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I. Political and Policy Developments

1. Von der Leyen wins Maastricht Debate

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen won the [Maastricht Debate](#), according to a viewer poll. The Maastricht Debate is a televised debate between the European parties' lead candidates in the EU elections. This year's debate, held on 29 April, focused on climate change, foreign policy, and EU democracy.

Agriculture was a key focal point in the debate. von der Leyen presented the Green Deal as an essential framework to secure EU competitiveness, and underlined the need for an inclusive approach to deliver a more sustainable agriculture, bringing together farmers and environmental groups, referring to the work of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture.

The Greens' lead candidate Bas Eickhout, who also delivered a strong performance according to viewers, criticised von der Leyen's green credentials, calling for a European investment fund to finance the EU's climate objectives. Eickhout stated that instead of watering down sustainability rules, the Commission chief should have worked on legislation to increase farmer incomes.

Eickhout and Nicolas Schmit (Party of European Socialists) also challenged von der Leyen on her ties with Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who is affiliated with the right-wing ECR. von der Leyen answered that her collaboration with the ECR would depend on the composition of the next Parliament. The answer is significant as it gives a clear signal that von der Leyen is open to forging an explicit alliance with the ECR after the EU elections.

von der Leyen was questioned on a range of other issues, including a potential ban of TikTok, which she said she would consider for security concerns, and PfizerGate, dismissing accusations and pointing out that the contracts she discussed with Pfizer's CEO had actually been signed and paid for by Member States.

Defence issues were also under the spotlight, with Renew's lead candidate Marie Agnes Strack Zimmermann calling for a common EU defence plan.

In another boost for von der Leyen's chances of a second term, this week Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, previously rumoured as a strong alternative to von der Leyen, confirmed he was not seeking an EU top job. von der Leyen launched her campaign [website](#) on 26 April.

2. Šefčovič and Dombrovskis interested in another term

Two Commission heavyweights declared their interest for another term this week.

Maroš Šefčovič, the Slovak Executive Vice President for the European Green Deal, said he would be available for a fourth term at the Commission, eyeing an industry or energy portfolio. Valdis Dombrovskis, the Latvian Executive Vice President for Economy and Trade, who in the previous weeks also said he would be keen to stay on as Commissioner indicated that he would like to move to a more technical portfolio. Dombrovskis also called for Central and Eastern Europe to be properly represented in EU top jobs appointments.

3. Italian political leaders to run in EU election

Italian parties have announced their candidates for the European election this week. The vast majority of political leaders are running, with the exception of former PM Giuseppe Conte and Matteo Salvini, heads of the 5 Star Movement and Lega. The move is largely tactical, as no leader will be taking office as an MEP if elected.

Among the most prominent candidates who could be taking senior posts in the next European Parliament: Letizia Moratti (former Education Minister and Milan mayor, EPP), Flavio Tosi (former Verona mayor, EPP), Stefano Bonaccini (currently governor of the Emilia Romagna region, S&D), Nicola Zingaretti (former leader of Partito Democratico, S&D), Brando Benifei, Irene Tinagli and Patrizia Toia (currently MEPs, S&D), Elena Bonetti (former Family Minister, Renew), and Carlo Fidanza (currently an MEP, ECR).

4. Pedro Sánchez stays on as Prime Minister

On 29 April, Pedro Sánchez announced that he would stay on as Spain's Prime Minister. His announcement comes a week after he said was considering his resignation following the launch of an investigation against his wife for alleged corruption and influence peddling.

Sánchez's decision is seen as strengthening his position both domestically and in Brussels, giving a boost to the chances of Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Ecological Transition Teresa Ribera, Sánchez's lead candidate, to get an influential post in the next Commission.

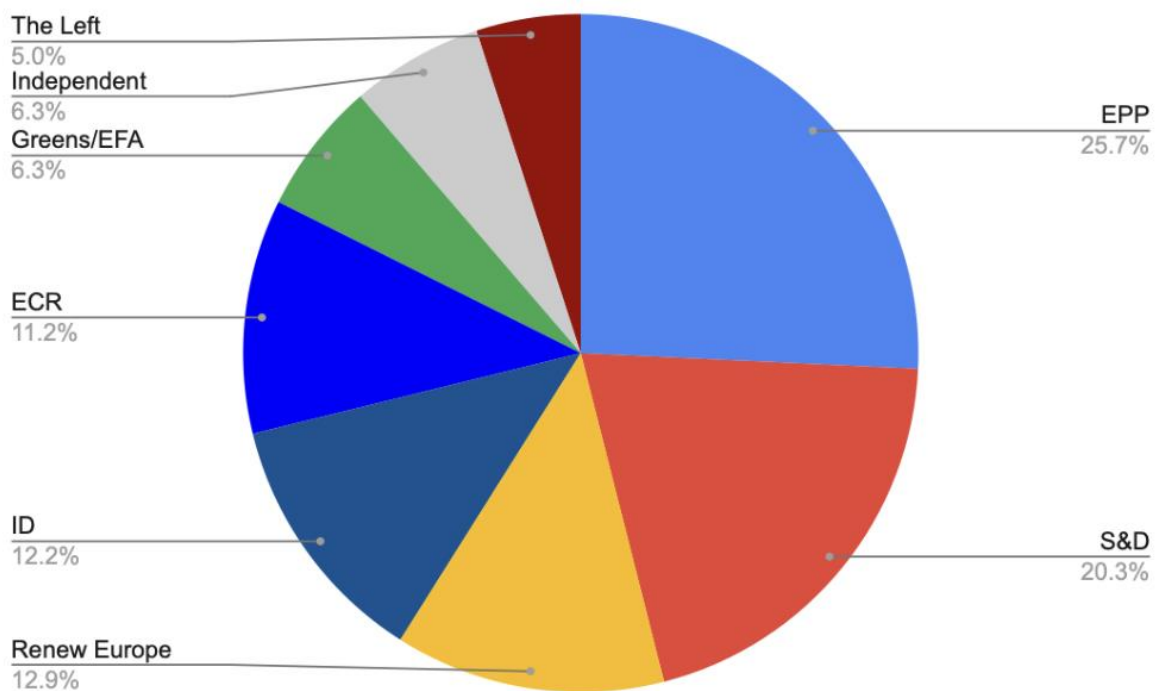
5. Barroso says enlargement and deeper EU integration are not incompatible

In an [interview](#) with Euractiv, former Commission President José Manuel Barroso stated that the EU should be ready to expand, with or without a treaty change.

Barroso reflected on his two terms as Commission President, during which the EU grew from 15 to 28 Member States. He stated that waiting for a new EU treaty would be a “huge mistake” because it would likely delay the enlargement process and open a window for certain countries to oppose the enlargement. Instead, Barroso called on the EU to avoid “too ambitious reforms” and to only make those necessary for enlargement.

Barroso added that the EU was today more integrated than it had ever been, referring to the debt mutualisation scheme under the NextGenerationEU fund. He also stated that there was a greater level of convergence today between 27 Member States at UN level than there had been when the bloc had 12 members.

II. Latest Projections



1. **European People’s Party (EPP):** 175 seats
2. **Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D):** 138 seats
3. **Renew Europe:** 88 seats
4. **Identity and Democracy (ID):** 83 seats
5. **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR):** 76 seats
6. **Greens – European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA):** 43 seats
Independent: 43 seats
7. **The Left (GUE/NGL):** 34 seats

Source: [Politico](#) (30/4/2024).

III. Key institutional milestones



Date	Event
6-9 June	EU elections
17 June	European Council on 2024-2029 strategic agenda / top jobs appointments
27-28 June	European Council on top jobs appointments
1 July	Beginning of Hungarian Presidency
16-19 July	European Parliament first plenary session
22-25 July	Formation of European Parliament committees
16-19 September (exp)	European Parliament vote on Commission President
October-November	European Commissioner-candidates hearings
1 December	New European Council President takes office
16-19 December (exp)	European Parliament vote on the new Commission