

## A test for Ursula von der Leyen in Strasbourg

It won't be easy for Ursula von der Leyen to be elected president of the European Commission when on Wednesday she will be called to face the Strasbourg hemicycle, which appears fatally segmented after the vote held at the end of May and not at all convinced of having to endorse without a fight a choice that many MEPs see as simply dropped out of the sky. The German Defense Minister must secure at least 374 votes to ascend officially to the Commission's presidency, at the end of a secret ballot. Still, missing the psychological threshold of 400 votes could prove politically painful: both in terms of solidity of her parliamentary majority and, above all, for what concerns the basic legitimacy needed to preside successfully over the EU. In the last week a long waltz of meetings with the leaders of the different European political groups has revealed the attempts made by the Belgium-raised German minister aimed at building a reliable coalition, despite giving origin also to a lot of critiques for the vagueness of her political manifesto. Currently, Ms. von der Leyen's candidacy can count on the EPP's 182 votes and in all likelihood also on Renew Europe's 108. However, the Liberals have put their condition, demanding the appointment of their leading exponent Margrethe Vestager (current Competition Commissioner) to the vice presidency of the Commission, with a request to equalize her role with that of the other Commission vice president, the Dutch Socialist Frans Timmermans. As far as they are concerned, Socialists are deeply divided: the Spanish, Por-

tuguese and Danish delegations have confirmed their endorsement for von der Leyen, although the German, British, Dutch, Belgian and naturally Greek colleagues seem to disagree. Another clear demonstration of the complexity achieved by the European elective game, where the simple belonging to the same political area is not enough to overcome pronounced national-geographic faults. Both the Greens and the left-wing group (GUE/NGL) have declared they will not support von der Leyen, subtracting 115 votes from the ballot and forcing her to seek instead the favor of the uncertain or divided: in addition to the Socialists (154 seats), remain on the table the Eurosceptics of Identity and Democracy (Salvini's and Le Pen's group, 73 seats) and the Conservatives and Reformists (62 seats), the latter being initially supportive of the German candidate. And if among the former the League might give its go-ahead in exchange for an Italian commissioner in Brussels, among the latter the Poles of Law and Justice appear on a war footing given the "cordon sanitaire" deployed against them in the European institutions. During the week, the pro-European forces have in fact activated themselves to prevent the election of openly Eurosceptic or right-wing presidents at the head of influent commissions, such as Agriculture, Legal Affairs, Employment and Civil Liberties. The umpteenth opposition between European and Euro-skeptical forces thus adds yet another unknown factor to the already complex negotiation on which the election of the first female president of the EU depends.