18-22 March 2024

I.   Political and Policy Developments

1.   European liberals kick off campaign amidst growing tensions

On 20 March, European liberals formally launched their election campaign under the platform [Renew Europe Now](#) at a launch event in Brussels.

The event featured several liberal heavyweights, including commissioners Margrethe Vestager, Věra Jourová, Thierry Breton, Didier Reyners, Kadri Simson and the European Council's Charles Michel. However, key figures such as France's Emmanuel Macron and the Netherlands' Mark Rutte were noticeably absent.

During the event, Renew Europe adopted their [ten priorities](#) for the next mandate, which highlight the importance of boosting EU competitiveness and defence. The liberals also appointed their "Team Europe", i.e. the three lead candidates that will represent the group during the EU elections. German MP Marie-Agnes Strack Zimmermann will be standing as the lead candidate of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) while French MEP Valérie Hayer and Italian MEP Sandro Gozi will be leading the campaigns of Renaissance and of the European Democratic Party (EDP) respectively. In her speech, Hayer stated she wanted to exclude the right-wing ECR group from negotiations for top EU positions, signalling her party's opposition to a potential centre-right coalition.

While the three groups formally launched their election campaigns together, a French initiative is already putting their unity to the test. Defying established organisations such as ALDE, Macron launched the association "New Europeans" earlier this month. The association aims to bring together the Renaissance party and other French, Romanian, Slovenian, Polish, and Danish parties to create a pan-European party called Renew. Unsurprisingly, the initiative is sparking tensions between Macron's Renaissance and ALDE and EDP, with many members of ALDE expressing reluctance to join a brand-new structure.

The initiative also adds to existing tensions regarding the ambitions of the liberal campaign. Kaja Kallas, Estonia's Prime Minister, recently praised Ursula von der Leyen's performance and hinted at supporting her second term bid. Kallas also stated that she expected the EPP

to win the elections and downplayed speculation about running for a top EU position. Kallas' remarks are in contrast with statements from other senior liberal figures, who argued against a second von der Leyen mandate.

2. ECR adopts 'conservative values' charter

On 21 March, the right-wing political group European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) adopted "A Charter for Conservative Values" at a party meeting in Subiaco, Italy.

The Charter calls for preserving Judeo-Christian values and highlights the importance of science in environmental policies. Commenting on the initiative, MEP Nicola Procaccini, co-chair of the ECR group in the European Parliament, stated the aim of the group was to rewrite its own constitution in terms of values "so that during the European elections, people will know who the European conservatives are."

The Charter is expected to feed into the ECR electoral manifesto, to be adopted on 17 April at a high-level party meeting. Procaccini stated the manifesto would be reflecting views similar to the EPP and he expressed hope for an ECR-EPP alliance that would remove "some errors from the Green Deal" and achieve a more balanced green transition.

The decision by ECR to adopt a manifesto is intended to dispel concerns about its political and policy positions, often seen as extremist by parts of the EPP, and facilitate the conditions of a post-election alliance.

3. Overview of European parties programmes

With the liberal conference and the ECR charter, most European parties have launched their campaign programmes. Red Flag has looked into each and developed a short comparative analysis comparing parties policy positions.

European People's Party: Focus on competitiveness
The manifesto of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) focuses on competitiveness, security and the need to shift the direction of the Green Deal from regulation to implementation. The EPP stresses in particular the need to support European businesses throughout the green transition.

Among the headline proposals:
- Promoting innovation rather than counterproductive bans, such as the aborted proposal for a Sustainable Use of Pesticide regulation
- Avoid overregulating AI, while adapting data protection and ethical standards
- Development of 5G and 6G networks across Europe
- EU-wide health plans on diseases such as Alzheimer's, dementia and Parkinson's, as well as cardiovascular issues.

Party of European Socialists: A new Social deal
The manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (PES) focuses on core social democrat tenets such as social rights and the fight for equality. It links the Green Deal to a Social Deal to ensure that the green transition proceeds in tandem with social support.

Among the headline proposals:
- Ambitious 2040 climate targets
- Cutting pesticide use based on "national best practices"
- Stronger regulation on algorithmic management and harnessing the power of AI following the "human in control" principle
- Ensuring fair and transparent medicine pricing, including for rare diseases
- Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate to make sure taxes are paid where profits are made.

Renew Europe: Reviving the Single Market
Renew Europe is the umbrella group comprising different liberal parties. Its three main factions, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the European Democratic Party (EDP) and Renaissance agreed on ten priorities. The three parties stress the need to provide a level playing field for European industries, including by reviving the EU Single Market. Integrating defence policy at European level also features as a high priority.

Among the headline proposals:
- A Commissioner for Enforcement to strengthen the Single Market and stimulating competitiveness
- SME Empowering Package
- Streamline pesticide authorisation, supporting NGTs and improving intake of low-risk alternatives
- Avoid overegulating AI, and encouraging the takeup of digital tools such as AI by businesses.

The Greens: Doubling down on the Green Deal
The Greens / European Free Alliance is composed primarily of green and regional parties. Its manifesto places an emphasis on fighting the climate crisis and accelerating the implementation of a more ambitious European Green Deal.

Among the headline proposals:
- Climate neutrality by 2040
- A green investment plan of 200 billion euros per year
- Cutting pesticide use, a ban on glyphosate and developing a "new agricultural model" to reduce emissions
- Stricter regulations on AI and crypto-currency
- A Digital Fairness Act against intrusive online advertising practices.

Identity and Democracy group: More security and less bureaucracy
Identity and Democracy (ID) has not adopted an election manifesto. Its key priorities include promoting jobs and growth, increasing security, tackling illegal immigration, as well as making the EU less bureaucratic. ID is a staunch opponent of further EU integration and of the European Green Deal.

ID is likely to:
- Oppose ambitious climate and environmental policies, and call for flexibility in the green transition

- Support traditional farming, oppose synthetic food production and pesticide reduction plans
- Call for a tougher stance on illegal migration.

European Conservatives and Reformists: The 'common sense' party

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) published a [Charter for Conservative Values](). The ECR calls for 'common sense solutions' and making decisions based on their added value for European citizens. The charter stresses the ECR core values, including free enterprise, lower taxation, minimal regulation, and the respect of national sovereignty. More details are expected in the ECR manifesto, to be adopted during a congress on 17 April.

The European Left: Curbing neoliberal policies

The European Left [manifesto]() focuses on the need to support the working class, curbing "neoliberal" policies and accelerating the implementation of a more ambitious European Green Deal.

Specifically, the Left calls for:
- Climate neutrality by 2035
- Rejecting the Stability and Growth Pact
- EU tax on the wealthy to fund investment for poverty reduction and the green transition
- Embedding the 'human in control' principle in AI regulation
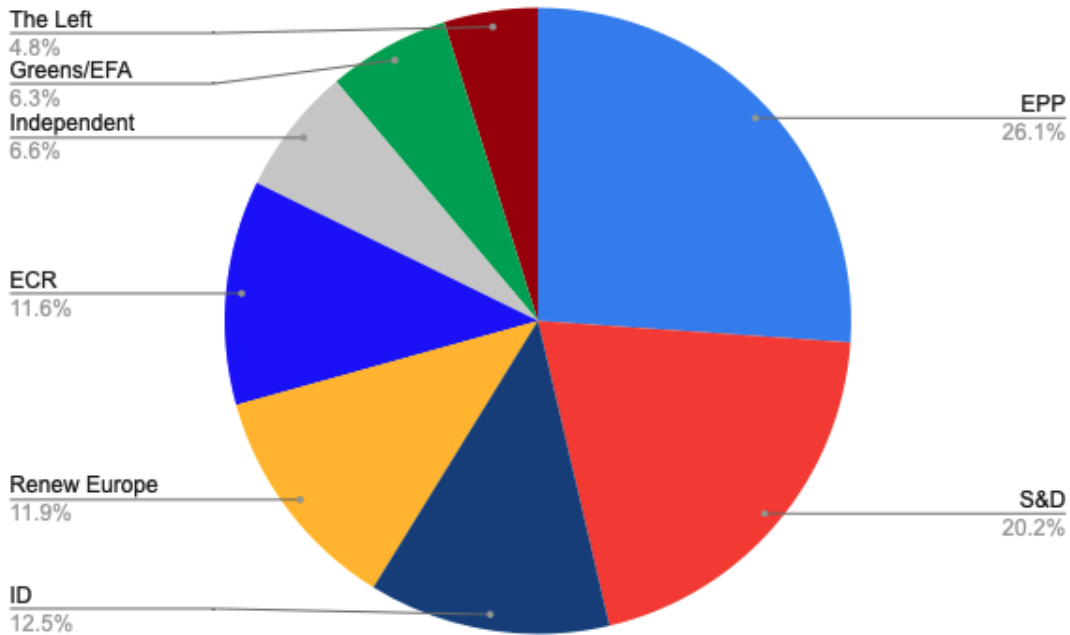- Creating a European public pharmaceutical / medical hub.

4. New governments coming in Portugal, Ireland

New governments are about to be formed in two member states: Portugal and Ireland.

In Portugal, centre-right politician Luís Montenegro was appointed as Prime Minister by President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa on 20 March. Montenegro is scheduled to present his new government on 27 March. He is seeking to form a minority administration, which would have to get the informal backing of the Socialist Party, given that Montenegro has pledged not to work with far-right party Chega.

In Ireland, centre-right Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, announced his resignation on 20 March. He will remain Prime Minister until a new leader of his party, Fine Gael, is elected, likely in the coming weeks. Current Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris, is tipped to succeed Varadkar as Fine Gael leader and Taoiseach. Varadkar cited personal and political reasons for his departure, which was likely spurred by his government's failure to secure a majority in two recent constitutional referendums. While speculation swirls regarding a potential general election later this year, Fine Gael's coalition partners are keen on maintaining the government's full five-year term, which is due to end in 2025

II. Latest Projections

The Left
4.8%
Greens/EFA
6.3%
Independent
6.6%
ECR
11.6%
Renew Europe
11.9%
ID
12.5%
EPP
26.1%
S&D
20.2%

1. **European People's Party (EPP):** 178 seats
2. **Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D):** 138 seats
3. **Identity and Democracy (ID):** 85 seats
4. **Renew Europe:** 81 seats
5. **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)**: 79 seats
6. **Independent:** 45 seats
7. **Greens− European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA):** 43 seats
8. **The Left (GUE/NGL):** 33 seats

Source: Politico (18/3/2024).

III. Key institutional milestones

Date	Event
22-25 April	European Parliament last plenary session
6-9 June	EU Elections
17 June	European Council on top jobs appointments
27-28 June	European Council ontop jobs appointments
1 July	Beginning of Hungarian Presidency
July	Formation of new European Parliament
16-19 July	European Parliament first plenary session
September	Formation of new European Parliament Committees
September	European Commissioner-candidates hearings
October/November	New Commission takes office