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EUROVISION WITH A DIFFERENCE

European Political Parties, Lead Candidates and the 2024
European Elections

Section 1: The Story

This section provides a short overview of the Eurovision Debate on the 23 May.

The Story of the Eurovision Debate

While thousands of EU citizens tuned in to the Eurovision Song Contest in the Malmö Arena in Sweden on Sunday 11 May, the jury is still out as to how many citizens will tune in to the Eurovision Debate on 23 May 2024 which will be broadcast live by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and national public broadcasters. While the EBU invited lead candidates from each of the recognised European political parties, they have limited participation to one candidate from each European Parliament political group. Thus far, the five confirmed lead candidates for the job of President of the European Commission who have been announced as participating in the debate are: Ursula von der Leyen (EPP-EPP), Nicholas Schmit (PES-S&D), Terry Reintke (EGP-G/EFA), Sandro Gozi (EDPRE), and Walter Baier (PEL-LEFT). The six key topics for debate, as well as the running order, were announced on 16 May. The topics for debate are: (i) the Economy and Jobs; (ii) Defence and Security Policy; (iii) Climate and Environment; (iv) Democracy and Leadership; (v) Migration and Borders; and (vi) Innovation and Technology. After a ‘spotlight’ pitch of their vision for Europe in advance of a 1:1 interview with the moderators, candidates will then face questions from European voters tuning in from capital cities across the Union, and questions gathered from social media.

As with all Eurovision contests, there is a front runner: Ursula von der Leyen, the current President of the European Commission, who is seeking a second term of office. However, the field is open, and the debate takes place just two weeks before EU citizens go to the polls to elect the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) for the new legislative term of the European Parliament (2024-2029). As the European Parliament is the EU’s only directly elected institution, it is an opportunity for European citizens to shape this institution which, as co-legislator with the Council, has competence to approve EU legislation, the EU’s budget, and the members of the future European Commission amongst other things.

The lead candidate process is not the official way to nominate the new Commission President but it establishes a link between the political groups in the Parliament and the choice of the new European Commission President. Ultimately, the candidate for the key post as President of the European Commission will be chosen by EU leaders who will meet informally on 17 June to discuss possible candidates and formally at the European Council on 27-28 June to reach consensus on their choice of candidate for that post. This candidate will then go to the first session of the European Parliament in summer or early autumn to be confirmed or rejected by a majority vote of newly elected MEPs.



Section 2: The History

This section traces the lead candidate process and the Europarties involved in the Eurovision Debate.

The History of the Lead Candidate System

Since the 2014 European Parliament elections, and in an attempt to increase the democratic legitimacy of the European Commission, each recognised European political party has had the right to nominate a lead candidate (known by the German term Spitzenkandidat) for the role of President of the European Commission.

The lead candidate process is based on the Treaty provisions that the European Council, when proposing a new President of the European Commission, should take into consideration the results of the European Parliament elections. While the lead candidate process initially envisioned the lead candidate of the largest party after the European Parliament election becoming the President of the European Commission, the Jáuregui Report passed by the European Parliament before the 2019 European Parliament elections signalled that the European Parliament would accept a lead candidate from any party that could lead a majority coalition in the Parliament.

Recognised Europarties are distinct from European Parliament political groups and there can be more than one Europarty in a European Parliament political group. Moreover, different members of the same Europarty can sit in different European Parliament groups. Europarties are made up of national, like-minded parties. Some Europarties, such as the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) and the Party of the European Left (PEL) allow individual members, but the majority of Europarties restrict membership to national political parties. Once elected to the European Parliament, one or more European political parties form new political groups or join existing political groups in Parliament. For example, Micheál Martin, Tánaiste and Ireland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, is a member of the ALDE in Europe due to his membership of Fianna Fáil, but is not a member of Renew Europe as he is not a Member of the European Parliament (MEP).

Ten Europarties are currently recognised by and governed by rules of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations. Although there are also a number of unrecognised trans-European political alliances, these do not have the right to officially nominate lead candidates for the President of the European Commission. There is no obligation upon Europarties to nominate a lead candidate, rather it is a right they may exercise. As indicated earlier, five of the lead candidates will participate in the final debate on 23 May 2024. The ECR Party, who potentially may come out of the European Parliament elections as the third largest party in the European Parliament, did not put forward lead candidates and will not therefore be able to participate in the debate.

In the aftermath of the 2019 European Parliament elections, however, none of the Europarties’ Spitzenkandidaten became the President of the European Commission. The Head of State and Government of the EU Member States in the European Council could not reach agreement on the nomination of either Manfred Weber, the lead candidate proposed by the European People’s Party (EPP), or of Frans Timmermans, lead candidate proposed the Party of European Socialists (PES). As a result, Ursula von der Leyen, who did not feature in the EPP’s election campaigns, became President of the European Commission.

The European Council’s nomination and European Parliament’s acceptance of Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission caused many analysts, commentators, and observers to consider the lead candidate process dead and the experiments of 2014 and 2019 as a failure.

Nevertheless, ahead of the forthcoming 2024 European Parliament elections from June 6-9, the majority of Europarties have put forward lead candidates for the post of the President of the European Commission. The campaign has started, and some informal debates amongst the candidates have taken place. Currently, the front-runner in the campaign is the incumbent President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

Section 3: Infographic on the Europarties

The infographic below, outlines the different Europarties, the 2024 lead candidates for the post of President of the European Commission (Spitzenkandidaten), their national political party, and the Irish parties which are members of that Europarty and, therefore, supporting that party's lead candidate (Spitzenkandidat).

1. European People's Party (EPP)



Lead Candidate
Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission



National Party:
Christian Democratic
Union (DE)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of EPP sit:**

European People's Party –
Christian Democrats (EPP)



Irish parties that are members of the European People's Party: **Fine Gael**

2. Party of European Socialists (PES)



Lead Candidate
Nicholas Schmidt
European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights



National Party:
Luxembourg Socialist
Workers' Party (LU)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of PES sit:**

Progressive Alliance of
Socialists and Democrats
(S&D)



Irish parties that are members of the Party of European Socialists:
Labour Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party

3. Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE)



Lead Candidate
Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann
Member of the Bundestag



National Party:
Free Democratic Party
(DE)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of ALDE sit:**

Renew Europe (RE)



Irish parties that are members of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe: **Fianna Fáil, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (Affiliate Member)**

4. European Green Party (EGP)



Lead Candidates
Bas Eickhout and Terry Reintke
Members of the European Parliament



National Party:
Green Left (NL)
and Alliance 90/
The Greens (DE)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of EGP sit:**

Greens/European Free
Alliance (G/EFA)



Irish parties that are members of the European Green Party: **Green Party of Ireland, Green Party of Northern Ireland**

5. European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR Party)

Did not nominate a common transnational candidate.

National Party:
N/A



European Parliament political group with which members of ECR party sit:

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)



Irish parties that are members of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party:
Ulster Unionist Party (Global Partner)

6. Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party)



Lead Candidate
Anders Vistisen
Member of the European Parliament



National Party:
Danish People's Party
(DK)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of ID Party sit:**

Identity and Democracy
(ID)



Irish parties that are members of the Identity and Democracy Party sit with: **None**

7. Party of the European Left (PEL)



Lead Candidate

Walter Baier

President of the Party of the European Left



National Party:
Communist Party of
Austria (AU)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of PEL sit:**

The LEFT in the European
Parliament – GUE/NGL (LEFT)



Irish parties that are members of the Party of the European Left sit with: **None**

8. European Democratic Party (EDP)



Lead Candidate
Sandro Gozi
Member of the European Parliament



National Party:
Italia Viva (IT)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of EDP sit:**

Renew Europe (RE)



Irish parties that are members of the European Democratic Party sit with: **None**

9. European Free Alliance (EFA)



Lead Candidates
Raül Romeva and Maylis Roßberg
Former Parliamentarian and Chairperson of the Youth in the SSW



National Party:
Republican Left of Catalonia (ES) and South Schleswig Voters' Association (DE)



European Parliament political group with which members of EFA sit:

Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA) / European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)



Irish parties that are members of the European Free Alliance: **None**

10. European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)



Lead Candidate
Valeriu Ghilechi
President of the European Christian Political Movement

National Party:
Independent
(MD/RO)



**European Parliament
political group with which
members of ECPM sit:**

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) / European People's Party (EPP) / Non-Inscrits (NI)



Irish parties that are members of the European Christian Political Movement:
Human Dignity Alliance

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