

17 - 21 June 2024

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### I. Political and Policy Developments

#### 1. Top job negotiations in full swing

Negotiations on EU top jobs are intensifying ahead of next week's European Council. On 17 June, EU leaders failed to reach an agreement during an informal dinner in Brussels. The potential deal included Ursula von der Leyen for European Commission President, former Portuguese PM António Costa for European Council President, and Estonian PM Kaja Kallas as High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

Two key factors led to the breakdown. First, EPP-affiliated leaders, buoyed by their strong EU election performance, proposed a two-and-a-half-year term for Costa as European Council President, with a view to having an EPP representative replace him in 2027, which was unacceptable to centre-left leaders. Second, a restricted pre-summit meeting between Germany, France, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands and Greece irritated other leaders, in particular Italian PM Giorgia Meloni.

Meloni is seen as trying to increase her leverage by beefing up her European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament, while discussions on potential alliances continue within the EPP. Polish PM Donald Tusk indicated that a centrist coalition would suffice to shape the new job landscape, including the Commission President.

EU leaders will reconvene on 27-28 June in Brussels to try to hammer out a deal on top jobs, as well as to adopt the European Council Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029.

#### 2. ECR becomes third biggest group; EPP and Greens/EFA elect their leaders

This week, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) grew by 10 MEPs, expanding to 83 members. Notable new members include Kristoffer Storm from Denmark Democrats, France's Marion Maréchal, and Claudiu-Richard Tarzi from Romania's AUR. AUR's admission upset Orbán's Fidesz, who may no longer join the group. The ECR overtook Renew's third place - Renew currently stands at 81 MEPs.

In another bad news for Renew, Volt's five federalist MEPs will be joining the Greens. Renew's position could further deteriorate with Dutch PM Mark Rutte's exit, and should

French President Emmanuel Macron lose its grip on government after the snap elections in France.

The European People's Party EPP [reelected](#) Germany's Manfred Weber as chairman, and appointed ten vice-presidents, including François-Xavier Bellamy (France), Andrzej Halicki (Poland), and Massimiliano Salini (Italy). The EPP welcomed 14 new MEPs from six delegations, including seven Hungarian MEPs led by Péter Magyar and two from the Netherlands' BBB. On the sidelines of the meeting, Weber expressed confidence that von der Leyen would "not be challenged" in her bid for reappointment.

The Greens [elected](#) Germany's Terry Reintke and the Netherlands' Bas Eickhout as co-chairs, and EFA [elected](#) Diana Riba i Giner as President. Reintke and Eickhout emphasised the Greens' eagerness to ensure a centrist majority without the far-right in the top job negotiations.

### 3. Slovakia and Finland nominate their commissioner-candidate

Slovak President Peter Pellegrini announced Maroš Šefčovič as Slovakia's commissioner candidate. Šefčovič, the outgoing Green Deal chief, seeks a fourth term, aiming for a portfolio in industry or energy.

Finland nominated EPP MEP Henna Virkkunen as its commissioner candidate. Re-elected for a third term, Virkkunen has served on the European Parliament's Transport Committee (TRAN) and Industry, Research and Energy Committee (ITRE), and has been Finland's Minister of Education, Public Administration, and Transport.

### 4. Hungary reveals priorities for upcoming Council Presidency

Hungary, set to assume the Council Presidency on 1 July, revealed its [key priorities](#) under the slogan "Make Europe Great Again". The presidency programme highlights economic competitiveness and security, defence and illegal migration as key areas of focus.

Key highlights include:

- An EU Competitiveness Deal to close the productivity gap with international competitors. Key recipes of the Competitiveness Deal would be deepening the internal market, supporting SMEs and delivering the green and digital transitions "in partnership" with industry and civil society through a technology-neutral approach.
- Strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base, including defence innovation and the enhancement of defence procurement cooperation between Member States.
- A "merit-based, balanced and credible" enlargement policy. While the Western Balkans are mentioned, Ukraine and Moldova are not.
- Curbing illegal migration and human smuggling through cooperation with third countries, more effective returns, and innovative asylum rules.

- Focus on the future of cohesion policy, with a high-level strategic debate.
- A “farmer-oriented” EU agricultural policy balancing green policies, market stabilisation and farmers’ incomes. Budapest wants the new Common Agricultural Policy to be “competitive, crisis-proof and farmer friendly”.

## 5. French far-right seeking absolute majority

The French election campaign is heating up. Far-right RN leader Jordan Bardella, whose party leads the polls at 34%, stated he would not seek to become PM without an absolute majority in the National Assembly. RN is projected to win 195-245 seats, short of the 289 needed. Bardella is trying to win the support of the traditional right, based on his alliance with Eric Ciotti, the head of the centre-right The Republicans (LR), and courting Eurosceptic voters by proposing to cut France’s EU budget contribution by €2-3 billion.

The leftist “New Popular Front” is emerging as RN's closest competitor at 27%, ahead of Macron’s centrist alliance at 20%. The alliance, including the Socialist Party, the Greens, and France Unbowed, faces internal splits over the PM appointment and issues like Ukraine, Gaza, and EU integration. Their programme, including a pledge to return the retirement age to 60, may also not appeal to liberal voters.

The tripartite division between RN, the New Popular Front, and Macron’s centrist alliance makes a strong government unlikely due to the absence of an absolute majority.

## II. Key institutional milestones

Date	Event
25 June	PES constituent meeting (vote on new president) PEL constituent meeting
26 June	Renew Europe constituent meeting ECR constituent meeting
27-28 June	European Council on 2024-2029 Strategic Agenda and top jobs appointments
1 July	Beginning of Hungarian Presidency
4 July	ID constituent meeting
16-19 July	European Parliament first plenary session
18 July (exp)	European Parliament vote on Commission President
22-25 July	Formation of European Parliament committees
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