



# The New European Parliament & European Council Appointments, 2014



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## Background

Since the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2010 the rotation of senior appointments in the EU (President of the Commission, Vice Presidents and all other Commissioners, the President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign & Security Policy) takes place every five years shortly after the elections have been held for the European Parliament. This year the new Commission appointments will come into effect on 1 November assuming that the European Parliament has approved them; the President of the European Council and the High Representative take up their posts on 1 December.

This paper does not cover the appointment of Commissioners or their portfolios (except for the High Representative for the Common Foreign & Security Policy – see below), which will be dealt with in a separate paper once the process is complete and has been approved by the Parliament.

Although too much can be read into the appointment of particular individuals to particular posts, as it is the heads of state and government meeting in the European Council who, under the Lisbon Treaty, lay down the “general political direction and priorities” of the EU (as they did at the June European Council when they adopted a Strategic Agenda for the next five years), nonetheless this quinquennial change in Brussels is significant. The increased powers of the Parliament, as a result of the Lisbon Treaty, also mean that its five-yearly elections are of greater significance than in the past.

Notable changes in 2014 include: the significant growth in the number of Eurosceptic and anti-EU members of the European Parliament (albeit divided between many different parties and groupings); the moving closer together of the two largest groups, the Socialists & Democrats and the European Peoples Party in response to this change; a wider realignment of political forces represented in the Parliament (including decline of the liberal group to fourth place); the decision of four of the groups in the Parliament to nominate Commission Presidency candidates during the elections, and the subsequent acceptance by the Council of the candidate from the group with the largest number of seats; and the first ever use of QMV in the European Council to decide the nomination of the President of the European Commission.

For the UK, the changes include an increase in the number of Labour and UKIP MEPs and a fall in the number of Conservative and Liberal Democrat MEPs (the latter now having only

one seat), the retirement of Baroness Ashton as the British Commissioner and High Representative for the CFSP, and the nomination of Lord Hill of Oareford as her replacement in the Commission. In addition, the UK Government's decision to force a vote on the nomination of Jean Claude Juncker as President of the Commission illustrated the Prime Minister's isolation from mainstream EU opinion.

### **The Presidency of the European Council & the High Representative**

At a special meeting of the European Council the Heads of State and Government agreed to appoint the Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, as President of the European Council for two and a half years from 1 December 2014 (he can be appointed for a further period of two and a half years, as Herman Van Rompuy was). Mr Tusk comes from the Civic Platform party (a member of the EPP), which he co-founded in 2001 and which is a centre-right, pro-European party. He has been Prime Minister of Poland since 2007.

The Treaty on European Union gives the President of the European Council the job of chairing its meetings and driving forward its work. As Mr Tusk is only the second full-time holder of this post, the role is still evolving. Given his background and experience, it seems likely that he will be more active in the EU's foreign and security policy work than his predecessor was. The increasing tendency of the Foreign Affairs Council to act as a body that prepares the ground for political decisions on major CFSP questions by the European Council also increases the likelihood of the European Council President taking a bigger foreign policy role. This partly reflects the current importance of EU-Russia relations in the light of the tensions over Ukraine, the position of Russian minorities in EU Member States and the insecurity felt in many Eastern European countries. But it would also be a response to wider security questions facing the EU, including terrorism and instability in the Middle East and energy insecurity, including dependence on Russian gas.

Mr Tusk has already been given by the June 2014 European Council a set of priorities for the EU (in the Strategic Agenda adopted at that meeting) which are intended to ensure a greater focus on economic growth, including completing the Single Market (especially in services and the digital sector). Mr Tusk himself listed his priorities as bringing an Eastern European "sensitivity" to relations with Russia; to stop the UK from leaving the EU; and to heal divisions between eurozone and non-eurozone states.

Interestingly, Mr Tusk, despite coming from a country which is not (yet) a eurozone member, will also be President of the Euro Summit, the meetings of the Heads of State and Government of the eurozone countries. Day-to-day political co-ordination in the eurozone will remain with the Eurogroup meeting of finance ministers of euro countries under the presidency of Mr Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Finance Minister of the Netherlands.

### The High Representative

Ms Federica Mogherini, currently the Foreign Minister of Italy and a member of the centre-left Italian Democratic Party, will serve as the High Representative for the CFSP. She will also serve as a Vice President of the Commission with overall responsibility for co-ordinating the external affairs work of the Commission (trade, development, enlargement and neighbourhood policy and humanitarian aid).

## The New European Parliament

In order to form a group, at least 25 MEPs from seven different Member States must come together out of the 751 members of the Parliament; those who cannot find a group or who choose to sit as independents do not have the same financial support that is provided to groups, nor are they entitled to a share of the potentially influential posts of committee and delegation chairs or to be rapporteurs.

The President of the Parliament, Martin Schulz, was re-elected for a second term of two-and-a-half years in July 2014. He is a member of the German SPD, which sits in the Socialists & Democrats group.

These are the groups that have been formed in the new parliament as of 1 July 2014:

- *European People's Party (EPP)*: as in 2009, the centre-right EPP is the largest group in the Parliament but its number of seats fell from 265 to 221 in 2014 (just under 30 per cent of the seats in the Parliament). Containing MEPs from 27 out of 28 Member States (there are no UK MEPs in the group since the Conservatives withdrew in 2009), the group's leader is Manfred Weber, a Bavarian MEP from the Christian Social Union;
- *Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S & D)*: once again the second largest group, the S & D have slightly increased their number of seats, from 184 in 2009 to 191 in 2014 (just over a quarter of the Parliament) and they continue to have MEPs from every Member State. British Labour Party MEPs are in this group; they gained seven seats in the 2014 elections and now have a total of 20, making them the third largest party in the S & D. The group leader is Gianna Pitella, a member of the Italian Democratic Party; his party has the largest number of MEPs in the group (31).
- *European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)*: now the third largest group in the Parliament, the ECR has gone up from 52 MEPs in 2009 to 70 today with members from 15 Member States, despite the UK Conservative Party losing seven seats in 2014. The leader of the ECR is the British Conservative, Syed Kamall. Other parties in this group include: the Law & Justice Party (Poland); Fianna Fáil (Ireland); Civic Democratic Party (Czech Republic); and Alternative for Germany.
- *Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE)*: down from 84 to 67 members in this Parliament, largely as a result of the British Liberal Democrats losing all but one of the 11 seats they held in the 2009 Parliament, ALDE has members from 15 Member States. The group leader is the Belgian MEP and former Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt.
- *European United Left / Nordic Green Left*: this confederation of leftwing groups includes Die Linke from Germany, Syriza from Greece, Sinn Fein from the Republic of Ireland and the UK and Front Gauche from France. Its numbers increased from 34 to 52 in the 2014 elections. Gabi Zimmer (Die Linke) is leader of the group.
- *The Greens/European Free Alliance*: this group is an alliance of greens and nationalists which has 50 MEPs from 17 countries after the 2014 elections, in which its overall numbers stayed the same as in the last Parliament. Of the six British members of this group, two are from the Scottish National Party, one is from Plaid

Cymru and three are from the Green Party in England. The group is jointly led by Philippe Lambert (Belgium, Green) and Rebecca Harms (Germany, Green).

- *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (EFDD)*: made up of 48 MEPs from the minimum number of countries required to form a group (seven) the EFDD is dominated by its 24 UKIP members. Nigel Farage leads this group, which was first established in 2009.
- *Non-attached*: the number of MEPs who belong to no group at 52 is far larger than in the past (it had reached 28 by the end of the 2009 Parliament), largely because of the dramatic increase in the number of French National Front MEPs (up from three to 23), who parties from most other Member States are not prepared to work with.

## **Analysis**

The 2014-2019 European Parliament is different from its predecessors because of the increase in the number of anti-EU and Eurosceptic MEPs. Both the low turnouts and the results underlined the disenchantment with mainstream political parties and politicians in many Member States. This result, which included Eurosceptic/anti-EU parties winning the largest share of the vote in three Member States (Denmark, France and the United Kingdom), is likely to have an even greater impact on the domestic politics of those countries than it will do on the European Parliament. Although there has been a realignment of groups in the Parliament, the EPP, the S & D group and ALDE together have a large majority in the Parliament. There is considerable similarity of view on the main EU questions between these three groups and it is likely that they will agree a single position on many of the key policy issues. The main effect of the rise in anti-EU and Eurosceptic MEPs will be on the atmosphere in the Parliament, which is likely to become more acrimonious as the anti-EU MEPs seek to disrupt and delay business.

Other changes following the elections include the decline of ALDE (mostly due to the UK results being bad for the Liberal Democrats) to fourth place in terms of numbers of MEPs and the rise of ECR to third place.

### United Kingdom

The results of the European Parliament elections in the UK were dominated by UKIP moving from second place in 2009 with 16 per cent of the vote to first place (ahead of Labour) on 26.77 per cent in 2014. The turnout, at 35.4 per cent, was slightly up on 2009, but still adrift of the EU average of 42.54. This low turnout meant that UKIP increased its vote but still had the support of no more than 10 per cent of the electorate.

UKIP topped the popular vote, with four more MEPs than Labour and five more than the Conservatives, which have 20 and 19 MEPs respectively. The improved performance of the Green Party was one of a number of factors which contributed to a dismal result for the Liberal Democrats who lost all but one of the 11 seats they had held in the previous Parliament. In Scotland, UKIP took one seat for the first time but in Wales and Northern Ireland there was no change in the distribution of seats between the parties.

The increase in the number of UKIP MEPs, few of whom participate effectively in key Parliamentary votes or Committee work, and the retirement of Sharon Bowles, who had

chaired the important Committee on Economic & Monetary Affairs, will reduce British influence in the Parliament. But the Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs Committee chaired by Claude Moraes (Labour) is influential, as is the Internal Market Committee chaired by Vicky Ford (Conservative). How effectively the British Conservatives in the ECR group work with members of the EPP on, for example, key economic questions such as the prospective trade agreement with the United States, the completion of the Single Market, energy policy and financial services will help to determine how much influence Britain can exercise in the Parliament.

The British Chairs of Committees in the Parliament are:

- Vicky Ford, Internal Market & Consumer Protection [Conservative];
- Linda McAvan, Development [Labour];
- Claude Moraes, Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs [Labour].

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## Senior European Experts

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