Information Guide

European Parliament

A guide to the European Parliament, with hyperlinks to sources of information within European Sources Online and on external websites

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[Please note: this guide does not take into account the 2014 European Parliament elections – for information on these elections search via ESO]

Introduction

> The EU needs arrangements for the separation of powers similar to those which ordinary people are familiar with from their own countries: a government, a parliament, a second chamber and a court of justice. If you think about it, this structure already exists. All we would have to do, really, is allow the existing institutions to play their proper roles: the Commission would act as a European government, and the European Parliament would elect and exercise scrutiny over that government and, together with the second chamber, the Council, adopt laws for the EU - laws, not legal acts! A Europe which is not democratic will never be accepted by ordinary people.
>
> A democratic Europe must be based on the principle that democratic scrutiny is exercised and accountability applies at the same level at which a given decision is taken. At EU level, therefore, scrutiny must be exercised by, and politicians must be accountable to, the European Parliament. On behalf of my colleagues, I welcome the fact that in recent months a consensus has emerged in the Commission and in the European Council - albeit rather belatedly - acknowledging that the European Parliament is the source of legitimacy for all EU policies …

From: Speech by Martin Schulz, EP President, to the European Council, 13 December 2012.

Overview

The European Parliament (EP) represents the European Union's (EU) 500 million citizens, and is the Union's only directly elected body. In the institutional triangle (expand 'Read full text) comprising Parliament, Council and Commission, it is Parliament's role to represent the interests of EU citizens (the Council represents the Member States; the Commission defends the interests of the EU).

In common with national parliaments, its essential role is to legislate, scrutinise and control the use of executive power. From initially being a consultative body with little power, the European Parliament is since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty a powerful legislator in the Union's decision-making process, in most cases jointly adopting legislation with the Council, shaping European policies.

The results of an EU-wide survey of citizens' knowledge of the EP and how it works were published by the EP in February 2011. They showed that more men than women claim to be aware of EP matters, people from more affluent social classes have a better knowledge of the EP, and the best informed age group, by their own assessment, are those between 40 and 54 (see Press Release and EB Parlemeter 74.3).

Another survey, held in November 2011, the mid-term of the 2009-2014 legislature, concentrates on the views of Europeans on the European Parliament, policies and values they wish to see promoted and defended (see Press Release and EB Parlemeter 76.3).

This study found out that the majority of Europeans want the Parliament to continue to play its enhanced role, while the number of respondents who want the Parliament to play either a more important or less important role has decreased. Concerning its image, 45% of Europeans have a 'neutral' view on the European Parliament, although the number of those who have a 'positive' image is decreasing while the number of those with a 'negative' image is increasing. Moreover, the number of people who think the Parliament is 'inefficient' is increasing as well as the number of people who think that it is 'not well known' and that it 'doesn't listen to citizens'.

In a three-part survey titled 'One year to go to the 2014 European elections', Eurobarometer (EB/EP 79.5) found that with six months to go until the 2014 European Parliament elections, more than a third of Europeans are aware that the next European elections will be held in 2014/May 2014. A trend regarding European Parliament's overall image has been reversed since November 2012 and is now positive again. In the context of the national debt crisis in some Eurozone states, European citizens want jobs and tackling unemployment and economic and social issues to be prioritised.

History

The European Parliament has its roots in the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) which first met in September 1952. When the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) were created in 1957, the ECSC Common Assembly served all three Communities under the name 'European Parliamentary Assembly'. It first met in Strasbourg in March 1958. The name 'European Parliament' was adopted in March 1962.

Prior to the first direct elections in 1979, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were nominated by national parliaments. They had a dual mandate, and were expected to serve at both national and European level. Since 1979 elections have been held every five years.

Year	Number of Member States	Number of MEPs	Basis of MEPs' membership
1952	6 (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, West Germany)	78	Nominated
1958		142	Nominated
1973	9 (Denmark, Ireland, UK join)	198	Nominated
1979		410	1st directly elected
1981	10 (Greece joins)	434	(Greek MEPs nominated)
1984		434	2nd directly elected
1986	12 (Portugal, Spain join)	518	(Portuguese and Spanish MEPs nominated)
1989		518	3rd directly elected
1994		567	4th directly elected
1995	15 (Austria, Finland, Sweden join)	626	
1999		626	5th directly elected
2004	25 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia join)	732	6th directly elected
2007	27 (Bulgaria, Romania join)	732	
2009	27	736	7th directly elected
2011	27 (Seat allocation Lisbon Treaty)	754	
2013	28 (Croatia joins)	766	
2014	28	751	8th directly elected

Although the European Parliament is an elected body, its decision-making powers have historically been very limited (essentially confined to Consultation) - a feature which has given rise to concern that the Union itself has a democratic deficit. However, Treaty

changes have seen a steady increase of Parliament's legislative and scrutiny powers, and it is now a significant decision-making body on equal footing with the Council.

Legal basis

According to Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the 'functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative democracy', citizens are 'directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament'.

Article 13 identifies the European Parliament as one of the Union's institutions.

Article 14 gives a brief overview of provisions governing the Parliament, including: its responsibility - jointly with the Council - for exercising legislative and budgetary functions; numbers of MEPs (a maximum of 750, plus the President, with no Member state having more than 96 seats); its term of office (five years); and election of the EP President. Article 14 (2) provides that 'the European Parliament shall be composed of representatives of the Union's citizens'.

More detail is given in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), where provisions on the Parliament are set out in Articles 223-234.

Article 223(1) concerns elections to the European Parliament, which are to be held:

> by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States or in accordance with principles common to all Member States.

Under Article 223(2), rules concerning the duties of MEPs to be agreed by Parliament with the consent of the Council.

In Article 10 (4) TEU the Treaty ascribes European political parties the role of contributing to forming political awareness and to expressing the will of European citizens. Regulations governing political parties at European level are to be laid down by the European Parliament and the Council (Article 224; on 6 April 2011, MEPs called for EU-level political parties and foundations to have legal personality based directly on EU law - see Press Release). After the adoption of Council Regulation 2004/2003 as amended in 2007, European parties received formal status distinct from political groups in Parliament.

If Parliament thinks the EU needs to legislate in order to implement the Treaties, it may, under Article 225, ask the Commission to submit a proposal for legislation.

Article 226 provides for a temporary Committee of Inquiry to be established, empowered to investigate alleged contraventions or maladministration in the implementation of EU law.

Under Article 227:

> Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, shall have the right to address, individually or in association with other citizens or persons, a petition to the European Parliament on a matter which comes within the Union's fields of activity and which affects him, her or it directly.

(The 2010 Annual Report the Petitions Committee showed that the issues of most concern to EU citizens petitioning the EP were the environment and fundamental rights - see Press Release).

Article 228 sets out details of the European Ombudsman: an independent official, elected by the EP and empowered to receive complaints concerning maladministration in the EU institutions, bodies, offices or agencies.

Article 229 specifies that an annual session of Parliament will be held on the second Tuesday in March.

Article 230 allows the European Commission to be represented at all EP meetings and, at its request, to be heard. Questions put to the Commission by Parliament or its Members are to be answered orally or in writing.

Under Article 231, the EP takes decisions by simple majority (unless otherwise specified elsewhere in the Treaties).

Article 232 requires the Parliament to adopt and publish its Rules of Procedure.

The annual general report submitted to Parliament by the Commission must, under Article 233, be discussed by MEPs in open session.

The issue of a motion of censure on the activities of the Commission is dealt with in Article 234.

Amongst the Protocols attached to the Treaty of Lisbon, Protocol 7 Article 7 provides that no restriction should be imposed on the free movement of MEPs travelling to or meetings of Parliament. Under Article 8, Members are not to be subject to any form of inquiry, detention or legal proceedings in respect of opinions expressed or votes cast by them in the performance of their duties. Provisions on immunity are set out in Article 9.

Role

The European Parliament's primary role is to serve and safeguard the interests of EU citizens. It achieves this by using its powers in a number of ways:

- scrutiny of legislative and policy proposals
- budgetary power
- control of the executive.

Scrutiny of EU policy and legislative proposals

MEPs' scrutiny of EU affairs is facilitated by: examining proposed legislation; assessing monthly and annual reports submitted by the European Commission (MEPs comment and vote on the Commission's annual work programme); questioning Commissioners and Commission officials; questioning Ministers. Parliamentary Questions may be put directly at Question Time during plenary sessions, or may be submitted in writing.

As part of the negotiations over the second Barroso Commission (see also 'Control of the executive' below), it was agreed that a 'Question Hour' will be held during every plenary session in Strasbourg. The initiative offers MEPs the opportunity to question the Commission President, with 30 minutes allowed for free questioning and 30 for questions on a chosen topic (the Commission's website has details of the Question Hour; the first one was summarised in this Press Release).

Every six months, the President of the Council presents the new Presidency programme to Parliament, and at the end of the six-month period submits a summary report on developments during the Presidency. The President of the Council must also report to Parliament on the outcome of each European Council (where the President of the

European Parliament makes a presentation on the main agenda items at the start of each European Council).

Parliament's legislative powers were enhanced by the 1986 Single European Act (SEA), which introduced the co-operation procedure, giving Parliament a legislative role in a limited number of areas, including environment policy, development policy and social policy. The SEA also required Parliament's assent for any further enlargement of the Community, and for international cooperation and association agreements.

The 1993 Treaty on European Union (TEU) extended the cooperation procedure to other areas and introduced the co-decision procedure, which increased Parliament's legislative powers, effectively giving the EP equal legislative powers with the Council of the European Union (see also European Parliament Ordinary legislative procedure). The Treaty of Lisbon re-named the co-decision procedure the 'ordinary legislative procedure' (details of the procedure are set out in the TFEU, Article 294).

In the event of disagreement between Parliament and the Council, the conciliation procedure is instituted, in a Conciliation Committee made up of the members of the Council and a delegation from Parliament meeting for a maximum of six weeks. The 15-member EP delegation, which reflects the composition of Parliament, is chaired by one of its Vice-Presidents. It always includes Parliament's 'rapporteur' (the author within Committee of the relevant report).

In 1997 the Treaty of Amsterdam simplified the co-decision procedure, making it the standard method of decision-making, and extended it to most areas of legislation.

The Treaty of Nice, which entered into force on 1 February 2003, enhanced the Parliament's role as co-legislator. The Treaty extended the co-decision procedure to seven areas to which it was decided that qualified-majority voting in the Council should apply. This affected the following EC Treaty Articles: 13 (incentives to combat discrimination), 65 (judicial co-operation in civil matters), 157 (specific industrial support measures), 159 (economic and social cohesion actions outside the Structural Funds), 191 (statute for European political parties), and 62 and 63 (visas, asylum and immigration).

Co-decision was to become the ordinary legislative procedure under Lisbon, Articles 289 and 294. The ordinary legislative procedure has been extended to over forty further areas of competence.

Budgetary power

The first significant power ceded to the European Parliament was in relation to the budget. The 1970 Treaty of Luxembourg gave the EP a role in allocating expenditure, and the 1975 Treaty of Brussels gave it the right to reject the budget. Parliament thus became jointly responsible - with the Council - for the European Community budget.

The procedure of examining, then adopting the annual budget takes place between June and late December. MEPs can propose modifications and amendments to the draft budget and can vote to reject it. Parliamentary approval of the budget is essential; the President of the European Parliament must sign the budget for it to become legally enforceable. Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control monitors EU expenditure, to ensure that money is used for the purposes approved and that fraud is minimised. Parliament also assesses whether the budget has been properly managed, and only when they are satisfied that it has will MEPs approve the annual accounts.

Control of the executive

Executive power in the EU is vested in both the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.

The Treaty of Amsterdam strengthened Parliament's role by granting it a right of approval, rather than merely a consultative role, on the appointment of the President of the European Commission. Since the Treaty of Nice entered into force in 2003 nominations for Commissioners must also be approved by MEPs (currently, Article 17(7) of the TEU stipulates that nominees to the Commission are to be subject as a body to a vote of consent by the EP; for further details of the process for electing the Commission President and the Commission, see Rules of Procedure 105 and 106 respectively).

The Brussels European Council in June 2004 nominated José Barroso as President of the Commission, following which the vote of approval by the EP took place on 22 July 2004 during the new Parliament's constituent plenary session. The vote, which was preceded by a statement by José Barroso and a debate, was taken by secret ballot and approved the nomination by 413 votes in favour out of 711 votes cast.

The team of Commissioners-designate, nominated by José Barroso, were subject to individual hearings before the relevant committees of the European Parliament between 27 September and 8 October 2004. During the hearings, the Italian nominee was rejected by the Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee and MEPs also stressed their dissatisfaction with other members of Barroso's team. Following this, the President-elect, Mr Barroso, decided not to present his Commission to Parliament for approval during the second October part-session, on the grounds that he needed more time to hold further talks with Parliament and the Member States. A revised proposal was presented to the European Council on the composition of the future Commission and a second round of parliamentary hearings was held on 15-16 November. The revised team was finally approved by the European Parliament on 18 November, allowing the new Commission to take up office on 22 November 2004, some three weeks later than originally envisaged.

The nomination of Mr Barroso for a second term was agreed at the June 2009 European Council and approved by the European Parliament on 16 September (see Press Release). Commenting on the re-election, Jerzy Buzek, then EP President, said that Parliament would play a full role in the hearings of the new Commissioners in order to ensure the strongest possible Commission (see Press Release).

A Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission is revised every five years. The current version is dated 20 October 2010 (see text). The scope of the Agreement is stated as being:

> To better reflect the new 'special partnership' between Parliament and the Commission, the two Institutions agree on the following measures to strengthen the political responsibility and legitimacy of the Commission, extend constructive dialogue, improve the flow of information between the two Institutions and improve cooperation on procedures and planning.

A significant supervisory power is the motion of censure, which would require the members of the Commission to resign as a body. Although a number of motions of censure have been tabled, none has yet been carried. However, the Santer Commission resigned in 1999 in order to forestall a vote on such a motion, which was expected to be carried.

Under Article 227 of the TFEU, citizens have the right to petition the European Parliament and to seek redress in appropriate matters. In addition, the European Ombudsman is

appointed by the Parliament to investigate citizens' allegations of maladministration by the Union's institutions.

History was made on 16 September 2010, when the President of the Council, Herman Van Rompuy, made his first report to the European Parliament on a meeting of the European Council (see EP news item).

Elections and turnout

Under Council Directive 93/109/EC of 6 December 1993 EU citizens have the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the EP even when resident in a Member State of which they are not nationals.

Elections are currently held under the 1976 European Elections Act, as amended by Council Decision 2002/772, which allowed for a number of changes to the 1976 Act:

- In particular it made provision for the abolition of dual membership of the European Parliament and national parliaments (known as the dual mandate). This came into effect at the European Parliament elections in 2004, although the UK and Ireland negotiated an exemption until the 2009 elections.

- The question of voting rights for Gibraltar was also covered in an annex to the Decision in which the UK government guaranteed that the people of Gibraltar would be able to take part in the European elections in 2004; provisions for this were included in the European Parliament (Representation) Act 2003.

162 million people voted in the June 2009 European Parliament elections, electing 736 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Overall turnout was estimated at 43.24%, with rates in the 27 Member States varying between 91% in Luxembourg and 90.39% in Belgium (where voting is compulsory), to 19.64% in Slovakia and 20.92% in Lithuania. The UK turnout was 34.48%.

Participation was generally lower than in previous elections. Commenting on the low turnout, Hans-Gert Pöttering, then EP President, said 'We must ensure continuous reporting of the EP's work in coming years and I am sure the turnout will be better in 2014' (see Press Release).

Turnout since the first direct elections in 1979 has been as follows:

Year	Member State	Turnout
1979	9	61.99%
1984	10	58.98%
1989	12	58.41%
1994	12	56.67%
1999	15	49.51%
2004	25	45.47%
2009	27	43.24%
2014	28	?

There are 766 MEPs in the current Parliament since Croatia joined the EU in July 2013. MEPs are elected to serve for five years (the same term as European Commissioners) by citizens voting in European elections, held under the 1976 European Elections Act, as amended by Council Decision 2002/772.

The 2009 elections took place under rules set by the Treaty of Nice, which stipulated that Parliament should have 736 Members. Under the Treaty of Lisbon, however, the number of MEPs increases to 751 (750 plus the President). The 18 additional seats were to be divided between 12 Member States, as follows: one new seat each for Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and the UK; two for Austria, France and Sweden; and four for Spain.

Germany loses three MEPs under the new Treaty, which states that the maximum number per State is 96. However, as they have already been elected, the three 'Nice Treaty' German MEPs are allowed to continue in their posts until the end of the 2014 Parliament.

The addition of 18 new seats temporarily increased the total number of MEPs to 754. The change required an amendment to the Treaty of Lisbon. On 29 November 2011, after the 27 Member States had ratified the protocol allowing the 18 additional MEPs to join the Parliament, the Treaty change has been signed in Rome permitting the text to enter into force on 1 December 2011. The new MEPs had to be designated by the 12 Member States concerned according to their national laws and on the condition that they have been elected by direct universal suffrage and in accordance with one of the three different methods approved by the European Council (see Background). The new MEPs were able to take office once the decisions have been taken and the names have been notified to the Parliament after the announcement by the Parliament's President at a plenary meeting (see EP Headlines). In addition, 12 further MEPs from Croatia joined Parliament in 2013, leading to a temporary increase in the numbers of seats to 766. However, after the elections in May 2014, the number of deputies will be 751 in accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon and will stay at this level in the future.

Details of the 2004 European elections were summarised by the European Commission in MEMO/04/61, while the EP itself produced 2004 elections: key facts. Information about the 2009 elections can be found at the Parliament's Elections 2009 site. See also: European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2009 study The European elections: EU legislation, national provisions and civic participation. A European Commission report on the 2009 European Parliament elections (COM(2010)605) assesses the level of awareness about the elections and participation in them. It also looks at how Member States have transposed and implemented relevant EU law and outlines measures for improving participation and enforcing EU citizens' electoral rights.

On 12 December 2006, the Commission proposed amending Directive 93/109/EC so as to make it easier for EU citizens living in another Member State to stand as candidates in EP elections. The draft Directive (issued as COM(2006)791) was finally adopted by the Council on 20 December 2012 (see Press Release 17591/12 and Procedure 2006/0277/CNS).

In a Resolution adopted on 22 November 2012, MEPs called for the next EP elections to be held on 15-18 May or 22-25 May 2014 rather than in June. They also urged European political parties, at that election, to nominate candidates for Presidency of the Commission and called for as many members of the next Commission as possible to be drawn from Members of the European Parliament (see also Press Releases 20121121IPR56164 and IP/12/1232).

2014 European Parliament Elections

Across the European Union, the next European Parliament elections are going to take place from 22-25 May 2014.

The European Parliament has set up an official website for the elections. On this website you can find a newsroom, top stories on EP elections as well as information on EU member states, on European political parties and a press kit.

In addition, ESO offers you access to a large number of other sources on the 2014 European Parliament elections. You can find them all through this link.

Members of the European Parliament

The database of all the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can be consulted by alphabetical order. An advanced search facility allows MEPs to be found by name and - via pull-down menus - by political group, committee, delegation, 'other bodies' (Bureau members, Quaestors etc.), or country. The amount of information available given for each MEP varies, but typically includes political party, names of committees and delegations of which the MEP is a member, his or her place and date of birth, and contact addresses in Strasbourg, Brussels and the Member State he or she represents. Entries also include a photograph of the MEP and their Declaration of Financial Interests.

Most of the EP Information Offices in the Member States also provide biographical information about their national MEPs. If an MEP resigns, the relevant Member State must inform the European Parliament of the name of his or her successor.

Statute

After many years of discussion, with differences of opinion between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers on several issues, a Statute for Members of the European Parliament was finally agreed in 2005 outlining a common system for the salaries and expenses of MEPs (Decision 2005/684/EC, Euratom; in July 2009, Decision 2009/C 159/01 was published, concerning implementing measures for the Statute).

The main provisions of the Statute are:

- a uniform salary structure - to be set at 38.5% of that of a European Court of Justice judge, which in 2005 would have been 7,000 euros per month. This is to be paid by the EU and not the Member States
- same tax as other EU officials paid to the EU budget rather than national rates
- reimbursement of travel costs based actual costs incurred rather than the flat rate at present
- amended pension scheme, funded one third by MEPs and two-thirds by the parliament
- a daily allowance to cover food and accommodation plus monthly allowances for office costs and staff.

Observers

Countries acceding to the European Union are invited to send Observers to the European Parliament in advance of their becoming members. The 10 countries that joined on 1 May 2004 had Observers and, after the Accession Treaty with Bulgaria and Romania was signed, 53 observers were appointed to the Parliament on 26 September 2005 (18 from Bulgaria and 35 from Romania). Following the signature of the Treaty on the accession of Croatia to the European Union on 9 December 2011, Croatia was invited to appoint 12 observers (equal to the number of future EP seats allocated to Croatia), whose term of office started on 1 April 2012 (see Observers page).

Organisation of Parliament

The European Parliament is headed by a President, who presides over plenary sessions, chairs meetings of the Bureau and the Conference of Presidents, and represents Parliament on official occasions and in international fora. The President of the European Parliament is the most senior of all EU officials.

Following the European elections of June 2009, the European Parliament's largest Political Groups, the centre-right European People's Party and the Socialists and Democrats, agreed to split the legislature's Presidency between them. Thus, Jerzy Buzek, MEP since 2004 and former Prime Minister of Poland, served in the first half of the five-year legislative term (see Press Release). On 17 January 2012, Martin Schulz, an MEP since 1994 and leader of Socialist Group since 2004, was elected new President of the European Parliament by 387 votes in favour out of 670 votes cast (see Press Release and Speech).

Parliament is managed by two main political bodies: the Conference of Presidents and the Bureau

The Conference of Presidents comprises the President and the chairs of the Political Groups. It sets agendas for plenary sessions, timetables the work of Parliamentary bodies, and establishes the terms of reference and size of Parliamentary committees and delegations.

Administrative matters (including budget and personnel) are dealt with by the Bureau, which is made up of the President, 14 Vice-Presidents, and six Quaestors, acting in an advisory capacity. Members of the Bureau are elected for two and a half years.

The six Quaestors are responsible for administrative and financial matters of direct concern to Members.

At the start of the new Parliamentary term in July 2004 new Rules of Procedure came into effect designed to streamline the Parliament's proceedings and make the institution more effective by ensuring that there would be less pressure at voting time. They were revised in September 2005, again in July 2009, in January 2012 and most recently in April 2015 (see Rules of Procedure text).

Political Groups

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) sit in Political Groups, not national delegations. In July 2004, with a view to preserving the transnational composition of Groups, Parliament's Rules of Procedure stated (Rule 29) that a Political Group must comprise a minimum 19 Members, drawn from 'at least one-fifth of the Member States'. The September 2011 Rules of Procedure now require (in Rule 32) that:

> 2. A political group shall comprise Members elected in at least one-quarter of the Member States. The minimum number of Members required to form a political group shall be twenty-five.

> 3. If a group falls below the required threshold, the President, with the agreement of the Conference of Presidents, may allow it to continue to exist until Parliament's next constitutive sitting, provided the following conditions are met …

Following the 2009 elections, the Groups are:

- Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP)
- Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D)
- Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
- Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)
- Confederal Group of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)
- European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)
- Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD)

The seats gained by each in 2009 were:

Political group	Seats	Vote
EPP	264	35.9%
S&D	161	21.9%
ALDE	80	10.9%
GREENS/EFA	53	7.2%
UEN	35	4.8%
GUE/NGL	32	4.3%
IND/DEM	18	2.4%
Others	93	12.6%

'Others' comprises those MEPs who are not aligned to any Group; they are often referred to by the abbreviation NI, from the French 'non-inscrits'.

Reaction from political leaders suggested agreement 'that the new distribution of power in the Parliament asks for novel, more permanent political cooperation' and that the election of MEPs from nationalist and extremist parties was of more concern than the low turnout (see Press Release).

In March 2009, the leaders of the political groups adopted a package of reforms aimed at updating the institution's internal procedures. The changes - the third such package of reforms - focused on the workings of committees and inter-parliamentary delegations (see Press Release).

Regulation 2004/2003 on the rules 'governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding' was adopted in November 2003 with the aim of establishing a long-term framework for European political parties and their financing from the Community budget and also seeking to lay down minimum standards of democratic conduct for such parties. It was amended by Regulation 1524/2007 (see Summaries of EU legislation). The annual accounts of political groups are available since 2001.

Committees

MEPs usually serve on a number of Parliamentary Committees. In July 2004 the new Parliament set up 20 Committees and two Subcommittees - all of which have been retained in the 2009 Parliament. The Committees are:

- Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)
- Budgets (BUDG)
- Budgetary Control (CONT)
- Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)
- Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)
- Culture and Education (CULT)

- [Economic and Monetary Affairs](#) (ECON)
- [Employment and Social Affairs](#) (EMPL)
- [Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#) (ENVI)
- [Fisheries](#) (PECH)
- [Industry, Research and Energy](#) (ITRE)
- [Internal Market and Consumer Protection](#) (IMCO)
- [Legal Affairs](#) (JURI)
- [Petitions](#) (PETI)
- [Regional Development](#) (REGI)
- [Transport and Tourism](#) (TRAN)
- [Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#) (FEMM)

External Policies

- [Development](#) (DEVE)
- [Foreign Affairs](#) (AFET)
  - [Subcommittee on Human Rights](#) (DROI)
  - [Subcommittee on Security and Defence](#) (SEDE)
- [International Trade](#) (INTA)

Under [Rule 197](#) of its [Rules of Procedure](#), Parliament can establish special committees, whose powers, composition and term of office are defined at the same time as the decision to set them up. They have a life of 12 months, unless renewed. Such temporary committees have been set up in recent years to consider issues including foot-and-mouth disease, safety at sea, and climate change. Links to some of these special committees are given on the main [Committees page](#).

Since 1993 Parliament has had the right to set up Committees of Inquiry to investigate 'alleged contraventions of Community law or instances of maladministration' ([Rules of Procedure](#), Rule 198). Topics covered by previous Committees of Inquiry have included BSE, the Community Transit System, the collapse of the Equitable Life Assurance Society and the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the transportation of prisoners (the so-called 'rendition process').

Maintaining relations with other parliamentarians is also a feature of MEPs responsibilities. Initially, MEPs were mandated to serve at both national and European level, and relations with national parliaments were strong, but since the first direct elections in 1979 they have been less close. The European Parliament's Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments has a responsibility for establishing and maintaining informal networks. Since 1989, national parliamentary bodies specialising in EU affairs have met twice a year with MEPs under the aegis of [COSAC](#) (Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union) a consultative and coordinating body (see also the EP pages on [National parliaments in the EU](#) and [Relations with national parliaments](#); to facilitate the flow of information, the European Parliament and national Parliaments have created the [IPEX](#) website).

External delegations

MEPs also meet representatives of parliaments outside the Member States, via a number of [Delegations](#). There are interparliamentary delegations with European countries outside the EU and with non-European countries.

Parliament also has relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States, via the [ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly](#) and with Mediterranean partner countries through the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of the Mediterranean](#) (PA-UfM; formerly the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentarian Assembly - EMPA).

Plenary sessions

Plenary sessions are when all MEPs come together for sessions of two to four days to debate and adopt opinions ('Resolutions') on legislative proposals and initiatives, and to question the executive. The dates of Parliamentary sessions are available via a calendar. The four-day sessions take place in Strasbourg, and the shorter sessions in Brussels.

The earliest detailed information for forthcoming plenary sessions can be found in Séance en direct which posts draft agendas of forthcoming plenary sessions as well as texts of amendments and motions for resolutions. It is also possible to watch the sitting as it progresses.

Parliamentary proceedings can be followed via a number of sources, including Europarl's default Headlines page, and the Press Service page, which has links to more specific sources, of which the most useful are:

- Agenda
- Press releases
- Plenary sessions

In September 2008, Parliament launched EuroparlTV. Split into five programmes (Parliament News, Young Parliament, Discover Parliament, Live and Parliament near you), EuroparlTV is intended to help make Parliament's work 'as transparent and understandable as possible to European citizens' and is seen as 'a means of bringing the life of the institution closer to its citizens in a modern and creative format.'

For the formal record of decisions taken and legislative resolutions adopted the Plenary section of Europarl contains links to Agendas; Minutes; Debates; Texts adopted etc.; see also The Plenary: a User's Guide.

Location

The European Parliament has three locations - Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg. A protocol annexed to the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty states that: 'The European Parliament shall have its seat in Strasbourg where the 12 periods of monthly plenary sessions, including the budget session, shall be held. The periods of additional plenary sessions shall be held in Brussels. The committees of the European Parliament shall meet in Brussels. The General Secretariat of the European Parliament and its departments shall remain in Luxembourg.' For practical reasons, however, a number of officials and the staff of the European Parliament's political groups work in Brussels.

This arrangement is frequently criticised for wasting time and money. However, although Brussels would be the most obvious place to site the European Parliament, neither France nor Luxembourg wish to see their countries deprived of the economic benefits they derive.

In a Resolution of 23 October 2012 on the draft 2013 budget, MEPs called on the Council 'to start elaborating a road-map with the Parliament towards a single seat'.

However, on 6 September 2012, an Advocate General's Opinion in Joined Cases C-237/11 and C-238/11 stated that existing case law demands that Parliament keeps holding 12 plenary sessions per year in Strasbourg (see Press Release 110/12). That advice was followed in the subsequent judgment, issued on 13 December 2012, in which the Court of Justice annulled the votes of the European Parliament concerning the EP's calendar of part-sessions for 2012 and 2013. Despite pleas by some for a change to the current arrangements (see for example the SingleSeat.eu campaign), Parliament must continue to hold 12 monthly plenary part-sessions in Strasbourg for the time being.

Parliament also maintains Information Offices in the Member States, whose role is to:

- inform the public about the European Parliament and the European Union
- ensure that Parliament's activities are covered in the media
- answer enquiries from the general public, interest groups and the media
- help people contact MEPs
- promote debate about the EU

Europarl provides details of visiting arrangements and contact details for Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg (link to Strasbourg Tourism Office).

Information sources in the ESO database

Find updated and further information sources in the ESO database:

2.7 European Parliament: General
- Key Source
- Legislation
- Policy-making
- Report
- Statistics
- News source
- Periodical article
- Textbook, monograph or reference
- Background
2.7.a European Parliament: Meetings
2.7.b European Parliament: President, Political Groups and elections
2.7.c European Parliament: Personnel and organisational issues

Relevant material may also be found under:
2.2 European Union: Current institutional developments
2.3 European Union: The policy-making process
2.3.a European Union: Decision-making processes/procedures

Further information sources on the internet

- European Parliament
  Selected pages / documents from the Europarl website are listed below, with the main sections of the site given first. It is not always easy to find particular pages within the European Parliament's website. Try using the search box (top right-hand corner of the home page), Index: A-Z.
  o Homepage
    ▪ Newsroom (includes: Press releases, Background notes, Weekly agenda, Plenary sessions, National angles, Infographics, Slideshows, Themes)
    ▪ About Parliament (includes: Powers and procedures, Organisation and rules, Human rights, In the past)
    ▪ MEPs (includes: Search, Full list, Incoming/Outgoing, Assistants, Directory)
    ▪ Plenary sitting (includes: Around plenary, Questions and declarations, Ordinary legislative procedure, Calendar)
    ▪ Committees (includes: Home, Meetings, Documents, Events, Supporting analyses)
    ▪ Delegations (includes: Home, Calendar, Supporting analyses, About Delegations, Archives)
    ▪ EPTV (includes: Home, Meetings, Channels, Themes, About EuroparlTV)
    ▪ The President (includes: The President, Agenda, Press room, Contact)

- - **Political Groups**
  - **Stay Informed** (includes: Citizens enquiries, Access to documents, Information offices in the member states, Social media, European Parliamentary Research Service, Factsheets on the European Union, Data protection, Security and access)
  - **Parliamentary Questions**
  - **Rules of procedure**
  - **About MEPs** (for 'Salaries and allowances' scroll down page)
  - **Q & A on Parliamentary immunity**
  - **Fact Sheets**
    - **The European Parliament: historical background**
    - **The European Parliament: powers**
    - **The European Parliament: organisation and operation**
    - **The European Parliament: electoral procedures**
    - **The European Parliament: relations with the national parliaments**
  - **European Parliament and the Lisbon Treaty**
  - **Petitions**
  - **Visiting** (includes: Homepage, Visits, Location)
  - **Agora** ('The Citizens' Agora represents a link between the European Parliament and European civil society')
  - **In the past** (see 'Previous elections' for Results of the 2014 and 2009 European elections)
  - **Faces of the European Parliament 2009-2011**
  - **50 Years of the European Parliament in video** *
  - **Historical Archives** (includes: Home, Holdings, Multimedia Gallery, Publications, About us. For archives of past EP Presidents, select 'Multimedia Gallery: Interviews of the Presidents')
  - **Download Centre** (includes: Home, Annual Campaigns and Events, Visual Identity, Elections, Various)

- Europa
  - **The European Parliament**
  - Policy areas: **Institutional affairs**
  - Summaries of EU legislation
    - **Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament**, **Voting rights and eligibility in European Parliament elections**, **The regulations governing political parties and rules regarding their funding at European level**

- European Commission: DG Communication
  - **RAPID** press releases database (use 'ep' in 'Keywords' box)
  - EU news: **About the EU**

- European Union: EUR-Lex
  The text of proposed and adopted legislation relating to the European Parliament can be found via EUR-Lex:
  - **Proposed**- 01 General, financial and institutional matters - **01.40.20 Parliament**
  - **Adopted** (01 General, financial and institutional matters - 01.40.20 Parliament)
  - **Treaty on European Union** Articles 13, 14
  - **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union** Articles 223-234

- Court of Justice of the European Union: InfoCuria
  Homepage: in 'Name of the parties' box enter 'parliament'. Select dates if required. Hit 'Search' at top or bottom of page.

- European Parliament: Legislative Observatory (OEIL)
  Homepage: Click on **Search** or 'search functions' (to refine search, expand 'search by reference' to select different document types).

- European Commission: PreLex
  Homepage. In standard search use 'european parliament' or other appropriate term, or in an advanced search, use 'Body' to select 'European Parliament and then use 'Role' options as appropriate.

- European Ombudsman
  Homepage. Select Cases and 'Search cases'. Under 'Institution concerned', select 'European Parliament'.

- Architecture Studio Europe
  o Homepage (photos etc. of European Parliament building in Strasbourg)

- BBC: News Online
  o Guide to the European Parliament

- Toute l'Europe
  o The European Parliament in Action Archives 2011-2013

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