EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Shifting sands

All kinds of sands are still shifting around Europe in the aftermath of this month's elections – we take a look at some of the key issues of the week, including job distribution and this week's French electoral debate.



House of cards

This week, the European Council gathers EU heads of state to finalise an agreement on the top EU jobs for the next mandate. Even though the EU elections were not a political landslide, the shift to the right was nevertheless clear. Yet this does not seem to have a direct impact on the distribution of top European positions, resulting in growing resentment – especially in Italy, Dutch newspaper *NRC* reports. The names of the leaders are already pretty much set: Ursula von der Leyen again as Commission President, former Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa as President of the European Council, and Kaja Kallas, the Prime Minister of Estonia, as the new EU foreign policy chief. Someone potentially not too thrilled about this distribution? Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who allegedly was annoyed that the "traditional three parties" wanted to divide positions as usual. The radical right political family of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) has displaced the Liberals from third place in size in the European Parliament. However, this political shift is not yet visible in the new line-up of the EU top dogs. And for better or worse, Meloni's irritation matters: she is expected to remain an important European player in the coming years, with whom not only von der Leyen as returning Commission President, but also European government leaders, will have to work with.

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You win some, you lose some

Another EU leader potentially not too thrilled about the EUCO outcome? Viktor Orbán. The first official EU summit after the European Parliament elections will see leaders discuss the main priorities for the new five-year EU cycle and the decision on the EU top jobs, writes Hungarian newspaper *Index*. Two days before the summit, negotiators from the three main European party families — the centre-right European People's Party, the social democratic S&D, and the liberal Renew Europe — agreed on certain issues, but not everything is finalised. A key concern for the leaders is which Member State will secure which portfolio in the new European Commission – and this could mean bad news for Orbán. As for now, little is known about this distribution. However, several diplomats are keen to ensure that Hungary does not handle enlargement: a topic which will be discussed at the summit, as the EU initiated accession talks with Ukraine this week (not exactly Orbán's favourite topic either). Italy, on the other hand, might be appeased with a significant portfolio. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose right-wing conservative party family ECR is sceptical of EU integration, aims to secure a Vice-Presidential position in the European Commission. A potential "you win some, you lose some"-week for Orbán and his allies.

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Marking his territory

Belgian newspaper *La Libre* reports on NATO's incoming secretary general, confirmed on Wednesday by the 32 member countries. Replacing Jens Stoltenberg after ten years in the post will be outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who has long been the top name for the job. He'll leave his current post on 2 July and take over at NATO starting 1 October, easily securing the nomination after his only competition, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, dropped out of the running and with a guarantee that Hungary will be exempted from military aid to Ukraine. Aside from Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, in which Rutte has supported the besieged ally, the biggest potential obstacle will be, ironically, the United States, should notorious NATO critic Donald Trump return to the White House next year. Even here, the outlook is good; Rutte has earned a good reputation not only in European politics, but with the Americans as well. Called the "Trump whisperer," he agrees with the former US president's demand for NATO members to meet the 2% GDP commitment to military spending – should Joe Biden secure a re-election, even better for the alliance.

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En garde!

Portuguese outlet *Expresso* recounts Tuesday's first debate ahead of the upcoming French legislative elections, featuring current Prime Minister Gabriel Attal of the centrist Ensemble coalition, Jordan Bardella of the far-right National Rally, and Manuel Bompard of the left-wing alliance New Popular Front. Surprising no one, the candidates were divided on all issues, chief among them being immigration and security. All promised to reduce the cost of energy for consumers, by various means – Bompard further arguing for price controls and raising the minimum wage. Attal stood by the recent controversial pension reform, with the other two candidates promising to repeal it, though neither option are ideal. On immigration, Bardella wants to end automatic citizenship for those born in France – Bompard cited the hypocrisy in that, as well as the boost that immigrants bring to the economy. Finally, the biggest point of contention was the suggestion of limiting public service jobs for people with dual nationality. Both Attal and Bompard pointed out that this lambasts millions of French citizens. In the end, all candidates called on voters not to succumb to fear or turn the French against one another – defined differently by each, of course.

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