EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Musical chairs

While the international community faces multiple crises and needs effective leadership, the biggest and most powerful players find themselves in a messy situation of jockeying for positions and political power. As the European Parliament fights over the future Commission, Trump makes highly questionable appointments and Germany haggles over political leadership, leaders are staying away from COP29, tragically neglecting the real priorities.

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It's not about content, stupid

This week and last, MEPs questioned and scrutinised the Commissioners-designate on their integrity and suitability for their possible future portfolios. According to the Italian news outlet *Il Post*, the appointment of the new College of Commissioners is currently stalled due to disagreements over the appointments of the most powerful position of the six vice-presidents. While hearings for the proposed vice-presidents ended on 12 November, European Parliament committees have postponed their votes, delaying the official start of the Commission. And while the EU desperately needs a functioning government to face, to put it mildly, significant challenges, the current stalemate, as *Il Post* aptly puts it, is not about the content of the hearings but, as always, purely political. The six vice-presidents represent different European political groups: two from the S&D group (Teresa Ribera from Spain and Roxana Mînzatu from Romania), two from the Renew Europe group (Kaja Kallas from Estonia and Stéphane Séjourné from France), one from the European People's Party group (Henna Virkkunen from Finland) and one from the Conservatives and Reformists group (Raffaele Fitto from Italy). Fitto's nomination in particular is controversial because his party, the far-right Fratelli d'Italia, is not part of the current majority supporting the Commission, and because he has been accused of misusing EU funds. President Ursula von der Leyen's strategic decision to include Fitto, aimed at strengthening ties with and rewarding the loyalty of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and potentially broadening the Commission's support base, has rightly infuriated the Socialists. The Conservatives, on the other hand, are refusing to endorse the Socialist candidate, Ribera, because of her role in the recent devastating floods in Spain, where she serves as minister for ecological transition. The current situation is unprecedented, shameful and comes at a time when European unity is more important than ever.

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Wanted: Leadership

Following last week's tragic break-up of Germany's so-called "traffic light" coalition on the same day as Trump's re-election, the EU's largest economy faced a heated public debate over a date for the upcoming snap election and future political leadership. After Chancellor Olaf Scholz agreed to face a vote of confidence on 16 December, paving the way for an election on 23 February 2025, the debate quickly turned into an election campaign by all parties. This debate reached a new climax at yesterday's parliamentary session, according to *The Irish Times*. During the parliamentary session, German conservative leader Friedrich Merz launched his election bid with a blistering attack on Chancellor Olaf Scholz, calling the Social Democratic Party (SDP) leader a "lightweight" and accusing him of sowing division in Europe's largest economy. Earlier in the day, Scholz tried to rally a majority to pass key legislation in the remaining time before the election and called for unity in difficult times: "This is about whether we move forward strongly like our partners worldwide, investing in the future and holding our country together – or whether we play one against the other at the cost of our future, at the cost of our unity". Opposition leader Merz, not known for his collegiality, had none of it, accusing Scholz of being responsible for the polarisation in Germany and calling his tactics in ending the coalition "simply unworthy of a chancellor". This political turmoil comes at a very inopportune time for Germany, to say the least, with the economy facing stagnation and a bleak future that demands strong and effective leadership.

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The "green" in green

As representatives from nearly 200 countries gather in Baku for the COP29 conference, budget and financing were top of the agenda – when aren't they? – as a post-2025 financial framework must be decided. One of the many inconvenient truths of climate change is that the richest countries contribute to the problem the most and the poorest pay the bigger price for it, for example in natural disasters and the costs associated with the green transition, writes *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Until now, the former have contributed $100 billion per year to assist the latter, but now the ask is raising to $1.3 trillion – a number that countries like Germany and the US are balking at as "certainly not realistic." But it's not just about grabbing cash out of Western coffers and it's not for nothing; there are already ideas in place such as subsidies, low-interest loans from development banks, and private investment above all, and this funding is essential to bolster access to renewable energy, repair damage from climate-related disaster, and other crucial needs. Complicating matters are Donald Trump's impending return to the White House, where he is expected to cease financial contribution – the epitome of climate hypocrisy considering the US is one of (if not the) largest greenhouse gas emitters. Icing on the cake is that the current leaders of the US, France, Germany, and EU all decided to skip the conference altogether. As ever, the hope for this funding is based on "the positive power of the markets." Lovely.

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Murderers' row

It's barely a week since Donald Trump won the election and he's already filling out his rogues' gallery with all kinds of familiar villains – even many of his own former adversaries, writes Austrian paper *Kurier*. Many breathed a slight sigh of relief when he suggested Senator Marco Rubio for Secretary of State and Congressman Mike Waltz for National Security Advisor, two relatively traditional Republicans with a respect for international order and alliances. Nonetheless, Rubio has voted against aid to Ukraine and supports a "negotiated" solution to Russia's war of aggression. The nominations quickly went of the rails when Trump announced that far-right Congressman Matt Gaetz, a man under investigation by the Justice Department under both Trump and Biden for sex trafficking of minors, would now lead that same department as Attorney General. Vampiric Stephen Miller will be back as deputy chief of staff, former Democrat and current autocrat fan Tulsi Gabbard will be the director of national intelligence, long-time deregulating Trump supporter Lee Zeldin will lead [what's left of] the Environmental Protection Agency, and migration hardliner Kristi Noem of South Dakota will be Trump's Secretary of Homeland Security. Don't worry, Trump didn't forget his new bestie, manchild Elon Musk, who gets his own department – DOGE – to reduce government spending. It's shaping up to be about as awful as we could have expected, and this EU Headlines author is glad he got out of that country when he did.

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