

Outcome of the informal dinner of Heads of State or Government on 28 May 2019

EU leaders met to consider the outcome of the European Parliament elections, and to start the appointment process to high-level EU positions ahead of the June 2019 European Council. They discussed the principles that would guide their action, and mandated the European Council President, Donald Tusk, to begin consultations with the Parliament. EU leaders reiterated their February 2018 position on the absence of automaticity between a role as lead candidate and the European Council nomination for President of the European Commission. They discussed the balance that needs to be found, but did not discuss any names. The President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, stressed the parliamentary majority's attachment to the *Spitzenkandidaten* process.

Background

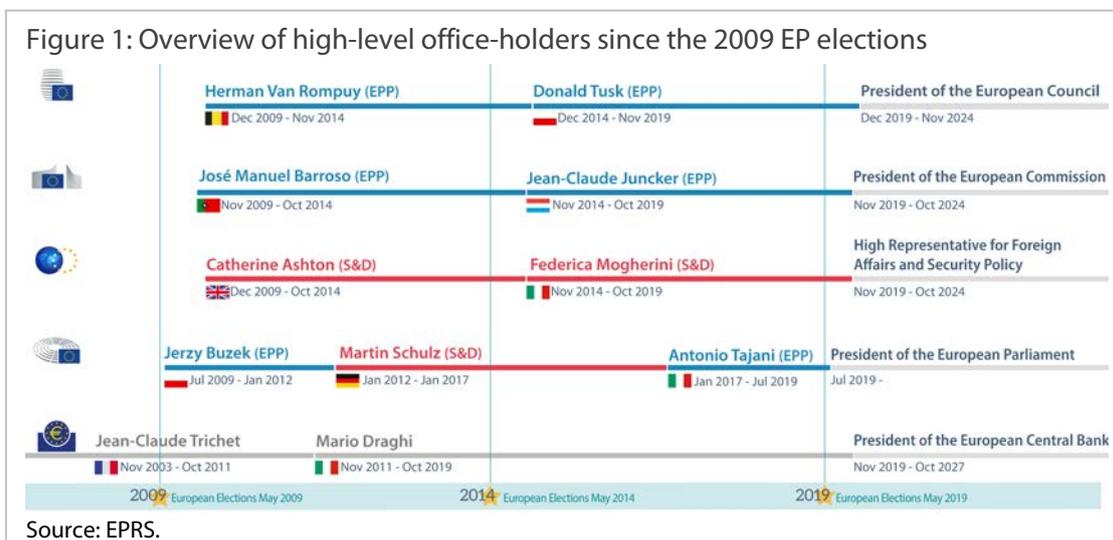
At the Sibiu Summit, Donald Tusk had [announced](#) his intention to convene the EU leaders on 28 May. The objectives of the meeting would be threefold: to take stock of the election results, to discuss the principles and method for nominating high-level EU officials, and to 'start the nomination process'.

European Parliament election results

EU leaders took stock of the results of the elections. They [welcomed](#) the high turnout ([over 50 %](#)), and stressed that it was the highest in European elections in a quarter of a century. They also noted that the [bi-party system](#) that has characterised the Parliament since the first direct elections in 1979 has given way to a more diverse hemicycle, in which there is need to form alliances of at least three political forces to ensure a majority. President Tusk [spoke](#) of a 'more complex' and 'more representative' parliament.

Principles guiding the European Council in the appointment of high-level officials

The Lisbon Treaty [set](#) two main principles – respect for 'geographical and demographic diversity' – as a basis for the appointments of the Presidents of the European Council, European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. President Tusk recalled those principles in Sibiu and added two more: gender balance and political representation. EU leaders confirmed their support for these principles as well as their position of 23 February 2018 [rejecting](#) any automaticity in applying the *Spitzenkandidaten* process. Some of them [stressed](#) that it is fundamental to have a clear view on what the EU wishes to achieve in the next five years in several policy areas, including climate, the economy and security, prior to considering who to appoint to different top positions. Others [indicated](#) that they would prefer to see a Commission President who is 'young, dynamic and with a lot of power'.



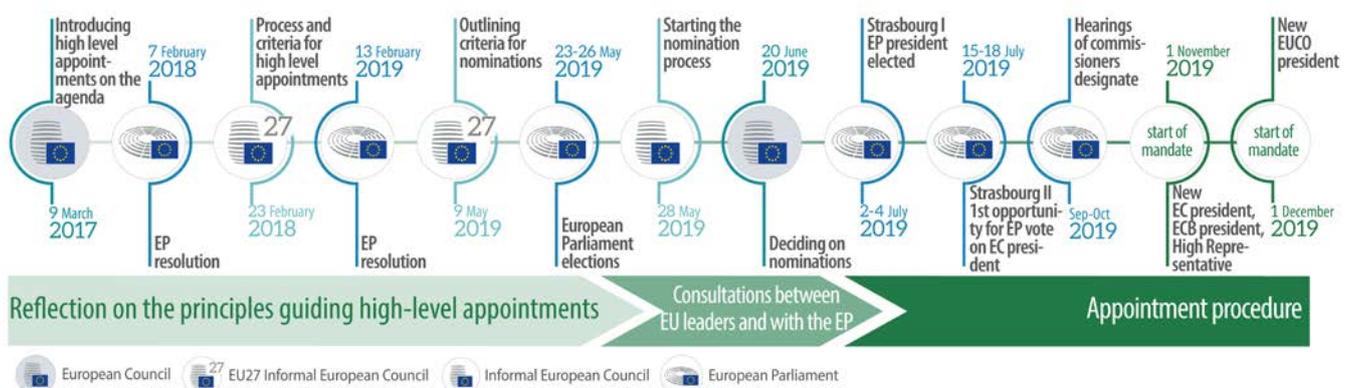
'Package' approach for top nominations

Four top-level EU positions – the presidency of the European Council, the presidency of the European Commission and the position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, as well as the presidency of the European Central Bank – are being considered, at this stage, as a 'package'. President Tusk [confirmed](#) the 'package' approach but mentioned that the 'ECB is not for party competition'. The Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, [said](#) that he would favour not including the appointment of the ECB President in the global 'package'.

The nomination process

The nomination process comprises three phases, as shown in Figure 2. The first phase, a period of reflection on the principles that will guide EU leaders in the nomination process, led to the emergence of diverging views between the European Parliament and the European Council with respect to the [Spitzenkandidaten](#) process. The European Parliament stated in two resolutions, in [2018](#) and [2019](#), its support for the [Spitzenkandidaten](#) process, whilst the 27 Heads of State or Government have [rejected](#) any automaticity in applying it.

Figure 2: Timeline of the high-level appointments process



Source: EPRS.

The 28 May 2019 special meeting of Heads of State or Government opened the second phase of the nomination process, a period of consultations. This second phase is intended to last until the June 2019 European Council meeting, when a 'package' agreement on top nominations is expected. Timely delivery on the 'package' agreement depends on the ability of both the European Council and the Parliament to overcome inter- and intra-institutional [divergences of views](#) on the *Spitzenkandidaten* process. If no consensus is reached in the consultation phase, it is likely that, as [announced](#) several times by President Tusk, the European Council will have to proceed to a vote by qualified majority. President Tusk [said](#) that he has 'offered to meet the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents as soon as they are ready' to start the consultation process and that, in parallel, he will continue consultations with EU leaders.

The third phase of the nomination process opens in early July 2019 with the election of the European Parliament's president. The ability to stay on course and to avoid several votes in Parliament for the election of the Commission President will depend on finding consensus during consultations.

European Parliament position

President Tajani underlined the Parliament's support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* process. The [Conference of Presidents](#) considered the Parliament the 'legitimate place for the mandate for change to be debated and defined'. Together with the European Council's next Strategic Agenda, the Parliament's 'mandate for change' could form 'a solid base for renewed priorities' for the next European Commission.

The way forward

In a situation of persistent deadlock on the package, EU leaders may be able to nominate the next European Council President in June 2019, or at the latest in September. However, until agreement is found on the candidate for European Commission President, it will also be difficult to nominate the next High Representative. The appointment of the next ECB President could also be possible in June.

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