

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

# Diamantopoulou's election ambitions signal break-up of Prodi's team

By George Parker in Brussels

Romano Prodi's European Commission yesterday showed the first signs of breaking up, when Anna Diamantopoulou, employment and social affairs commissioner, said she would be stepping aside to contest the Greek general election.

With less than nine months to go until the end of the Commission's five-year mandate, members of Mr Prodi's team are plotting their political future away from Brussels.

The European Commission president plans to return to Italian politics to head the centre-left challenge to Silvio Berlusconi's government, but insists he will see out his term, which expires in October.

Viviane Reding, the culture commissioner, may contest the June European elections in her native Luxembourg; her spokeswoman said the party list had yet to be finalised.

Meanwhile, Loyola de Palacio, transport commissioner, is to fight the Spanish general election in March, but only to put down a marker; her name is bottom of her party list, so she stands no chance of being elected.

Ms Diamantopoulou's decision to fight the March 7 Greek elections marks the first fracture in a 20-strong Commission, the personnel

in which has not changed since it was appointed in 1999.

The 44-year-old socialist will head her party's list, and will take unpaid leave during the election campaign. She is widely expected to join the government if her party wins a fourth successive term.

"After having consulted the president of the Commission, she has accepted becoming a candidate and

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT FOR COMMISSIONERS

Commissioners who have signalled interest in serving another term:

- Mario Monti – Italy, competition
- Frits Bolkestein – Netherlands, internal market
- Günter Verheugen – Germany, enlargement
- Michel Barnier – France, regional policy
- Margot Wallström – Sweden, environment
- Antonio Vitorino – Portugal, home affairs

Commissioners leaving Brussels at the end of their term:

- Pascal Lamy – France, trade
- Neil Kinnock – UK, administration
- Chris Patten – UK, external relations
- Franz Fischler – Austria, agriculture
- Pedro Solbes – Spain, economy
- Erkki Liikanen – Finland, industry

asked that she could abstain from her duties as commissioner for the duration of the electoral campaign," the Commission said in a statement.

Margot Wallström, the Swedish environment commissioner, will take on her job during the election campaign.

The last nine months of Mr Prodi's Commission are likely to be chaotic, with some members of his team planning their future, while 10 new commissioners arrive on May 1 from new member states.

Daniel Gros, director of the Centre for European Policy Studies, says it still has some important tasks to fulfil, including ensuring the smooth integration of 10 new member states.

"There is also the very important decision at the end of the Commission's term on whether to recommend the start of accession negotiations with Turkey," he said.

Mr Prodi's Commission is regarded as one of the most individually talented to work in Brussels, but less than the sum of its parts.

A number of heavy hitters have indicated their interest in serving another term in Brussels, including Mario Monti, Frits Bolkestein and Günter Verheugen. Those leaving Brussels at the end of their term include Pascal Lamy and Neil Kinnock.



Anna Diamantopoulou: plans to step aside to contest the Greek general election on March 7

Reuters