

The EU in Crisis. Merkel for President?

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EU Prime Ministers [met last week-end](#) to try to fill the key EU posts of President of the Commission, President of the Council, President of the Central Bank, and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. They failed miserably, agreeing only to kill off the candidacies of European Parliament Spitzenkandidaten Manfred Weber (EPP), Dutch socialist Franz Timmermans and the Danish liberal Margrethe Vestager.

Insiders joked the leaders couldn't even agree on what they disagreed on. Leo Varadkar opined it was easier to elect a Pope. Jean-Claude Juncker noted with some conceit that "it appears I'm not that easy to replace." EU Prime Ministers like to keep decisions on the top jobs to themselves, and are not about to outsource that decision to the European Parliament, or indeed to the European peoples who elected that Parliament.

They meet again this week-end ahead of the opening session of the European Parliament which must approve their choice for Commission President, but with no guarantee they will succeed in moving the process any further forward. The complex series of compromises required to achieve an acceptable mix of ideological, party, nationality, personality, and gender balances may well continue to elude them. And yet the EU, confronted by Trump, trade wars, and Brexit, needs strong and capable leadership now more than ever before.

As the largest party in the Parliament, the EPP consider it their right to nominate the next President of the Commission even if their Spitzenkandidat, Manfred Weber is rejected. [Politico has a rundown on 9 potential alternative centre right candidates](#) for the job. All have their pluses and minuses but none seem to command majority support. For some, it is simply the wrong time to switch from their current positions. But how about a centre right candidate not mentioned by Politico: Angela Merkel?

Merkel has lost her position as leader of the German CDU and will not be seeking re-election as Chancellor in 2021 at the latest. She is effectively a "lame duck" Chancellor and may just be happy to retire from public office at that stage. She will be 65 shortly, but is by no means the oldest of the potential candidates mentioned. Could she be persuaded that the EU needs someone of her stature to deal with the challenges posed by Trump, trade wars, Iran, climate change, immigration, refugees, Brexit, and EU and Eurozone development post Brexit?

At least she would have the authority and the relationships to build a consensus on key issues, even if her hallmark has often been her slow, cautious and incremental approach to policy making. In an Era of Trump and Boris Johnson, the rise of the far right in Europe and the challenges of climate change for the world, the EU could do worse. There are not many adults left in the room at G7 and G20 leaders meetings, and the EU needs someone who can command the respect of Trump, Putin, Xi Jinping, Abe, Modi, and Bolsonaro et al, not to

mention Macron, Johnson, Conte and Sánchez within the EU.

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