

WEEKLY ROUND-UP

TOP STORIES: 9–16 May 2014

1

Live TV debate with candidates for next Commission President: A final TV debate with the European parties' candidates for the presidency of the European Commission took place on 15 May in the European Parliament. The 'Eurovision Debate' featured Jean-Claude Juncker (centre-right), Martin Schulz (Socialists), Guy Verhofstadt (Liberals), Ska Keller (Greens) and Alexis Tsipras (radical left). The contenders clashed over a number of topics ranging from the economy, including the impact of austerity measures, to Russia and Ukraine, immigration and religious symbols. The debate was broadcast on 58 national and regional TV channels and web-streamed on 71 websites across EU member states. *Links:* [Europolitics](#); [EurActiv](#); [European Voice](#); [EUobserver](#); [New Europe](#).

2

Latest survey shows gap closing between EPP and Socialists: The latest PollWatch 2014 predictions show that the gap between the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and the centre-left Socialists and Democrats Group (S&D) is narrowing. With less than a week to go before the polls open, the EPP is predicted to gain 212 seats, with the S&D close behind on 209. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) remain on 63 seats, while the radical left European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) has improved slightly and would now find itself with 52 seats. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group lead the rest of the chasing pack, with 43 seats. *Links:* [PollWatch 2014](#); [Europe Decides](#); [Reuters](#)

3

Merkel and Hollande discuss Commission President: The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the French President, François Hollande, met in Germany last weekend to discuss several EU-related issues, including the choice of a new Commission president. Merkel said that it will take several weeks following the European elections to reach a decision, amid talk of her and other EU leaders wanting to consider candidates other than the lead candidates of the pan-European parties. The EPP lead candidate, Jean-Claude Juncker, has said that Merkel gave him a firm signal that he will become the next Commission president if the centre-right wins the election, but the leader of the Socialists and Democrats Group in the European Parliament, Hannes Swoboda, criticised the Chancellor for reportedly trying to prevent the Parliament's President (and Socialist lead candidate), Martin Schulz, from chairing the assembly's post-election review meeting. Swoboda said Merkel is only one of the 28 leaders in the European Council and should stop interfering in parliamentary business. *Link:* [EurActiv](#); [Reuters](#); [Chicago Tribune](#); [Europolitics](#); [S&D news](#); [EUobserver](#)

4

Lidington sets out UK's vision of Europe: The UK's Europe minister, David Lidington, told an audience at the European Policy Centre in Brussels that the EU legitimacy gap should be addressed through national parliaments, not by giving more powers to the European Parliament. He set out Britain's suggestions as priorities for the next Commission, adding that the European Council should pick "the best person" for the Commission presidency as "nothing in treaty limits choice to certain people". *Link:* [EurActiv](#)

5

Grybauskaitė ahead in presidential election: Dalia Grybauskaitė, Lithuania's President, won 46% of the vote in the first round of the presidential election on Sunday. The former European commissioner is expected to win the run-off with Zigmantas Balcytis (who won 14%) on 25 May. *Links:* [European Voice](#); [EUobserver](#); [New Europe](#); [BBC news](#); [NDTV](#); [Reuters](#); [Bloomberg](#)

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ALSO IN THE NEWS

Bernadette Ségol: 'Citizens must pick Commission president - no back-room deals': Bernadette Ségol, the General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, has said that Europe needs a wake-up call, new impetus and different policies. She added that the choice of Commission president must reflect the will of voters, and not the results of a deal made behind closed doors. *Link:* [ETUC news](#)

Schulz and Juncker in French TV face-off: Martin Schulz (Party of European Socialists) and Jean-Claude Juncker (European People's Party) met on 13 May in a head-to-head debate broadcast by French news channel LCI. As in previous debates, the two candidates shared similar views on many issues, with the proposed EU-US trade deal being the main point of contention. *Link:* [Europolitics](#); [European Voice](#)

David Cameron: I won't quit if Britain votes to leave EU: David Cameron has vowed that he would not resign as Prime Minister if Britain voted to leave the EU. Cameron repeated his pledge that a referendum will take place before the end of 2017 if his party is re-elected in next year's general election and said he could campaign to leave the EU if more favourable terms for the UK are not secured. *Link:* [The Guardian](#)

Ukip British Asian supporter quits over race politics: A prominent British Asian supporter of the UK Independence Party has quit the party as a result of its controversial European elections campaign. Sanya-Jeet Thandi claimed that the party's poster warning voters of the impending arrival of 26 million European citizens to take British jobs was evidence of a "form of racist populism" that made her position in the party untenable. *Links:* [EUObserver](#); [The Guardian](#)

Denmark withdraws scandalous EU election video: The Danish Parliament has withdrawn a controversial animated cartoon which aimed to inspire young people to vote in upcoming European Parliament elections. The 90-second video featured 'Voteman', a superhero, aggressively punching reluctant voters into a polling station. *Links:* [EurActiv](#); [New Europe](#); [Europe Online Magazine](#); [Reuters](#); [The Guardian](#); [Newsweek](#); [Washington Post](#)

Confidence rising but voices not being heard, say pre-election attitude surveys: The European Commission published the results of 'Europeans 2014', a Eurobarometer survey conducted in all 28 Member States and which looks at public perception on the economic outlook in Europe and the future of the EU. The survey says confidence is on the rise compared to 2013 levels, even in countries facing economic hardship. 44% of people surveyed consider that 'the worst of the crisis is behind us'. Another survey, by the Pew Research Centre, suggests that around one third of Europeans feel their voices are heard in Brussels, but the remainder do not, sparking fears of a large Eurosceptic vote in next week's European elections. *Link:* [Europa RAPID](#); [Reuters](#); [EurActiv](#); [Europa RAPID](#); [EUObserver](#); [Pew Global](#)

Hollande warns 'disappointing' EU at risk of unravelling: François Hollande has urged French voters to reject Eurosceptic parties at the European elections, with the French President condemning the protectionism and the anti-euro policies of the far-right National Front (FN), led by Marine Le Pen. However, a survey by IFOP, released this week, puts the FN on 24%, with 22.5% for the centre-right UMP and just 18% for the Socialists. About two-thirds of voters are expected to abstain. *Link:* [EurActiv](#); [EUObserver](#)

Greece's Golden Dawn cleared for European elections: The Supreme Court in Athens has approved the candidacy of the far-right Golden Dawn party in the European elections. Golden Dawn is currently under criminal investigation, with party leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos and five MPs all in pre-trial detention on charges involving murder, arson and extortion. Opinion polls suggest Golden Dawn will win around seven per cent of the vote. *Links:* [Europolitics](#); [Financial Times](#); [BBC News](#); [Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC News](#)

Venizelos raises doubts about whether coalition will survive elections: Evangelos Venizelos, Greece's Deputy Prime Minister, said in a televised interview on Tuesday that poor results for the centre-left Elia (Olive tree) coalition would jeopardise the coalition government's legitimacy. His statement angered Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, who claimed that that Venizelos' statement created unnecessary instability. The leader of Greece's radical left Syriza party, Alexis Tsipras, reiterated that for him the upcoming elections constitute a referendum on the success of Greece's bailout programme. *Link:* [Ekathimerini](#)

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Italian PM vows to push for United States of Europe during presidency: Speaking at the State of the Union conference in Florence, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi called for a United States of Europe, warning against anti-European populism and asking European leaders to offer "*an idea of Europe that corresponds to an attractive adventure, rather than just a financial or economic exercise*". Renzi also indicated his policy priorities for the Italian presidency: immigration, growth and employment, citizens' rights and openness to the world. *Link:* [EurActiv](#)

Pavel v Pavel: Soc Dems want Mertlík but coalition partners want Telicka: The Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD) have announced their preferred nominee to the European Commission – former finance minister Pavel Mertlík. However, junior coalition partner ANO 2011 favours former commissioner Pavel Telička. *Link:* [Europe Decides](#)

Finland's SDP ousts finance minister, sparking off government turmoil: Finland's Social Democrats voted to replace their leader, Finance Minister Jutta Urpilainen, with Antti Rinne, a critic of the government's austerity measures. Rinne received 257 votes in the party congress election against 243 votes for Urpilainen, who will stand down as minister. Rinne could push for changes in the government or early elections. The ruling National Coalition Party will also change its leader in June. *Links:* [Reuters](#); [Bloomberg](#)