EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

My world's on fire

Just when we thought last week's news of Orbán's and Putin's continued efforts to sabotage democracy was bad, this week sees Donald J Trump headed back in the White House, the German government divorcing itself and the Spanish far right exploiting the devastating floods. The only ray of hope for democracy seems to be the confirmation of Michael McGrath as Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law.

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Orange is the new whack

The US election on 5th November saw a tragic victory for Donald J Trump that will have profound implications for the EU and beyond. Trump's victory was much clearer and bigger than expected and prayed for. In its article, the Cypriot media outlet *Philenews* examined how pollsters tried to predict the outcome of this election and the challenges they faced. According to the author, this is the third consecutive election in which the polls underestimated the vote for Donald Trump. The most astonishing fact is that the former and now president-elect won all the swing states in the election, while the most recent polls expected him to be neck-and-neck with Democrat Kamala Harris. However, while these results have caught most of us off guard, *Philenews* points out that the polls have been relatively accurate in this election, as they have come under intense scrutiny after under-predicting Donald Trump's victory in 2016 and overestimating Joe Biden's margin of victory in 2020. The problem with polls is that a large proportion of Trump voters don't participate in them, as evidenced by the fact that white Democrats were 16 percent more likely to respond to pollsters than white Republicans.

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When a fire starts to burn, right, and it starts to spread

Just when you thought you could take no more negative political news, Germany's ruling traffic light coalition of Social Democrats (SPD), Liberals (FDP) and Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) has split up. According to the Portuguese media outlet *Expresso*, SPD Chancellor Olaf Scholz has sacked Finance Minister and FDP leader Christian Lindner and called for a vote of confidence on 15 January, which could lead to early elections in March 2025, six months earlier than planned. The announcement was made at a press conference after a meeting at the chancellery where the three parties sat down to discuss the future of the coalition. In a hot-tempered speech for the usually stiff, uncharismatic, and very German Chancellor, Scholz accused Lindner of having "broken" his trust "too often" and of being interested only in patronage and the short-term survival of his own party. Lindner, on the other hand, criticised Scholz's lack of economic ambition. He criticised that his proposals to revive the German economy "were not even accepted as a basis for consultation by the SPD and the Greens", adding that Scholz had "for a long time trivialised" people's economic concerns. The coalition, which has been in power for almost three years, has had to contend with marital problems almost from the start. While the SPD and the Greens support a strong role for the state, including the issuing of debt to finance public policy if necessary, the FDP takes a fundamentally different view. These differences, particularly on economic and budgetary policy, have led to this tragic divorce, which will only add to the continuing political instability in Europe in the face of another Trump term. We wish everyone out there, especially *se Germans*, the best of luck.

Read the full article



Commissioner for the people

Irish Commissioner-Designate Michael McGrath is being as clear as language allows: there is no compromise on the rule of law or the protection of journalists and independent media, writes Slovenian outlet *Delo*. "This is at the heart of what we stand for in the European Union," he told MEPs during his confirmation hearings this week. He's made his main priority the European Act on Freedom of the Media, which took force in May, and plans to establish a European Media Services Committee, reiterating his commitment to media freedom and rule of law. Echoing many others in the EU institutions in recent years, McGrath wants to make EU funds even more closely linked to respect for the rule of law, a clear message to ever-brazen right-wing European leaders, and further detailed a greater emphasis on the internal market in the future following Mario Draghi's bombshell recent report on European competitiveness. Finally, he vowed to introduce greater protections for online users as part of his mandate that includes consumer protection. In the end, he was confirmed on that second day of hearings, with more to come next week – a win for European principles that are increasingly under attack from anti-democratic forces.

Read the full article



Capitalising on chaos

In the aftermath of the horrible flooding in Valencia that took hundreds of lives last week, far-right groups are rushing to take advantage of citizens' dissatisfaction with authorities' response, writes Spanish outlet *El País*. One group in particular, Revuelta – a youth-oriented group connected to far-right, ultranationalist party Vox – claims to have reached thousands of young people in the effort to "help affected Spaniards," specifying national origin as a point of order. Extreme racist group Núcleo Nacional and Revuelta are collaborating, along with other groups, on food and aid delivery on the ground, but very much prioritising "the Spanish people." Myriad such groups are rising from the woodwork, all echoing fascist rhetoric with messaging that screams: "the proud nation has risen up to help its fellow Spaniards in the face of inaction by the leftist national government." As with many countries in Europe as well as the US, the messaging boils down all struggle and strife to an "us" vs "them" mentality, demonising the outsiders, the left, and the government as the sources of societal problems. Researcher Felipe González Santos points out a clear trend: this kind of behaviour in this current crisis can "anticipate how [the far-right] will act" in future catastrophe, of which we can expect more and more due to climate change.

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