

The next President of the European Council and High Representative for Foreign Affairs: a final look at the candidates

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The European Council will meet on 16 July with the aim of deciding who will replace Herman Van Rompuy as President of the European Council and Catherine Ashton as the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs. [Jon Worth](#) takes a final look at the candidates for each role. He notes that while it is anticipated a centre-left candidate will take the position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and a centre-right candidate will become the new European Council President, there are bound to be a few surprises in terms of the actual nominees.



As members of the European Council look forward to their next meeting on Wednesday 16 July, one of their major tasks is to come up with names to succeed Herman Van Rompuy as [President of the European Council](#), and Catherine Ashton as the EU's [High Representative for Foreign Affairs](#).

With [Jean-Claude Juncker](#) finally appointed as President of the European Commission today, the emphasis is now on deciding the other two roles, seeking a balance of geography, party politics and gender. In 2009 the roles were agreed as a package and then, as now, the name of the Commission President was known ahead of the other two positions.

However the short term pressure is greater to find a name for the High Representative position as s/he is also a member of the European Commission, and hence needs to fit into Juncker's planning for his term. Indeed EUObserver is even [reporting](#) that the European Council may only decide a name for this position, and leave the President of the European Council decision to the autumn.

Both positions are appointed by a [Qualified Majority](#) of the members of the European Council, yet with the High Representative position also needing the approval of the European Parliament as part of the Parliament's procedure to approve the entire European Commission. The High Representative can serve a five year term, with no renewal limit, while the President of the European Council is appointed for a term of two and a half years, renewable once.

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

The centre-left, having lost the European Parliament elections, and hence having to accept Juncker as President of the European Commission, have been swift to [put forward](#) Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini for the post. There are two barriers to her nomination – her relative inexperience of the highest level of foreign affairs (she has been Foreign Minister in Italy for only 5 months), and opposition from Baltic states to her nomination, viewing her as not adequately understanding of their predicament having made her first overseas trip as a Foreign Minister to



Herman Van Rompuy, Credit: European People's Party (CC-BY-SA-3.0)

Russia.

Catherine Ashton also lacked experience of Foreign Affairs before taking up her post in 2009, so Mogherini's lack of experience will count against her in light of the problems Ashton has faced. The centre-left has few other viable candidates to put forward, although the 2009 case might illustrate that this is no barrier. Names like [Frans Timmermans](#) or [Pierre Moscovici](#) could be in the frame, but geography and gender counts against them.

[Kristalina Georgieva](#), currently Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, could be a possible compromise candidate, and it is thought that Juncker would also favour her. With a background in international organisations, and a Bulgarian national, she has been an efficient Commissioner for the past five years and would be ideal to ensure the European External Action Service is administratively and organisationally strengthened. However, she leans to the right, and the Party of European Socialists would hence demand concessions elsewhere.

Among more classically centre-right nominees, Polish Foreign Minister [Radek Sikorski](#) is the leading name. Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2007, and a leading character in the normalisation of Polish-EU relations, he would bring clout and experience to the job. However his abrasive and outspoken comments, his ability to outshine other Foreign Ministers, and his recently [leaked comments](#) about the United States and the UK may count against him. His nomination would also ultimately mean the centre-right would not get the President of the European Council position.

President of the European Council

Considering the extent to which Herman Van Rompuy developed his role, and the importance of the European Council since the financial crisis, the debate about the new nominee for this position has been rather subdued of late.

With the centre-left aiming for the High Representative position, and with the European Council still largely dominated by centre-right politicians, the centre-right should be in pole position to get its way here. But for that they would need a viable candidate, and there is no clear front runner. Former Finnish Prime Minister [Jyrki Katainen](#), already nominated to be Finland's Member of the European Commission, could make the step up to the European Council. [Valdis Dombrovskis](#) from Latvia, although less known than Katainen, could also be a possibility as he is also from a member party of the European People's Party, and is also Latvia's likely nominee for Commissioner. When EU top jobs are mentioned, Irishman [Enda Kenny's](#) name is never too far away, but he has repeatedly stated that he sees his future in Irish politics.

Two former liberal Prime Ministers – [Andrus Ansip](#) from Estonia, and [Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#) from Denmark – could be possible compromise candidates. The more understated and consensual Ansip would bring less baggage than the more abrasive and confident Rasmussen, who has recently ended his term as NATO Secretary General. The name of current Danish Prime Minister [Helle Thorning-Schmidt](#) has also been in the frame for EU top jobs for months – initially for President of the European Commission, and now potentially for President of the European Council. It remains unknown if she would wish to leave Danish politics, and her nomination would only be realistically possible if the Party of European Socialists abandons efforts to push a candidate for the High Representative position.

So that is the state of play, in as far as we know it, ahead of Wednesday's showdown. If 2009 is any precedent the criteria will hold, but the actual nominees themselves will throw up some surprises. Let the games begin!

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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