



## **CEC Weekly Political Update**

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### **Negotiations on Top EU Jobs**

The European Union is facing major changes in the upcoming months. On 26 May, EU citizens will choose their European Parliament representatives. Additionally, the European election also marks the end of the five-year institutional term of the bloc. Consequently, further changes will also take place in key EU positions, including: President of the European Commission (replacing Jean-Claude Juncker), President of the European Council (replacing Donald Tusk), the EU High Representative (replacing Federica Mogherini), as well as the President of the European Central Bank (replacing Mario Draghi).

The European Council is scheduled to meet in Sibiu (Romania) on the 28 May for an initial discussion on the matter. The President of the

European Council hopes that this summit will allow member states to begin talks on nominations, a process he hopes will finish prior to the anticipated Council summit on 20–21 June.

The European Council will select a candidate for the President of the European Commission – a reinforced qualified majority is required meaning 72% of member states and 65% of the EU's population. The candidate then presents their political programme which has to be approved by the European Parliament with a majority vote. Although the choice of President has to take into account the result of the EP election, there are no legal requirements which specify party or group membership. In 2014, however, the European Parliament took lead on the matter and developed a system, which boosts its influence over the nomination of the President of the EC. The so-called spitzenkandidat – the lead candidate – of the political group that wins the largest share of votes in the election is favoured for the position. Still, Donald Tusk argued that there is no automaticity in this process – suggesting a potential power struggle between the Council and the Parliament.

The two largest groupings EPP and S&D have put forward their candidates – Manfred Weber and Frans Timmermans respectively. Given the ambiguity of the process, however, there are hints that some unofficial candidates may be taken under consideration. These include Michel Barnier, Mark Rutte, or Christine Lagarde. For Poland's Law and Justice, there are hopes that the ECR will improve its previous election result and builds a wider coalition. There are certain sources which argue that the ECR's spitzenkandidat Jan Zahradil stands a chance in the contest for EC President. His appointment, however, does not seem likely.

Donald Tusk argued that a consensus on the appointment of nominees to these offices would be best, but is unlikely. Previously, this was not an obstacle, as the European Council chooses its candidates through a majority vote. It will be important for the major powers, such as France and Germany to make room for the newcomers. Donald Tusk urged these countries not to be tempted to grab all top jobs and reminded of the geographical and demographic balance, which has to be maintained. Other EU leaders took a similar tone and argued against the

current custom, which allows the winning EP group to choose the President of the European Commission. However, others also warned of undermining the European Parliament by forcing the decision of an elite few.

In the current Commission, Poland is represented by Elżbieta Bieńkowska who is responsible for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. Before she assumed her office in November 2014, Bieńkowska was a Deputy Prime Minister in the PO-PSL government. Representatives of the ruling PiS party hope that a reshuffled post-election European Parliament, as well as the new President of the European Commission, will acknowledge Poland by nominating a Polish commissioner to an important policy sector.

The short-list which is being considered by the PiS leadership consists of top figures, but the debates are supposedly concentrating on whether to bet on a more political or technical candidate. It reportedly includes Minister of Development and Investment Jerzy Kwieciński, Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Konrad Szymański, the Deputy Speaker of the Senate, one of PiS' top strategists Adam Bielan, as well as former FM Anna Fotyga. Certain voices from Brussels indicate that EU leaders would be willing to accept the nomination of Prime Minister Morawiecki to Poland's Commissioner, over other candidates from PiS. The ultimate decision, however, will be dependant on many variables including the policy sector proposed, the internal situation within PiS, and the results of the election itself.

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