

Letters

Juncker is the democratic choice to head the EU commission

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Jean-Claude Juncker with Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, who is pushing his candidacy to become EU commission president. Photograph: Pool/Getty Images

When proposing a candidate for the EU commission president, the Lisbon treaty instructs the European council to "take into account the elections to the European parliament" and states that the commission president "shall be elected by the European parliament" ([Report](#), 28 May). When the EU governments added these words to the treaty, it was widely seen as a significant break from the past, as from now on the choice of the most powerful executive office in the EU would be done in a more open and democratic way. We find it disingenuous to claim, as some heads of government have done, that these treaty changes have no meaning. They believe that as heads of states and governments they have the right to choose the president of the commission and the European parliament should ratify. In this interpretation, the parliament can veto, but not take initiatives.

The alternative view, taken by the main political parties before the [European elections](#), claims that the council must take into account the outcome of the elections. European citizens, therefore, have a word to say about who leads the [European commission](#), which alone makes proposals for European laws. The first approach has contributed to the perception that distant "Brussels" takes decisions over which citizens have no control.

The second approach aims to return sovereignty to the citizens of Europe. It seeks to balance the excessive power of the council by the democratically elected European parliament.

In the spirit of the new treaty, Europe's party families have nominated candidates for the commission president before the election. The candidates fought a rigorous campaign, criss-crossing the continent. There were several live TV debates between the candidates and the media have covered the candidates' campaigns. And, crucially, the candidates have argued about the direction of the EU. In short, this was the birth of democratic politics in the EU. We acknowledge that the system is not perfect. Nevertheless, this was an encouraging start, and in time this process has the potential to enable European citizens to engage with EU level politics far more than they have been able to do up to now.

We hence urge the heads of government not to kill this new democracy process at its birth. We urge the members of the European parliament to rally around the candidate who got most seats. The European People's party has emerged from the elections as the largest group. The European council should therefore now propose the candidate of the EPP: Jean-Claude Juncker. This would follow the spirit of the new treaty and also be consistent with the way the chief executive is chosen in most of our national constitutions: where after an election the president or monarch invites the candidate of the largest party to have the first go at demonstrating that he or she has the support of a majority. Proposing someone other than Juncker would be a refusal to recognise the changes in the treaty. It would also further undermine the shaky democratic credentials of the EU, and play into the hands of the Eurosceptics across the continent.

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• Surely a fatal objection to Juncker becoming president of the European commission is that he is a former prime minister of Luxembourg, which vies with the Republic of Ireland as the biggest tax stealer in the EU. For example, Ian Griffiths described in detail how Amazon and Luxembourg deprive the UK of rightful tax payments (Report, 4 April) .

It is incredible that the EU didn't deal with the tax-stealing problem decades ago. Instead it has expanded geographically and the European commission has expanded its activities outside its competence while letting the tax problem grow. The EC needs to come up with proposals for fixing it now – Juncker is not the person to lead it in this effort.

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