
EU POLITICAL GROUPS START TO HAMMER OUT COALITION CONTENT

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The European Parliament's four main political groups, aiming to forge a coalition after last month's EU elections, will meet on Thursday (13 June) for the first time to hammer out issues of substance.

Negotiations on choosing the new leadership for EU institutions are going on in a separate track, while the political parties will start negotiating on the possible policy platforms for a coalition between the centre-right, the socialists, the liberals and the greens.

"Tomorrow we will go to Brussels and we will start the negotiations with other three pro-EU parties on defining the mandate for the next five years, content is now important," the centre-right European People's Party's (EPP) lead candidate for the EU commission presidency, Manfred Weber said Wednesday (12 June) in Spain.

The EPP remained the biggest party after the May elections despite losing dozens of seats, while the greens and liberals received a strong boost in numbers.

MEPs from the groups will meet on Thursday morning in five different working groups to address topics the parliament's emerging majority wants to focus on: climate and environment, social and economic issues including taxation and trade, rule of law, migration and terrorism, Europe in the world, defence, multilateralism, and digitalisation, single market and innovation.

The working groups were set up as part of an agreement between the four groups last week.

In the afternoon, leaders of the groups will then meet for a political discussion.

The political parties are keen to stay on top of the convoluted process of choosing the new EU leadership.

Despite most parties signing up to the Spitzenkandidat 'lead candidate' process, which means that the largest party after the elections should get the commission top job, there is no clear candidate of the parliament.

Summit looms

EU leaders, who will gather in Brussels for their regular pre-summer summit next week, are also eager to keep the process of choosing the top leadership in their hands.

They also treat top jobs as a 'package', and want to agree on not only the EU commission president (to replace Jean-Claude Juncker), but also on the EU's foreign affairs chief (Federica Mogherini), the presidents of the European Council (Donald Tusk), and the European Central Bank (Mario Draghi).

A new president for the European Parliament will also have to be selected.

The negotiations are led by EU council president Tusk, who is expected to present a list of names next week to leaders.

In the meantime, European political families also designated two leaders per alliance to coordinate.

Liberals Charles Michel of Belgium and Mark Rutte of the Netherlands, centre-right Krisjanis Karins of Latvia and Andrej Plenkovic of Croatia, and socialists Antonio Costa of Portugal and Pedro Sanchez of Spain met last Friday in Brussels for the first time.

Plenkovic said on Wednesday that while the discussions were "very open, frank and friendly", the politicians stuck to their positions.

"The first positions were completely identified. That is to say, we are supporting Manfred [Weber], Socialists are supporting [commission vice-president Frans] Timmermans, and liberals are supporting [competition commissioner Margrethe] Vestager. That's why we agreed to continue our discussion," Plenkovic told a journalist standing next to Weber.

The Croatian prime minister said the EPP is adamant that they should get the commission presidency.

"That is the only post that the EPP is deeming as something logical, after the results to belong to the political group we represent," he said, adding that the main strand of negotiations is led by Tusk.

"When you look at the national level, what is more natural than to have the relative winner given a chance to form a government, and the European commission is in a way the government of the EU," Plenkovic added.

What complicates things for the EPP is that the party is outnumbered in the European Council, the forum of EU leaders, where it holds eight seats, while the liberals and socialists hold 15 seats.

Visegrad coordination

On Thursday, the leaders of the Visegrad Four - the informal group of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia - will gather in Budapest to coordinate on possible candidates ahead of the summit.

Hungary's premier Viktor Orban, who is suspended from EPP and does not support Weber, said last month the V4 countries would take a common stance on the issue.

The four leaders represent four different political groups, with Poland's prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki hailing from the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), the Czech Republic's

prime minister Andrej Babis belonging to the liberal group, and Slovakia's premier Peter Pellegrini being a Social Democrat.

Kaynak/Source: