



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) of the 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 Lisbon Treaty.

The United Kingdom's scheduled withdrawal from the EU necessitated a rethink about how the country's 73 seats should be redistributed. Following a proposal by Parliament^[1], on 28 June 2018 the European Council adopted a decision establishing the composition of Parliament after the elections in 2019^[2]. The total number of seats was cut from 751 to 705, with some Member States seeing their share

[1] [European Parliament legislative resolution of 13 June 2018 on the draft European Council decision establishing the composition of the European Parliament \(Texts adopted, P8_TA\(2018\)0249\)](#).

[2] [European Council Decision \(EU\) 2018/937 of 28 June 2018 establishing the composition of the European Parliament \(OJ L 165 I, 2.7.2018, p. 1\)](#).



increased. The number of MEPs to be elected in each Member State was as follows: Germany 96; France 79; Italy 76; Spain 59; Poland 52; Romania 33; the Netherlands 29; Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Sweden and the Czech Republic 21; Austria 19; Bulgaria 17; Finland, Denmark and Slovakia 14; Ireland 13; Croatia 12; Lithuania 11; Latvia and Slovenia 8; Estonia 7; Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta 6. However, Article 3(2) of that decision also provides that should the UK still be a Member State at the beginning of the 2019–2024 parliamentary term (i.e. in June 2019), the number of MEPs per Member State will remain the same as the preceding term^[3] until the UK's withdrawal becomes legally effective.

After every election, Parliament shall meet, without requiring to be convened, on the first Tuesday after expiry of an interval of one month (Act of 20 September 1976^[4]). In accordance with Article 229(1) TFEU, Parliament shall also meet, without requiring 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 amongst 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 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 145(3)). 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 current topic. The President is assisted in this task by the 14 Vice-Presidents, who may take over the Chair. The European 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.

[3]See Article 3 of [European Council Decision of 28 June 2013 establishing the composition of the European Parliament for the basis of this \(OJ L 181, 29.6.2013, p. 57\)](#).

[4]Act concerning the election of the representatives of the Assembly by direct universal suffrage of 20 September 1976 (OJ L 278, 8.10.1976).



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, two subcommittees and 39 delegations (interparliamentary delegations and delegations to joint parliamentary committees, parliamentary cooperation committees, and multilateral parliamentary assemblies)^[5]. Parliament also sends a delegation to the Joint Assembly set up under the agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states and the EU^[6]. Parliament may also establish special committees (Rule 197) or committees of inquiry (Article 226 TFEU and Rule 198).

On the basis of Rule 204, 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 25 Members (Rule 32). 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.

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^[7]. As a response to certain abusive practices, these rules were recently amended by Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/673 of 3 May 2018^[8], with a view

[5]Numbers of members per committee are laid down in paragraph 1 of the [European Parliament decision of 2 July 2014 on the numerical strength of the committees \(OJ C 224, 21.6.2016, p. 34\)](#).

[6]See the [Cotonou Agreement, as revised in Ouagadougou on 22 June 2010, Article 17](#).

[7][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 \(OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 1\)](#).

[8][Regulation 2018/673 of 3 May 2018 amending Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) No 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations \(OJ L 114, 4.5.2018, p. 1\)](#).



to strengthening the European dimension of European political parties, ensuring a fairer distribution of funds and improving enforcement.

The European parties currently in existence are: the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE), the European Green Party (EGP), the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE), the Party of the European Left (EL), Europeans United for Democracy (EUD), the European Democratic Party (EDP), the European Free Alliance (EFA), the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), the Alliance of European National Movements (AEMN), the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM), and the Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (ADDE). 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^[9] 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^[10], 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.

G. Parliament's Secretariat

Parliament's [Secretariat](#) is headed by the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the Bureau (Rule 222). The Secretariat's composition and organisation are also determined by the Bureau: it currently comprises 12 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).

^[9][European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 \(OJ C 419, 16.12.2015, p. 185\).](#)

^[10][European Parliament decision of 7 February 2018 on the revision of the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission \(OJ C 463, 21.12.2018, p. 89\).](#)



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 Council, topical and urgent debates, and statements by the Presidency. Committee meetings and plenary sittings are held in public and are webstreamed.

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 for a long time to do so, 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, including the session at which the decision on the annual EU budget is taken, should be held;
- 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 (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 regretted 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 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 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 since then been consolidated.



MEMBERSHIP OF PARLIAMENT BY GROUP AND MEMBER STATE

A table offering an overview of the political groups and their composition can be found at the following link: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/crosstable.html>

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