

WEEKLY ROUND-UP

TOP STORIES: 19–25 April 2014

1

Van Rompuy comments unite Juncker and Schulz in criticism: The lead candidates for the centre-right and centre-left in the European elections, Jean-Claude Juncker (European People's Party) and Martin Schulz (Party of European Socialists) have criticised the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, who stated that he was not a supporter of the lead candidates concept and that the member states will eventually choose the next Commission president. Juncker and Schulz stressed that the votes of EU citizens must be taken into account. A spokesperson for the current Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, described Van Rompuy's remarks, made in an interview at the weekend with German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, as "premature". *Links: [EurActiv](#); [European Voice](#); [Europolitics](#); [EurActiv](#); [New Europe](#); [Süddeutsche Zeitung](#)*

2

Election forecast sees EPP stay in first place: The latest round of predictions from PollWatch 2014 on the European Parliament elections sees the centre-right EPP maintain a lead over the Socialists and Democrats. According to the polls, the EPP will win 217 seats, nine ahead of the S&D on 208. The gap between third-place ALDE and the radical left, in fourth place, has grown, while the Greens have picked up support and are now level with the Conservative group on 41 seats. *Links: [Europe Decides](#); [Pollwatch](#)*

3

Nigel Farage launches Ukip campaign amid criticism of 'racist' rhetoric: Nigel Farage's UK Independence Party (Ukip) has launched its campaign with posters alleging that the 26 million unemployed people in the European Union could be seeking jobs in the UK. Critics said the campaign was xenophobic and even racist. Farage said the posters should highlight the fact that an influx of cheap foreign labour had driven down wages and increased youth unemployment. *Links: [The Guardian](#); [The Guardian](#); [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#); [New Europe](#); [The Telegraph](#); [The Independent](#)*

4

Juncker - "I will work to conclude a fair deal with Britain": The EPP candidate for the Commission presidency, Jean-Claude Juncker, outlined his priorities for his presidency in a speech this week, including economic growth, higher employment and the digital single market. Juncker also stated that, if elected, he will tackle the British question and help renegotiate the UK's EU membership. He said that no reasonable politician can ignore the need to find a solution to keep the UK in the Union. In particular, Juncker stated he would like to conclude a deal with the UK that accepts Britain's specificities, while allowing for the further integration of the eurozone. *Links: [Europolitics](#); [EurActiv](#)*

5

Parties gear up for the First European Presidential Debate: Lead candidates Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP), Martin Schulz (PES), Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE) and Ska Keller (Greens) are gearing up for the First European Presidential Debate, which will be held in Maastricht on Monday 28 April. Young people will have the opportunity to question the candidates for the presidency of the European Commission on the European economy, the future of the EU, and Europe's foreign policy role. This focus on youth issues is intended to stimulate interest among young people in the European elections, since this age group is the most likely not to vote. The debate will be broadcast live on Euronews. Radical left candidate Alexis Tsipras is not participating, instead choosing to focus on the campaign in Greece. *Link: [EurActiv](#)*

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ALSO IN THE NEWS

Juncker to visit 15 countries in last weeks of campaign: The EPP candidate for the Commission presidency, Jean-Claude Juncker, will campaign in fifteen countries between now and the election. His first stops will be in Poland, Germany and Bulgaria. His Socialist opponent for the top job, Martin Schulz, will mainly campaign in Germany according to his campaign website. Guy Verhofstadt, the candidate of the ALDE group of liberals, will visit seven countries between now and the elections. *Link: [European Voice](#)*

Greek leftists opt for 'more suitable' European election candidate: The Greek radical left party Syriza has replaced Sabiha Suleiman, a well-known Roma activist from the Thrace region, with Oumit Mestan Osman, a member of the Thrace's Muslim minority, on its candidate list for the European Parliament elections. Suleiman has been unpopular within the Muslim minority in Thrace when she attempted to distinguish the Roma Muslims from the rest of the population. *Link: [Ekathimerini](#); [Enet English](#)*

Le Pen targets top spot: Marine Le Pen, the leader of the France's far-right National Front (FN), says she aims to win the European elections and then push for a French referendum on European Union membership. The FN also stated in a campaign launch event that it wants France to leave the euro and that it would veto any free trade agreement between the EU and United States. Le Pen aims to form a far-right group in the European Parliament, but Britain's Eurosceptic UK Independence Party (Ukip) has rejected the FN's proposal to join forces, instead building links with the much smaller 'Arise The Republic' party. Potential allies for Le Pen include Austria's far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Dutch politician Geert Wilders, Belgium's Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*), Italy's Northern League (*Legha Nord*) and the Sweden Democrats. The FN is currently battling for top spot in French European election opinion polls with the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). *Link: [European Online Magazine](#); [The Guardian](#)*

Van Rompuy accuses parties of inaction: In an interview with German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, said that he would like to see the European political parties fight for a more positive image of the EU. In an interview in which he expressed doubts about the 'lead candidate' concept (see above), Van Rompuy said that Eurosceptic views grab a lot of attention but that pro-Europeans need to do more to counter anti-EU sentiment. *Link: [Süddeutsche Zeitung](#)*

Bulgaria: fifteen parties, six coalitions, six independent candidates run in European elections: On Tuesday 22 April the deadline for the registration of lists of candidates in Bulgaria expired. A total of 318 candidates are registered. They will compete for 17 seats in the European Parliament. *Link: [Novinite](#)*

Poll: European elections unimportant, say Czechs: According to a CVVM poll conducted among 1,061 people, 56% of Czechs consider the European Parliament election to be unimportant. Only 39%, mostly from Prague, think it is important. *Link: [Prague Post](#)*

Senior aide latest to quit Wilders' Dutch far-right party: Stephan Jansen, a parliamentary staffer described as the right-hand man to Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) leader Geert Wilders, has quit the PVV. Jansen said in a public letter that anti-Moroccan remarks by Wilders had marginalised the party. Two other lawmakers left the party last month in response to the remarks. The PVV is currently second in the European Parliament opinion polls to the progressive liberal D66 party. *Link: [Swiss info](#)*

Social Democrat leader heads slate while Slovenia's governing party goes it alone: Slovenia's centre-left Social Democrats have confirmed their European Parliament election list, headed by the party's President, Igor Lukšič. Current MEPs Tanja Fajon and Mojca Kleva Kekuš are in second and third place respectively. Meanwhile the governing Positive Slovenia party (which is soon to join ALDE) has decided to run its own list after talks to form a common liberal slate broke down. *Link: [Slovenian Press Agency](#)*

The next edition of Europe Decides Weekly appears on Wednesday 30 April.