



# Ask the IIEA

## Changing the guard: What are the key upcoming changes in Brussels?



Future of the **EU27**



The upcoming elections to the European Parliament will take place across all Member States from **23 to 26 May 2019**. These elections are the start of a process that will determine the new character of the EU institutions as a whole, not just the European Parliament. This explainer takes you through the key upcoming changes to the European Parliament, European Commission and the European Council from May to November 2019, ushering in a new legislative term in the EU.

### May 2019

#### Elections and results

From **23 to 26 May 2019**, elections to the European Parliament will be held in all EU Member States. These elections take place on different days in different countries, but are all part of the same electoral cycle. In Ireland, the European elections will be held on **Friday 24 May**, the same day as the local elections. By **26 May 2019**, you can expect national exit polls and provisional results to be published.

As a result of the ongoing Brexit negotiations, there is still some uncertainty about the exact composition of the new Parliament. If the UK leaves the EU by 22 May 2019 (the day before the European elections), 27 of the UK's 73 seats will be re-allocated to other Member States, including an extra two seats for Ireland, bringing Ireland's total allocation of MEPs to 13.<sup>1</sup>

However, if the UK is still a Member of the EU on 23-26 May 2019 and if it has not ratified by the Withdrawal Agreement by 22 May 2019<sup>2</sup>, the UK would be legally obliged to hold elections to the European Parliament. This means that UK MEPs would be required to take up their seats until the UK officially leaves the EU. In this case, the extra MEPs allocated to some Member States would not take up their seats until after the UK's official departure. This would be the case for the two extra Irish MEPs from the Ireland South and Dublin constituencies.

#### Formation of political groups

From **27 May 2019**, newly elected MEPs will negotiate among one another to form political groups. The criteria needed to form a political group is at least 25 MEPs made up from at least one quarter of Member States. At present, there are **eight** political groups in the Parliament. However, this may be subject to change given the emergence of new political groupings since the previous elections in 2014.

The most recent seat projections published by the European Parliament,<sup>3</sup> indicate that the two main groups in the current Parliament, the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and the centre-left Socialists & Democrats (S&D), are expected to lose their combined majority for the first time ever, while Eurosceptic parties are expected to make significant gains.

### June 2019

#### Selection of candidate for Commission President

At the European Council summit of **20 and 21 of June 2019**, Heads of State and Government will propose a candidate for the position of Commission President. In doing so, Member States are required to take into account the result of the European elections. To date, the European Parliament has insisted that they will only consider a Commission President who has been nominated as a *Spitzenkandidat* or lead candidate by one of the political groups. In contrast, EU leaders have said that they are not obliged to propose a *Spitzenkandidat*.

The *Spitzenkandidaten* or lead candidate process, allows political groups in the EU to put forward nominees for the position of Commission President. The process was designed to strengthen the link between the democratically elected Parliament and the EU's executive arm, the European Commission, but has proved controversial.

1 For more information on the effect of Brexit on the European parliament and the redistribution of seats, see the IIEA's paper on the topic [here](#).  
2 For further information on Brexit and its impact on the European elections, please see the [conclusions](#) of the European Council meeting of 10 April 2019.  
3 New seat projections for the European Parliament. Available [here](#).



## July 2019

### Election of the President of the European Parliament

On **1 July 2019**, the term of the outgoing European Parliament officially ends and on **2 July 2019**, the new European Parliament will sit for the first time in Strasbourg. During this session, MEPs will elect the President of the European Parliament and the 14 Vice-Presidents. The President of the European Parliament is elected for a two and a half year term, i.e. half of the Parliament's term. Traditionally, the two biggest groups in the Parliament, the EPP and the S&D, have agreed to share the position (albeit with some exceptions). However, this precedent may be subject to change if the EPP and the S&D do not retain their combined majority.

### Election of the President of the European Commission

From **15 to 18 July 2019**, the European Parliament will sit again and will have the opportunity to elect the President of the European Commission. The European Council's proposed candidate must secure the support of an absolute majority of MEPs to have their candidacy confirmed.

Based on the outcome of the vote there are two potential outcomes:

1. The Parliament elects the Commission President by an absolute majority and both the President-elect and the Member States proceed to propose nominees for Commissioners.
2. If the candidate does not obtain a majority, the European Council must propose another candidate within one month.

Depending on the outcome of the vote, the exact dates of the following developments may vary slightly.

## September–October 2019

### Choosing the Commissioners

Following the election of the Commission President, Member States and the President-elect of the Commission will propose a list of candidate Commissioners and designate policy portfolios. Typically, Commissioners are former ministers or politicians from Member States, chosen because of their specific policy knowledge and political awareness. At present, there is one Commissioner per Member State; however, this number may be reduced at the discretion of the European Council.<sup>4</sup>

### Confirmation of the new Commission

The Commission candidates are scrutinised before the relevant committees in the European Parliament during September and October 2019. While the Parliament cannot reject the candidacy of individual Commissioners, it has been known to use the threat of exercising its right to reject the whole Commission to force a change in candidate.

The final stage in the selection process is the Parliament's approval of the entire College of Commissioners, including the Commission President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Following parliamentary approval, the European Council officially elects the Commission.

### Election of President of the European Council

During the European Council summit of **17 to 18 October 2019**, Heads of State and Government are expected to elect the new President of the European Council. The President is elected for a two and a half year term, which is renewable once, by a qualified majority of Heads of State and Government. Current President, Donald Tusk, has been in office since 2014 and cannot therefore be re-elected. It is the responsibility of the Member State holding the rotating Council Presidency (which will be Finland at this time), to coordinate the election process. The President will formally take up office on 1 December 2019.

## November 2019

### New Commission takes up office

The new Commission is expected to take up office on **1 November 2019**, and the new legislative term of the EU will begin.

*If you have a topic you would like us to address in this series please email [FutureofEurope@iiea.com](mailto:FutureofEurope@iiea.com)*

<sup>4</sup> Ask the IIEA: Why does the EU need 27 European Commissioners? Available [here](#).



## Key Dates in 2019



**23–26 May:**  
Elections to the European Parliament are held in all EU Member States.

# MAY



**27 May:**  
Elected MEPs begin to form political groups.



**20-21 June:**  
Heads of State and Government will propose a candidate for the position of Commission President.

# JUN



**15-18 July:**  
The Parliament has the opportunity to elect the President of the European Commission based on the proposed candidate of the European Council.

# JUL



**2 July:**  
The newly elected Parliament takes office and MEPs elect the President of the European Parliament.



**17-18 October:**  
Heads of State and Government expected to elect the new President of the European Council.

# SEP OCT



Member States and the President-elect of the Commission propose a list of candidate Commissioners. These candidates are scrutinised before the Parliament.



Parliament expected to approve the entire Commission, including the Commission President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

# NOV



**1 November:**  
The new Commission is expected to take office.