

WEEKLY ROUND-UP

TOP STORIES: 15-21 March 2014

1

Socialists and EPP 'neck-and-neck' in race to be biggest group: The centre-right EPP Group and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) Group are in a statistical dead heat to be the European Parliament's biggest group after May's elections, according to the latest PollWatch 2014 predictions. The new forecast puts the Socialists on 214 seats and the EPP on 213. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Group is set to take third place after having previously been slated to come fourth, behind the radical left. *Links:* [Europe Decides](#); [EurActiv](#); [European Voice](#)

2

Lewandowski to stand in Parliament election: The Commissioner for Financial Programming and Budgets, Janusz Lewandowski, will run in the European election in Poland for the centre-right Civic Platform (PO). He will take five weeks' unpaid leave to campaign. Other PO lead candidates include former finance minister Jacek Rostowski – a potential commissioner, and current European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group MEP Michał Kamiński. *Link:* [Europe Decides](#); [European Voice](#)

3

Schulz receives open letter calling for him to stand down: Representatives of five German parties have sent a letter to the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, calling on him to stand down given his role as the Party of European Socialists (PES) lead candidate in the European elections. *Links:* [Die Welt](#); [Liberale](#); [FDP file](#)

4

Left-liberals and hard left gain seats on Dutch councils: Discontent with governing Liberal (VVD) and Labour (PvdA) parties in the Netherlands saw left-liberal party D66 and the hard-left Socialist Party emerge as the big winners in local elections in the Netherlands. Local parties also made gains, winning 29% of the votes collectively. The far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, remains the biggest party in the municipality of Almere. *Link:* [European Voice](#)

5

Berlusconi foiled in bid to return, but daughters may take up baton: Former Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi has been thwarted in a bid to lead the lists of his party, Forza Italia, in May's European election. Italy's highest appeal court upheld a two-year ban on him holding public office, but it is rumoured that the ex-PM's daughters, Marina and Barbara, may head the party's campaign. *Links:* [EUObserver](#); [Telegraph](#); [Gazzetta del Sud](#); [The Local](#); [BBC News](#); [Irish Times](#); [BBC News](#); [Reuters](#); [The Times](#); [News Talk ZB](#); [Malta Today](#)

ALSO IN THE NEWS

Reding tops CSV list: European Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding will head the list of the Christian Social People's Party (CSV) for the European election in Luxembourg. The list includes current MEPs Georges Bach and Frank Engel. At the announcement – attended by EPP lead candidate Jean-Claude Juncker – Reding called for a stronger Luxembourgish influence in the next parliament. *Link:* [L'essentiel](#)

Bulgaria's parties name candidates as government comes under fire: Sergei Stanishev, the PES President, will head the Bulgarian Socialists' list for the European election. Iliyana Yotova MEP is second on the list. Other parties, including Bulgaria without Censorship, also named candidates. Meanwhile the leader of the centre-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party, which added MEPs Andrei Kovachev and Maria Gabriel to a list headed by ex-EU funds minister Tomislav Donchev, predicted the government's collapse. Boyko Borisov, said he expected elections to be held this year. *Links:* [Novinite](#); [Focus Information Agency](#); [Focus Information Agency](#); [Focus Information Agency](#)

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Spain's Socialists opt for youth: Spain's Socialists (PSOE) have a youthful line-up for the European Parliament election, with several candidates under 40 in the top 20 places. The list, announced on Saturday, is led by deputy party leader Elena Valenciano. The centre-right People's Party is expected to name its candidates shortly. In Cyprus, current GUE/NGL MEP Takis Hadjigeorgiou has been named as a candidate on the far-left Progressive Party of Working People's (AKEL) list. The centre-right Democratic Rally (DISY) party named Eleni Theocharous MEP among the candidates. The Lithuanian Labour Party, a member of ALDE, put party founder Viktor Uspaskich and a former speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament, Vydas Gedvilas, at the head of its list, while MEP Tunne Kelam was named as a candidate for Estonia's Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL), an EPP member. *Read more on [Europe Decides](#)*

Czech authorities review lists: The Czech authorities have announced that 39 entities have filed candidate lists for the European election on 23-24 May. The lists will be verified by early April. *Link: [The Prague Post](#)*

Haider's daughter to lead Austrian far-right party in EU vote: Ulrike Haider-Querica, daughter of Austrian far-right leader Jörg Haider, will lead the list of the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) for the European election. The BZÖ, founded by Haider senior and once in government, is polling at around two per cent, well below the four per cent threshold to win seats in the Parliament. *Links: [EUObserver](#); [Reuters](#)*

SLS endorses joint slate with NSi: The Slovenian People's Party (SLS) and fellow EPP-affiliated party New Slovenia (NSi) will have a joint list for the European election. Candidates are said to include former defence minister Aleš Hojs and MEP Alojz Peterle. *Links: [Slovenska Tiskovna Agencija](#); [Europe Decides](#)*

Battle lines drawn as Fianna Fáil picks last candidates: Ireland's main opposition, Fianna Fáil, has chosen its last candidates for the European election. Pat the Cope Gallagher MEP and Thomas Byrne will stand in the Midlands-North-West constituency, completing the line-ups for the main parties. *Link: [Irish Times](#)*

Cool reception for Cameron's EU reform plans: David Cameron, the British prime minister, set out his plans on how to reform the EU last weekend, focusing on immigration, an increased role for national parliaments, subsidiarity and red tape. MEPs gave the plans a cool reception when they were presented by David Lidington, Britain's Europe minister, at a meeting this week. Lidington highlight the benefits of the plans for all member states, and the possibility of implementing without treaty change. *Link: [European Voice](#)*

One in five will vote in election in Slovakia: Slovakia – the country which has had the lowest voter turnout in the last two European elections – will see only one in five voters definitely casting a ballot in May, according to a new survey. 39.6% of Slovaks polled are considering voting. A quarter of voters will vote for a party other than that they support in national elections. *Link: [The Slovak Spectator](#)*

Tight race for Slovak presidency: Slovakia's PM, Robert Fico, won the first round of the country's presidential election. He will face businessman-turned-philanthropist Andrej Kiska in a run-off on 29 March. *Links: [European Voice](#); [The Wall Street Journal](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC News](#)*

EPP must go 'social', or CDH will leave, says candidate: Claude Rolin, who heads the Francophone Belgian Christian Democrats list for the European Parliament election, says that his party might consider leaving the EPP unless it enhances the social dimension of its policies, rather than austerity. *Link: [EurActiv](#)*

Groups pledge hate-free campaigns: LGBT rights lobby ILGA-Europe and anti-racism group ENAR have drafted a pledge to be signed by political groups that commits them to avoiding discrimination and intolerance in European election campaigns. Most mainstream parties have signed the pledge, but the EPP Group did not, citing its commitment to the principles in a letter. *Link: [EUObserver](#)*

Golden Dawn expels MP as net tightens on far right: Greece's Golden Dawn has expelled MP Stathis Boukouras after he said he may leave the neo-Nazi party. He is one of six senior party officials facing charges of belonging to a criminal organization following a government crackdown. Opinion polls put Golden Dawn on 4.5% for the European Parliament election. *Link: [The Chicago Tribune](#)*

LIVRE approved as new political party in Portugal: Portugal's Constitutional Tribunal has officially recognised the LIVRE party, launched by Green MEP Rui Tavares. LIVRE candidates can now run in the European election. *Link: [Publico](#)*