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## MACRON'S RENAISSANCE MAKES ITS PITCH FOR THE EU CENTRE GROUND

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### PARIS

Emmanuel Macrons Renaissance platform, which aims to create a centrist alliance of more than 100 lawmakers, set out its stall at a rally on Saturday in Strasbourg.

Reuters reported that Macron could play a kingmaker role in the next European Parliament considering that neither the centre-right European Peoples Party (EPP) nor the EU socialists will be able to form a majority. Macron has said he respects EPPs candidate Manfred Weber but does not feel bound at all by the principle of Spitzenkandidaten

MEP and EPP vice-president Françoise Grossetête said she would vote for Macrons list than her own centre-right Les Republicains party. Former right-wing PM Jean-Pierre Raffarin also made a passionate speech in Strasbourg on the EU.

Guy Verhofstadt, who had to stay in a Paris hospital for a health issue, sent a video message, as well as centre-left Matteo Renzi whose Democratic Party is considering joining the Renaissance group in the next EU Parliament.

Antonio Costa, the Portuguese socialist PM, also voiced his support, arguing that the EU needed its progressive parties to work together.

Those who say that we will be isolated and that will have no clout in the parliament will discover we have at least 100 lawmakers on whom they will have to rely, Nathalie Loiseau, who leads the Renaissance list, told RTL-LCI.

According to her, the group should be a centrist group in the European Parliament that makes a difference, without which no majority is possible.

Dimitris Papadimoulis, EU Parliament vice-president and leftist Syriza MEP, told EURACTIV.com on 10 May that Weber had no chance to get the EU Commission high post.

I think even Berlin proposed Weber as a single-use candidate and not because he thinks he has a real chance of being Junckers successor. The EU left, the socialists and the Greens have already said a clear no to Mr Weber. A new majority, which can pick another president, is being shaped, Papadimoulis said.

EU democrats should create a wide pro-EU alliance, from leftist Alexis Tsipras to centrist Emmanuel Macron, he said in an interview last September. (Aline Robert, EURACTIV.fr / Sarantis

## **LONDON**

Farage slams BBC: In a heated interview on the BBCs Andrew Marr show, Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage slammed the broadcaster for not asking the types of questions he wanted to answer.

I've been going around the country speaking at packed rallies every night and do you know who is not there? The BBC, Farage said on Sunday. And with this line of questioning I can see why. You are just not interested are you?

Farage refused to address Marrs questions on a range of controversial issues, including gun regulation, global warming, and the privatisation of the NHS. (Samuel Stolton, EURACTIV.com)

## **BERLIN**

AKK has no plans to push Merkel out. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, leader of the governing Christian Democrats (CDU) has said she has no ambition to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor before 2021. The chancellor and the government are elected for a full term and citizens are right to expect that they take this mandate seriously, she told German dailyDie Weltin an interview.

Commenting on speculations that Merkel might leave earlier than planned, she said: When it comes to me, I can rule out that I am scheming for a change.

## **MADRID**

More Catalans reject independence. A poll conducted by the regional Opinion Studies Center has found that 48.6% (44.1% in March) of respondents in Catalonia are against the separatist movement and the idea of secession from Spain, El Pais reported.

## **ROME**

EU referendum. Lega leader Matteo Salvini has called the upcoming EU elections a referendum on his partys policies. On 26 May there are no EU elections, but a referendum between life and death, past and future, a free Europe and an Islamic State based on insecurity and fear, he said.

Far-right environmentalist movement. Giuseppe Civati, the leader of the leftist party Possibile which planned to run in the EU elections together with the Italian Greens, has suspend the campaign after a report in the daily Il Foglio found that two Green candidates were also backed by the far-right environmentalist movement Green Front. Constitutional values and anti-fascism come first for me, said Civati. (Gerardo Fortuna, EURACTIV.com)

## **WARSAW**

Man of the Year. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the foundation of Gazeta Wyborcza daily, President of the EU Council Donald Tusk received its Man of the Year award.

I would like all those who find a common ground, e.g. with the US President as the Polish government does, to convince even the most demanding partners, that they do not treat the EU as a problem, as something negative [ \* ] It is in the interest of Poland and entire Europe to maintain transatlantic ties at any price, Tusk said.

According to a TVN channel survey, in the first round of presidential elections, 41% of respondents would vote for current President Andrzej Duda, and 28% for Tusk.

## **BRATISLAVA**

Le Pen visits Bratislava. The leader of the French National Rally will meet her new Slovak partners in the ENF, Sme rodina [ ] Boris Kollárs party, which is expected to elect one or two MEPs in the EU elections.

We want to uphold the EU. Marine Le Pen wanted to exit from the EU in the past. She is not saying that anymore \* As we put it, she embraced common sense, Peter Pčolinský, Sme rodina lead candidate, told EURACTIV.sk in an interview. (Zuzana Gabrižová, EURACTIV.sk)

## **PRAGUE**

Police cooperation is growing. Police authorities from other EU member countries detained 330 persons wanted in the Czech Republic last year using the European Arrest Warrant, the Czech News Agency reported.

The Czech police also found over 450 persons wanted in other EU countries. The use of the warrant and other forms of police and judiciary cooperation has been growing since Czechs entered the EU in 2004. (Ondřej Plevák, EURACTIV.cz)

## **BUDAPEST**

Orban avoids debate with Timmermans. According to socialist MEP István Ujhelyi, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has refused a Euronews invitation for a TV debate with socialist Spitzenkandidat Frans Timmermans ahead of the latters visit to Budapest on 18 May.

It would not be right to interfere in the election campaign of Mr Weber and Mr Timmermans, Orban said. Last week, Orban said he would not back Weber as president of the EU Commission despite coming from the EPP.

Orbans cowardice is well-documented. Since 2006, he has been refusing to participate in any open debate as he prefers to use his propaganda machine to get political messages across, Ujhelyi said.

## **ATHENS**

Mitsotakis hits out at Tsipras. Main opposition New Democracy leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis has said Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban dont want Weber as the next EU Commission President but both of them are not saying whom they really want. He also called Tsipras to resign and call snap national elections if his party comes second in the EU elections. (Theodore Karaoulanis, EURACTIV.gr)

Syriza counter-attacks. A new poll commissioned by Documento.gr has found that the difference between New Democracy and Syriza has narrowed to 2.5%. New Democracy scored 30.5%, Syriza 28%, far-right Golden Dawn 6.5% and socialist Movement of Change (Pasok) 5.5%. The poll was conducted before Tsipras announced anti-austerity measures last week. (Sarantis Michalopoulos, EURACTIV.com)

## **SOFIA**

Defending the citizenship-by-investment program. The Bulgarian association of employers wants the government to keep a program that grants citizenship to foreign investors. There were calls to revise the scheme after the chairman of the national agency for Bulgarians living abroad was charged with creating an organised crime group and taking bribes in a lucrative scheme that may have allowed thousands of people to fraudulently acquire passports from Bulgaria. (EURACTIVs partner Dnevnik).

Tensions with Turkey. Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva is summoning on Monday (13 May) the ambassador of Turkey Hasan Ulusoy following the latters statement on 11 May that Ankara wants the Bulgarian authorities to encourage the teaching of the Turkish language in Bulgarian schools.

Ulusoy made the statement in front of Bulgarian PM Boyko Borissov on the occasion of the opening of a plant by a Turkish investor in the Bulgarian city of Kardjali, an area with compact Turkish ethnic population. Zaharieva called Ulusoy's statement disturbing adding that Turkish can be studied in Bulgaria like any other language. Ulusoy later explained that Turkish investors needed workers who could not only speak but also write in Turkish. (Georgi Gotev, EURACTIV.com)

## **BUCHAREST**

Fresh ELA spat. Romania could not have applied to host the European Labour Authority because, as the holder of EU Council presidency, it needs to be impartial, labour minister Marius Budai wrote on Facebook. Centre-right MEP Siegfried Muresan, who has repeatedly asked the government to file a bid to host the new EU agency, said the minister was either unaware of the EU rules or he is deliberately lying to hide his incompetence.

No EU rule denies Romanias right to file a bid, it just cannot use the EU Council presidency to influence the decision in its favour, Muresan said. Its like saying the World Cup organiser cannot

take part in the competition it hosts, he added.

## **ZAGREB**

Opportunity for Croatian companies. The Croatian Chamber of Commerce (HGK) has signed an agreement with the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) and the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK) under which Croatian companies operating abroad would be able to use the services of German foreign trade chambers under the same terms as German companies.

## **BELGRADE**

Belgrade wants good relations with Skopje. At the inauguration of the newly elected President of North Macedonia, Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vučić said Belgrade would try to remove misunderstandings between the two countries and boost economic ties (Beta-EURACTIV.rs)

## **SARAJEVO**

BiH on US agenda after Serbia-Kosovo spat. High representative of the international community in BiH Valentin Inzko has said the USA will be more engaged in the Western Balkans region. The problems facing BiH will be tackled after the Serbia-Kosovo crisis is resolved, he added. (Željko Trkanjec, EURACTIV.hr)

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*[Edited by Sarantis Michalopoulos, Benjamin Fox]*

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