

WEEKLY ROUND-UP

TOP STORIES: 5–11 April 2014

1

Schulz and Juncker go head-to-head in TV debate: The two main official contenders for the European Commission Presidency, Jean-Claude Juncker of the European People's Party and Martin Schulz of the Party of European Socialists, held their first televised debate on 9 April. In a 45-minute debate on France 24 there was agreement on many points as the candidates discussed the economy, employment, the future of Europe and international affairs. The first debate with all the contenders will take place on 28 April at the University of Maastricht. *Links:* [European Voice](#); [France24](#); [Reuters](#)

2

Finnish PM to stand down in hope of EU job: Finland's Prime Minister, Jyrki Katainen, announced that he will be stepping down in June with a view to taking one of the EU's top jobs following May's European elections. The announcement has fuelled speculation that Katainen may be about to replace Herman Van Rompuy as President of the European Council or that he is positioning himself for the Commission presidency in case a compromise candidate is required for that post. *Links:* [EUObserver](#); [Europolitics](#); [Star Online](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [Financial Times](#)

3

Orbán wins elections, far right gains ground: Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, retained power following national elections on 6 April. Orbán's party, the ruling centre-right Fidesz, obtained 45% of the votes and is set to win 133 seats in the 199-seat Parliament – a two-thirds majority that would allow it to unilaterally change the constitution. Once votes cast by overseas voters and diplomats are counted, however, Fidesz (which also named its European election candidates this week) could win anything from 131 to 135 seats. Jobbik, a far-right party, won 23 seats and 21% of the vote, up from 17% in 2010. The Socialist-led alliance came second with 38 seats and 25% of the vote. The OSCE said that Fidesz benefited from an undue advantage because of restrictive campaign rules, biased media coverage and campaign activities that blurred the activities of the party and the state. *Links:* [EurActiv](#); [EurActiv](#); [EUObserver](#); [New Europe](#); [Financial Times](#); [France24](#); [Independent](#); [Telegraph](#); [Guardian](#); [Guardian](#); [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#); [Chicago Tribune](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [Bloomberg](#); [Budapest Business Journal](#); [Deutsche Welle](#); [Guardian](#); [Reuters](#)

4

Spanish minister to head PP party's European election list: After many weeks of speculation, Spain's governing People's Party confirmed the country's agriculture minister, Miguel Arias Cañete, as the party's lead candidate for the European election. The President of the Committee of the Regions, Ramon Luis Valcarcel, will also stand on the list, published on Thursday. *Links:* [Europolitics](#); [Reuters](#); [Panorama News](#); [El Economista](#); [Europe Decides](#)

5

EP group leaders plan post-election strategy: Leaders of the political groups in the European Parliament, together with the Parliament's President, Martin Schulz, have held a meeting with the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, in which they agreed the post-election timetable for the selection of the Commission. Senior MEPs will meet on 27 May to discuss the election results. *Links:* [European Parliament](#); [EUObserver](#)

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ALSO IN THE NEWS

Austrian MEP Andreas Moelzer stands aside after Nazi remarks: Andreas Moelzer, an MEP for Austria's far-right Freedom Party, has withdrawn his candidacy for the European election. He had come under pressure to step down after comparing the EU to the Third Reich. The FPÖ currently stands at 27% in national opinion polls, ahead of Austria's governing parties. *Links:* [The Star](#); [Austrian Independent](#); [BBC News](#); [Jerusalem Post](#)

Full lists for Croatia, Slovakia and Latvia, and more candidates announced: The complete set of lists for Croatia, Slovakia and Latvia have now been published, along with candidates of the Greek Democratic Left (featuring the S&D MEP Marilena Koppa) and the populist pro-European party The River. *Link:* [Europe Decides](#)

Renzi's Democratic Party announces lists for European Parliament elections: Italy's centre-left Democratic Party, led by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, has presented its lists of candidates for the European elections. Each of the lists for the five constituencies is headed by a woman. The first place in the lists does not necessarily guarantee them a seat, as Italy has an 'open list' system. Meanwhile the Italian Parliament has approved a law requiring electors to choose candidates representing both genders among their three choices, or see their third preference invalidated. *Links:* [Europe Decides](#); [Repubblica](#)

Italy's Grillo wants disloyal MEPs to pay hefty fine: Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S), which is expected to win around 25 seats in the next European Parliament, will ask his candidates to commit to step down and pay a €250,000 fine if they are found to be in "serious breach" of the M5S code of conduct. Activists could vote online to demand the resignation of offending MEPs, a move that could be ruled unconstitutional given that the Italian constitution guarantees a free mandate to elected politicians. The list of 73 candidates, selected through an online ballot of party members, was unveiled on 4 April. *Link:* [EUObserver](#)

Deadline expires for parties, coalition to register for Bulgaria's European Parliament elections: Bulgaria's main parties and coalitions have all submitted the required documents for the European elections to the Central Election Commission, which will now check the validity of the 2,500 signatures needed for a party to be registered. 17 MEPs will be elected in Bulgaria. *Link:* [Sofia Globe](#)

Seven candidates to run for Lithuania's Presidency: The current Lithuanian President, Dalia Grybauskaitė, will be joined by MEP Zigmantas Balcytis, the Mayor of Vilnius, a representative of the Polish community and three other candidates on the ballot paper for the presidential election on 11 May. *Link:* [Authint mail](#)

CDU consider limiting court's powers: After the German Constitutional Court ruled the three per cent threshold for entry into the European Parliament as unconstitutional, Christian Democrats are now considering limiting the Court's powers. February's ruling is expected to lead to more fragmentation and to result in the Neo-Nazi NPD party winning seats in the European Parliament. *Link:* [EuObserver](#)

Antonescu backs Verhofstadt and confirms ALDE membership: At a joint press conference on 7 April Crin Antonescu, the leader of Romania's National Liberal Party (PNL) expressed his support for the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt, the President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group in the European Parliament, for the European Commission presidency. Antonescu scotched rumours that his party would quit ALDE to join the EPP. *Link:* [Partidu National Liberal](#)

Juncker warns UK over renegotiation: EPP Commission presidency candidate Jean-Claude Juncker has said he wants the UK to remain part of the EU but insisted that the basic principle of free movement of people could not be ended. He was reacting to plans by British PM David Cameron to target 'vast migration' as one of the subjects of renegotiation of Britain's EU membership. *Link:* [BBC News](#)

Expenses scandal rocks Conservatives ahead of European elections: Britain's culture minister, Maria Miller, resigned after days of criticism over expenses claims and her perfunctory apology for over-claiming a parliamentary allowance. She had been backed by David Cameron, Britain's PM. Miller's resignation brought back memories of a wider expenses scandal that took place before the last European election and which contributed to a surge in support for the UK Independence Party. At his party's campaign launch,

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Cameron said UKIP MEPs are untrustworthy and do not stand up for the UK in Europe. The PM argued that the Tories offer a ‘third way’ in Europe, opposing the status quo and the exit door. *Links: [Reuters](#); [BBC News](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [BBC](#); [Guardian](#)*

France: Le Pen well ahead of Socialists in European election poll: France’s ruling French Socialist Party is lagging behind both the centre-right UMP (25%) and Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Front (FN, 24%) in a recent European election opinion poll. The PS would take 19%, with the Greens on nine per cent, down from 16% in the 2009 vote. The FN score would be a major advance on the nine per cent in scored in the last European election. 51% of the French have little or no interest in May’s poll. *Link: [New Europe](#)*

Poland's ruling party back in the lead after Ukraine crisis: According to a poll published on 6 April, the crisis in Ukraine has created electoral momentum for Civic Platform (PO), the centre-right party of Poland’s Prime Minister, Donald Tusk. The PM’s proactive role during the events in Kiev has overshadowed domestic political issues and seen the PO go ahead of Jaroslaw Kaczynski’s conservative Law and Justice. Kaczynski, whose party led the polls by up to seven points until recently, called for a televised election debate, but Tusk refused. *Link: [EUObserver](#)*

Tsipras lambasts ‘casino capitalism’: Alexis Tsipras, leader of Greece’s Syriza party and the European Left’s candidate for the presidency of the European Commission, condemned ‘casino capitalism’ at a conference on debt and austerity in Europe held in Brussels. He said he did not share the general optimism about the success of the Greek five-year sovereign bond issue on Wednesday. *Link: [New Europe](#)*