

Espresso.Insight

No. 03/2024

July 20, 2024

What Can We Expect from von der Leyen's Second Mandate?

—

Besar Görgi



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES

Group for Legal and Political Studies

is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit public policy organization based in Prishtina, Kosovo.

Our mission is to conduct credible policy research in the fields of politics, law and economics and to push forward policy solutions that address the failures and/or tackle the problems in the said policy fields.

legalpoliticalstudies.org

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM VON DER LEYEN'S SECOND MANDATE?

By: Besar Gërgi - Research Fellow at Group for Legal and Political Studies

The European Union just underwent legislative elections that shook the entire continent. Its reverberations are still being felt in countries like France that [called snap elections](#) as a direct result of 9 June and is yet to form a new government. Yet, consistent with [GLPS's projections](#), the center held – although with a slightly diminished majority – while the far-right has made sizeable gains. So far the biggest winner of these results is Ursula von der Leyen who was just [voted by the European Parliament for a second mandate](#). The reappointment is no small feat for von der Leyen, as the first woman president of the Commission and now the first post-Lisbon president to exercise two mandates. This Espresso Insight will present a short recapitulation of her first mandate and offer some predictions on her second mandate.

Von der Leyen Commission 1 (2019-2024)

For Kosovo, von der Leyen's first mandate was marked by three major events: a. the financial & vaccine support during the COVID-19 pandemic; b. the New Growth Plan and c. Continuation of the dialogue under the leadership of Borrell & Lajcak. Let's quickly explore each of these themes.

Financial & Vaccine Support during COVID-19

The New Commission's first test arrived barely months into the new mandate, as the world was stuck by the COVID-19 virus. Brussels immediately drew plans for common action both for the EU and its aspiring members. Von der Leyen's legacy here is mixed as many experts have credited her steady leadership during the challenging pandemic times, while others have questioned her [intrusive & hyper-centralized style of control](#). With regards to the Western Balkans, the Commission rolled out a [program of financial support of up to EUR 3.3 billion](#) for the region that helped to ease the burden on public finances. Later, it also assisted the region's governments in [acquiring vaccines](#) for their populations. These two policies, beyond merely assisting the region, are also a testament to EU's unshaken dedication to the Western Balkans even in the most challenging times.

Growth Plan

[The New Growth Plan](#) is one of the flagship initiatives of the von der Leyen Commission for the Western Balkans. The facility aims to promote fundamental reforms in the EU integration path. One of the main goals is the precipitation of the convergence of the living standards of the region with that of the EU. The total value allocated for the whole Western Balkans is around EUR 6 billion, 945 million of which will be dedicated to Kosovo – the largest share in terms of per capita funds. This investment program started as a personal initiative of Ursula von der Leyen, and many have credited her [personal support](#) for its smooth approval, especially considering that it was passed at the end of their mandate. Therefore, her reelection may be regarded as a positive sign for the continuation of the political support behind the program.

Dialogue in its fourth Commission

Borrell's and Lajcak's mandate of mediation in the dialogue was met with deep skepticism in Kosovo, not the least because they both [originate from non-recognizing member states](#). As discussed above, Kallas' appointment to the head of European External Action Service (EEAS) is welcome news for Kosovo. Contrary to Borrell, she originates from a recognizing country, has had multiple meetings with the Kosovar leadership, and as a Baltic stateswoman

understands the Russian-influenced hybrid threats much better than her predecessor. Another importance attached to her new role is the fact that Ms. Kallas will be decisive in the appointment of the next EU/SR for the dialogue. [All three names under consideration](#) – Finnish Pekka Haavisto, Danish Peter Sorensen, and Slovenian Borut Pahor – come from recognizing countries and would represent an upgrade to the existing structure. Therefore whoever replaces Lajcak, is well positioned to return some much-needed balance to the dialogue in tandem with Kallas' term.

Conclusions

It is difficult to predict the second mandate of the von der Leyen Commission as a College of Commissioners is yet to be formed. However, we can safely assume that the support for the Growth Plan and the normalization process will continue. It is also emboldening to see enlargement given a special attention in both the [Strategic Agenda 2024-2029](#) and the [Political Guidelines](#). Ultimately, the success of both the region's accession and the Kosova-Serbia dialogue is tied to Ukraine's fate. Should the current war end in favorable terms to Kyiv, a new window for accession similar to the 2004 'Big Bang Enlargement' seems feasible. Additionally, all war-mongers would comprehend that in 21st century Europe wars of aggression will not succeed. That would most certainly incentivize regional countries to cooperate and resolve bilateral issues decidedly. However, if Ukraine were to lose the war, its accession would be stalled – probably pulling the plug on the Western Balkans as well – and agents of chaos in the region would be emboldened to embark on militaristic adventures.

Ultimately, Ukraine will be the top priority of the von der Leyen 2 Commission and any other decision-maker in the West. But that should not demoralize the Western Balkans; on the contrary, the end of the war is likely to create a positive momentum for the continent. The new EU institutional leadership faces an uphill battle with war in the continent and discontent in the Union. However, a feasible enlargement process, coupled with courageous reform agenda represents the best hope for the region today. Let's hope von der Leyen 2 Commission will be up to the task!

Espresso.Insights

Espresso.Insights are aimed at decoding the policy research of our Fellows to a broader audience. Espresso.Insights present short summary of analysis and information that help readers and policy-makers in particular, to understand the relevant research, as they suggest possible policy options and argue for certain path of action. Aiming to intensify the debate about policy issues and general public concerns, Espresso.Insights will, in addition, serve as gears to aid an informed decision-making process.



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES