



2019 European Parliament Elections Review

September 2018



NEW IN THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

- In the last month, two candidates from the European Parliament's two largest groups have officially announced that they will be running to be their party's *Spitzenkandidat*, as speculations that others will soon join the race continue to gain traction. Introduced at the 2014 European Elections, the process foresees the appointment of a lead candidate for a political grouping, who then becomes the party's top choice for the job of European Commission President. Meanwhile, the controversial process continues to receive criticism from established liberal-progressive parties, rising nationalist right-wing parties and French Presidents, as more figureheads speak out against the arguably unfair practice.
- Manfred Weber and Maroš Šefčovič, have announced they will be running for EPP and S&D *Spitzenkandidat*, and after their respective party conferences, they could be elected to represent the two current leading Parliamentary groups. In the EPP, speculations continue about Former Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb and current Chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier entering the race, while in S&D, Pierre Moscovici recently announced he will make a decision about running 'soon.'
- The official announcements however are not reserved for mainstream parties, as the Greens and the ACRE put nominations forward. On the far-right, Jan Zahradil and Bernd Lucke have announced they are running to be the ECR *Spitzenkandidat*, and while they don't believe the system should ultimately appoint the Commission President, they believe the *Spitzenkandidat* could be instrumental in uniting Europe's far-right parties under the ECR group. In the Greens Party, four contenders will be facing each other at the party's conference on 25 November to decide who will be the party's *Spitzenkandidat*.
- No candidates have been put forward as of yet for the Centrist ALDE, who are sympathetic to the plans of Emmanuel Macron to create a united progressive front to tackle the expected electoral success of the far-right. Recent announcements by Margarethe Vestager who called out the process as 'undemocratic', have shown that ALDE might not be in favour of the *Spitzenkandidat* procedure.

THE NEW COMPOSITION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On 13 June, the European Parliament Plenary held a vote on the draft recommendation establishing the composition of the European Parliament post-Brexit. The recommendation, which endorses the draft European Council decision, was adopted through a single vote with 566 votes in favour, 94 against, and 31 abstentions. EU leaders formally adopted the decision on the new composition of the European Parliament at the summit in Brussels on 29 June.

This means that:

- The number of MEPs will decrease from 751 to 705 after Brexit;
- 46 of the current 73 UK seats will be kept for possible future EU enlargements;
- 27 UK seats will be shared out among 14 under-represented EU countries:

 France +5	 Italy +3	 Spain +5
 Poland +1	 Romania +1	 Netherlands +3
 Sweden +1	 Austria +1	 Denmark +1
 Slovakia +1	 Finland +1	 Ireland +2
 Croatia +1	 Estonia +1	

The Parliament decision also stresses that the new allocation will apply only if the United Kingdom leaves the EU. Otherwise, the current arrangements will stay in place until Brexit has been legally completed.

STATE OF THE UNION

On 12 September 2018, outgoing European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker used his final State of the Union address to announce a series of concrete measures aimed at addressing concerns with regard to the upcoming 2019 European Parliament elections. The Commission's proposals include measures to enhance transparency for online political advertisements and granting it the ability to impose sanctions to counter illegal use of personal data intended to deliberately influence the elections' outcome.



AP Photo -Jean-Francois Badias

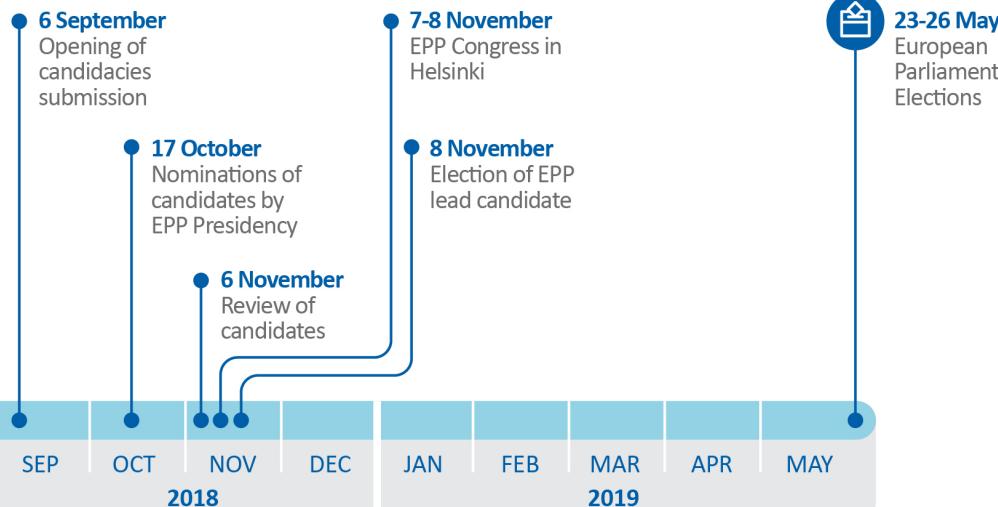
The measures to ensure free and fair European elections specifically include: A Recommendation on election cooperation networks, protection against cybersecurity incidents and fighting disinformation campaigns, guidance on the application of EU data protection law, and a legislative amendment to tighten the rules on European political party funding.

The enforcement of this new legislation will complement regulations that have already been put in place by European Institutions to protect its citizens and the resilience of European democracy. These include the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and existing regulations on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations, amongst others.

European People's Party (EPP Group)



TIMELINE



- Formally running for EPP Spitzenkandidat:*



Manfred Weber (DE) – As the only formally announced EPP candidate, the group's Chairman Manfred Weber is seen as an early frontrunner in the race to become the EPP Spitzenkandidat. Weber announced his candidacy after securing (non-exclusive) support from German Chancellor Angela Merkel, significantly strengthening his position. However, his lack of executive experience puts a serious question mark behind his ability to gather wider support from among the EU's heads of government.

Although Weber has received public endorsement from leading EPP MEPs, he has not been able to secure support from many rank-and-file MEPs in his party. These have refused to back him on crucial issues such as the vote to initiate article 7 proceedings against Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in which just 60% of EPP MEPs votes in favour of initiating sanctions, highlighting the challenges he faces in uniting the party behind him.

- Potentially running for EPP Spitzenkandidat:*



Alexander Stubb (FI) – Vice Chairman of the European Investment Bank and former Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb has announced his interest in the candidacy. Stubb's announcement came at a time when current Vice-President of the European Commission and fellow former Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen chose to retire from politics after his current tenure ends in order to support his wife's career in Finland. Stubb is now actively exploring his options in Brussels.



Michel Barnier (FR) – European Chief Negotiator for Brexit Michel Barnier is a strong and widely supported potential candidate but he faces considerable challenges in securing French endorsement: Barnier would probably need to defect from the Republican Party to Macron's 'En Marche' movement in order to be put forward as the French candidate.



Antonio Tajani (IT) – President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani is widely seen as a potential EPP candidate. He is a former Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Transport (2008-2010) and for Industry and Entrepreneurship (2010-2014) and was one of the founders of Italy's Forza Italia party (1994).



Dalia Grybauskaitė (LT) – There has been speculation around Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė's potential candidacy. However, she is not currently member of any European political party and EPP candidacy rules require party membership.

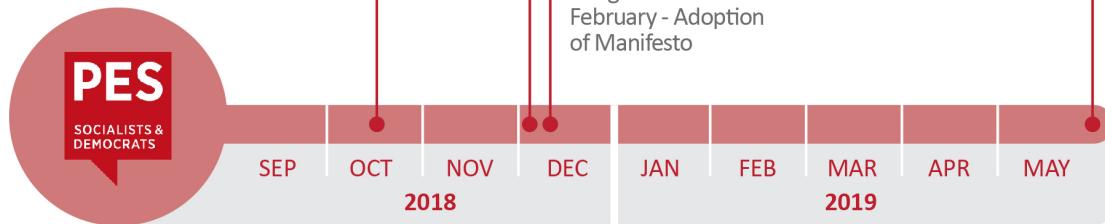


Enda Kenny (IR) – Former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny is often mentioned by commentators but has taken no formal steps towards announcing his candidacy.

The EPP's Manifesto will be developed after the EPP Electoral Congress, and it is understood that:

- The EPP aims to finalise the Manifesto by end of January 2019;
- Content will be heavily influenced by the candidate;
- Elements may be taken from the policy papers developed by the party in the first half of 2018, but this is not guaranteed;
- EPP MEPs will have minimal influence in determining the Manifesto's content;
- Member parties will have a larger influence, but it is 'not a super inclusive process' as EPP insiders point out.
- Time to influence will be after the Electoral Congress: November 2018 – January 2019.

TIMELINE



- *Formally running for S&D Spitzenkandidat:*



Maroš Šefčovič (SK) – On 17 September, European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič officially announced that he is running for the position of Spitzenkandidat for the Party of European Socialists (PES), the political party represented by the S&D group in the European Parliament.

As a Slovakian, Šefčovič would be the first ever Commission President originating from the group of countries which joined the EU in 2004. The Commission Vice President is acutely aware of the East-West divide and vowed to restart the European integration engine. Šefčovič said he would also concentrate on making Europe greener, smarter and support an assertive trade and competition policy, as well as an industrial policy with a focus on job creation.

- *Potentially running for S&D Spitzenkandidat:*



Pierre Moscovici (FR) – Currently appointed as European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, Pierre Moscovici remains a strong potential candidate. On September 13th, he stated that he would announce whether he will run for the Commission's top job at the end of September.



Federica Mogherini (IT) – While earlier on commentators saw Mogherini as a potential candidate, the current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission has recently announced she is not interested in running for the position, probably in view of the lacking support from the Italian government.

TIMELINE



- Potentially running for ALDE Spitzenkandidat:

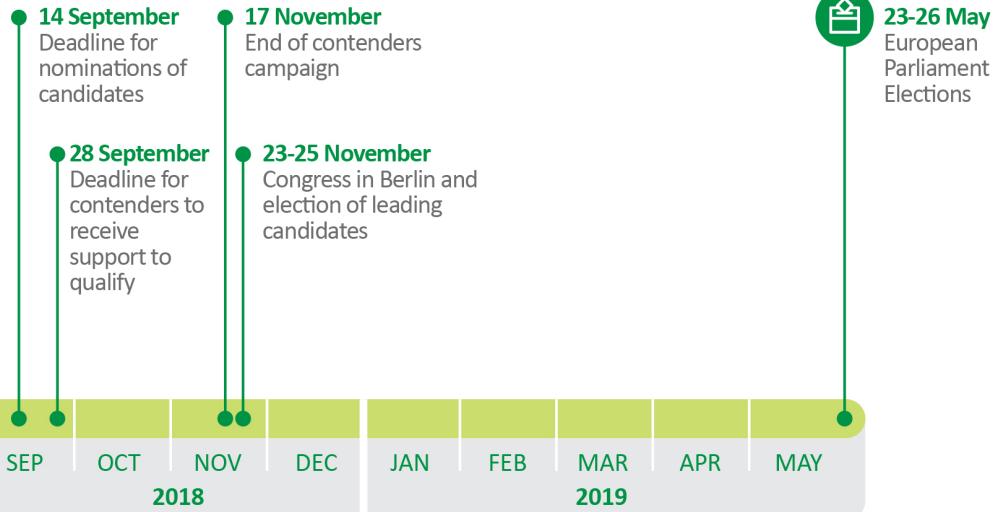


Guy Verhofstadt (BE) – Current chairman of the ALDE group in the European Parliament Guy Verhofstadt has stated his interest in the position and is expected to officially announce his candidacy in the coming weeks. He has some experience of this process, as he was already ALDE's Spitzenkandidat for the 2014 European elections.



Margrethe Vestager (DK) – European Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager, who is considered by many as a good candidate for the position, has recently expressed her strong disapproval of the Spitzenkandidat process. In a debate organised by Politico on 18 September, Vestager said that she does not see the process as democratic and believes that the Council and Parliament must take the decision together. However, she has neither formally confirmed or denied whether she would seek to run for Commission President herself.

TIMELINE



- *Formally running for Greens Spitzenkandidat:*

On September 17th, the European Green Party announced 4 candidates who have entered the race to become Spitzenkandidat for the European Green Party. These are:



Petra De Sutter (BE) – Current Senator nominated by the Belgian Groen party;



Bas Eickhout (NL) – Current MEP, nominated by the Dutch GroenLinks party;



Ska Keller (DE) – Current MEP, nominated by the German Bündnis 90/Die Grünen parties;



Atanas Schmidt (BG) – Nominated by the Bulgarian Zelena Partija party.

To qualify for the next phase, candidates will have to gather the support of at least 5 additional European Green Party member parties by 28 September. European Green Party delegates across Europe will then elect the two leading candidates at the next Party Council between 23-25 November in Berlin.

Spokespeople of the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE), the political party represented by the ECR group in the European Parliament, have made it clear that the party disagrees with the current Spitzenkandidat process. Instead, the party sees Spitzenkandidaten as a way to increase the attractiveness of the European elections but does not believe that the process should determine the selection of the next Commission president. Members are expected to vote on their candidate on 21 September 2018.

- *Formally running for ACRE Spitzenkandidat:*



Jan Zahradil (CZ) – Czech MEP and President of the ACRE, Jan Zahradil, is one of two candidates to represent ACRE as Spitzenkandidat in the upcoming European elections. He is open to the ECR taking in more radical parties including Italy's Lega party and is confident that the ECR will maintain its position as third-largest group in the European Parliament.



Bernd Lucke (DE) – German MEP and former AfD co-founder, Bernd Lucke, is the second candidate to officially run for ACRE Spitzenkandidat. The German economist founded the Liberal Conservative Reformers (LKR) party in Germany after leaving the AfD in 2015, but is little-known outside his home country.

The Macron Element

▪ **Macron rejects the Spitzenkandidat process**

The chief executive of *La République En Marche* (LREM), Christophe Castaner, has publicly rejected the Spitzenkandidat process, arguing that it is a “democratic anomaly”. He specified that France is willing to return to the old system, under which the European Council proposes a candidate for the European Commission presidency followed by approval from the European Parliament for the new College of Commissioners as a whole.

▪ **Coalition building**

Currently, ‘En Marche’ chief executive Castaner is continuing his European tour, reaching out to other ‘progressive’ political parties across the EU. The main objective is to create a new platform of progressive political parties which will gather around a set of policy priorities and aim to counter Eurosceptic factions. The platform is expected to be formally presented in the autumn and will unite factions from across a wide political spectrum of the European Parliament. So far, Castaner has visited other party executives in Rome, Madrid, Warsaw and Brussels.

▪ **Macron as the alternative to Orbán**

Macron has positioned his movement as offering the EU’s ideological alternative to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. As such, the French President has been vocal in criticizing the EPP for not taking a stance against Hungary’s breach of core EU values.

▪ **Which group for *En Marche*?**

LREM’s chief executive Christophe Castaner has met with ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt over the past few weeks, and Verhofstadt was keen to confirm that he is working with *En Marche* to build a decisive movement in the EP (suggesting “Generation Europe” as a potential name). Castaner, however, appeared more reserved and merely stated that *En Marche* is not yet ready to form official alliances.

Through coalition-building with like-minded political parties, Macron seeks to mimic the strategy he implemented successfully at national level, gathering MEPs from different political groups under a single movement.

In the Spotlight:

▪ Far right expected to gain ground

Over the summer, Steve Bannon, the former chief strategist to U.S. President Trump, has been seeking to gather far-right support in Europe to foster anti-EU sentiment and sway the vote in the upcoming European Parliamentary elections.

Speculation about the rise of the far right at the elections is intensifying with some polls suggesting Eurosceptic parties could grow by as much as 60% next May. National election results in Italy and Sweden, and the growing support for far-right parties such as Germany's AfD, appear to confirm these polls.

The latest estimates by Reuters suggest that the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD), which today includes parties such as UKIP and the Italian Five Star Movement could grow to 58 seats, from 45, despite the loss of British MEPs due to Brexit.

The Europe of Nations and Freedom group, which includes the French National Rally, the Austrian FPÖ, the Dutch Freedom Party, and the Italian Lega Nord could double their seats at the elections as a result of Lega's success in Italy. However, the EPP group is considering new alliances ahead of the elections, and its lead Manfred Weber did not want to rule out that he might extend a hand to Salvini's party.

Combined, the two groups of populist Eurosceptic MEP's, EFDD and the EFN, could account for 15% of the total seats post-2019. This would leave them of course far from able to push through potentially disruptive legislation with ease but would make them a significant factor to consider when finding majorities.

The leader of Austria's far-right, and in-government, Freedom Party (FPO), Heinz-Christian Strache, publicly invited Orbán to unite under a common bloc. Despite Orbán's willingness to stay in his current group, the EPP has backed a censure motion against his political party, the Fidesz, which might push him to seek new alliances in the European Parliament.