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**NEXT EU COMMISSION CHIEF NOT NECESSARILY A SPITZENKANDIDAT, ECR LEADING CANDIDATE SAYS**

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25.04.2019

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EurActiv (26 April 2019)

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PRAGUE

Spitzenkandidaten and EC presidency: ECR Spitzenkandidat Jan Zahradil believes that his group will remain the third largest political force in the European Parliament after the EU elections. He also said the new European Commission chief should not necessarily be one of the Spitzenkandidaten. I think that the European Council has the right to choose even somebody who is not among the offered election leaders, Czech MEP Zahradil said.

Czechs are tired of Brexit: Over a half of Czechs feel tired of the Brexit debates, recent polls published by STEM/MARK agency shown. Also about half of the respondents think that most British would vote against Brexit if a second referendum were held in the country. (Aneta Zachová, EURACTIV.cz)

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LONDON

Climate demo faces extinction: After nine days of protests and over 1,000 arrests, the Extinction Rebellion □ a demonstration against climate change that has brought London to a standstill □ will end on Thursday, activists said, after police shifted the final roadblocks in the city centre.

The campaign, which has built on the publicity generated by 16-year-old campaigner, Greta Thunberg, has urged Theresa Mays government to tell the truth about climate change; reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2025; and to create a citizens assembly to oversee progress. (Benjamin Fox, EURACTIV.com)

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BERLIN

Germany's new migration deal: The conservative wing of the CDU/CSU WerteUnion has criticised a new package of legislation on migration, which the German Cabinet approved past week, and

wants renegotiations.

The package includes the so-called Orderly Return Bill (Geordnete-Rückkehr-Gesetz), pushed forward by Germany's Interior Minister Horst Seehofer. It aims to make it harder for people whose asylum request has failed, to avoid deportation. Another part of the package is the Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz, a new labour immigration programme, which attempts to attract skilled workers from non-EU countries to work in Germany. The CDU/CSU had previously conditioned its approval to the latter on the SPD's acceptance of the Orderly Return Bill.

However, the WerteUnion claims that too many concessions have been made to the coalition partner, arguing that the drafted labour immigration programme would facilitate the access of foreigners to social securities. This again would increase migration caused by poverty, they say. (Alicia Prager, EURACTIV.de)

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## PARIS

Shelter for migrants: Mayors of thirteen large cities have asked the government to find shelter for the migrants they host. In a letter, the mayors wrote, We are facing increasing tension over care arrangements.

They denounced a humanitarian situation that is constantly deteriorating, with women, children and hundreds of men living in unsuitable conditions in the heart of our cities for lack of appropriate solutions.

A fresh union on the left side: Socialists, Place publique and Nouvelle donne teamed up yesterday with the left radicals or Radicaux de gauche. MEP Virginie Roziere is a member of the party close to socialists in France. She is well known for her fights against Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple in the EU's copyright reform. According to the polls, the list should not get more than 4 or 5 seats. (EURACTIV.fr)

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## MADRID

Five former ministers to run for the EU elections: Spain's official journal has published the candidates for the upcoming EU elections. Although not many of the current MEPs are likely to get a seat again, EPP group vice-president Esteban Gonzalez Pons or European Socialist Party first Vice-President Iratxe Garcia will most probably go back to the chamber in July. Among the new faces are former chair of the Parliament and current Foreign Affairs Minister, Josep Borrell (S&D), as well as four ex-ministers from Spanish Popular Party governments, including the head of the list, Dolors Montserrat, dealing with Health during the Mariano Rajoy mandate. (Beatriz Ríos, EURACTIV.com)

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## ROME

Salvinis turn-around: In the last four and a half years, the maximum estimated number of irregular migrants in Italy is around 90,000, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has said in a press conference. Analysts noticed that the number was much lower than Salvini's previous estimates, around

500,000-600,000 migrants, which contributed to fueling an anti-migrant sentiment. (Gerardo Fortuna, EURACTIV.com)

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## ATHENS

Greece to establish a National Security Council: The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs has put a new bill in public consultation that changes its organisation and mainly recommends for the first time a National Security Council in the country. Most parties expressed their reservation on its role in crisis situations.

PM to visit China: In his third visit to the eastern country, Greek PM Alexis Tsipras will go again to China this week to join the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Chinas investments in Greece, which currently stand at around  billion, are expected to be on the agenda, including COSCOs investment in the port of Piraeus, which faces delays.

Some Chinese companies have also expressed strong interest in Greeces energy sector, but critics are worried about the EUs reaction to the Chinese opening. (Theodore Karaoulanis, EURACTIV.gr)

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## WARSAW

Polish teachers on strike: Polish teachers have been on strike for 18 days, asking for a  monthly pay rise. According to the Ministry of National Education statistics, the average junior teacher currently earns €500 while the most senior diploma teacher €900.

If the strike continues, it could endanger the final A level exams (matura) due in May, however, Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki yesterday introduced a new regulation that de facto omits teachers to enable examinations. (Karolina Zbytniewska, EURACTIV.pl)

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## BRATISLAVA

Climate dinosaurs: Slovak political parties in the European Parliament performed alarmingly weak in climate policy, an analysis of Climate Action Network Europe (CAN) for the period 2014-2019 has shown. The EPP affiliated parties (Most-Híd, KDH, SMK) belong to the Dinosaurs group of parties which have not yet grasped the need for action against climate change and prevent others from doing more, while ECR parties (NOVA, OĽANO, SaS) showed a complete denial of the urgency to act against climate change.

The best PES affiliated party (Smer-SD) made it among Delayers and no party qualified as Defender. (Zuzana Gabrižová, EURACTIV.sk)

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## BUCHAREST

Criminal law changes: The Romanian Parliament has adopted new changes to criminal laws, which according to critics, will only favor the culprits and not the victims, as well as close several ongoing

high-profile corruption cases.

It is the second time over the past year in which the Parliament has modified the Criminal Code, but the countrys Constitutional Court had previously rejected changes. The opposition said it would challenge the new laws as well, although the ruling parties said they have only introduced the revisions that were already ruled constitutional. (EURACTIV.ro)

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## SOFIA

Election lists ready: 318 Bulgarians will run in the European elections, EURACTIVs partner Dnevnik.bg has reported. This represents 13 parties with 17 candidates each (Bulgaria has 17 MEPs with or without the UK in the EU), 8 coalitions and 6 initiative committees, which include 5 independent candidates.

According to the polling agency, Alpha research only three forces are expected to pass the 5.8% threshold and elect MEPs: the ruling party GERB of Boyko Borissov (EPP-affiliated), the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (PES-affiliated) and the mostly ethnic Turkish DPS □ Movement of Rights and Freedoms (ALDE-affiliated). (Georgi Gotev, EURACTIV.com)

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## ZAGREB

Why Croatia signed agreements with China: Trade between Croatia and China amounts to □ billion. Croatia, like most other countries, has a trade deficit with China. The agreements that have been signed are aimed at reducing the trade imbalance, said Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković.

Croatia providing well for migrants: The Council of Europe (CoE) has said that the Croatian authorities have been providing for migrants well but the existing accommodation capacity is insufficient for unaccompanied migrant children. NGOs also accused the police of inhuman treatment toward migrants. Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs Marija Pejčinović Burić is a candidate for the position of Secretary General of the CoE. (Željko Trkanjec, EURACTIV.hr)

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## LJUBLJANA

Mainstream parties are to blame: Slovenian PM Marjan Šarec has told AP that mainstream EU officials and parties have failed to deter right-wing groups. Šarec said populists were on the rise because moderate groups havent pushed their own agenda actively enough. Brexit is a quite good example how things are done in the EU, endless debates, then the date of exit is coming, then we are faced with it and we prolong it again, he said. (Željko Trkanjec, EURACTIV.hr)

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## BELGRADE

Google becomes a member of Digital Serbia Initiative: Google became a new member of the non-profit Digital Serbia Initiative, which gathers 28 organisations and companies from different fields

around the idea of transforming Serbia into a digital society. Google will use its international experience in supporting the development of digital economies to help the Initiative. (Beta-EURACTIV.rs)

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[Edited by Sarantis Michalopoulos and Samuel Stolton]

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