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## **TUSK WANTS QUICK DEAL ON EU TOP JOBS AT THURSDAY SUMMIT**

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European Council president Donald Tusk on Wednesday (19 June) said he hoped EU leaders would agree on names for the bloc's top jobs when they gather in Brussels on Thursday.

Tusk said in a letter to leaders that he is "cautiously optimistic" about finding the new leadership posts of the EU, as leaders expressed "determination to decide swiftly".

"I hope we can make it on Thursday," he added.

"There are different views, different interests, but also a common will to finalize this process before the first session of the European Parliament," Tusk said in his letter.

EU leaders last month tasked the outgoing Polish president of the EU council to present them with a list of names at their dinner on Thursday evening. Tusk has been meeting in EU capitals since the European election last month.

Tusk has met with group leaders in the European Parliament, where there is no consensus emerging on whom to back to become the EU commission's next president.

The centre-right, the socialists, the liberals and the greens have been working to put together a majority coalition before the EU leaders' meeting.

Tusk might try to push for a majority vote at the EU summit, if there is broad support emerging among EU leaders for candidates.

Five years ago, at the nomination of current EU commission president Jean-Claude Juncker was opposed by the UK and Hungary.

Thursday's dinner - where leaders will be discussing the top positions, just as last month when they first talked about the election results - will be veiled in complete secrecy with phone signals jammed, and only a handful of people present.

EU diplomats sound more sceptical whether the leaders might be able to find agreement on who to nominate to lead the EU commission, the EU council, and European Central Bank and be the EU's foreign affairs chief.

"It is a difficult puzzle to put together," one senior EU diplomat said. Tusk is expected to speak to all 28 leaders in some format on Thursday before they all convene for the dinner talks.

One of the key obstacles to an agreement is a split between Berlin and Paris on who should run the commission.

French President Emmanuel Macron opposes the Bavarian candidate promoted by the weakened, but still largest, centre-right European People's Party (EPP) group in the parliament, Manfred Weber. Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel, however, has publicly backed Weber.

Tusk may even call for another EU summit later next week, before the new European Parliament convenes in the first week of July, to get an agreement among leaders.

"All options are on the table, we are going to see a dynamic 24 hours," a senior EU source said.

## **Drawing names**

Meanwhile, the four parliamentary groups are still in talks on forming a coalition.

In the European Parliament, the EPP is pushing for their lead candidate, Weber to take the commission top job - despite criticism of his lack of executive experience.

Even without Weber, the EPP wants to hold onto the commission. But the liberals, who had an impressive show at the EU elections, and have boosted their numbers in the parliament also pushing for the position, and put their faith in Danish commissioner Margrethe Vestager.

Socialists championing Dutch commissioner Frans Timmermans also want to claim at least one of the top posts for the S&D group.

Other names have been circulating as well: Brexit negotiator, France's Michel Barnier, the World Bank's chief executive officer, Bulgaria's Kristalina Georgieva, plus Croatian prime minister Andrej Plenkovic have also been talked about in Brussels.

Besides the parliament trying to putting together a coalition before the European Council starts, government leaders have been also looking into possible candidates.

Liberals Charles Michel of Belgium and Mark Rutte of the Netherlands, the centre-right's Krisjanis Karins of Latvia and Plenkovic, and socialists Antonio Costa of Portugal and Pedro Sanchez of Spain have held a discussion in Brussels.

The premiers of the Visegrad 4 countries met last week in an attempt to coordinate the position of the central European countries. The four countries agreed that one of the key EU jobs needs to go to someone from the central and eastern European region, source said.

While the haggling on the EU top jobs might be the most sensitive immediate topic, another issue that seems to stir divisions among member states is whether to include a reference in the EU's

strategic agenda for the next five years to a commitment to reach climate neutrality by 2050.

While the majority of member states support such a commitment, there is no unanimity as some EU countries are concerned about the costs of overhauling their economy.

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Kaynak/Source: