

Yes, Mrs President?

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Gender equality is being taken increasingly seriously in the hunt for a new European Union president. Ahead of next week's summit to appoint the new full-time chair of the European Council, the Schuman Foundation promoting European ideas is sounding out public opinion. In its website, it includes one woman, the former Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, among five candidates.

Analyst Piotr Kaczynski at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels ticked off some of the points in her favour:

"Vaira Vike-Freiberga is an excellent negotiator, she speaks the languages, she is the leader, she is the natural leader, she is widely respected across the Union. She is one of these few newer member states' politicians who are trying to make (an) international career."

The former Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik is bidding for the EU's first foreign policy High Representative post with boosted power and profile. Another name mentioned for this post is Anna Diamantopoulou, the Greek Minister for Education, and a former EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs.

For all its talk of gender parity goals, the European Parliament and Commission both have men in the driver's seat.

Myria Vassiliadou at the European Women's Lobby said:

"If you have any other category, any other group where 52% of the population is represented in, I don't know 20 or 30% of the jobs, sometimes 3% of the jobs, you do something about it. Why not when it comes to women?"

Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso is well short of the number of women he wants in the next EU executive college. So far, only three member states have named women as their commissioners. The outgoing Commission's high point was ten out of 27.

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