EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Euro extremes

This week, we ride the wave of Europe's shifting political landscape. From the rise (and fall) of far-right movements across Europe to twists and turns amongst EU officials.

European Headlines is a weekly newsletter from the European Movement International highlighting media perspectives from across Europe. Click here to subscribe.



Should I stay or should I go?

As the aftermath of the Portuguese elections hit Brussels, the potential uphill battle in the upcoming European elections manifest for European conservatives and Christian Democrats. Recent events in Portugal, where the centre-right alliance barely clinched victory and the extreme right gained ground, highlight the complexities faced by the populist coalition, *El País* argues. As polls indicate a rise in support for ultra-conservative and populist parties, the European elections in June will determine if conservatives and Christian Democrats align with the far-right or stick with their long-standing coalition of social democrats and liberals. The EPP's recent manifesto indicates a shift to the right, leaning towards a stricter stance on immigration and greater scepticism of the EU. And for Portugal? Recent events, where the Socialist Party held an absolute majority just two years ago before a corruption scandal led to the downfall of António Costa's administration, highlight the growing normalisation of the radical right. With Costa gone, socialist representation in the European Council is significantly weaker. An accident rarely happens alone.

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To the left, to the left

Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders has resigned as head of government in the Netherlands due to the lack of support from the parties with which he was trying to form a coalition, *Publico* reports. The Dutch far-right Islamophobic leader surprised the Netherlands and the rest of Europe by obtaining a victory for the extreme right in the last legislative elections for the first time. Since then, Wilders' political party PVV has only strengthened, according to polls. However, not everything is running smoothly over in far-right land. Wilders first tried to win a government majority with the liberal VVD party, the agricultural party BBB and the centrist New Social Contract (NSC) party, but negotiations reached an impasse last month when the leader of the latter political force, Pieter Omtzigt, abruptly withdrew from the talks, pointing out the dismal state of public finances. Omtzigt had already expressed concerns about Wilders and PVV's manifesto, advocating for a ban on mosques and the Koran, as well as the Netherlands' exit from the European Union. For now, Mark Rutte remains in the role as prime minister pending the formation of a new government.

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The company you keep

Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo found himself defending his domestic alliances at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday, though he had intended to discuss Finland's vision for the future of Europe, writes *Helsingin Sanomat*. MEPs called out Orpo and his leading centre-right party for working with the far-right Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset), calling it extremist – a classification that Orpo rejects. S&D chairman Iratxe García Pérez raised the issue in plenary, pointing to recent scandals in which the State Finance Minister posed proudly with scissors to demonstrate cuts to social security, as well as a leak of old private messages in which the Minister of Economic Affairs referred to himself as a Nazi. García Pérez also directed criticism at EPP chair Manfred Weber for centre-right cooperation with extremist far-right parties. Greens/EFA Co-President Philippe Lamberts and GUE/NGL Deputy Chairman Nikolaj Villumsen joined in rejecting cooperation with the far-right. The main thrust of the arguments were defence of human rights, respect for human dignity and Orpo's cuts and reforms to the labour market. Though Orpo denied the presence of far-right parties in the Finnish government, he was nonetheless praised by ECR Co-Chair Nicola Procaccini during the discussion – which may have hurt more than helped.

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Writing on the wall

As the right gains more power and influence across Europe, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's right-wing government is moving to take more control over its media as well. Czech outlet *iDNES* outlines the bold proposal to put the country's public media, RTVS, under state control as a new entity. The move, partly inspired by Hungary, has been met with condemnation from the opposition, the media, and EU observers including European Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová, who criticised it as a violation of citizens' rights and freedoms and warned of insufficient investigation into corruption and fraud. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) also decried it as "a transparent attempt to turn […] public media into state-controlled media" and a hit against democracy and freedom of speech. Slovakia's media was near-unilateral in its outcry, with over 600 RTVS employees warning against political control of the media. Slovak newspaper Denník N furthermore wrote that this is in the autocrats' handbook, calling the move unprecedented. This comes with the passage in the European Parliament of the Media Freedom Act, meant to strengthen media independence and plurality, and the Commission is "closely monitoring" developments in Slovakia.

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