

## WEEKLY ROUND-UP

### TOP STORIES: 17–23 May 2014

1

**Polls open in European election:** The polls have opened in the European Parliament elections, with voting taking place until Sunday. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, voting took place on Thursday, with the progressive liberal D66 party winning the election in the Netherlands according to an exit poll by Ipsos for the Dutch public broadcaster, NOS. The same exit poll suggested that the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) would lose a seat. In the UK, the UK Independence Party (Ukip) performed well according to the early results from local elections. The results of the European elections will be announced on Sunday, after voting has taken place in the rest of Europe. *Links:* [EUObserver](#); [Europolitics](#); [BBC News](#)

2

**EPP to remain largest party, says PollWatch:** The final PollWatch 2014 prediction suggests that the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) will be the biggest party in the next European Parliament, with a 16-seat advantage over the Socialists and Democrats (S&D). The Liberal Group would be third, on 59 seats, and the radical left fourth, on 53 seats. If these latest predictions are confirmed by the actual results, Ukip and France's National Front would become the fourth- and fifth-largest single parties in the Parliament respectively. Early analysis of the results suggests a grand coalition is on the cards, with neither a centre-left or centre-right coalition gathering sufficient support. *Link:* [Europe Decides](#); [PollWatch 2014](#); [EUObserver](#)

3

**Greece faces double election showdown:** Candidates from Greece's radical left party, Syriza, have performed well in the first round of local elections, reaching the second round of voting in Athens and in the Attica region, the country's two most populous constituencies, on Sunday. New Democracy, the centre-right ruling party performed better in the rest of the country, while the far-right Golden Dawn party scored higher than 16% in Athens. The Syriza leader, Alexis Tsipras, said that the European poll will be a referendum on the Greek bail-out programme. *Links:* [EurActiv](#); [EUObserver](#); [European Voice](#); [European Left](#); [New Europe](#); [Financial Times](#); [Novinite](#); [Reuters](#); [Sofia Globe](#); [New Europe](#); [Jewish Telegraph Agency](#)

4

**No commitment from Herman Van Rompuy to pick lead candidate:** The President of the European Council has stated that the choice of Commission President will depend on a majority in the Parliament and a "large majority" in the European Council. His remarks were seen as a further indication that someone other than one of the five candidates put forward by European political parties may be nominated by the European Council. The lead candidates have warned of a parliamentary veto if the member states' nominee is not one of the five, despite evidence of a lack of knowledge about the candidates among European citizens. *Links:* [European Voice](#); [EurActiv](#); [Euronews](#); [EUObserver](#); [EUObserver](#)

5

**Sarkozy wants EU shake-up:** Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy has called for the creation of German-French economic zone, a common immigration policy, more EU integration led by France and Germany, and restrictions on the EU's competences in an article published in French magazine *Le Point* and German newspaper *Die Welt*. His plea comes as the National Front (FN) is set to win as much as 25% of the vote in Sunday's European election. The FN leader, Marine Le Pen, attacked Sarkozy's plea and doubted his ability to deliver reform. *Link:* [Financial Times](#)

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### ALSO IN THE NEWS

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**Merkel: Voters elect next commission chief 'in principle':** The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said on Thursday that *"in principle"* the next Commission president will be elected by citizens. Merkel noted in the past that there is no automaticity between candidates and electoral result, but the electoral campaigns and the possibility of an institutional blockage seem to be forcing the Chancellor to remain open to one of the lead candidates taking the role. *Link: [EUObserver](#)*

**David Cameron seeks allies in keeping Jean-Claude Juncker from Brussels job:** David Cameron is planning to launch a diplomatic offensive in an effort to lobby against Jean-Claude Juncker, the EPP candidate for the position of President of the European Commission, being selected for the role. The British PM considers Juncker, according to a report in the *Financial Times*, to be part of the established apparatus in Brussels and aims to persuade his fellow leaders that the EU needs a more liberal Commission president. Candidacies for the top jobs will be discussed at an informal dinner next Tuesday and at a dinner in Sweden in early June, although Herman Van Rompuy has stated that it will be too early to expect a decision next week. Instead, leaders *"will talk about the process"* for forming a new Commission. *Link: [Financial Times](#); [EUObserver](#)*

**Timmermans: 'I won't succeed Ashton':** Frans Timmermans, the Dutch Foreign Minister, has said he is not a candidate for the position of next EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. *"I will never play that role"*, he told a Dutch reporter. *Link: [EurActiv](#)*

**Cañete in 'macho' remarks apology:** The lead European election candidate for Spain's ruling People's Party (PP) apologised on Wednesday for the *"unfortunate"* remarks he made to explain his disappointing performance in televised debate with his Socialist rival, Elena Valenciano. After the debate five days previously, Cañete said: *"If you abuse your intellectual superiority you come across like a macho who is pushing a defenceless woman into a corner"*, adding that the debate would have been somewhat different had he debated with Alfredo Rubalcaba, the leader of the Socialist Party (PSOE). Cañete had come under pressure from political opponents, including PES lead candidate Martin Schulz, who tweeted that such *"sexist comments... are unacceptable"*. Polls suggest smaller parties will see an increase in their scores while the PP and PSOE will win 60% of the vote, down from 80% on the 2009 European elections. *Link: [Financial Times](#); [Wall Street Journal](#)*

**Schulz and Juncker face off one last time:** The last TV head-to-head between Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP) and Martin Schulz (PES), broadcast on German television, covered topics such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and data privacy and protection. *Links: [EurActiv](#); [EUObserver](#); [Europolitics](#)*

**EU not a social Union, says Merkel:** After the European Court of Justice upheld Germany's decision to reject benefit claims from EU citizens who come to Germany solely to receive benefits, the country's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said that *"the EU is no social union"*. The ECJ said Germany could reject claims to prevent 'social tourism'. *Link: [EU Observer](#)*

**Italian PM calls for stronger EU ahead of elections:** Matteo Renzi has called on citizens to believe in a stronger European Union, proposing an *"alliance among those who believe that Europe has a future and not only a past"*. The European elections will be the first national vote faced by Renzi, who replaced Enrico Letta in February. Opinion polls predict a healthy lead over rivals, but Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia are usually underestimated by polls. A bad result could expose Renzi to attacks from inside and outside his Democratic Party, possibly leading to new elections. *Links: [New Europe](#); [EurActiv](#)*

**Ukip buys advert to deny racism after Farage's Romanian slip-up:** The UK Independence Party has sought to repair damage caused by anti-Romanian remarks made by its leader, Nigel Farage. The party took out an advert in a national newspaper rejecting allegations of racism after Farage suggested in a radio interview last week that people would be concerned if their neighbours were Romanians, a comment that sparked outrage among rival politicians. Farage claimed his slip-up, which caused an aide to intervene in the interview, was a result of tiredness. *Link: [EurActiv](#)*

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**Ukip success could boost Scotland's independence movement:** Success for Ukip in the European elections could nudge Scottish voters towards voting in favour of independence in September, according to a survey. 18 per cent of respondents were more likely to vote in favor of independence if Ukip captures the largest share of the UK vote in the European elections this week. *Link:* [Financial Times](#)

**Far-right will be useless in the European Parliament says Rachida Dati:** French conservative MEP Rachida Dati has attacked Ukip leader Nigel Farage and National Front leader Marine Le Pen for leading single-issue parties that will be ineffective in the European parliament. Dati expressed confidence about her party, the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), winning the election in France. She also blamed mainstream politicians such as Commission President José Manuel Barroso for not being able to explain their policies, leading to rising abstention and more votes for extreme parties. *Link:* [Telegraph](#)

**Hungarian far-right MEP suspected as Russian spy:** An MEP from Hungary's far-right Jobbik party, Béla Kovács, may lose his parliamentary immunity following a request by the Hungarian chief prosecutor regarding Kovács's alleged spying for Russia. The procedure is likely to take several months in the European Parliament. *Link:* [EurActiv](#)