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## PARLIAMENT DIVIDED OVER FUTURE OF BRITISH MEPS

22.11.2016

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EurActiv

The redistribution of the European Parliaments top jobs in January raises questions over the future of British MEPs. Blocking the Brits may hand key posts to the extreme right, EurActiv France reports.

How can a British MEP legitimately keep their position in the European Parliament after the Brexit vote? This is the thorny question the institution must answer.

The 73 British MEPs are largely concentrated in three political groups: the Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), which was founded by the British Conservative Party after its split with the European Peoples Party (EPP), Nigel Farage's resolutely anti-European Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group, in which the UK has the third-largest delegation, after Germany and Italy.

Between a rock and a hard place

The S&D group has more pro-European British MEPs than any other group. The question of their future in the institution after the UK's vote to leave the EU is becoming a burning one, as the Parliament prepares for its mid-mandate reshuffle of key posts.

Convention dictates that this reshuffle, which will affect the Parliaments committee presidents, coordinators and vice-presidents, must take place by January 2017.

I would like to raise a subject that nobody is talking about: I think that in the future structure, the British MEPs should be removed from committee presidencies and positions as coordinators and rapporteurs, said Belgian Socialist MEP Marc Tarabella.

### LEAKED MEMO: UK GOVERNMENT HAS NO BREXIT STRATEGY

The British government has no Brexit strategy, and may not have one before triggering Article 50 in March 2017, according to a leaked memo published by The Times today (15 November).

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A sensitive debate

A member of the internal market committee, Tarabella hoped to make the committee president, the British Conservative MEP Vicky Ford (ECR group), clarify her intentions for 2017.

I am blowing the whistle on this question. The debate is not open at all because we are afraid of offending people. But we absolutely have to take a position by the end of the year, he said.

While many Socialists see the Belgian MEPs question as a pertinent one, a majority in the Parliament prefer not to rock the boat, so long as the Brexit agenda remains undefined.

British Prime Minister Theresa May has announced her plan to activate Article 50 of the EU Treaty by March 2017, which would set the UK on a course to leave the bloc by March 2019 at the latest.

But the timetable could be disrupted by this month's High Court ruling that May must consult the UK parliament before starting negotiations with the EU.

#### UK GOVERNMENT DEFEATED IN ARTICLE 50 COURT CASE

The UK's High Court has ruled against Theresa May's government on whether parliamentary approval is needed to trigger Article 50, in a decision that could have devastating consequences for the prime minister's Brexit plans.

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Brexit is not the fault of the United Kingdom alone. We are seeing the same things happening in the United States and in other European countries. Punishing the UK for Brexit does not seem like the best option to me, said Jude Kirton-Darling, a Labour MEP (S&D group).

Parliament presidency

Then there is the delicate question of the presidency of the European Parliament.

Current Parliament President Martin Schulz has hinted he may run for a third term. But the German Socialist is facing opposition from the EPP, the Parliament's biggest political group. The centre-right group hopes to place its own candidate in the top spot for the second half of the mandate, as they had agreed with the S&D at the start of the mandate.

#### EPP CANDIDATES LINE UP TO REPLACE SCHULZ

Five centre-right candidates are in the running to become the next president of the European Parliament. But after five years in the job, Martin Schulz has no intention of stepping down. EurActiv France reports.

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As long as the question of the Parliament presidency is not decided, the other questions will not be either, a parliamentary source said. And Martin Schulz will need all the votes he can get if he wants to be re-elected.

Under the DHont system, the European Parliament's key posts are distributed evenly between the different political groups, depending on the number of members they have.

It is generally considered a fair method of distributing responsibilities, but proved flexible in 2014,

when the bigger groups twisted the rules to deny the Eurosceptic EFDD group access to the top jobs.

#### PRO-EU PARTIES SHUT OUT FARAGE'S EFDD FROM COMMITTEES

UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage this evening (7 July) blasted the three main pro-European parties for blocking his Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy MEPs from influential positions in European Parliament committees.

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The same flexibility could this time be called on to block Marine Le Pens Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group from the institutions positions of power. Formed in June 2015, this extreme right group now has the same rights of access to the Parliaments top jobs as any other group.

But for the majority of pro-European MEPs, this is unthinkable.

The pro-European members very much want to avoid any situation that could give more power to the National Front, a source said. Otherwise we may have seen more forceful calls to re-examine the situation of the British MEPs, they added.

#### LE PEN'S NEW EU PARLIAMENT GROUP TO SCOOP €17.5 MILLION OF PUBLIC MONEY

Marine Le Pen, the leader of Frances National Front, will today (16 June) announce the creation of Europe of Nations and Freedoms, a new far-right European Parliament group that will qualify for up to €17.5 million of EU money over the next four years.

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