

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS REVIEW 2019

NEW IN THE MAY ISSUE

POWER DYNAMICS

While most pre-election polls didn't include the UK in the formula, the latest outcomes of BREXIT negotiations suggest the appointment of 73 UK MEPs in the next European Parliament. In addition to this news, Eurosceptic right-wing factions are aiming to become a powerful third voice in the new legislature, which would benefit liberals' and greens' ambitions to position as king makers.

SPITZENKANDIDATEN CAMPAIGN

This month, we take a look at the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaign and update you on the latest news and insights from candidates for the Commission Presidency.

FEATURED MEPS

We also take a look at the profile and election chances of some Members of the European Parliament active in the health, transport, tech and environment sectors.

OUR NATIONAL EXPERTS

Our units from across Europe in France, Italy, Spain, Romania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary update us on the latest news from the field on the European Elections.

TIMELINE

Romanian EU Presidency until New President of European Council

MARCH

MAY

23-26 May

European Elections

JULY

July – December: Finnish EU Presidency

2-5 July: First plenary session of newly-elected European Parliament; election of Parliament President and the 14 Vice-Presidents

16 July: Second plenary session; European Parliament to vote on Commission President nominations

17 July: Composition of European Parliament Committees announced

22-30 July: Election of Parliamentary Committees Chairs

OCTOBER

Commissioner hearings

End-October: Newly-elected Commission President delivers first speech in Parliament

October-November: Member States appoint new President of the European Council

JAN

FEB

APRIL

15-18 April

Last plenary session of current European Parliament Legislature

JUNE

Parliamentary Groups forming

ALDE Party Extraordinary Council

21 June: European Council nominates Commission President based on European Parliament consultation

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

Commission portfolios announced

NOVEMBER

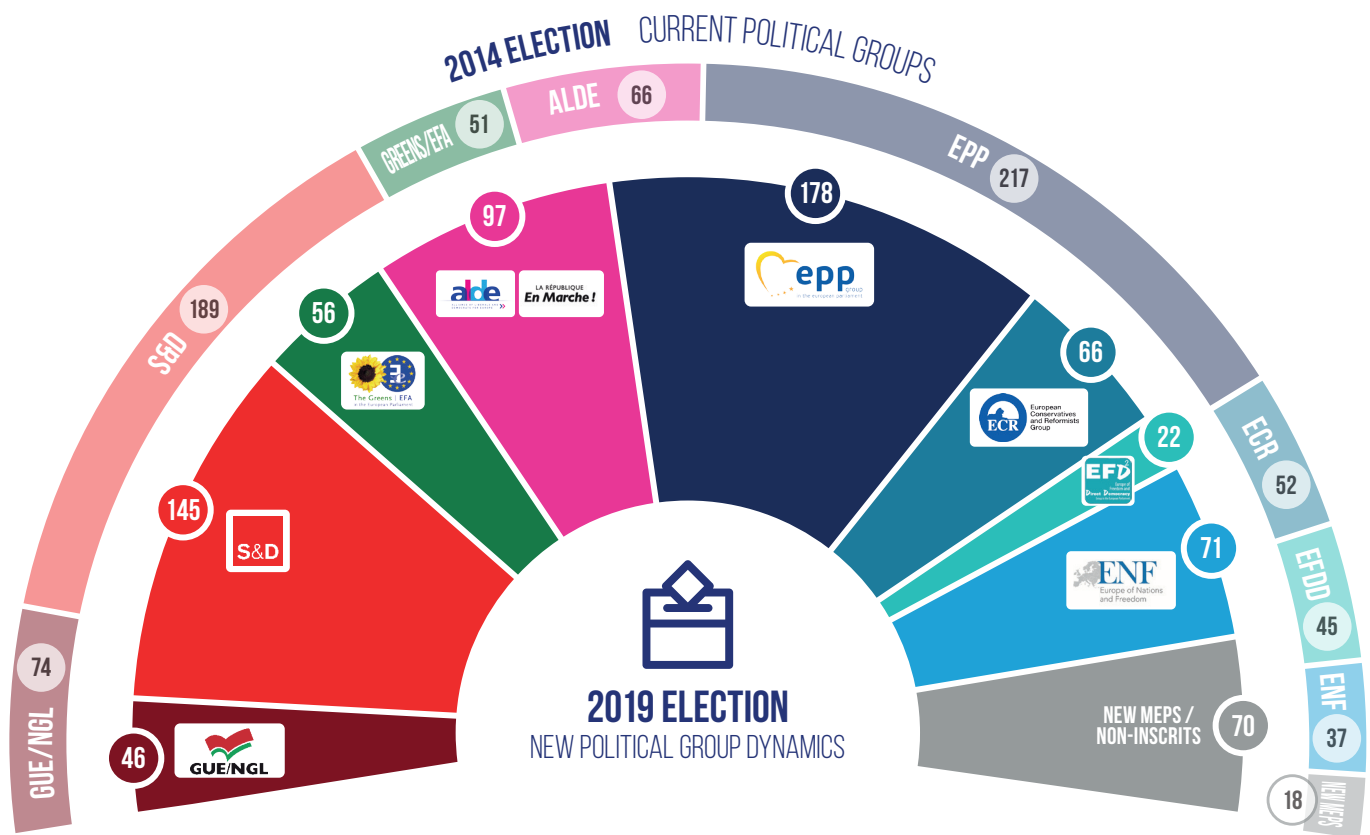
New President of the European Commission expected to take office and new Commissioners to begin their work

DECEMBER

1 December: New President of the European Council expected to take office

POWER DYNAMICS

The 2019 European Parliament elections are expected to appoint a highly fragmented assembly. Traditional centre-left and centre-right parties, already weakened in national elections, will need to adjust to changes brought about by a fortified Eurosceptic far right, a strengthened pro-EU liberal centre, a new wave of pro-EU environmentalists, and an anti-systemic far left. Fragmentation will challenge dominant positions, and nudge existing narratives and policy priorities. Coalition making will likely be fraught, and as such more volatile and less predictable for businesses and civil society alike.



Source: Poll of Polls

No more Grand Coalition

Current polls yield a striking fact: the long-established Grand Coalition between the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and Socialists and Democrats (S&D) will likely not be able to secure a majority of seats. Together, the EPP and S&D groups are projected to win 323 out of the total 751 seats (43% of the share). The EPP will likely remain the first group (with a projected 178), while the S&D will secure 145 seats (assuming the UK takes part in the elections).

Potential kingmakers

The most immediate implication of the end of the Grand Coalition will be that smaller parties will be determinant in forming parliamentary majorities, which can potentially give them more relative political weight.

The first key test will be the appointment of the President of the European Commission. Formations like the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) – which in partnership with French President Macron’s La République En Marche (LREM) could gain up to 97 seats – may become a kingmaker. ALDE opposes the EPP and S&D-backed Spitzenkandidat system. Should either EPP candidate Weber or the PES’s Timmermans fail to build consensus among EU Member States, liberals may find themselves in a strong position and suggest one of their seven candidates (including the popular Commissioner for Competition, Margrethe Vestager) as a more viable option.



Source: Politico

Right-wing and other anti-systemic forces

The recently announced European Alliance of Peoples and Nations (EAPN) is the latest attempt to unify European right-wing parties. The EAPN gathers together the Italian League, the French National Rally (RN), Alternative for Germany (AfD), other right-wing parties from Austria, Denmark, Estonia, and Finland. EAPN could secure as many as 71 seats. Taking into account also the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), right-wing parties could become the third largest voice in the next EP, winning as many as 135 seats.



Source: Reuters

The UK Factor

As we write, British voters will be called to the polls to elect the 73 UK MEPs. The new “Brexit Party” led by former UKIP leader Nigel Farage is predicted to win the largest number of seats. The Labour Party follows closely with a projected contingent of 20 MEPs, which is expected to attenuate the socialists’ losses across the EU. The Conservatives’ MEPs are also slipping and polling at around 14%. A remaining 31% of votes are spread across parties such as the Liberal Democrats, The Scottish National Party (SNP), the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Greens, and other minor parties - signalling that fragmentation now defines even traditionally bi-party systems like the UK’s.



Source: Reuters

SPITZENKANDIDATEN CAMPAIGN

The past weeks have seen EU parties' lead candidates campaigning across EU Member States, in a bid to gather support for a process which might not survive the 2019 election cycle. Most candidates have taken the opportunity to feature their priorities and vision for the next political cycle, which we will analyse in this section.

Manfred Weber 12 Policy Proposals

As the EPP is polling first for the next EP elections, Manfred Weber has been very active in his campaign throughout Europe. The German candidate's priorities as Commission President are captured in the following policy proposals:



Source: Getty Images

 <p>10,000 EUROPEAN BORDER GUARDS BY 2022</p>	 <p>STOPPING ACCESSION TALKS WITH TURKEY</p>	 <p>EUROPEAN FBI TO FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND ORGANISED CRIME</p>
 <p>NEW RULE OF LAW MECHANISM</p>	 <p>EUROPEAN MASTER PLAN AGAINST CANCER</p>	 <p>SMART HOMES FOR SENIORS HOME-BUILDING LOANS FOR YOUNG FAMILIES</p>
 <p>CUTTING OVER 1,000 OUTDATED REGULATIONS</p>	 <p>FIVE MILLION JOBS FOR OUR YOUTH</p>	 <p>DIGITAL TRANSITION FUND FOR FACTORY WORKERS</p>
 <p>CHANGE EU COMPETITION RULES IN 'SPECIAL CASES' TO FOSTER EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS</p>	 <p>GLOBAL BAN ON CHILD LABOUR</p>	 <p>GLOBAL BAN ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC</p>

The Maastricht Debate

On Monday 29 April, lead candidates from the ALDE, S&D, ECR, Greens and the



Source: EPA

European United Left groups debated on the future of Europe in front of a large and young audience in Maastricht University. The debate was organised by Politico and saw the current Vice-President Frans Timmermans and lead candidate for the S&D Group (PES) win the debate according to an online poll. While the EPP's Manfred Weber did not participate in the debate, his fellow contenders exchanged views on the topics listed below.

1 DIGITAL EUROPE

EU MINIMUM CORPORATE TAX

Frans Timmermans, Bas Eickhout (Greens) and Violeta Tomić (European United Left) pledged to support an EU minimum corporate tax as a means of increasing social justice.

STRENGTHENED EU COMPETITIVENESS

ALDE's Guy Verhofstadt repeatedly called for a proper EU internet model and a "European Facebook", respectful of European standards.

ONLINE DISINFORMATION

To fight fake news, the Greens called for increased transparency, the European United Left called for a "fake news scale" to avoid political mis-uses and ALDE's Guy Verhofstadt called for efficient regulation of algorithms.

2 SUSTAINABLE EUROPE

ENVIRONMENT STANDARDS IN TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

The liberal candidate joined his fellow MEP Bas Eickhout in suggesting the imposition of EU environmental standards to trade agreements.

ACHIEVING UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

As a Commissioner, Frans Timmermans pledged to link his mandate and his – eventual – commissioners' portfolios to the achievement of UN SDGs.

CARBON TAX

The ALDE leader echoed Macron's promise to set up a carbon tax within the coming years, which would help fund environmentally friendly initiatives.

SLOW "GREEN TRANSITION"

Jan Zahradil doesn't support a bold transition to the green economy, as he believes not all European economies can bear it.

3 FUTURE OF EUROPE

GENDER-BALANCED COMMISSIONERS COLLEGE

All candidates committed to choosing a 50% gender-balanced Commission if appointed Commission President.

MINIMUM WAGE FOR WORKERS

All candidates, except Jan Zahradil, support the introduction of a minimum wage / social security level for EU citizens.

EUROPEAN MIGRATION POLICY

While attitudes on the means to achieve it do differ from one candidate to the other, all candidates named migration policy as a horizontal priority for each political group.

FEATURED MEPS

HEALTH



Health

CRISTIAN-SILVIU BUSOI (EPP, RO)

Profile

- ITRE Committee member and substitute member of ITRE & IMCO Committees;
- EPP rapporteur on “Safer healthcare in Europe: Improving patient safety and fighting AMR”, the ENVI opinion on “Horizon Europe” and the IMCO opinion on HTA;
- Co-chair of the Friends of the Liver Group in the European Parliament;
- MEP champion of PACT, the Patient Access Partnership.

EP Elections 2019

- 9th in the National Liberal Party (PNL) list
- PNL seat projections: 8 but upward trend
- Likelihood of election: **Probable**



Health

ALOJZ PETERLE (EPP, SL)

Profile

- ENVI Committee substitute;
- Long-standing co-chair of the MEP Working Group on Health;
- President of the MEPs Against Cancer (MAC) group and one of the drivers behind the EPP's position paper on cancer (2018) which resulted in an explicit pledge to find a cancer cure in the EPP election manifesto.

EP Elections 2019

- 4th on the Nova Slovenija (NSI) list
- NSI seat projections: 1
- Likelihood of election: **Possible** (As a former Prime Minister, he might obtain enough preferential votes)



Health

EVA KAILI (S&D, GR)

Profile

- ITRE Committee member and substitute member of ECON & EMPL Committees;
- Chair of the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA);
- Very active on digital files (including interest in digital health).

EP Elections 2019

- Lead candidate for Kinal Movement (KA)
- KA seat projections: 2
- Likelihood of election: **High**



ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & CHEMICALS



MIRIAM DALLI (S&D, MT)

Profile

- ENVI Committee member and substitute member of the ITRE Committee;
- S&D coordinator in the ENVI Committee;
- Very vocal on circular economy and plastics.

EP Elections 2019

- 6th in the Partit Laburista (PL) list
- PL seat projection: 4
- Likelihood of election: **low**



FRÉDÉRIQUE RIES (ALDE, BE)

Profile

- ENVI Committee member and substitute member of the INTA Committee;
- Rapporteur on the Single-Use Plastics Directive;
- Will likely lead on high-profile reports in the future.

EP Elections 2019

- 2nd on the Mouvement Reformateur (MR) list
- MR seat projections: 3
- Likelihood of election: **High**



MARK DEMESMAEKER (ECR, BE)

Profile

- ENVI Committee member;
- Rapporteur on motion for resolution on addressing the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation;
- Heavily involved in the EP work on plastics and likely to be involved in upcoming files including the non-toxic environment;
- Balanced approach taking an industry-friendly position.

EP Elections 2019

- 4th in the New Flemish Alliance (NVA) list
- NVA seat projections: 4
- Likelihood of election: **High**



TRANSPORT



Transport

ISTVÁN UJHELYI (S&D, HU)

Profile

- TRAN Committee member and Vice-Chair;
- S&D rapporteur on “Europe on the Move” and on the “European strategy on Cooperative Intelligent Transport Systems” (C-ITS);
- Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s Tourism Task Force and Head of the Hungarian delegation in the S&D group.

EP Elections 2019

- 2nd on the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) list
- MSZP seat projections: 3
- Likelihood of election: **High**



Transport

MARIAN-JEAN MARINESCU (EPP, RO)

Profile

- TRAN Committee member and substitute member of ITRE & CONT Committees;
- EPP Rapporteur on the “Connecting Europe Facility” report and Vice-Coordinator for Transport and Tourism;
- Vice-Chair of the EPP Group and Chair of the EPP Working Group on Budget and Structural Policies.

EP Elections 2019

- 10th on the National Liberal Party (PNL) list
- PNL seat projections: 8
- Likelihood of election: **Low**



TECH



Tech

CLAUDE MORAES (UK, S&D)

Profile

- Chair of the LIBE Committee and substitute member of the BUDG Committee;
- Leading debates on Data Protection and online disinformation.

EP Elections 2019

- 1st in the London constituency for the Labour Party
- Labour Party seat projections: 20
- Likelihood of election: **High**



Tech

AXEL VOSS (EPP, DE)

Profile

- Member of the JURI Committee and substitute member of the LIBE & PETI Committees;
- EPP rapporteur on the recently adopted “Copyright Directive” and involved in the “European Data Protection Package” and the “Passenger Name Records” Directive.

EP Elections 2019

- 4th in the Christian Democrats’ (CDU) list in the constituency of North Rhine-Westphalia
- CDU/CSU list seat projections: 29
- Likelihood of election: **High**



Tech

SOPHIA IN 'T VELD (ALDE, NL)

Profile

- Member of the LIBE Committee and substitute in the ECON and FEMM Committees;
- Chair of the Parliament’s Privacy Platform and involved in the “e-Privacy” file;
- Vice-Chair of the ALDE Party.

EP Elections 2019

- Lead candidate for the Social Liberals (D66)
- D66 Seat projections: 2
- Likelihood of election: **High**



NEWS FROM MEMBER STATES



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OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Traditionally, European elections fail to attract a large panel of electors and only see the most proactive citizens vote. The result is a polarisation of the electorate, with the pro-EU almost federalist voters on one side and on the other, populists against the government. With only 41% of people saying they intend to vote, it looks like this year is no exception to the rule and the real winner is once again, abstention.

According to the latest poll LaREM and far-right party RN (EFDD group) are still ahead in the run-off to European elections, with 24.5% and 21.5% respectively. Following the two frontrunners is LR (EPP group), far behind with 14% while all other lists are below 10%.

Thematically, the focus is on immigration, which is a godsend for far-right parties. Trying to attract as large an audience as possible, the media are betting on this issue to be at the core of the debates. This was particularly the case during the first debate that reunited all the heads of lists. For almost two hours, immigration and national sovereignty were discussed whereas social and economic questions were only discussed after midnight.

Nathalie Loiseau, LaREM head of list clearly applies the “us or the chaos” strategy trying to polarise the

debate between the progressives that she champions and populists that would, according to her, put the country and the EU in jeopardy. Ironically, it was made public in the press this week that while a student in SciencesPo, she was on a far-right student union list for student representative elections.

The campaign of Xavier Bellamy, Les Républicains (LR, centre-right) head of list, has gained momentum since the beginning of the campaign. Laurent Wauquiez’s (leader of LR) strategy to bet on a newcomer to represent the conservative party appears to have worked out, preventing the collapse of the party. Should the election results not be as bad as expected, Laurent Wauquiez will be in a better position to maintain his power and lead the 2020 mayoral elections.

The Parti Socialiste (PS), on the contrary, is still drowning despite the support of its new philosopher lifeguard Raphael Glucksmann who has so far failed to create a positive momentum.



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SALVINI EMERGES AS FAR-RIGHT LEADER IN A BID TO FORM AN “INTERNATIONAL OF NATIONALISTS”, WITH A CLOSE EYE ON DOMESTIC POLITICS

Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and League's leader Matteo Salvini officially launched the campaign for the European Parliament elections, as he gathered a number of European far-right parties together in Milan including Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Finns Party, and the Danish People's Party. The coalition (which includes Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN)) aims at forming a European political group after the elections, Salvini announced.

The League has managed to consolidate a hegemonic position within Italian politics, firstly by overturning power dynamics with their governing coalition partner, the Five Star Movement. Polling between 30-34%, the League is expected to elect 25-27 MEPs. However informal Salvini's leadership style, he could find himself leading an influential political force. In fact, the whole far-right galaxy could count as many as one-third of MEPs, with significant influence over other European mainstream parties (such as the EPP and S&D) on key issues such as migration, security, and crucially, the relationship between the EU and national governments. It remains unclear however whether the coalition will work (parties' positions remain divergent on a number of issues such as migration and economic policy), and whether Salvini as a leader

can solve the inevitable paradox of an “international of nationalists”, as he put it.

Meanwhile, Five Star's public support has been constantly slipping over the last weeks, partially dented by the Democratic Party's (PD) timid recovery – which however remains far from Matteo Renzi's record high of 40% in 2014. Both Five Star and PD are now polling around 20%, and are expected to each elect about 18 MEPs.

All in all, there is a sense in Italy that the elections will matter first and foremost for their potential internal implications. Divisions among coalition partners Five Star and the League have continued to fuel speculations over the government's stability, and many are predicting a post-election scenario where the League seeks to capitalise on its public support by pursuing general elections. In that sense, European elections very much remain a delicate national game.



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LAST-MINUTE CHANGES IN LIGHT OF THE GENERAL ELECTION

Spain's attention has lately been on the general elections of the 28th of April, whose outcome undoubtedly has a huge impact on the European Parliament elections. Traditionally in Spain, voters use the European elections to punish the ruling party or the one that obtained the highest number of votes in the general elections. This year's European elections are however different because of their proximity to the general elections.

Pedro Sanchez of the PSOE has won the election with 123 seats in the Parliament as well as the majority of the seats in the Senate (139 seats). Pablo Casado of the PP has come in second place with 66 seats, Ciudadanos came third with 57 seats and Podemos fourth with 42 seats. The new right-wing party Vox, has obtained 24 seats and enters the Parliament for the first time, and the Catalan left-wing pro-independence ERC has won 15 seats.

Although the formation of coalitions, and the investiture of the new Prime Minister is not expected until after the European, regional and municipal elections of the 26th of May, the most likely outcome will be a left-wing coalition led by the PSOE and including Podemos, ERC and Compromís (Valencian party). These four parties add up to a comfortable majority of 180 seats in the Parliament (176 needed for a majority). A very

unlikely scenario, although a much more stable one, would be a two-party coalition made up of the PSOE and Ciudadanos (C's) also with 180 seats.

The general elections have also had a last-minute impact on the candidates' lists for the European elections. Alvaro Garrido, fourth on the list for the conservative Popular Party (PP), and the regional Premier of Madrid, announced at the end of April that he will run in the general elections for the liberal Ciudadanos, abandoning years of militancy within the PP. Garrido, who has been replaced by Leopoldo Lopez (father of Nicolás Maduro's opponent in Venezuela), now features 12th on the list, while Juan Ignacio Zoido moved up to fourth place in the PP's list.

According to the polls published by the European Parliament, the elections on 26 May could result in the Socialist Party (PSOE) winning 29.6% of the votes, with 18 seats, followed by the conservative PP with 21.8% of the votes and 13 seats. The far-left coalition of Podemos, Izquierda Unida (IU) and Catalonia en Comú, would remain the third force, with 13.8% of the votes and 8 seats. The liberal Ciudadanos is expected to increase its contingent to 7 MEPs and the newly created far-right Vox party is expected to obtain 6 seats.



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THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

If Alexis de Tocqueville were alive, he would probably have described the European Union as “the great experiment”, in a very similar way in which he spoke about the early American democracy. This should remind us how fragile we are and that every generation gets to choose whether this experiment continues. This set of elections has an importance that goes beyond the future configuration of the European Parliament. The EU is undergoing major transformations, from the reconfiguration of the transatlantic relationship to the establishment of new lines for the functioning of the European community.

Against this background, the European elections in Romania raise a very important question: are our candidates prepared to cope with the new regional and international challenges that are being configured? The proposals of the different parties for this set of elections have long been analysed, but what raises questions are some of the messages that these candidates are sending.

The proposals of the two main parties – National Liberal Party (PNL) and Social Democratic Party (PSD) – are combinations between experienced politicians, and what we might call experiments. Without any doubt, the two parties will accumulate about 20-25 seats

in the future European parliamentary configuration, but among their candidates there are only a few names that have a certain European experience: Daniel Buda, Siegfried Muresan, Adina Vlean, and Cristian Busoi from PNL, and Rovana Plumb (who is believed to be Romania’s candidate for a European commissioner position), Victor Negrescu and Dan Nica from PSD. The messages sent from the two camps are, in essence, the same. Nationalist tones, with a certain amount of populism, are not lacking in electoral speeches.

The most interesting proposals are those from the two new political parties: Alliance 2020 and PRO Romania. Former Prime Minister and European Commissioner for Agriculture, Dacian Ciolos, and Corina Cretu, the current European Commissioner for Regional Policy, are top seeded on their parties’ lists. By far, their messages are the most European ones, demonstrating the ability to understand the new challenges that are shaping the European future. Also, provided the People’s Movement Party reaches the electoral threshold, it will send the former Romanian president, Traian Basescu, to Brussels.



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QUARREL IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BETWEEN THE DUTCH LIBERAL CONSERVATIVES (VVD) AND OTHER DUTCH MEPS

The vote in the European Parliament on 15 April on the social security reform led to frustration among the conservative liberal party (VVD) who blamed other Dutch MEPs for being absent during the vote, which was scheduled last minute. The social security reform is a sensitive issue in Dutch politics with MPs and others accusing foreign labourers of taking Dutch unemployment benefits home.

Most of the VVD's frustration focussed on the fact that the vote would have been discarded if the other Dutch MEPs had been present. When asked for reasons for their absence, one MEP cited "heavy traffic". Last week the VVD (sarcastically) thanked the leftist parties for coming to the vote on Twitter.

With the vote being postponed until after the European elections, things seem to have calmed down for now.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS (D66): THE TIME HAS COME FOR A WOMAN TO LEAD ALDE

The Liberal Democrats (D66) announced that the time has come for a woman to lead the ALDE Group, as D66 MEP Sophie In 't Veld announced her candidature. According to MEP In 't Veld, the party will look very different after the elections, as a lot of new young women are on the list. With this new dynamic, she plans to "shake things up", stating in the Dutch media

that the EU has come to a standstill on key issues such as migration, climate change, social policy and digitalisation. In 't Veld will be gathering support in the upcoming weeks. Other candidates for the position of D66 party leader have yet to present themselves, but can be expected to come forward soon.

CANDIDATE LISTS AND ELECTION PROGRAMMES OF ALL PARTIES ARE FINALISED

With the presentation of the candidate list of pro-immigrant party DENK and the election programme of the Socialist Party (SP) all programmes and lists are now finalised. For DENK this will be the first European election. They are however not very likely to obtain a

seat. The recently presented election programme of the SP contains little surprises, with the Eurosceptic socialists fighting for a "fairer" Europe with more national sovereignty, limits to the internal market and an end to the Euro.



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AHEAD OF THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PORTUGAL IN OCTOBER 2019, THE EP ELECTIONS ARE REGARDED AS A POLITICAL TEST

According to the most recent polls based on Aximage Polling Agency in Portugal the results for Portugal for the EP would be:

- PS, the Socialist Party, at 33.6% , maintaining its current 8 seats;
- PSD, the Social Democrats, with 31.1% , which means they would gain two more seats in addition to their current six and be on equal footing with the PS;
- CDU, the coalition of PCP, the Communist Party + PEV, the Greens at 9.4% getting only 2 seats (currently 3), followed by BE, the Left Bloc, at 8% gaining one more seat (2 seats);
- CDS, the Christian Democrats, also polls at 6.8% keeping its one seat in the EP.

Below is a list of some of the most interesting new candidates.

- Maria Manuel Leitão Marques (PS), the former Minister of the Presidency and for Administrative Modernisation, who did an excellent job at developing government and public administration technology and AI.
- Margarida Marques (PS), MP, a former Secretary of State for European Affairs and former Head of Portugal's permanent representation in Brussels.

Marques is a highly reputed European Affairs expert.

- Lídia Pereira (PSD), a former Secretary General for International Affairs of JSD (Social Democratic Youth).

Electoral turn out for the EP elections might be an exception as it puts to the test three years of the “geringonça” (literal translation: primitive gadget), a parliamentary alliance of the left, including PS, PC and BE which formed the government in 2015 against the PSD who had come out the strongest party with 37%.

In the last three years, the geringonça restored wages, pensions and social benefits and stopped privatisations, especially in the transportation sector. Simultaneously, it discretely increased indirect taxes, cut public expenditure, systematically reaffirming its adherence to EU political and economic guidelines. Whilst major reforms were stopped to avoid putting the coalition government in jeopardy, the government's measures proved successful: GDP, exports and employment increased, while state debt and the budget deficit dropped.

More recently, however, government support has declined, following poorly managed reconstruction after the 2017 summer fires, the theft of sensitive military equipment and cases of nepotism.



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EXPECTED LOW TURNOUT TO BE CRUCIAL AMID A FRAGMENTED POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The campaign for the European Parliament elections in Czech Republic has thus far maintained a lukewarm tone. Big EU issues such as Brexit are perceived as something the Czechs cannot really influence; migration no longer appears as “the” political theme at the moment, nor is the debate around the Euro of interest to Czech voters. In fact, the results of the elections will be affected by low participation, as the turnout is expected to be as low as 15%.

Andrej Babiš’s liberal movement, ANO2011 (ALDE), is confirming its popularity as the first political party with a solid 25-30% of votes. Also on the rise is the Pirate Party which - polling around 15-20% - is expected to become one of the main anti-Babiš forces, together with the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) whose (ECR) popularity is slowly rising. Polling around 15-18%, the party is expected to benefit from its new pro-European stance. Public support for TOP09 (EPP) (which is joining forces with Independent Mayors) is slipping and may potentially suffer from ODS’s popularity. TOP09’s voters however are very pro-European and more engaged compared to others. It is polling around 7%. Public support for the Christian Democratic Party KDU-CSL remains stable around 5-7%, and so does the communists KSCM’s (GUE/NGL), around 5-9%.

Other forces close to the 5% threshold include: the anti-immigration party Movement P imá demokracie Tomia Okamury (polling at 4-6%) whose support, however, is slipping and may potentially be further eroded by internal rifts; and the Social Democratic CSSD (polling at 5%) which is perceived as waning and not really capable of capitalising on its experience in government.



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The deadline for presenting party lists for the European Parliament elections expired on 23rd April, which means that we know which parties are officially running for the elections in May. Parties contesting the election had to collect 20.000 signatures to set up a party list. Voting in Hungary will take place on 26th May: voters will be able to cast their votes for 11 parties and party alliances, which have been registered by the National Election Commission.

Two parties that have also been able to register a list of candidates are Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk Mozgalom) and the Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party (MKKP). Since both parties – but especially the latter – have their base of voters mainly in Budapest, it is likely that they will take away votes from other minor opposition parties, like LMP (Politics Can Be Different) or Momentum.

The radical nationalist party Our Homeland Movement was founded by politicians who bolted from Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) after an allegedly rigged election of party officials. Those who were dissatisfied with the results, the new party leadership and the sudden change of the party ideology since the last Hungarian parliamentary elections decided to break ranks and establish a new party together.

They can expect 1 percent of the votes casted in the European elections.

The Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party (MKKP) is a joke party founded in 2006, which in 2014 has registered as an official political party. Their electoral base is mostly in Budapest, therefore it can expect to get most of its votes in the capital city, which means they will take votes from most minor opposition parties.

According to fresh polls, the ruling Fidesz – Christian Democratic People's Party alliance is supported by 54 percent of decided voters, and if the elections were to be held now, a month before the actual date, 36 percent of the entire Hungarian electorate would vote for their list. This means they have a gigantic lead ahead of other contesting parties: the second runner up, opposition party Jobbik, is supported by 14 percent of decided voters and 9 percent of the whole electorate. The only opposition joint list of the Hungarian Socialist Party and Párbeszéd (Dialogue) would possibly get 7 percent of the votes, they are supported by 10 percent of decided voters. The leftist opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) would get 5 percent, while LMP and Momentum both could expect only 3 percent, which is not enough to pass the parliamentary threshold.



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FIRSTLY, GET THEM TO THE POLLS

After the election of the new Slovak President, the European Parliament elections have finally stepped out of the shadow and campaigns are slowly unfolding. Since Slovakia regularly achieves record-low voter turnouts, the focus is put on getting people to go and cast a ballot in the first place.

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the European Commission Representation in Slovakia are organising discussions and running social media campaigns in order to raise interest in the EU. Meanwhile, Eurosceptics and extremists are trying to mobilise voters by rallying against the “dictate of Brussels” and fighting for “Slovak sovereignty”. Rising scepticism and the decline of traditional parties will change the distribution of power within Slovakia’s thirteen seats (14 after the UK leaves).

According to the latest poll from March 2019, SMER-SD (the only Slovak member of the PES) maintains its lead. After anti-corruption marches and the murder of a journalist and his fiancée, SMER-SD expected to gain only three seats (previously four). The biggest decline, however, is predicted amongst the members of the European People’s Party. Due to the lower support of the Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH) and Hungarian parties (SMK and MOST-HÍD), EPP members should only gain two seats, down from six in 2014. According to the poll, SaS and OĽaNO (both

ECR) should be able to maintain their current three seats.

As traditional parties are in decline, newcomers are successfully filling the gaps. The far-right SNS is polling second (12.9%) with its anti-EU campaign. So far, they have not gone public about discussions with any European group. SME RODINA announced that they would join Matteo Salvini’s bloc and at 9%, they could provide the ENF group with one or two additional seats. The new Christian Union was founded by current MEPs, Branislav Škripek and Anna Záborská, whose renewed candidacies were not supported by their former parties. While potentially appealing to Christian voters, they have received minimal media coverage to date and do not even feature in the polls.

Two liberal parties – Progressive Slovakia (PS) and SPOLU – have joined forces and presented a common list. They will probably join the ALDE group, since PS is already a member. Currently at 8%, they could still increase their votes, after winning elections for both Bratislava’s Mayor and the Presidency.



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Below are three noteworthy new candidates with a good chance of being elected.

MR. MAURI PEKKARINEN, CENTRE PARTY (ALDE)

A career politician with 28 years of experience in national parliament, Pekkarinen, 72, held cabinet positions in three governments, most recently a short stint as minister of trade and industry in 2007. Energetic and tenacious, his political connections in Finland are without parallel, but he has never been seen as particularly interested in EU affairs. Pekkarinen has made his name as a traditional Centre party politician committed to his constituency in the central Finnish town of Jyväskylä. In Brussels we would expect Mr. Pekkarinen to try to carve a role for himself on issues related to agriculture, regional government, bio-fuels and free trade.

MR. EERO HEINÄLUOMA, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PES)

Heinäluoma, 63, is the former party chairman of the SDP and served as Minister of Finance 2005-2007 and as the Speaker of Parliament 2011-2015. Heinäluoma's background is strongly associated with organised labour. Before entering parliament, Heinäluoma was employed by Finland's central

labour association SAK. Heinäluoma epitomises the consensus-oriented corporatism, which has been a building block of Finnish society, but has recently come under scrutiny. He has a reputation as a skilled negotiator and deal-maker. Heinäluoma is likely to concentrate on finance and labour issues. He is a strong supporter of national fiscal responsibility and opposes debt solidarity.

MR. KIMMO SASI, COALITION PARTY (EPP)

A former long serving parliamentarian and a former minister for foreign Trade, Sasi surprisingly did not get elected in the last election in 2015. Sasi represents the right wing of the Coalition Party, especially on issues such as free trade, competition and privatisation. Sasi has been a long-time member of the European Council where he has been active in denouncing the crimes of communists and has supported excluding Russia. He has a very positive view of the US and its role in international affairs. He is pro NATO and wants Finland to commit to total integration to the west. Sasi is an internationalist and has good contacts with other Nordic countries due to his active and long-lasting participation in the Nordic Council. A staunch supporter of business deregulation, he is also interested in legal issues, defence and free trade.



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Below are four noteworthy candidates.

KARLO RESSLER, CROATIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (HDZ), EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (EPP)

A former assistant to the current Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, when the latter was an MEP, Karlo Ressler returned to Croatia with Plenkovic as a special adviser to the Prime Minister in 2016. A Vice-President of the EPP Youth organisation, Ressler heads the HDZ list for the EP elections and is also in charge of the HDZ programme of the EP elections. Ressler holds an MA in law and is currently finishing a doctorate on the issue of human trafficking.

DUBRAVKA ŠUICA, HDZ, EPP

The former mayor of Dubrovnik and long-standing Member of the Croatian Parliament, Dubravka Šuica is second after Ressler on the HDZ list and its most experienced candidate. Šuica was first elected to the EP in 2013 when Croatia joined the EU, and then again in 2014 at the last EP election. Her key interests include the situation of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the fight against cancer.

TONINO PICULA, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CROATIA (SDP), SOCIALISTS & DEMOCRATS (S&D)

Two times elected to the European Parliament with the highest number of preferential votes, it remains to be seen whether Tonino Picula, will be that successful again in this year's elections.

The former Minister of Foreign Affairs (2000-2003) and mayor of Velika Gorica (2005-2009), Picula has been a prominent party member since the early 1990s.

TOMISLAV SOKOL, HDZ, EPP

The third on the HDZ list for the European Parliament elections, Sokol only became a member of the Croatian Parliament in 2018. With a master's and PhD from the Faculty of Law at Leuven Catholic University, Belgium, Sokol taught law at Zagreb's School of Economics and Management.



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A QUIET CAMPAIGN

According to the latest pre-election polls in Slovenia, two seats at the European Parliament are expected for both the coalition of SDS/SLS (EPP) and SD (S&D). One seat is expected for LMŠ (ALDE), Levica (GUE/NGL), NSi (EPP) and SNS. The latter has not yet defined a political group in the EP.

Compared to the previous polls, LMŠ experienced the biggest loss, when three seats were predicted, an additional seat is now being announced to the SD, and the SNS is re-ranked.

The current PM Marjan Šarec's (LMŠ / ALDE) party goes to the elections with a positive attitude of renewal after its success at national level. As PM Šarec announced, they will lead a calm and not overly expensive campaign. Referring to the low voter turnout in recent European elections, he pointed out that citizens must be convinced it is worth voting.

The SD (S&D) submitted a candidacy list led by MEP Tanja Fajon. Among the main challenges for the next period, she highlighted jobs, climate, security and migration. The main focus of SD's campaign, similarly to LMŠ, will be the question of low confidence among citizens in European institutions.

The Slovenian Democratic Party and the Slovenian

People's Party (SDS+SLS / EPP) had formed a coalition in order to achieve more successful results. Leader of the list, MEP Milan Zver claimed that they are counting on at least four seats in the EP. He believes that the centre-right pole is less fragmented and that there is no indication that the centre-left will be more consolidated.

New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (NSi / EPP) put an experienced politician Ljudmila Novak in the leading position. A well-known MEP, Alojz Peterle, is again on the NSi list. If he manages to get enough voter support, it will be his fourth term in the EP.

The party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB) goes to the election with leading candidate Angelika Mlinar, who is currently an Austrian MEP (ALDE) of Slovenian origin.

SMC's president Miro Cerar underlined the wish for a modern political environment in Slovenian and European politics with an emphasis on rule of law, democracy, welfare, human rights and peace.

MEP Igor Šoltes (European Greens), will switch membership and will be lead on the DeSUS list (Slovenian pensioners / EDP).



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