

## THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: ORGANISATION AND OPERATION

The organisation and operation of the European Parliament are governed by its Rules of Procedure. The political bodies, committees, delegations and political groups guide Parliament's activities.

### LEGAL BASIS

- Article 14 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Articles 223, 224, 226, 229, 231 and 232 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);
- [Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament.](#)

### MEMBERSHIP AND COMPOSITION

The general rules for the composition of the European Parliament are laid down in Article 14(2) TEU, which stipulates that the European Council shall adopt by unanimity, on the initiative of Parliament and with its consent, a decision establishing composition. It also states that Parliament is to be composed of no more than 751 representatives of the EU's citizens (750 Members plus the President). In addition, the representation of citizens is 'degressively proportional', with a minimum threshold of six members per Member State. No Member State can have more than 96 seats.

The concept of degressive proportionality means that although the total number of seats is allocated on the basis of Member State population size, more populous Member States agree to be under-represented in order to favour a greater representation of less populous Member States: the larger the country, the smaller the number of seats relative to its population. This concept has been further defined in the successive European Council decisions taken under Article 14(2) TEU since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The next elections of the European Parliament will be held from 6 to 9 June 2024. On 22 September 2023, following Parliament's legislative resolution of 15 June 2023 on the composition of the European Parliament, the European Council adopted a decision establishing the composition of Parliament, increasing the total number of seats in Parliament from 705 to 720. The number of MEPs to be elected per Member State will be as follows:

Belgium	22
Bulgaria	17
Czech Republic	21
Denmark	15
Germany	96
Estonia	7
Ireland	14
Greece	21

Spain	61
France	81
Croatia	12
Italy	76
Cyprus	6
Latvia	9
Lithuania	11
Luxembourg	6
Hungary	21
Malta	6
The Netherlands	31
Austria	20
Poland	53
Portugal	21
Romania	33
Slovenia	9
Slovakia	15
Finland	15
Sweden	21

After every election, Parliament has to meet, without needing to be convened, on the first Tuesday after expiry of an interval of one month ([Act of 20 September 1976](#)). In accordance with Article 229(1) TFEU, Parliament must also meet, without needing to be convened, on the second Tuesday in March each year.

## ORGANISATION

### A. The President

Under the Rules of Procedure, the President of Parliament is elected from among its Members for a renewable term of two and a half years (Rule 19). The President represents Parliament vis-à-vis the outside world and in its relations with the other EU institutions. The President oversees the debates in plenary and ensures that Parliament's Rules of Procedure are adhered to. At the beginning of every European Council meeting, the President of the European Parliament sets out Parliament's point of view and its concerns as regards the items on the agenda and other subjects. After the EU budget has been adopted by Parliament, the President signs it, rendering it operational. The Presidents of both Parliament and the Council of the European Union sign all legislative acts adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure. One of the 14 Vice-Presidents (Rule 23) can replace the President.

### B. The plenary

The plenary is the European Parliament *sensu stricto* and its sittings are chaired by the President. It meets in Strasbourg every month (except August) for a 'part-session' lasting four days from Monday to Thursday. Additional part-sessions are held in Brussels. The part-session is divided into daily sittings (Rule 153). The places assigned to Members in the Chamber are decided by political affiliation, from left to

right, by agreement with the group Chairs. The President opens the sitting, sometimes with a tribute or a speech on a topical issue. The President is assisted in this task by the 14 Vice-Presidents, who may take over the Chair. The Commission and the Council of the European Union take part in the sittings in order to facilitate cooperation between the institutions in the decision-making process. If Parliament so requests, the representatives of the two institutions may also be called upon to make declarations or to give an account of their activities.

### C. Political bodies

Parliament's political bodies comprise the Bureau (Rule 24 – the President and 14 Vice-Presidents), the Conference of Presidents (Rule 26 – the President and the political group chairs), the five Quaestors (Rule 28 – responsible for Members' administrative and financial business), the Conference of Committee Chairs (Rule 29) and the Conference of Delegation Chairs (Rule 30). The term of office of the President, the Vice-Presidents and the Quaestors, as well as of the committee and delegation chairs, is two and a half years (Rule 19).

### D. Committees and delegations

Members sit on 20 committees, four subcommittees and 44 delegations (interparliamentary delegations and delegations to joint parliamentary committees, parliamentary cooperation committees, and multilateral parliamentary assemblies)<sup>[1]</sup>. Parliament also sends a delegation to the Joint Assembly set up under the agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific states and the EU<sup>[2]</sup>. Parliament may also establish special committees (Rule 207) or committees of inquiry (Article 226 TFEU and Rule 208). On 10 April 2024, Parliament [adopted](#) a new Rule 207a on temporary legislative committees, to provide a better allocation of tasks. The new rule sets out that, when 'a matter falls within the competence of more than three committees, without the competence of any committee prevailing, the Conference of Presidents may as a last resort, on the basis of a recommendation by the Conference of Committee Chairs, propose to Parliament the setting up of a temporary legislative committee to deal with a specific proposal for a legally binding act or a pre-legislative strategic document'.

On the basis of Rule 213, each committee or delegation elects its own Bureau, consisting of a Chair and up to four Vice-Chairs.

### E. Political groups

Members do not sit in national delegations, but according to their political affinities in transnational groups. Under the Rules of Procedure, a political group must comprise Members elected from at least one quarter of the Member States and must consist of at least 23 Members (Rule 33). The political groups hold regular meetings during the week before the part-session and in part-session weeks, as well as seminars to determine the main principles of their activity. Certain political groups correspond to supranational political parties operating at EU level.

[1]Numbers of members per committee are laid down in paragraph 1 of the [European Parliament decision of 15 January 2020 on the numerical strength of the committees](#) (OJ C 270, 7.7.2021, p. 117).

[2]See the [Samoa Agreement, Article 90](#).

## F. European political parties and foundations

Parliament recommends the creation of an environment that is conducive to the development of truly European political parties and foundations, including the adoption of framework legislation. Article 224 TFEU provides a legal basis for the adoption, in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, of a statute for European-level political parties and of rules on their funding. In 2003, a system for the funding of European political parties was established, which allowed political foundations to be set up at EU level<sup>[3]</sup>. As a response to certain abusive practices, these rules were amended by [Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2018/673](#) of 3 May 2018, with a view to strengthening the European dimension of European political parties, ensuring a fairer distribution of funds and improving enforcement.

The European political parties currently in existence are: the European People's Party, the Party of European Socialists, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, the European Green Party, the European Conservatives and Reformists Party, the Party of the European Left, the Identity and Democracy Party, the European Democratic Party, the European Free Alliance and the European Christian Political Movement. Supranational parties work in close cooperation with the corresponding political groups in the European Parliament.

Some of the most important European political foundations include: the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, the European Liberal Forum, the Green European Foundation, the Institute of European Democrats, Transform Europe, and New Direction – The Foundation for European Reform.

On 22 November 2012, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) urging the European political parties to nominate candidates for the Presidency of the Commission, with a view to strengthening both Parliament's and the Commission's political legitimacy. These arrangements were implemented ahead of the 2014 elections, when lead candidates ran for the very first time. Following those elections, one of the lead candidates, Jean-Claude Juncker, was elected as Commission President by Parliament on 22 October 2014. In its [decision of 7 February 2018](#) on the revision of the Framework Agreement on relations between Parliament and the Commission, Parliament stated that it would be ready to reject any candidate for the Commission Presidency who was not nominated as a lead candidate of a European political party (Spitzenkandidat) ahead of the 2019 European elections. Although in the end it was discarded for the 2019 elections, the lead candidate process has been regarded as creating a broader platform for debate among candidates, bringing both increased transparency and political legitimacy to the role of Commission President and enhancing the involvement and awareness of EU citizens in the process. On 3 May 2022, Parliament adopted its [position](#) at first reading on the reform of electoral law in which it considered that the lead candidate process could be formalised by a political agreement between the European political entities and by an Interinstitutional Agreement between Parliament and the European Council. It also called on European political parties, European associations of voters and European electoral entities to

[3][Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations \(OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 1\)](#).

nominate their candidates for the position of President of the Commission at least 12 weeks before the election day and said that it expected candidates to be placed in the first position of the corresponding list of the Union-wide constituency.

In 2018, in its communication on [institutional options for making the European Union's work more efficient](#), the Commission put forward the idea of transnational lists as a step towards improving the legitimacy of the EU institutions in the eyes of the citizens. Creating a Europe-wide constituency could strengthen the European dimension of the European elections, as it would give citizens the opportunity to connect with candidates across Europe. Parliament, however, considered that the time was not yet right for the creation of a transnational constituency for the 2019 European elections, but left the door open for future debate. In its above-mentioned [position](#) on the reform of electoral law, Parliament suggested 'introducing binding geographical representation in the lists for the Union-wide constituency' and encouraged 'European political parties, European associations of voters and other European electoral entities to appoint candidates in the Union-wide lists coming from all Member States'. This electoral reform should see the creation of 28 transnational seats for the EU-wide constituency on top of the current 705 seats, with full respect for geographical and gender balance.

#### G. Parliament's Secretariat

Parliament's Secretariat is headed by the [Secretary-General](#), who is appointed by the Bureau (Rule 234). The Secretariat's composition and organisation are also determined by the Bureau: it currently comprises 13 Directorates-General and the Legal Service. Its task is to coordinate legislative work and organise the plenary sittings and meetings. It also provides technical, legal and expert assistance to parliamentary bodies and MEPs to support them in the exercise of their mandates. The Secretariat provides interpretation and translation for all meetings and formal documents.

## OPERATION

Under the Treaties, Parliament organises its work independently. It adopts its Rules of Procedure, acting by a majority of its component Members (Article 232 TFEU). Except where the Treaties provide otherwise, Parliament acts by a majority of votes cast (Article 231 TFEU). It decides the agenda for its part-sessions, which primarily cover the adoption of reports prepared by its committees, questions to the Commission and the Council of the European Union, topical and urgent debates, and statements by the Presidency. Committee meetings and plenary sittings are held in public and are web streamed.

## SEAT AND PLACES OF WORK

From 7 July 1981 onwards, Parliament has adopted several resolutions on its seat, calling on the governments of the Member States to comply with the obligation incumbent upon them under the Treaties to establish a single seat for the institutions. Since they failed to do so for a long time, Parliament took a series of decisions concerning its organisation and its places of work (i.e. Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Brussels). At the Edinburgh European Council of 11 and 12 December 1992, the

Member States' governments reached an agreement on the seats of the institutions, whereby:

- Parliament should have its seat in Strasbourg, where the 12 monthly part-sessions should be held, including the session at which the decision on the annual EU budget is taken;
- Additional part-sessions should be held in Brussels;
- The parliamentary committees should meet in Brussels;
- Parliament's secretariat and back-up departments should remain in Luxembourg.

This decision was criticised by Parliament. However, the Court of Justice of the European Union (judgment of 1 October 1997 – C-345/95) confirmed that the seat of Parliament was determined in accordance with what is now Article 341 TFEU. The substance of this decision was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam in a protocol annexed to the Treaties.

Although Parliament criticised these decisions, it has been obliged to draw up its annual calendar accordingly on a proposal by its Conference of Presidents. In general, in the course of a year, Parliament holds 12 four-day part-sessions in Strasbourg and six two-day part-sessions in Brussels. Several initiatives have been launched by Members to avoid meeting in Strasbourg. For 2012, for example, a calendar was adopted which included two two-day part-sessions during the same calendar week in October in Strasbourg, reducing the overall meeting time in Strasbourg by four days. Following a complaint by France, however, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that two full part-sessions are required (Case C-237/11) to comply with the decisions taken.

Pursuant to Article 229 TFEU, Parliament may hold extraordinary part-sessions, at the request of a majority of its component Members or at the request of the Council of the European Union or the Commission. On 18 December 2006, Parliament held, for the first time, a supplementary plenary sitting in Brussels directly after the European Council of 14 and 15 December 2006. This practice of immediate follow-up of European Council meetings has been consolidated since then.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Parliament also enables Members to participate in plenary sessions remotely and use remote voting procedures.

## MEMBERSHIP OF PARLIAMENT BY GROUP AND MEMBER STATE

A table providing an overview of the political groups and their composition can be found at Parliament's [dedicated webpage](#).

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