

# The ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ in European Parliament Elections

The initiative of ‘*Spitzenkandidaten*’ was introduced by the European Parliament during the 2014 elections. The idea is that by voting in European elections, European citizens not only elect the Parliament itself, but also have a say over who would head the European Commission. In the process, European political parties<sup>1</sup> can appoint lead candidates (‘*spitzenkandidaten*’ in German) for the role of Commission President ahead of European elections. This process has been debated as the right to nominate the Commission president remains with the European Council (the council of the European heads of state and government), although the Lisbon Treaty now require the European Council to propose a candidate for Commission President, ‘taking into account the elections to the European Parliament’. It has also been debated to what extent the ‘*spitzenkandidaten*’ increase the interest in the election, as research show that only few national parties highlighted these candidates in their 2014 campaigns (Braun & Schwarzbözl 2019). In the 2014 elections, Jean-Claude Juncker was the candidate of the European People’s Party (EPP). The EPP won the most seats and Juncker became the president of the Commission. See below for the main European parties’ ‘*Spitzenkandidaten*’ in the 2019 elections.

Table 1. Spitzenkandidaten in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

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| <p>The European People’s Party (EPP) has appointed <b>Manfred Weber</b> (CSU, Germany), who is the chair of the EPP group in the European Parliament.</p>   |  |
| <p>The Party of European Socialists (PES) endorsed the Commission’s First Vice-President <b>Frans Timmermans</b> (PvdA, Netherlands) as its lead candidate.</p>   |  |
| <p>The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) has announced that it would designate a ‘team of liberal leaders’ for the campaign, including the ALDE leader <b>Guy Verhofstadt</b> (Open Vld, Belgium), who was the lead candidate in the 2014 elections.</p> |  |
| <p>The European Green Party elected the duo of <b>Ska Keller</b> (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Germany) and <b>Bas Eickhout</b> (GroenLinks, the Netherlands) as its lead candidates.</p>   |  |
| <p>The Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) did not put forward a candidate in 2014 but has for 2019 nominated Czech MEP <b>Jan Zahradil</b> (Civic Democratic Party, Czech Republic).</p>  |  |
| <p>The European Left Party elected <b>Violeta Tomič</b> (Levica, Slovenia) and <b>Nico Cue</b>, (former Secretary-General of the Belgian metalworkers union) as its lead candidates.</p>  |  |

**Source:** European Parliament (2019) [Election of the President of the European Commission: Understanding the Spitzenkandidaten process](#). Brussels: EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service. Image source: [International news](#), [Courrier d’Europe & Europe Elects](#)

## References

Braun Daniela & Schwarzbözl Tobias (2019) ‘Put in the spotlight or largely ignored? Emphasis on the Spitzenkandidaten by political parties in their online campaigns for European elections’, *Journal of European Public Policy*. 26:3, 428-445.

<sup>1</sup> The European parties are not the same as the party groups in the European Parliament, although some parties also form a party group (e.g. EPP and ALDE). The party groups can contain other parties and candidates to form a larger coalition.