

MARTIN SELMAYR THE NEW EU GOD?



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Martin Selmayr

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In Brussels, Martin Selmayr is known as “the Monster of the Berlaymont”. In Britain, he is blamed for a series of malicious leaks during the Brexit negotiations, ranging from unflattering remarks about Theresa May’s appearance to preparations for the fall of her government. How has Jean-Claude Juncker’s chief of staff earned such notoriety? And how does a law professor come to wield so much power?

Before the late 1980s, when Jacques Delors turned the European Commission into the vanguard of federalism, its president used to be *primus inter pares*, working with the other commissioners on a collegiate basis. The claret-quaffing Juncker might seem like a throwback to the days of Roy Jenkins.

In reality, however, Juncker is the most ideological and authoritarian president since Delors. He was elected by the European Parliament with a clear manifesto: a return to “ever closer union”, including a European finance ministry and a European army, after the distractions of the migration crisis and Brexit. Juncker’s campaign, during which he saw off rivals such as Michel Barnier, was highly effective. His campaign manager was Martin Selmayr.

Under Juncker, the European Commission has become much more hierarchical, with access to the president strictly controlled. This is the work of Selmayr. He combines the roles of gatekeeper, enforcer and *eminence grise* in a manner reminiscent of the Merovingian emperors of the Dark Ages, who were ruled by their mayors of the palace.

The zeal of his major-domo is also the reason why Juncker has pushed a centralising agenda, ignoring the recent spate of populist and separatist revolts across Europe. Only by delving into Selmayr’s background can one understand why he should have made it his mission to force through a Brussels blueprint that had hitherto seemed to belong less to the realm of *Realpolitik* than to that of Utopia.

The Selmayrs are by origin Bavarians, who have always seen themselves as European rather than German – except during the Third Reich. Martin’s grandfather Josef was a professional soldier during the Weimar Republic and later rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Wehrmacht. He was imprisoned for war crimes in the Balkans, but only briefly. Josef Selmayr’s experience made him useful in the Cold War and led to his rehabilitation: first as a member of the shadowy Gehlen Organisation, a CIA-funded group of former Nazi intelligence officers, then from 1955 to 1964 as the first director of MAD, the German Military Counterintelligence Service, with the rank of Brigadier. His career paralleled that of Kurt Waldheim, whose role in war crimes in the Balkans did not prevent him later becoming UN Secretary General and Austrian President.

Josef, the *paterfamilias*, only died in 2005, aged 100. His son Gerhard served as a civil servant at the German defence ministry, then in the Chancellor’s office, during the 1960s. Martin was raised in the Rhineland, once the focus of Franco-German rivalry, later the heart of Adenauer’s “Bonn Republic”. After the German capital moved to Berlin, Martin preferred to pursue a career in nearby, congenial Brussels.

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The Selmayrs are a family of public servants in the German tradition that goes back to Hegel. Such officials (Beamte) saw themselves as above politics: their administrative skills were placed at the service of an idealised state. Fatally, they conflated the Nazi state with the rule of law. After 1945 they switched allegiance, first to the Federal Republic and then to the European project.

Martin Selmayr is very much a chip off the old block. Like many Germans of his generation (he was born in 1970) he has always seen Europe as a source of redemption from Hitler's toxic legacy. In the late 1990s Selmayr flirted with the private sector at Bertelsmann, which was then becoming Germany's biggest media conglomerate. As an intern, fluent in five languages, Selmayr seemed destined for the global business elite; there he met his later patron in Brussels, Elmar Brok. In 2000, however, Bertelsmann was exposed as having concealed the fact that, as the Wehrmacht's publisher, it had once flooded Europe with anti-Semitic propaganda.

Having decided that his destiny lay in public service, Selmayr published a study of the legal aspects of the euro, with the untranslatable but characteristic title: *Die Vergemeinschaftung der Wahrung* (roughly "the Europeanisation of the currency"). This may be a key to Selmayr: not only the currency, but the economy and society must be Europeanised by an enlightened bureaucracy.

Hence Brexit, as a direct threat to this vision, is anathema to Selmayr. Though he disclaims any desire to punish the British, the leaks from unnamed sources in Brussels keep coming. Despite Selmayr's denials, few doubt that they emerge from the presidential office; after all, he ensures that nobody else at the Commission dares to leak. After resigning as a vice-president, the Bulgarian Kristalina Georgieva described the atmosphere there as "poisonous". It is becoming clear that Professor Dr Martin Selmayr is, it seems, accountable to none. The existence of such overrated mandarins made Brexit inevitable.



Jean-Claude Juncker alias "Drunkert"