EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Heating up

10 weeks before the EU elections, we gather articles that do a deep dive into some key issues that will be crucial for Member States during the campaign.

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



Sweet 16

Belgian teens aged 16 and 17 won't face penalties for skipping the EU Parliament elections this June, The Brussels Times reports. The right to vote for the European Parliament was first extended to people from the age of 16 in Belgium over two years ago, meaning that some 270 000 teenagers will be allowed to head to the polls this June. So, the teens would be equal to their adult peers one would think? Only to a certain extent. Even though voting is compulsory for teens, Belgian adults who fail to show up at the polling station risk a fine between €40 and €80. On Wednesday, the Federal Government decided that this would not be the case for the youngsters. Immediately, the question arose whether (and how) the authorities should then enforce this compulsory turnout for minors with sanctions – as Interior Affairs Minister Annelies Verlinden pointed out punishments for adults cannot simply be applied to minors.

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Common E(U)nemy

While never completely disappeared since the migrant crisis of 2015-2016, anti-immigration rhetoric is back ahead of the elections for the European Parliament, Balkan Insight reports. How come? Czechia's two largest populist parties are again indulging in all-too familiar migrant bashing ahead of June's EU elections. And it appears people are keen to listen, with a February survey identifying immigration as one of Czech citizens' key priorities for the upcoming European elections. In June 2023, the Council of the EU reached a breakthrough agreement on new asylum and migration rules, praised by Czech officials for border security. However, concerns arise over a pre-entry screening procedure possibly leading to mass detention. The "mandatory solidarity" concept allows member states to choose between relocation or a financial contribution, criticized as a "penalty fee." Despite initial support, the Czech government abstained from voting due to dissatisfaction with the final version of the text. With elections looming, immigration remains a potent political tool, amplifying emotional reactions over rational discourse.

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Train Wreck

Greece's political sphere is ablaze with tension as the country gears up for the European elections in June, with opposition parties filing a motion of no confidence against the government. According to Greek newspaper *Ekathimerini*, the catalyst for this political storm is the handling of the tragic train crash at Tempe last February, which has become a focal point of contention. Led by socialist President Nikos Androulakis, the opposition accuses the government of orchestrating a cover-up. Androulakis didn't mince words, lambasting the government for what he perceives as a systematic erosion of the rule of law. His ire was ignited by allegations of manipulated audio recordings that purportedly pointed to human error as the cause of the crash. These allegations have intensified the opposition's resolve to hold the government accountable and Syriza leader Stefanos Kasselakis is now demanding the government's resignation and the deployment of international observers for the upcoming national and European elections. Despite the opposition's efforts, the ruling New Democracy party, boasting a robust parliamentary majority of 158 MPs in the 300-seat Parliament, appears poised to weather this political storm.

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Fake Alert

Deutsche Welle reports that the EU has issued a call to arms for social media giants like Facebook and TikTok, urging them to combat AI deepfakes ahead of June's European elections. Focusing on safeguarding against Russian manipulation and disinformation, Brussels unveiled guidelines under the Digital Services Act (DSA) to ensure platforms toe the line while respecting freedom of expression. Thierry Breton, Europe's digital Commissioner, emphasized the importance of these guidelines, utilizing every tool in the DSA arsenal to prevent election manipulation. The Commission urges platforms to label AI-generated content like deepfakes and to promote official election information while curbing the monetization and spread of potentially harmful content. Political ads will soon require clear labeling under tougher laws set for 2025, and platforms are urged to implement measures to mitigate any incidents that could sway election outcomes. Stress tests with platforms are slated for late April ahead of the June 6-9 elections, marking a proactive stance by the EU against electoral interference.

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