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## European elections: debate between lead candidates. Exchange on economy, jobs, climate and enlargement

A debate that was generally smooth, with positions often overlapping. The live-streamed debate between the five Spitzenkandidaten (candidates for the Commission presidency), moderated by two journalists, with questions from the audience both in the room and connected remotely, took place at the headquarters of the European Parliament in Brussels today. Different topics were covered: economy and jobs; defence and security; climate and environment; democracy and leadership; migration and borders; and innovation and technology. On the stage were Walter Baier (Austria), of the European left; Sandro Gozi (Italy), representative of Renew Europe Now; Ursula von der Leyen (Germany), of the European People's Party, current President of the European Commission; Terry Reintke (Germany), of the European Greens; and Nicolas Schmit (Luxembourg), Party of European Socialists, current European Commissioner. Absent – by their own choice – were the representatives of the two right-wing and Eurosceptic forces at the European Parliament – the ECR Conservatives and the sovereignists of Identity and Democracy. The Green candidate Reintke began by saying that “we need to break the so-called contradiction between climate and the economy” and called for “strong and decisive action against climate change” and investment in infrastructure. On economic issues, Baier, from the Left, insisted on workers' rights and fair wages. Von Der Leyen recalled the Commission's decisions over the past five years, including minimum wages (“a prerequisite for fairness”), funds for social housing, and investment to boost competitiveness. Liberal Gozi from Renew – urged by moderators – addressed the issue of EU enlargement. “It is not us who choose, it's history. The EU was designed to bring the whole continent together. But before new accessions, the Treaties must be reformed and the EU budget adapted”. On the same question, Baier said: “We are in favour of enlargement, but it must be beneficial to the interests of the working people, and at the same time, it must strengthen democracy and the defence of rights” in candidate countries.

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