

## WEEKLY ROUND-UP

## TOP STORIES: 25-31 October 2014

1

**New Commission prepares to take over with smaller private offices and new spokesperson service:** The new European Commission, under its President, Jean-Claude Juncker, takes office on Saturday. Under structural changes, the spokesperson's service will have around 15 members, while commissioners will be expected to have more direct interaction with the media. Commissioners will no longer have spokespeople but communications officers, and they will also have smaller private offices of just six members (with vice-presidents having seven cabinet members and Frans Timmermans, the First Vice-President, eight). *Links:* [European Voice](#); [Europolitics](#)

2

**Changes to Council voting rules about to be phased in:** New decision-making rules in the Council of the European Union will take effect on 1 November. The rules, introduced in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, will alter the balance of voting power between member states, attaching greater importance to the population size of countries. A qualified majority will now have to consist of at least 55% of the member states with votes representing 65% of the EU population. A blocking minority will have to comprise at least four member states. The current rules can still be applied, at the request of a member state, until 2017. *Link:* [European Voice](#)

3

**Brussels warns David Cameron over €2.1bn bill payment:** The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has said that the UK Treasury will not pay an extra €2.1bn contribution to the EU's budget on 1 December, saying that he will challenge the decision "*in every possible way*". Criteria to calculate member state contributions to the EU budget are based on countries' economic performances and have been recently modified. The European Commissioner for Financial Programming and the Budget, Jacek Dominik, said that British representatives did not raise "*any concern*" during the negotiations to set up the new calculation method, and that the Commission was simply applying the agreed formula. *Links:* [Financial Times](#); [European Voice](#); [EurActiv](#); [BBC News](#)

4

**Latvian president endorses coalition government:** The President of Latvia, Andris Berzins, has approved a new government coalition composed of the centre-right Union party, the centrist Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), and the conservative National Alliance party. The new government will be voted on 5 November. If it is approved, the Union party will be responsible for the finance, transport, foreign policy and education portfolios, the ZZS for the health, economics, welfare, agriculture and defence portfolios, and the National Alliance will supply the environmental protection and regional development, justice, and culture ministers. *Link:* [New Europe](#)

5

**Bulgarian election winner Borissov may not lead new cabinet:** Bulgaria's former prime minister Boyko Borissov, who won national elections without an outright majority on 5 October, announced that he may not lead the next cabinet unless coalition party leaders take part in it. Borissov's GERB party – a member of the European People's Party (EPP) – holds 84 seats in the 240-member assembly. At present, the Socialists (39 seats), the Reformist Bloc (23 seats) and the nationalist Patriotic Front (19 seats) are refusing to enter into a coalition. The EPP President, Joseph Daul, has warned Borissov not to include the Patriotic Front in the future governing coalition. If no government can be formed, the EU's poorest country will face another round of early elections. *Links:* [Bloomberg](#); [EurActiv](#); [EurActiv](#)

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### ALSO IN THE NEWS

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**Names of key members of Tusk's cabinet unveiled:** The future European Council President's team is still being put together, but the names of some members have already been confirmed. André Gillissen, who currently heads the trade unit at the Council Secretariat-General in Luxembourg, is expected to be named deputy chief of staff, under Piotr Serafin, Poland's former Europe minister. Frenchman Jean-Pierre Vidal (who was formerly with the European Central Bank) will probably become Tusk's economic adviser. Danish national Preben Aamann is expected to be reappointed as spokesperson to the new President. *Link: [Europolitcs](#)*

**Cameron's bid to guarantee EU referendum fails:** British Prime Minister David Cameron's hopes of introducing legislation to hold a referendum on the EU membership in 2017 have collapsed, with his Liberal Democrat coalition partners blocking the proposed law. Cameron still has a chance to hold a referendum if he secures a majority in the 2015 general election. *Link: [EurActiv](#)*

**Swedes lean towards Nato membership, poll shows:** According to a new poll, support for Swedish membership of Nato is growing. 37% of Swedes would be in favour of joining the alliance, more than those who oppose it – a historic first. The country has always been considered neutral but last week's hunt for a suspected Russian submarine in the waters outside Stockholm appears to have triggered a shift in public opinion. The current centre-left government is opposed to a Nato membership but has recently signed an agreement allowing the organisation to deploy troops in the country. *Link: [Financial Times](#)*

**Estonia's finance minister resigns:** Jürgen Ligi, Estonia's finance minister and vice-chairman of the Reform Party, has tendered his resignation after disparaging remarks about a cabinet colleague. The decision helped relieve tensions between the Reform Party and its Social Democrat coalition partners after Ligi called the education and research minister, Jevgeni Ossinovski, "rootless" and "ignorant" in comments posted on Facebook following an immigration debate on Estonian television. The finance portfolio will now go to his economic adviser Maris Lauri, who lacks political background but has a strong financial track record. *Links: [European Voice](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [Reuters](#); [Bloomberg](#)*

**Socialists choose Paşcu to be new Parliament vice-president:** Romanian MEP Ioan Mircea Paşcu is set to replace Corina Creţu as a European Parliament Vice-President. The Socialists and Democrats group has put forward Paşcu to replace Creţu, who becomes Commissioner for Regional Policy. Paşcu, who became an MEP in 2007, when Romania entered the European Union, is likely to be approved by the Parliament on 12 November. *Link: [European Voice](#)*

*With the new European Commission taking office on 1 November, and the other major institutional changes complete, this will be the last edition of Europe Decides Weekly.*

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