

**BACK TO SCHOOL EDITION**

**27 July - 30 August 2024**

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**I. Political and Policy Developments**

**1. Member States finalise lineup for next EU Commission**

Over the previous weeks 25 Member States have nominated their commissioner-candidates. Belgium is expected to do so over the coming hours.

Once all the nominations are in, President Ursula von der Leyen will assemble the new Commission puzzle assigning the portfolios. Reports indicate she plans to create five or six “clusters” under Executive Vice Presidents, eliminating the role of vice-president. This setup would give senior positions to France, Italy, Spain, and three Central and Eastern European countries. It would also maintain political balance, with mainstream parties — the European People’s Party (EPP), the Socialists and Democrats (S&D), and Renew Europe — each getting two senior seats, while the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) would receive one.

Von der Leyen is provisionally scheduled to present the final list to European Parliament political leaders on 11 September. One of the challenges she is likely to face is the lack of gender balance, as most governments defied her request to present both a male and a female nominee.

Below an overview of the nominations:

- **Austria: Magnus Brunner** - Outgoing Finance Minister, targeting a portfolio focused on competitiveness.
- **Belgium: No nominee yet** - Outgoing Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders seems the most likely nominee, potentially keeping the consumer policy portfolio.
- **Bulgaria: Ekaterina Zaharieva & Julian Popov** - Zaharieva is former foreign minister, Popov a former environment minister. Zaharieva could take on regional and cohesion policy, Popov energy.
- **Cyprus: Costas Kadis** - Environmental scientist and former minister, expected to take on transport, Mediterranean, agriculture, or EU maritime policy.

- **Croatia: Dubravka Šuica** - Outgoing Commission Vice President, potentially keeping her demography role or moving to cohesion, enlargement, or agriculture.
- **Czech Republic: Jozef Sikela** - Outgoing Trade Minister, interested in energy or broader economic roles like budget.
- **Denmark: Dan Jørgensen** - Outgoing Climate and Energy Minister, a strong candidate for energy and climate or international partnerships.
- **Estonia: Kaja Kallas** - Outgoing Prime Minister, already appointed as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs as part of the European Council's top jobs deal.
- **Finland: Henna Virkkunen** - Centre-right MEP, eyeing a security or competitiveness-related portfolio.
- **France: Thierry Breton** - Outgoing Internal Market Commissioner, eyeing a major economic role or the new Defense Commissioner position, and a probable executive vice-presidency.
- **Greece: Apostolos Tzitzikostas** - Regional governor and former Committee of the Regions President, likely for cohesion or agriculture.
- **Hungary: Oliver Várhelyi** - Outgoing Enlargement Commissioner, interested in either keeping his current portfolio or moving to a role related to international partnerships.
- **Ireland: Michael McGrath** - Outgoing Finance Minister, expected to secure an economic portfolio.
- **Italy: Raffaele Fitto** - Outgoing EU Affairs Minister, likely to get an executive vice presidency role with a budget or economic portfolio.
- **Latvia: Valdis Dombrovskis** - Outgoing Trade Executive Vice President, aiming for an internal market post, and a probable executive vice presidency.
- **Lithuania: Andrius Kubilius** - Centre-right MEP and former Prime Minister, eyeing portfolios related to enlargement, foreign policy, or defence.
- **Luxembourg: Christophe Hansen** - Centre-right MEP, favoured for agriculture but also in the mix for trade or finance.
- **Malta: Glenn Micallef** - Formerly the Prime Minister's Head of Cabinet, seeking either the new Mediterranean role or an economic position.
- **Netherlands: Wopke Hoekstra** - Outgoing Commissioner for Climate Action, eyeing an economic portfolio.
- **Poland: Piotr Serafin** - Senior diplomat aiming for the budget or enlargement portfolio.
- **Portugal: Maria Luís Albuquerque** - One of the few female nominees, positioned for an economic role or the agriculture portfolio.
- **Romania: Victor Negrescu** - Centre-left MEP interested in economic integration, investment, and competition.
- **Slovakia: Maroš Šefčovič** - Outgoing Green Deal Executive Vice President, eyeing an industry or energy portfolio. Likely to retain his executive vice presidency.
- **Slovenia: Tomaž Vesel** - Former Court of Audit President; interested in finance, budget or enlargement.
- **Spain: Teresa Ribera** - Outgoing Environment Minister, in the mix for a major environment or energy role. Likely to secure an executive vice presidency.
- **Sweden: Jessika Roswall** - Outgoing EU Affairs Minister, expressed interest in a wide range of issues, including Ukraine, competitiveness, climate, and crime.

## 2. Commission nominees to face tough time in EP hearings

Commission nominees are preparing for challenging European Parliament hearings. Hungarian Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi is expected to face strong opposition over his controversial management of the enlargement portfolio and concerns about Hungary's rule of law. Budapest may replace him with Fidesz MEP Enikő Győri if his re-appointment falters.

Other nominees likely to face resistance include Spain's Teresa Ribera for her stance on nuclear energy, Greece's Apostolos Tzitzikostas over alleged far-right ties; Malta's Glenn Micallef for lack of experience and France's Thierry Breton, after his social media clashes with Ursula von der Leyen, Elon Musk, and Donald Trump. Another variable to watch will be whether the S&D decide to put pressure on some EPP candidates in response to Luxembourg selecting Christophe Hansen over their lead candidate, outgoing Jobs Commissioner Nicolas Schmit.

## 3. Health and defence to be elevated in new European Parliament committee deal

The European Parliament is finalising a deal on the new committee structure. A special committee on housing is expected to be created, while the Sub-Committees on Public Health (SANT) and Security and Defence (SEDE) are likely to be upgraded to standing committees, getting the power to amend and vote on legislation. The European Parliament Conference of Presidents is expected to discuss the deal in the coming weeks.

## 4. Changes within the far-right; far-left eyes new European party

Tensions are rising within the ECR group, with reports suggesting moves from former Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki to secure the ECR presidency, currently held by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Negotiations are ongoing, with Meloni reluctant to step down.

The Identity and Democracy (ID) group has rebranded as Patriots for Europe (PfE), following the absorption of most ID members and the rebranding of its social media channels, which were approved by the Authority for European Political Parties.

A new far-left group is expected to be created in the European Parliament, after several national parties are breaking away from the Party of the European Left (PEL). The new group could be called the European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet. This move follows ongoing tensions among PEL delegations over issues like the war in Ukraine.

## 5. Macron faces impeachment proceedings after refusing left pick once again

With the Paris Olympics truce over, French President Emmanuel Macron faces pressure to appoint a Prime Minister. Despite talks with the leftist New Popular Front (NFP), Macron rejected their candidate, Lucie Castets, arguing that an NFP-led government would face immediate censure. This decision angered the NFP, leading the far-left Unbowed France (LFI) to launch an impeachment bid against Macron, accusing him of "denial of democracy." This effort is likely to fail, as it requires two-thirds support in both the National Assembly and Senate, a difficult feat especially with some NFP members distancing themselves from the initiative.

Amid the tension, Macron is reportedly considering a centre-left figure unaffiliated with the NFP and critical of LFI as Prime Minister. Potential candidates include former Premier Bernard Cazeneuve and Saint-Ouen mayor Karim Bouamrane. This approach would allow Macron to appease centre-right and centre-left critics all while avoiding an NFP appointment.

## II. Key institutional milestones

Date	Event
11 September (exp)	Presentation of organigramme & mission letters
20 September	European Parliament sends questionnaires to Commission
29 September	Commissioner replies to questionnaires
30 September - 4 October	European Commissioner-candidates hearings
21 October	European Parliament vote on the new Commission
1 November	New European Commission takes office
1 December	New European Council President takes office