

## JEAN-DOMINIQUE GIULIANI EXCLUSIVELY FOR ADN

*"The Paris-Berlin axis is strong and will continue to be functional and to deliver. It was the French President, Emmanuel Macron who brought Ursula von der Leyen's name to the table which is a sign that the two sides are willing to work together," says the President of the Robert Schuman Foundation*

by **Genç Mlloja**  
SENIOR DIPLOMATIC EDITOR

"Generally speaking, von der Leyen is not at all against the idea of enlargement to the Western Balkans - on the contrary, she fully supports the idea of opening the talks - but she also recognises that there still has to be done a lot within the EU and also in the potential new member states before full accession to the EU will be possible," has said Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schuman Foundation, a reference research centre on the European Union and its policies.

In an exclusive interview with Albanian Daily News

focusing on the election of Ursula von der Leyen, a German conservative, as the next president of the executive EU Commission, Mr. Giuliani, Special Advisor to the European Commission (2008-2010), Maitre de Requetes, for the Council of State, Director of the Cabinet of President of the French Senate, Mr. Rene Monory (1992-1998) and Director within the General Management of Taylor Nelson Sofres (1998-2001), insisted that the opening of the talks depends on the member States, not the EU Commission. "The Western Balkan

countries have to convince their partners that they are ready for EU membership."

Albania and North Macedonia expect to get an opportunity for the opening of the EU accession talks next October.

According to Mr. Giuliani, Ursula von der Leyen is the right person in the position of president of the executive EU Commission. "Her implication in foreign and defense policies is good news for Europe as one of its major challenges will be to gain more influence in global power relations." Besides her profes-

sional assets, Ursula von der Leyen promises to be a strong president thanks to her personality: she is trilingual - a considerable advantage in the diverse Europe; throughout her long professional career she has been able to build up a strong international network which will be highly useful for her in European affairs; and third, of course, the fact that she is a woman does count a lot, he said.

In a comment on the so far reactions from the capitals of EU member states upon her election have been mostly positive, from heads of states or governments or other influential figures in Spain, Romania, the Netherlands, and also from Visegrad countries, etc. "Others remain skeptical and von der Leyen will have to prove her capabilities. Her 100 first days in office will certainly be revelatory of whether she can reach the support she needs," said Mr. Giuliani.

"European citizens want more Europe and that they have a lot of demands towards the EU. This is why she intends to "be bold and decisive" in her position as president as she writes in her agenda. She wants the European institutions to work towards these demands of EU citizens and to live up to their expectations of a functioning Union that takes action in challenges that concern the continent as a whole. In her speech to Parliament, she has underlined that the unity of the Union is one of

her priorities," he said.

Further on, Mr. Giuliani noted that the Paris-Berlin axis is strong and will continue to be functional and to deliver. He revealed that it was the French President, Emmanuel Macron who brought Ursula von der Leyen's name to the table which is a sign that the two sides are willing to work together. "The new Aachen Treaty that Germany and France have signed in the beginning of 2019 is another strong indication that the Franco-German motor is working."

Concerning Brexit, according to him, the future political and economic configuration of the EU still remains uncertain because the British side does not have a clear agenda. "Which is clear, however, is that the remaining EU member states stand united and therefore post-Brexit EU will still be a prosperous Union. Nevertheless, Brexit remains a tragedy for both sides," said Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schuman Foundation, in the interview which follows:

**Albanian Daily News: Mr. Giuliani, we are having your opinions at a special time for the EU, the Continent and the world- the European Parliament on Tuesday confirmed Ursula von der Leyen, a German conservative, as the next president of the executive EU Commission by 383 votes to 327 against.**



Jean Dominique Giuliani

# "Von der Leyen Is the Right Person"

Ursula von der Leyen Elected European Commission President





Macron and Merkel have united in struggle for Europe, commentators say

**First of all, which are your expectations from such a choice?**

**Mr. Jean- Dominique Giuliani:** Ursula von der Leyen is the right person in this position. Her implication in foreign and defense policies is good news for Europe as one of its major challenges will be to gain more influence in global power relations.

I also expect her to deliver good results because she is a very experience politician, pro-European and determined. This becomes particularly evident in her agenda which she presented to Parliament that seems serious and realistic. This is what Europe needs at this point.

**-The result of the vote was sort of narrow if we take into consideration even the abstentions. Which might be, Sir, the implications of such 'equilibrium' in her performance, and how much might her adversaries tie new president's hands in handling critical issues?**

-A part of the socio-democrats and the Greens have voted against her because of political national reasons. We also have to keep in mind that she only had two weeks to convince Parliament and she did succeed.

The EU legislative process is something very specific that requires negotiation, bargaining and at the end consensus

from the EP political families. This is not a confrontational process. There is no majority and no opposition within the EU Parliament. And the EU Commission is not a government.

**-In her first statement after the election Madam von der Leyen said: "The trust you placed in me is confidence you placed in Europe. Your confidence in a united and strong Europe, from east to west, from south to north." Mr. Giuliani, how much support can the German conservative leader, a close ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, gather from all the EU members to accomplish these two crucial challenges when the Union isn't like it was before?**

-So far, the reactions from the capitals where mostly positive, from heads of states or governments or other influential figures in Spain, Romania, the Netherlands, and also from Visegrad countries, etc. Others remain skeptical and von der Leyen will have to prove her capabilities. Her 100 first days in office will certainly be revelatory of whether she can reach the support she needs.

**-As a follow up, Sir, her appeal was "to work together constructively because the endeavor is a united and strong Europe". What**

**message does she carry with this 'constructive' spirit? And, secondly, how much would she be able to bridge the differences between the 'strong' and 'weaker' members in the Union when there are unresolved, and I might say, rising disputes between Brussels and some member countries?**

-Von der Leyen has understood that European citizens want more Europe and that they have a lot of demands towards the EU. This is why she intends to "be bold and decisive" in her position as president as she writes in her agenda. She wants the European institutions to work towards these demands of EU citizens and to live up to their expectations of a functioning Union that takes action in challenges that concern the continent as a whole.

In her speech to Parliament, she has underlined that the unity of the Union is one of her priorities. She is aware of the frictions within the EU - especially when it comes to Brexit, but also with regards to rising populism - and she seems to be determined to overcome these frictions. Nevertheless, she stands behind her pro-European values and her principles which are firmly rooted in an understanding of the EU as a place where rule of law prevails. I do not at all expect her to abandon these principles.

**-In the meantime, do you think, Mr. Giuliani that the Paris- Berlin axis will continue to be the solid foundation of the Union, and according to you, what will be the impact of Brexit in the future political and economic configuration of EU?**

-Yes, the Paris-Berlin axis is strong and will continue to be functional and to deliver. It was the French President, Emmanuel Macron who brought Ursula von der Leyen's name to the table which is a sign that the two sides are willing to work together. The new Aachen Treaty that Germany and France have signed in the beginning of 2019 is another strong indication that the Franco-German motor is working.

Concerning Brexit, the future political and economic configuration of the EU still remains uncertain because the British side does not have a clear agenda. Which is clear, however, is that the remaining EU member states stand united and therefore post-Brexit EU will still be a prosperous Union. Nevertheless, Brexit remains a tragedy for both sides.

**-It's long time that EU doesn't have a woman at its helm. As a veteran insider in the Union and shrewd political observer what can you see in her personality**

**as strong cards in performing her tasks vis- a- vis the Union and non- European 'big guns' like the US, China and Russia?**

-Besides her professional assets, Ursula von der Leyen promises to be a strong president thanks to her personality: she is trilingual - a considerable advantage in our diverse Europe; throughout her long professional career she has been able to build up a strong international network which will be highly useful for her in European affairs; and third, of course, the fact that she is a woman does count a lot.

On the international scene this will certainly relativize the effects that the vain discourse of the male dominant figures on the world stage has and which the world population obviously has had enough of.

**-Madam von der Leyen will take up her new role on November 1 this year. In the meantime Albania and North Macedonia expect to get an opportunity for the opening of the EU accession talks next October. First, does this timing complicate the ambitions of the two aspirant countries, and secondly, in your view, which will be the enlargement agenda towards the Western Balkans of the new President and the other newly elected senior officials in Brussels Headquarters?**

-I do not expect the timing of her taking office to be an issue for the opening of the accession talks. Generally speaking, von der Leyen is not at all against the idea of enlargement to the Western Balkans - on the contrary, she fully supports the idea of opening the talks - but she also recognises that there still has to be done a lot within the EU and also in the potential new member states before full accession to the EU will be possible.

And as you know, the opening of the talks depends on the member States, not the EU Commission. The Western Balkan countries have to convince their partners that they are ready for EU membership.