EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Here's looking at June

With three months to go before European citizens head to the polls, we take a look at party movements and preparations for the contest.

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Round two

After announcing her candidacy for a second term as European Commission chief in February, Ursula von der Leyen received significant support from the European People's Party (EPP), *Le Monde* reports. The decision places her as frontrunner for the top EU job. A total of 400 EPP delegates voted in favour of von der Leyen, having navigated the European Commission through multiple crises like Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine. In a speech ahead of her vote, von der Leyen emphasised that the united Europe is challenged like never before, with the EPP keen to put on a show of strength as the largest grouping in the parliament. However, as the Green Deal, von der Leyen's main achievement in her first term, is turning politically toxic with recent farmers' demonstrations across Europe, von der Leyen critics are anything but than optimistic. Faced with the reality of far-right parties riding high in polls, a shift in priorities has been observed in the last couple of weeks.

Read the full article



Back to black

The European centre-right parties, gathering at the European People's Party Congress in Bucharest, are leaning towards the right, reports German newspaper *Spiegel*. Their recently approved election program aims to re-embrace core EPP values, prioritising the strengthening of EU competitiveness, stricter migration controls, and support for agricultural interests. Security and defence are also focal points, with calls for a dedicated EU foreign minister and a nuclear protective shield. Controversy surrounds their proposal to scrap the unanimity principle in foreign and security policy, however. Discussions within the party also revolved around who could be possible coalition partners, emphasising pro-Europe, rule of law support, and backing for Ukraine, effectively excluding far-right parties like Rassemblement National and AfD but potentially welcoming the post-fascist Brothers of Italy party. However, the EPP faces scrutiny over its distinction from the far right during the upcoming election campaign. Critics argue for clearer differentiation, particularly concerning alliances with far-right factions. Current European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, member of the EPP, is running again for the next mandate and several voices from the more progressive groups are calling for her to take a clear stance and rule out collaboration with the extreme right.

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Another contender

Nicolas Schmit was officially chosen as the top candidate for the European Social Democratic Party (PES) ahead of the European elections, *Tageblatt* reports. The EU Labour and Social Commissioner emphasised unity and solidarity as essential in his speech and assured continued support to Ukraine. Schmit also took the opportunity to warn peers of steering clear of far-right alliances. Many speeches have previously praised, among other things, the achievements and records of social democratic leaders in the EU Commission and European governments, with PES President Stefan Löfven labelling the election as the "most important" since 1979. Schmit is joining the European election battle with comprehensive experience. Before joining the government in 2004, he was, among other things, Luxembourg's EU ambassador to Brussels. In the 2019 European elections, Schmit ran on the LSAP list and then moved to the Commission in the fall as Labour and Social Commissioner under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen, against whom he is now running in the European election campaign.

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Batten down the hatches

After years of increasing interference and cyberattacks related to Western elections and the recent rapid progression of AI technology, the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) is updating its Compendium on Elections Cybersecurity and Resilience, writes *Balkan Insight*. The document warns that any successful attack, regardless of the target Member State, could compromise the entire EU election process – even the perception of technical errors or security breaches could severely undermine not only the act of casting and processing votes, and subsequently the functioning of parliament, but faith in election results as well. In October, ENISA published the 11th edition of its Threat Landscape, outlining how AI can manipulate systems and individuals through tactics like phishing chatbots, disinformation, and cybercrime. To prepare, ENISA has organised cybersecurity drills to test national and EU-level responses to cybersecurity incidents that may affect EU elections. The article goes on to detail specific examples in Slovakia and Greece.

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