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## **GREEK MINISTER: FAR-RIGHT RISE IN EUROPE NEEDS A PROGRESSIVE FEDERALISM RESPONSE**

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The election of Manfred Weber as the European Peoples Party (EPP) Spitzenkandidat ahead of next Mays European elections confirms the right turn of the EPP, Nikos Pappas, Greek minister for digital policy, media and telecommunications, told EURACTIV.com on Thursday (8 November).

According to him, the rise of the far-right in Europe needs to be answered with the creation of a progressive pro-EU alliance.

The EPP cannot address this crucial challenge, said Pappas, a minister in Alexis Tsipras leftist government. The tough conservative right is a preacher of national antagonisms and hatred, Pappas said.

According to the Greek minister, it was regrettable that there seems to be no political will to escape from the practices and policies that, he said, have led the EU to a lasting economic and political crisis.

We would expect them to estimate what is wrong in the EU, why the far-right is still being boosted and why its rhetoric is often adopted by mainstream political parties. The EPP needs to say why our continent is not developing at the same pace as its competitors, Pappas said.

Manfred Weber, a German conservative from the Bavarian CSU party, was elected on Thursday (8 November) as the EPP Spitzenkandidat for the 2019 European elections. He secured 492 votes at the EPP congress in Helsinki, while his rival Alexander Stubb was well behind, winning 127 votes. The EPP is the European Parliaments largest party and currently appears likely to remain so after next Mays elections.

### **Weber wins EPP Spitzenkandidat in landslide victory**

German Manfred Weber was crowned Spitzenkandidat of the EPP, the European Parliaments largest party, on Thursday (8 November), after he swept to victory in a contest that saw ex-Finnish Prime minister Alexander Stubb win only 20% of the votes.

In an interview with EURACTIV in September, GUE-NGL chief Gabriele Zimmer said the EPP should decide whether it wants to be a conservative party belonging to the centre or move closer to the right of the political spectrum.

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) used to be part of the EPP some years ago and they left. If this kind of political force is coming back because of a new orientation, then the EPP will go further right, she told EURACTIV.

### **Bringing progressives together**

Pappas, who is a close ally of the Greek premier, said the objective was to create a progressive alliance that will overcome the failed model of neo-liberalism, and push back the far-right, leading the EU towards a social and democratic model.

When we talk about a front of progressive forces, we do it on the basis of political priorities. It is, therefore, important all the forces have their say on the agenda which is now clear and requires answers: how do we stand against neo-liberalism, the far right, the democratic deficit, Pappas said.

Pappas added that as members of the European Left, we have formed a co-ordination strategy with the Greens and the Social Democrats.

On 9-11 November, the European Forum of Progressive, Ecological and Leftist Forces will be held in Bilbao to push for unity of the progressive forces ahead of the EU election.

In addition to that, on 27 November, the Progressive Caucus, an informal group of MEPs from GUE-NGL, the Greens and S&D, are organising an event in the European Parliament. For the first time, all presidents of the groups will take part: Udo Bullman (S&D) Ska Keller (Greens/ EFA) and Gabrielle Zimmer (GUE/ NGL).

For Syriza MEP, Dimitris Papadimoulis, who is coordinating the progressive push at the EU Parliament level, progressive political forces should not remain silent in light of the far-right rise.

The left-wing and progressive political forces that were the initiators of European unification cannot be non-united in the next European elections, especially when the ghosts of the past reappear to break the European project [ \* ] when the extreme right is on the rise, European Parliament Vice-President Papadimoulis told EURACTIV.com.

### **Syriza in quest to unite progressive forces ahead of EU elections**

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his close ally, senior Syriza MEP Dimitris Papadimoulis, are launching a number of initiatives to build bridges among Europe's fragmented progressive political forces and create a broad alliance ahead of the EU elections.

It is clear that the only solution for the progressive forces is a left-wing federalism. At this time, we have no right to show indecisiveness or hesitancy, Pappas warned.

If the Left and the Progressive Forces do not speak aggressively about the prospect of deepening

the European unification, we will see nationalism increasingly gaining ground with more and more disappointed fellow citizens, he concluded.

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Kaynak/Source: