



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

The race for the job has begun - what factors will shape the future leadership in Brussels?



In the next year, we should not expect a particularly great effort, significant decisions, or top executive leadership from the institutions of the European Union.

They have already entered the year leading up to the elections for the European Parliament and the transfer of functions, which happens in Brussels every five years.

Since April 1, the selection of candidates for the European elections, which take place within the parties at the national level as part of the electoral procedure for the European elections in the spring of 2024, has been under way.

It is also a formal introduction to the campaign for the redistribution of high European positions. The pretenders are thinking about their future positions, and their current holders are planning to hold their positions, or move to other influential positions.

The EU bureaucratic and political apparatus, which controls 32,000 officials in the European Commission alone, is already in pre-election mode.

This leaves little room for the EU to function in full force. The EU's decisions and moves in the next year will be influenced by pre-election calculations more than the creation and implementation of policies.

Where are the current bosses moving?

At the highest levels of the Brussels administration, the main question has been where would the careers of the current bosses go? And who would take their influential functions?

The focus of media speculation has been the departure of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to the post of NATO Secretary General.

Her background as German defence minister seems to be the most significant asset for a possible move to NATO.

For some, it is also her main handicap, bearing in mind the not very convincing results in strengthening Germany's military potential during her tenure in Angela Merkel's government.

At the same time, the German media speculate that in the race for the most important position in NATO, the German conservative politician could have strong competition in Spanish Prime Minister Pedro González and British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

Ms. Von der Leyen, has bad timing if she really wants the NATO position because it will be vacant in October, which would mean that she would have to step down as president of the European Commission at least half a year before the end of her mandate, which has not been the practice until now.

However, her most important recommendation is, apart from her previous office, the similarity of her positions with the positions of the US in terms of common defence strategies, both towards Europe, with the Ukrainian crisis at the centre, and globally.

Her recent joint trip to China with French President Emmanuel Macron was an opportunity to demonstrate a tougher European attitude towards Beijing than the attitude of a chief guest from Paris.

In anticipation of her departure, whether to NATO or elsewhere, the President of the

European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, has been mentioned as one of the aspirants for Mrs. Von der Leyen's current position.

Beaten paths for advancement

Ms. Metsola, with her personal energy acceptable to various political groups in the EU, has managed to rise above the traditional bureaucratisation of the European Parliament and profiled herself as a leader, regardless of the fact that she comes from Malta, one of the smallest members of the Union.

One of the more influential European leaders to show support for Ms. Metsola's engagement, Mark Rutte, the liberal long-time prime minister of the Netherlands, has also been the subject of rumours. Apparently, he wants the top job in NATO, although he has said he had no intention of changing jobs.

One of the more important positions in the Brussels administration, although not as powerful as membership or leadership in the European Commission, will also be vacant in a year - the position of head of the European External Action Service, the first EU diplomat.

Spanish diplomat Josep Borrell (76) will most likely hand over that position to one of the current heads of diplomacy of one of the more influential EU members.

He came to office in Brussels from the position of the head of diplomacy in Spain, which was also the case with his predecessor Federica Mogherini, who moved to Brussels in 2014 from the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy.

Ukraine and China criteria for

future leadership

The construction of the new top of the bureaucratic pyramid in Brussels will be different from all the previous ones, including the one in 2019, when the current management set was formed.

Its future will be dominantly influenced by the tectonic disturbance brought about by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Personnel decisions at the top of the Brussels administration will pass through the filter of their ability to cooperate with the closest partners, primarily NATO, in implementing support for Ukrainian efforts to defend the country and its subsequent reconstruction.

The EU will be focused on global crises and its role in solving them more than in 2019, when it last elected its leaders.

In this regard, relations with China, but also with Iran and the Middle East, will define the conditions for obtaining the most responsible jobs in the Union's administration.

The campaign for those positions has already started, even if only at rumour level, but in the next year it will still be a priority for influential European parties and their leaders.

During that time, we should not expect great international engagement and enthusiasm from the EU.

In a situation where it opposes Russian aggression, implements sanctions against the Kremlin, and keeps its members united in support of Ukraine, it will be more than enough to maintain the achieved level of its engagement and unity. Anything beyond that, in a pre-election year, would be a success.

