

25-28 March 2024

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### I. Political and Policy Developments

#### 1. Far-right leaders pressure ECR to oppose von der Leyen's second term bid

On 23 March the far-right group Identity and Democracy (ID) held their [“Winds of Change” convention](#) in Rome. During the event, Matteo Salvini, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Lega party, stated he would “never choose another mandate with Ursula von der Leyen and the socialists.” Other far-right leaders, including Marine Le Pen from France's Rassemblement National and André Ventura from the rising Portuguese Chega party, also opposed Ursula von der Leyen's bid for a second term.

The positioning of the far-right leaders is a not so implicit warning to the ECR and Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in particular. There is increasing speculation that the good working relationship between Meloni and von der Leyen might lead to post-election alignment between the ECR and the EPP.

ID parties emphasised the need to toughen migration rules and border protection, while shying away from taking a common stance on other policy issues.

#### 2. EU elections expected to weaken Green Deal

The Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) held its annual [Think2030 event](#) on 27 March. The future of the European Green Deal in the next mandate took centre stage in the discussions.

During the event, the IEEP revealed the preliminary findings of its 4th European Green Deal Barometer, which surveyed the views of 312 sustainability experts. According to the report, 68% of EU experts anticipate the Green Deal agenda to narrow or weaken after the EU elections.

Commenting on these findings, Leena Yla-Mononen, the Executive Director of the European Environment Agency (EEA), stressed the importance of cooperation between stakeholders (governments, industry, NGOs, and academia) to achieve “systemic change” in the green transition.

Alain Maron, Environment Minister of the Brussels-Capital Region, who plays a role in the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU, asserted that there was “no time for a break or a pause” and suggested that the Green Deal could be made more socially acceptable by disseminating positive narratives around the green transition.

MEP Saskia Bricmont (Greens, Belgium) emphasised the importance of civil society engagement in ensuring that the green transition outlives the EU elections and the rise of political groups hostile to the Green Deal.

### **3. Economic issues leading concern for European voters**

A pan-European [poll](#) conducted by Ipsos highlights that high economic issues remain the biggest concern for European voters. 68% of respondents said inflation was their main concern, followed by rising social inequalities (64%) and economic growth (62%). Crucially, only 28% of EU citizens believe the EU has had a positive impact on economic growth over the last years.

Illegal immigration (59%) and climate change (52%) ranked behind economic issues. The survey was conducted in 18 countries representing 96% of the EU’s population.

The results of the poll confirm a widespread feeling of economic insecurity among EU voters, which coincides with a rise in polls of far-right parties. According to the poll, most of those considering inflation as the leading electoral issue (79%) are supporters of the far-right group Identity and Democracy.

Reacting to the poll results, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit, the lead candidate of the Party of European Socialists (PES), called on policymakers to intensify efforts in combating poverty and social exclusion. Specifically, he stressed the need for policymakers to do a better job at “assessing the distributional impact of all policies.”

### **4. EU Commission releases new guidelines for online platforms ahead of EU elections**

On 26 March, the European Commission published [new guidelines](#) to help mitigate risks of disinformation, interference and online hacking during the EU elections.

The new guidelines are addressed to very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs) and are meant to facilitate compliance with the Digital Services Act during election periods. Key recommendations include labelling political ads and AI deepfakes published online, ensuring algorithms promote diverse content, and setting

up specialised bodies to monitor potential threats and misinformation. The Commission also recommends tools such as pop-up warnings to allow users to report posts containing misleading information.

## **5. Reynders to take leave from Commission**

European Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders will be taking leave from the Commission as of 25 April. He will focus on his candidacy as Secretary General of the Council of Europe. This means that his duties, related to justice and consumer protection issues, will be taken up by another commissioner.

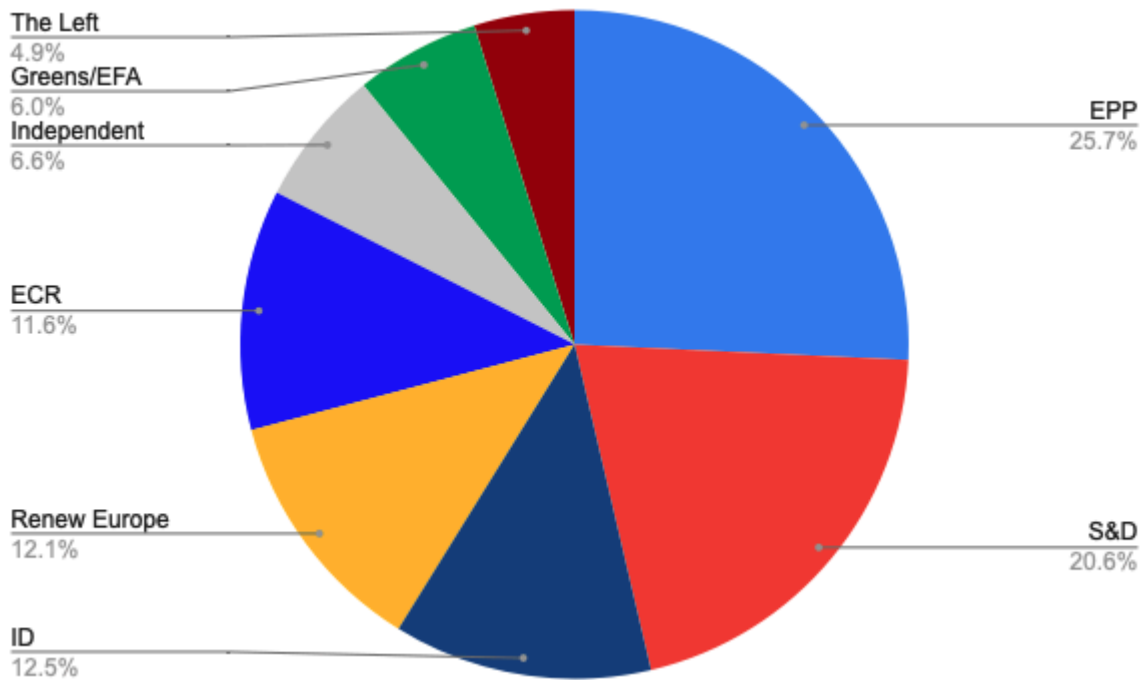
Reynders is expected to be away from the Commission at least until the end of June, when a decision about the Council of Europe's next Secretary General is expected to be taken.

## **6. Upcoming change of government in Ireland**

In Ireland, Simon Harris, the current Minister for Further and Higher Education, was appointed as leader of Fine Gael at the party's convention on 24 March, replacing Leo Varadkar, who unexpectedly resigned his premiership and leadership of the party on 20 March.

Harris is expected to be voted in as Taoiseach by members of the Irish parliament when they meet next on 9 April, supported by Fine Gael's coalition partners Fianna Fáil and the Green Party. In his appointment speech, Harris stressed his attachment to the values of law and order, called for the development of a long-term migration strategy, and stated he would be standing with farmers and small businesses. He also reiterated the party's commitment to the EU and pro-European values.

## II. Latest Projections



1. **European People’s Party (EPP):** 175 seats
  2. **Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D):** 140 seats
  3. **Identity and Democracy (ID):** 85 seats
  4. **Renew Europe:** 82 seats
  5. **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR):** 79 seats
  6. **Independent:** 45 seats
  7. **Greens– European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA):** 41 seats
  8. **The Left (GUE/NGL):** 33 seats
- Source: [Politico](https://www.politico.com) (25/3/2024).

### III. Key institutional milestones

| Date             | Event   |
|------------------|---|
| 17 April         | ECR election manifesto                          |
| 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 on top 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                     |