

LETTERS

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Political leaders must do more to ensure gender balance

The results of the European Parliament mid-term elections last week reveal that this institution still has a long way to go for gender parity. As you pointed out in your editorial last week ("Parliament fails the gender test", 19-25 January), the Parliament will once again be chaired by a man, and the number of women among its vice-presidents (only three out of 14) has dropped to the level of 2004, undermining the progress made in recent years.

In 2009, European voters sent a clear message in support of parity democracy: the number of women MEPs increased by five percentage points, to 35%. Two and half years later, the unwillingness of the political groups of the Parliament to do their share, by ensuring the election of women in internal leadership posts, means that this message has not been heard.



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 35% are women, but few make it to the top. EP

The backlash on parity democracy in the Parliament is worrying, as the EU decision-making bodies need democracy and transparency more than ever. Citizens' trust in the capacity of these institutions to listen to their voices is fading, and economic and social challenges will not be solved to the benefit of all women and men if decision-making

bodies are not representative of their concerns.

The European elections in 2014 are the next opportunity for our political leaders to get the gender balance right. For this to happen, political parties must ensure that women and men are equally placed in national electoral lists.

The political groups of the Parliament must, in their

turn, commit themselves to putting up both women and men as candidates for internal leadership posts. Finally, the debate on binding measures for gender balance within European institutions needs to be reopened, now.

Cécile Gréboval

Secretary-general
European Women's Lobby
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Where are the Socialist women in leading posts?

You wrote last week in your editorial that women are poorly represented in senior positions in the European Parliament ("Parliament fails the gender test," 19-25 January).

In the Parliament's women's committee we have adopted several resolutions calling for targets and quotas for women in industry's top jobs.

Although I would naturally like to see more women occupying such posts, I believe that quotas denigrate the role of women in the workplace. I and the group to which I belong, the European Conservatives and Re-

formists, have often been attacked by Socialists for this position. Given the left's strength of feeling on the matter, I would have expected Martin Schulz – until recently, the leader of the Socialist grouping – to have seized the opportunity presented by his election to the presidency of the Parliament, by placing some women at the top of his cabinet, staff personally appointed by him.

Unfortunately, a glance down the list of his special advisers shows that he is not practising what his group has preached for all these years. Men hold all of the top

jobs, including the posts of head and deputy head of cabinet and spokesperson. There are far more men in senior positions than women, and overwhelmingly more women in assistant

positions than men.

The Socialists may like to remember this the next time they get on their high horse.

Marina Yannakoudakis MEP
Brussels

Corrections

• A book review of "Why leaders lie" ("For the people, despite the people," 12-18 January) suggested that the decision to name and shame the worst managers of EU money was made by the European Court of Auditors. The decision was made by the European Commission.

• Martin Schulz's bookshop ("A presidential welcome", *Entre Nous* 19-25 January) is in Würselen.

• The European Parliament leadership page (19-25 January) contained a number of errors. A corrected and updated version of the page is printed opposite (page 13).

competencies in economic governance.

I think it is reasonable to assert that the Barroso II college of commissioners is navigating in the most turbulent waters of European integration ever. We live in unprecedented times and comparisons with a supposed Commission 'golden age' in days gone by are fatuous. The Commission is required to lead in a number of fundamental areas. It proposes legislation, it is the guarantor of the Community interest, it upholds European values and it is the defender *erga omnes* of the Community method. Small states in the EU look to the Commission to secure their interests. Citizens, businesses and regions count on the Commission to invest in Europe's future through the Community budget.

In all these areas and more, the Commission – and all of its members – are delivering. No institution is perfect and all who serve the European interest in current circumstances need to be accountable for the decisions they take. Perhaps, therefore, some in the Brussels beltway might do well to listen to the words of a former Brazilian president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who declared that "Brussels" is an anchor of reason in today's crazy world.

Self-flagellation by Brussels insiders is sad and unfair. Exceptional times call for exceptional responses. History will, I believe, record that it was the Commission during this time that decisively and skilfully contributed to navigate the ship to safer waters. This story ain't over yet.

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