fast-tracked the appointment of President Juncker's Head of Cabinet Martin Selmayr as Secretary-General of the institution, the European Parliament was understandably outraged, calling it "a coup-like action which stretched and possibly even overstretched the limits of the law".

Selmayr had been promoted from Head of Cabinet to Deputy Secretary-General, and then to Secretary-General, during a single meeting of the College of Commissioners, bypassing normal selection procedures.

The Parliament's criticism was echoed by the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, who [opened an investigation](#) into the unprecedented elevation of Mr. Selmayr, and found four instances of maladministration by the Commission.

Pointing to "the reputational damage caused to the EU as a whole", the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in December 2018 to demand Selmayr's resignation, stating that "the Commission failed to respect the principles of transparency, ethics and the rule of law in the procedure it used to appoint Martin Selmayr as its new Secretary General". It [called on the Commission](#) "to adopt a new procedure for appointing its Secretary-General, ensuring that the highest standards of transparency, ethics and the rule of law are upheld".

So, it was surprising to say the least to see the European Parliament take a leaf out of the Commission's discredited playbook earlier this month when it decided on the procedure for appointing its own next Secretary-General.

According to reporting by [French journalist Jean Quatremer](#) of [Liberation](#) and [Politico Europe](#), the European Parliament's ruling bureau tacitly approved a secret deal between four (or three – this is unclear) EP political groups that would see the Alessandro Chiocchetti, Parliament President Roberta Metsola's Head of Cabinet, installed as Secretary-General. In return, the other groups in the deal would be rewarded with other top jobs, including through the creation of a brand-new 13th Directorate-General in the EP secretariat.

Clearly oblivious to its own calls for greater transparency, the Parliament issued a [6-line vacancy notice](#), without any formal requirements for the job, with an application deadline of 1 August – the day when the EU institutions traditionally shutter for the summer holiday and public scrutiny of their activities is virtually non-existent. The role is advertised at AD15 level, one grade below that of current and past Secretaries-General. According to reports, Chiocchetti is a AD15 official and

had only recently been promoted to that level.

It beggars belief that the European Parliament, which had been so outspoken in its criticism of the Commission's outrageous abuse of procedure, now seeks to do the same thing with the backdoor appointment of its next Secretary-General. As recently as May, the European Parliament [voted in a resolution](#) to call on its Secretary-General "to ensure transparency and fairness during senior management appointment procedures". The Parliament's staff unions are now rightly up in arms.

When Transparency International EU recently carried out a study of the integrity and ethics regimes of the EU institutions, the European Parliament was the only one of the three major institutions which refused to cooperate. In [our report](#), we wrote: "to fulfil its mission as the directly elected representative of citizens the EP must hold itself to a higher standard. This is particularly true for its role in holding other EU institutions to account and safeguarding the democratic legitimacy of the Union."

We had hoped that under its new President Roberta Metsola, a former co-Chair of the European Parliament's anti-corruption intergroup who has spoken out forcefully against government corruption in her native Malta, things in the Parliament would be different. By apparently seeking to parachute her own Head of Cabinet into the role of Secretary-General, and bending the internal rules in the process, the President does herself and her institution no favours.

When it comes to the European Parliament's attitude to transparency and integrity, it seems it's once again "one rule for them, one rule for us" – the title of our report on the Parliament last year. In the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, such blatant displays of institutional corruption will only serve to further undermine trust in Europe's legislative assembly.

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