

## EPP Congress: Climate change, populism and enlargement top agenda

Written by Rajnish Singh on 21 November 2019 in News  
News

Over 2,000 centre-right Christian Democrat policymakers gathered in Zagreb this week for the European People's Party (EPP) Congress.



Photo credit: EPP

Speaking on the opening day of the Congress, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković called it "a great honour" to organise and host this year's get-together, adding that the timing was important for Croatia, coming just ahead of the country's six-month EU Council presidency.

"The Congress and its conclusions are consistent with Croatia's priorities," he said.

Plenković highlighted the main priorities of his country's upcoming presidency including the

enlargement and accession processes for Albania and Macedonia, jobs and growth, the digital revolution, protection of citizens, and post-Brexit preparations.

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The UK was originally scheduled to assume the Council's rotating presidency on 1 January 2020, but due to Brexit, Croatia will take the presidency reins instead.

Responding to questions about Hungary's Prime Minister Victor Orban and his right-wing populist party Fidesz, Plenković said, "The political assembly of the EPP has suspended Fidesz from the EPP, and that is why Victor Orban has not been invited to this Congress."

He pointed out that a "group of three wise men", led by former EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy, will compile a special report where the status of Fidesz within the EPP will be considered.

He added, "until then the position of the EPP and HDZ has been very clear."

"A new president will be the beginning of a new era. Change is inevitable, and the EPP needs to adapt" **Outgoing EPP President Joseph Daul**

EPP secretary general Antonio López-Istúriz alluded to the Congress's slogan, 'One Europe, our planet, your party', saying "We know [climate change] is happening and we want to tackle it, but we want to do so in a reasonable and balanced way, where jobs and growth are not sacrificed."

The party, he said, needed to be an "interlocutor" between environmentalists and business.

Commenting on French president Emmanuel Macron's recent actions blocking further Western Balkan EU accession negotiations, Plenković said, "It was a mistake not achieving consensus concerning the accession of the Western Balkan countries," adding that he personally found France's and other Member States' positions "bizarre".

Elsewhere at the Congress, Joseph Daul welcomed the election of Donald Tusk as his replacement as EPP President, saying, "A new President will be the beginning of a new era. Change is inevitable, and the EPP needs to adapt."

Daul also pointed out that Tusk would be the first EPP President from central Europe and with the continent celebrating the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall, the timing of Tusk's election was also pertinent.

"We know [climate change] is happening and we want to tackle it, but we want to do so in a reasonable and balanced way" **EPP Secretary General Antonio López-Istúriz**

The former French MEP called on the party to counter the growing threat of right-wing populist parties. Reflecting on May's European Election results, where the party lost seats, Daul said, "We need to analyse why we lost to the populists."

In particular he regretted the drop in support from the young for EPP-affiliated parties.

However he warned, "we should not sell our soul to the devil" or compromise EPP values, in a drive to regain votes.

### **About the author**

Rajnish Singh is commissioning editor for the Parliament Magazine

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