EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Shake-ups and shake-downs

It has been a tumultuous week around Europe – we're digging in to some of the scandals and controversies of the moment.

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



'Til death

"Any influence by foreign states through espionage [...] must be investigated and strictly stopped" – a bold and novel stance from far-right Alternative für Deutschland leaders Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla after an emergency meeting, while their top European Parliament election candidate Maximilian Krah has an aide in handcuffs for spying on behalf of China. The aide, known as Jian G., is accused of passing information to China regarding EP activities and Chinese opposition members in Germany, writes *Westdeutsche Zeitung*. Krah, described by one Green as the EP's "loudest vassal of China", denies any knowledge or wrongdoing in the matter. While Krah is taking a step back from the campaign – skipping an upcoming public appearance and pulling his face from advertisements – he's set to remain the top candidate, per German law, and this can only change if he loses the right to hold office through an extreme circumstance such as criminal conviction or death. Either way, he wouldn't seem likely to back out, vehemently denying any connection to the espionage and stating, "I am and will remain the top candidate." Along with Krah, the AfD's number-two candidate has recently been accused of connections to pro-Russian networks. It remains to be seen if and how these scandals will affect the AfD in the upcoming elections.

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Media manoeuvres

As 25 April marks the Italian liberation from fascism, this year's celebrations were overshadowed by a censorship row at the public broadcaster RAI centred around Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's far-right roots, writes *Times of Malta*. Critics have for months claimed that RAI has appointed figures ideologically close to Meloni's government, the most right-wing since World War II. And critics would not need to look long for more fuel to the fire, as the broadcaster abruptly cancelled a monologue on fascism by a renowned writer due to be broadcast on Saturday ahead of Liberation Day on April 25. The broadcaster's decision to pull Antonio Scurati's monologue, in which he accused Meloni's party of rewriting history, sparked widespread outrage. The leading lady Meloni herself denied censorship on her part and responded to the row by posting Scurati's monologue on her Facebook account. Even though Meloni told the parliament when she took office that she never felt any sympathy for regimes including Fascism, led by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini between 1922 and 1943, her own party did indeed grow out of the roots of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), formed by supporters of Mussolini after the war, and still uses the MSI flag in its logo. 2024 unfortunately underscores the need to never forget the painful parts of history.

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Existential crisis

In a shocking move late Wednesday, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez published a letter on X revealing his internal dilemma: is this all worth it? Sánchez is considering resigning his post – to be announced on Monday – in the wake of a corruption investigation into his wife Begoña Gómez, according to Italian newspaper *La Stampa*. Both deny the allegations and Gómez is determined to clear her name; the Office for Conflicts of Interest has already dismissed some of the claims as having no legal basis. While the ramifications remain to be seen, it's worth noting where this case originates: a far-right organisation called Manos Limpias, levelling the legal complaint after weeks of rumours amongst right-wing politicians and media – a fact of which Sánchez is well aware. It amounts to a hit job, according to the prime minister, and he is taking the weekend to reflect on whether he wants to continue leading his country amidst attacks on himself and his family from political opponents. While members of the opposition lambast him for "victimising" himself, as they say, and some cynics call the whole thing a stunt, Spain and the rest of Europe wait at attention for the next developments.

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Goodbye, Leyen!?

Ursula von der Leyen's re-election as European Commission President is far from certain, according to Hungarian newspaper *Index*. After a series of stumbles in recent weeks, uncertainty appears to be growing, EU officials and diplomats have stressed. This is quite a turnaround compared to the beginning of the year, when the Commission president's chances seemed like a safe bet. von der Leyen's stumbles – from the Pfizer case to her trip to Israel – are being reframed as we approach the election, said Alberto Alemanno, professor of law at HEC business school in Paris. Other officials considered the party congress in Bucharest in March to be the turning point, taking a turn for the worse as some in the EPP refused to support her. Further, the Commission was challenged by an inter-party initiative in the European Parliament – in which the EPP also participated – which awarded €10 billion in EU funds to Hungary, despite the debates about the rule of law. While Germany has no choice but to support their former defence minister, France is playing a different game, expressing uncertainty about the candidate. And potentially von der Leyen's biggest concern? The European Parliament, where the Commission president only had a narrow majority in 2019. If the extreme right gains ground, it would be difficult for von der Leyen to repeat this. Bye bye Leyen?

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The European Movement International
Place du Luxembourg 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

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