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THE 2024 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: OUTCOMES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Abstract: As enshrined in the treaties on which the European Union (EU) is founded, citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament, an institution that plays a key role in appointing the European Commission and other EU bodies and institutions. Member States are represented in the European Council by their Heads of State or Government and in the Council by their governments, themselves democratically accountable either to their national Parliaments, or to their citizens. In the light of the treaties provisions and taking into account the strong interest of EU citizens in the 2024 European elections and awareness of their significance for the future of Union, the purpose of this study is to describe the process of renewing the EU institutional leadership, with emphasis on the steps to be taken by the end of 2024. In this approach, the analysis will be focused first of all on the aspects related to constitution of the political groups and constituent plenary sitting of the new European Parliament. As is expected, further analysis will deepen the aspects related to election of the European Commission President and appointment of the new College of Commissioners. Also, will be addressed issues related to the election of the new President of the European Council, the Parliament vote on investiture of Commission and election of the European Ombudsman.

Keywords: European treaties; legal provisions; 2024 European elections; EU institutional leadership; EU member states

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General aspects regarding the 2024 European elections

Between 6 and 9 June 2024, more than 400 million citizens were called to vote in elections for the European Parliament, the European Union's representative body. Therefore, according to Articles 20, 22 and 223 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and Article 39 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, citizens across all 27 EU Member States were able to enjoy the right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament both in their country of origin and in any other EU Member State, under the same conditions as nationals of that State. This was the 10th time that EU citizens could vote directly for the policy and decision-makers who will represent them in EU politics.

As a general rule, the European Parliament's composition is assessed before each election, in line with the principles set out in the Treaties (i.e. a maximum of 750 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) plus the President, no less than 6 and no more than 96 seats for any EU country, and the "degressive proportionality" principle), and based on the most recent population figures¹. Regarding the composition of the European Parliament for the 2024-2029 parliamentary term, taking into account the Treaty on European Union (TEU), and in particular Article 14(2) thereof, the European Council adopted Decision 2023/2061 of 22 September 2023 establishing the composition of the European Parliament². Thus, in view of the demographic changes in EU member states, the decision set the number of European Parliament seats at 720, the distribution of seats taking into account the size of the population of Member States as well as the need for a minimum level of representation for European citizens from smaller countries³.

The results of 2024 European elections and the first plenary session of the new European Parliament

Under the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure, MEPs sit in political groups – they are not organized by nationality, but by political affiliation. A formally recognized political group must consist of at least 23 MEPs coming from at least one-quarter of the Member States (i.e. seven, at least). MEPs may only belong to one political group. Some do not belong to any political groups at all and are known as "non-attached" Members. For formal recognition of a political group,

¹ Dan Vătăman, *History of the European Union* (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria Publishing House, 2011), 135.

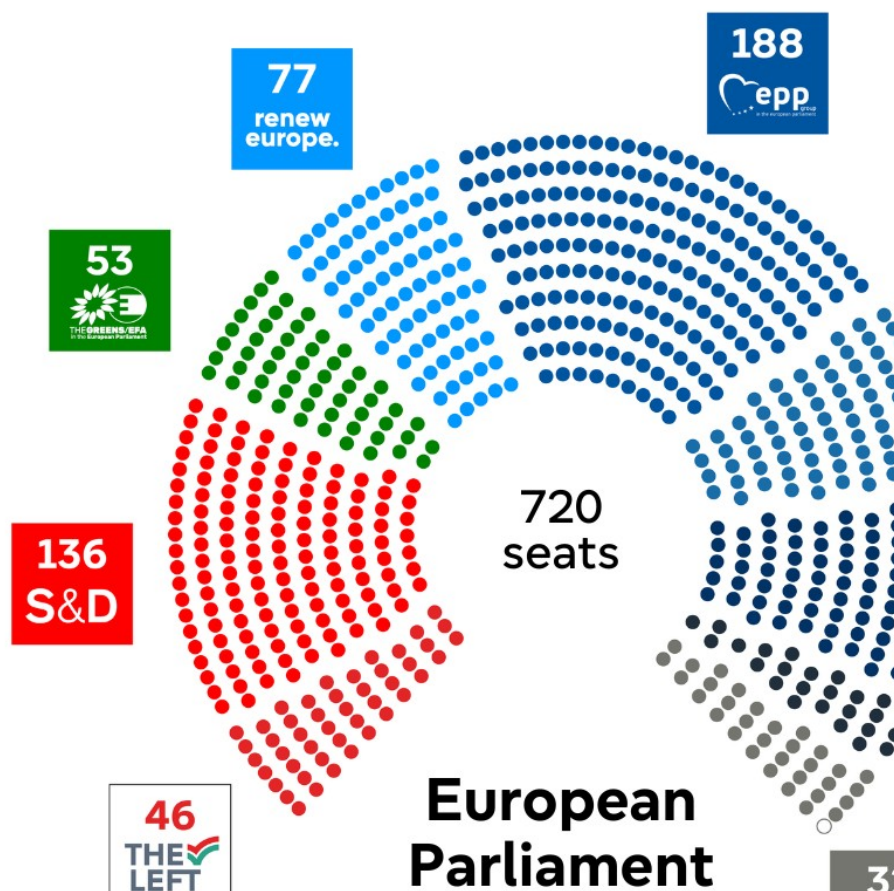
² Official Journal of the European Union L 238/27.9.2023, pp. 114–116.

³ In this distribution, Romania, as the sixth-most populous member state of the European Union, was allocated 33 seats.

the President of European Parliament shall be notified in a statement when a political group is set up. That statement shall specify the name of the group, a political declaration setting out the purpose of the group and the names of its members. Therewith, all members of the group shall declare in writing in an annex to the statement that they share the same political affinity⁴.

In light of these legal provisions, on 16 July 2024, the date of European Parliament's constitutive plenary session, 8 political groups were established in the European Parliament: EPP - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; PflE - Patriots for Europe Group; ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group; Renew Europe - Renew Europe Group; Greens/EFA - Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; The Left - The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL; ESN - Europe of Sovereign Nations Group. Non-attached Members are added to these political groups.

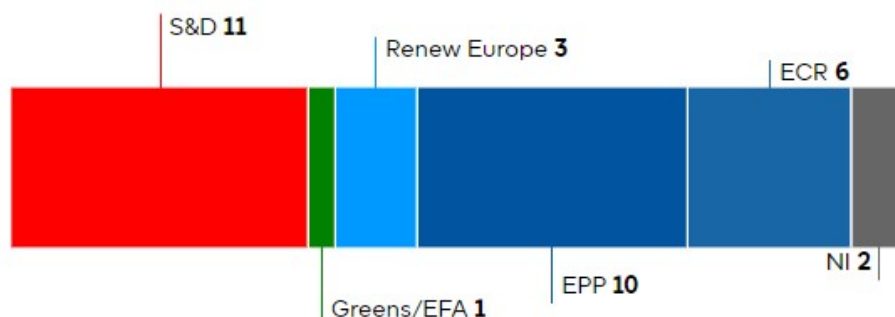
⁴ On 10 April 2024, European Parliament adopted a revised version of its Rules of Procedures. The revised version enters into force on 16 July 2024 – the first day of European Parliament's 10th term.



Source : <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>

With reference to the representatives of Romania in the European Parliament as a result of the 2024 European elections, the total of 33 seats were allocated on National Parties as follows: Alliance PSD - PNL (Social Democratic Party, National Liberal Party) – 19 (11+8); AUR (Alliance for the Union of Romanians) – 6; United Right Alliance – 3; UDMR/RMDSZ – 2; SOS Romania – 2; and the independent candidate Nicolae Ștefănuță – 1.

Referring to the seats by political group, the representatives of Romania were affiliated as follows:



Source : <https://www.results.elections.europa.eu/en/romania/>

During the first plenary session of the new legislative term that took place on 16 July 2024 the first task of the European Parliament was the election of its new president, vice-presidents and quaestors as well as decide on the number of MEPs who will be sitting in each parliamentary committee.

Regarding to election procedure of the European Parliament's President, since the first European Parliament election by universal suffrage in 1979, its President has been elected for a renewable period of 2.5 years. During each legislative term, a first election is normally held in July, immediately after the election of the new Parliament, and a second, mid-term, election is held 2.5 years later, in January. According to Article 14(4) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the European Parliament elects its President from among its members, on the basis of nominations, with the nominees' consent⁵. As it was widely expected, Roberta Metsola (EPP, MT) was re-elected as President of the European Parliament for a second term of two-and-a-half years in July 2024. She won the election in the first round of voting, where she received an absolute majority of 562 votes cast out of 699 by secret paper ballot, while her competitor Irene Montero (The Left, ES), won only 61 votes.

Once the new President has taken the chair, MEPs selected 14 Vice-Presidents for the first half of the new legislative period in a secret vote by paper ballot. Eleven were elected in the first round of voting, and three were elected in the second and final ballot. Parliament's Vice-Presidents for the first half of the 10th legislative term are as follows, in order of precedence, based on the order of their election: Sabine Verheyen (EPP, DE); Ewa Kopacz (EPP, PL); Esteban González Pons (EPP, ES); Katarina Barley (S&D, DE); Pina Picierno (S&D, IT); Victor Negrescu (S&D, RO); Martin Hojsík (Renew, SK); Christel Schaldemose (S&D, DK); Javi López

⁵ European Parliament's Rules of Procedure as last revised in 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2024, set out the procedure for this election.

(S&D, ES); Sophie Wilmès (Renew, BE); Nicolae Ștefănuță (Greens/EFA, RO); Roberts Zīle (ECR, LV); Antonella Sberna (ECR, IT); Younous Omarjee (The Left, FR)⁶. As it can be seen, two Romanian MEPs - Victor Negrescu (S&D) and Nicolae Ștefănuță (Greens) - were elected Vice Presidents of the European Parliament.

The five new Quaestors for the first two-and-a-half years of Parliament's new term were elected by electronic secret vote on 17 July 2024, in two rounds. In the first round of voting were elected by absolute majority four Quaestors: Andrey Kovatchev (EPP, BG); Marc Angel (S&D, LU); Miriam Lexmann (EPP, SK); and Fabienne Keller (Renew, FR). The fifth Quaestor was elected in the second round, this being Kosma Złotowski (ECR, PL)⁷.

Election of the European Commission President and appointment of the new College of Commissioners

Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, on 27 June 2024, in accordance with Article 17(7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the European Council adopted the decision proposing Ursula von der Leyen to the European Parliament as candidate for President of the European Commission.⁸

In these circumstances, pursuant to Article 17(7) TEU and Rule 128 of the EP's Rules of Procedure, on 18 July 2024, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, candidate for a second mandate 2024-2029, presented her political priorities and outlined her vision and plans as Commission President. The statement was followed by a debate with MEPs, in the hemicycle of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. After this, pursuant to Article 14 (4) TEU, the European Parliament elected Ursula von der Leyen as President of the Commission in a secret ballot, 401 deputies voted in favour, 284 against and 22 voted blank or invalid.⁹

Once this procedure was completed, the President-elect of the Commission sent official letters to the Heads of State and Government of the Member States inviting them to put forward their candidates for the posts of European Commissioners.

⁶ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240710IPR22814/parliament-s-new-bureau-elected>, accessed on 25 July 2024.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ European Council conclusions (27 June 2024) – <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/qa3lbg/euco-conclusions-27062024-en.pdf>, accessed on 30 July 2024.

⁹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240710IPR22812/parliament-re-elect-ursula-von-der-leyen-as-commission-president>, accessed on 30 July 2024.

It is important to remember that under the terms of the reform made by Lisbon Treaty it was created a new post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is a *de jure* Vice-President of the European Commission according to Articles 17(4) and 18(4) TEU¹⁰. The appointment procedure is described in Article 18 (1) TEU, according to which the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, with the agreement of the President-elect of the Commission, appoints the High Representative. In accordance with the provisions of the TEU, on 27 June 2024, the European Council considered Kaja Kallas (Estonian prime minister between 2021-2024) to be the appropriate candidate for High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.¹¹

The list of candidates proposed for appointment as members of the Commission was adopted by Council on 19 September 2024, this decision¹² being then sent to the European Parliament. In the next procedural stage, according to the Rule 129 of the EP's Rules of Procedure, Roberta Metsola re-elected as President of the European Parliament invited the President-elect of the Commission to inform Parliament about the planned structure of the new Commission and the allocation of responsibilities (portfolios) in the proposed new College of Commissioners in accordance with the political guidelines of the President-elect as well as about other horizontal issues, including gender balance in that College.

The next step in the appointment process put the candidates face confirmation hearings before the European Parliament's committees, in advance of Parliament's vote on the College of Commissioners as a whole. It is important to remember that the rules for this process were recently adapted and modernised. Thus, to speed-up decisions, Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee first scrutinises candidates' declarations of financial interests, to bring possible conflicts of interest to light. Second, each Commissioner-designate appears before the competent parliamentary committee or committees for a single confirmation hearing. In this procedural stage, MEPs seek to assess in the confirmation hearings whether the Commissioners-designate have the independence, the competences and the European commitment to serve as members of the new European Commission. Candidates also have to answer written questions prepared by the parliamentary committees. Once the confirmation hearings are closed, the Commission President is invited to present the

¹⁰ Dan Vătăman, *European Union: Specialized Practical Guide* (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria Publishing House, 2015), 100-101.

¹¹ European Council conclusions (27 June 2024) – <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/qa3lblga/euco-conclusions-27062024-en.pdf>, accessed on 30 July 2024.

¹² Council Decision (EU) 2024/2517, taken by common accord with the President-elect of the Commission, of 19 September 2024 adopting the list of the other persons whom the Council proposes for appointment as Members of the Commission – OJ L, 23.9.2024, pp.1-2.

College of Commissioners-designate and its programme during a debate in plenary, following which the European Parliament votes on the Commission's College as a whole.¹³

According to the procedure described above, the 2024 hearings were scheduled to take place from 4 to 12 November, at the European Parliament in Brussels. Regarding the confirmation hearing of the representative of Romania, Ms. Roxana Mînzatu, as Executive Vice-President-designate of the European Commission for People, Skills and Preparedness, the event took place on 12 November 2024. As is evident from the evaluation letter signed by MEP Bernd Lange (Chair of the Conference of Committee Chairs), "the general outcome of this confirmation hearing is that the Commissioner-designate gave a convincing impression of her aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to her", the conclusion being that "the Commissioner-designate Roxana Mînzatu, is qualified both to be a member of the College of Commission and to carry out the specific tasks assigned to her"¹⁴.

Once Parliament's Conference of Presidents (President Metsola and the political group leaders) has conducted the final evaluation and declared the hearings process closed, on 27 November 2024, MEPs voted on approving the new College of Commissioners. Following a debate with Ursula von der Leyen on her new team and programme, MEPs elected the College of Commissioners as a whole by roll-call vote. To be confirmed, according to the Rule 129 (7) of the EP's Rules of Procedure, the College of Commissioners needed a majority of the votes cast. The results were as follows: 370 MEPs voted in favour, 282 against, and 36 abstained. Most of the 33 Romanian MEPs present in the plenary of the European Parliament meeting in Strasbourg voted in favour of the new European Commission. Thus, in favour of the new European Commission voted MEPs Rareș Bogdan, Daniel Buda, Gheorghe Falcă, Mircea Hava, Siegfried Mureșan, Adina Vălean (all members of the European People's Party group), Dan Barna (member of the Renew Europe group), Dragoș Benea, Vasile Dîncu, Gabriela Firea, Maria Grapini, Roxana Mînzatu, Ștefan Mușoiu, Victor Negrescu, Dan Nica (all members of the S&D group) and Nicolae Ștefănuță (member of the Greens group). Among the Romanian MEPs, Adrian Axinia, Gheorghe Piperea, Șerban-Dimitrie Sturdza, Claudiu Târziu, Georgiana

¹³ Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, Annex VII: Approval of the Commission and Monitoring of Commitments Made During the Confirmation Hearings – <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/>, accessed on 22 September 2024.

¹⁴ *Hearing of Vice-President-designate Roxana Mînzatu: Evaluation letter* – https://hearings.elections.europa.eu/documents/minzatu/minzatu_evaluationletter_en.pdf, accessed on 22 November 2024.

Teodorescu (all members of the European Conservatives and Reformists group, ECR) and Luis-Vicențiu Lazarus (non-affiliated) voted against the new EU executive. MEPs Lorant Vincze and Iuliu Winkler (both from the EPP group) abstained from voting.¹⁵

Following the announcement of the vote results, after its formal appointment by the European Council via a qualified majority according to Article 17(7) TEU, the new European Commission taken up its duties on 1 December 2024.

Election of the new President of the European Council

As with other top jobs at EU level, the position of the European Council President is fundamental for the upcoming institutional cycle. Therefore, according to Article 15(5) TEU, at its meeting on 27-28 June 2024, the European Council elected António Costa (former Portugal's Prime Minister) as President of the European Council for the period from 1 December 2024 until 31 May 2027. Also, it requested the Secretary-General of the Council to assist the elected President of the European Council in the transition period.

As the President-elect of the European Council, António Costa met with holders of other top jobs at EU level, as follows: Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, on 20 September 2024 in Brussels; Kaja Kallas, elected EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on 23 September 2024 in Brussels; and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, on 30 October 2024 in Brussels.

Presidential handover ceremony took place on 29 November 2024, on which occasion President of the European Council Charles Michel passes the reins to António Costa.

On 1 December 2024, António Costa started his mandate as the fourth President of the European Council. In his inaugural speech, he said: "Standing for our values, strengthening our European projects of peace and prosperity and building citizens' trust- this is the agenda ahead. Let's get to work!"¹⁶.

Conclusions

The 2024 European elections marked a turning point in the EU's future, as they shaped the EU's political direction over the next five years. As the legislative

¹⁵ Minutes - Results of votes, Wednesday, 27 November 2024 – Strasbourg – https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PV-10-2024-11-27-VOT_EN.html, accessed on 29 November 2024.

¹⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/11/29/speech-by-incoming-european-council-president-antonio-costa-at-the-handover-ceremony-with-the-outgoing-president-charles-michel/>, accessed on 30 November 2024.

powerhouse of the European Union, the Parliament and its Members will hold a pivotal role in shaping policies and making legislation that transcend borders, on a variety of issues ranging from climate action to economic strength in order to address the pressing global geopolitical challenges¹⁷.

According to European Treaties provisions, the European elections were just the first step in a broader renewal of the leadership of all the European Union's main institutions. Thus, after the European Parliament's constitutive plenary session on 16 July 2024, the European Union started to prepare so-called "institutional cycle" for 2024-2029 with the election of the new top jobs and the new College of Commissioners.

At the end of this process, starting with 1 December 2024, the EU's priorities for the five-year institutional cycle are outlined in the European Council's Strategic Agenda, a document that guides the work of the EU institutions. Thus, in the face of a changing global landscape and growing instability, the strategic agenda aims to make Europe more sovereign and better equipped to deal with immediate and future challenges, being structured around three pillars: a free and democratic Europe; strong and secure Europe; a prosperous and competitive Europe. Operationalisation the EU's priorities is guided by the mobilizing message of European Council's Strategic Agenda: "Our destiny is in our own hands. We have the talent, courage and vision to successfully shape our future"¹⁸.

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¹⁷ Dan Vătămănuș, *Institutions of the European Union* (Bucharest: Legal Universe Publishing House, 2011), 93.

¹⁸ European Council: Strategic Agenda 2024 – 2029. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>, accessed 1 December 2024.

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