EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

House out of order

Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán, Commission President von der Leyen and the leaders of the European Parliament's political groups had a heated debate during Orbán's presentation of his presidency agenda in Strasbourg. Alongside issues such as competitiveness and support for Ukraine, migration was a key issue that continues to dominate public debate and is likely to dominate next week's European Council summit.

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You're not welcome anymore

This Wednesday, at the halfway point of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán gave a brief progress report, followed by reaction speeches from the leaders of the parliamentary groups. French media *Les Echos* summarises the whole debate and looks at the different points of view of the different party leaders. After Orbán's short presentation, he was subjected to what Les Echos rightly calls "a hail of sharp attacks" and a "scathing address" by Commission President von der Leyen. In her speech, von der Leyen focused on economic mismanagement and violations of the rule of law, if there is any left in Hungary, as well as Orbán's stance on migration. She was followed by the leaders of the political parties in the European Parliament. While Manfred Weber, leader of the conservative European People's Party, told Orbán how he and his illiberal agenda are isolated in Europe, Iratxe García, leader of the Socialist group, exposed Orbán's inhumane propaganda on migration. Valérie Hayer, leader of the centrist liberal group, focused on government corruption, with public procurement benefiting the prime minister's son-in-law and one of his childhood friends, "a plumber and heating engineer who became a billionaire". In response to these speeches, in which Orbán sounded overwhelmingly like an angry, bullied schoolboy, he accused all critics of repeating the propaganda of the Hungarian left, accused von der Leyen of overstepping her role and went on to attack Manfred Weber.

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Putin's protégé

Echoing its French counterpart, Romanian media outlet *digi24* describes von der Leyen's reaction to Orbán's presentation as "extremely harsh" and examines von der Leyen's speech on Ukraine. While Putin's protégé Orbán is currently blocking 50 billion euros in aid for the Ukrainian army and the renewal of sanctions against Russia and surprisingly barely mentioned the Ukrainian cause in his introductory presentation on the Council presidency agenda, Ursula von der Leyen found it necessary to do so. Without mentioning Orbán, the head of the European Commission pointed out in her speech that although Ukraine has been the target of an invasion that has been going on for almost three years, with Ukrainians witnessing atrocities, there are still people who "blame not the invader but the invaded". In a powerful historical comparison, she then asked if the same people had blamed the Hungarians for the Soviet invasion in 1956. On the morning of 4 November 1956, Soviet troops launched a ground attack to crush the spontaneous uprising that had broken out in Budapest on 22 October 1956. The Hungarians demanded the democratisation of political life, better working conditions and the immediate evacuation of Soviet troops. Within days, some 200,000 troops and over 1,000 armoured vehicles occupied large parts of Hungary.

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Duck and weave

For his part, our friend Orbán told the MEPs assembled in Strasbourg that migration is a "major burden," and reminded those present that he's been harping on this issue for nearly a decade, writes Czech outlet *iDNES*. Orbán called for stricter external border controls and so-called "hotspots" outside of the EU which would detain migrants and asylum seekers at the border until they, eventually or if ever, receive a positive answer to enter. Otherwise, the Hungarian prime minister mostly discussed the recently released Draghi report and its importance to strengthening European competitiveness with the United States and China. After the rebuttals from group leaders and von der Leyen, Orbán took a page out of the Trump handbook and played the victim: "I would have liked to talk about the agenda of the presidency, but I see that you are not interested," he said – given his failure to sufficiently address Ukraine in his speech, it's implied that support for the besieged country is not high on his list of priorities. He finally took the lame-duck stance of standing up for "peace"; notably not elaborating on how such peace should be reached. In the end, it was the rebuttals to Orbán that rang louder than the man's own words.

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Clamming up

With migration leading the conversation, as ever, ahead of next week's European Council summit, Portuguese newspaper *Expresso* delves into the debate and its various perspectives. With Germany the latest culprit, more and more Schengen members are tightening internal border controls, hindering the free movement that is a cornerstone of the European Union's fundamental rights. Eight Schengen members have internal checks at the moment: Germany, Sweden, Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Norway, Denmark and France. While Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson touts and defends Schengen, highlighting the recently approved Migration and Asylum Pact, the political groups in the EP vary on the details. The centre-right EPP and liberal Renew groups want to implement the pact as soon as possible, and for better and for worse, everyone else has an issue with it. The EPP group, for their part, also want measures to return migrants to their country of origin, while Renew, S&D, the Greens and the Left want to move past internal borders within Schengen as envisioned. On the far-right end of the spectrum, Patriots for Europe call a Europe without borders a "myth", and while ECR and ESN want to strengthen external borders, even the former stressed that they want to defend Schengen. Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas had to emphasise that external borders are "not unprotected" and highlight the varying contradictory narratives around the topic. We will see next week where Member State leaders stand.

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