Frequently Asked Questions about MEPs and the European Parliament

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Parliament’s powers and legislative procedures

For the vast majority of EU legislation, Parliament adopt laws jointly with the Council of the EU. The ordinary legislative procedure – “co-decision” – covers, among other areas: the single market, free movement of workers, services, agriculture, fisheries, energy security, visas, asylum, immigration, justice and home affairs, consumer policy, trans-European networks, environment, culture (incentive measures), research (framework programme), social exclusion, public health, the fight against fraud affecting the EU, incentives to combat discrimination, specific industrial support measures, economic and social cohesion actions, the statute for European political parties.

In a few areas, specific decision making procedures apply where Parliament simply gives its opinion on a proposal from the Commission. In these cases, the Council must receive Parliament’s position before voting on the Commission proposal, but it is not bound by it. The most prominent legislative area where this consultation procedure still applies is taxation. Legislation in these areas also requires unanimous agreement in the Council if legislation to be adopted.

In some other cases, Parliament's approval is needed for a decision to be made. The vote in this case is a simple and binding yes or no. This applies, among other things, to the accession of new EU Member States and international agreements between the EU and third countries or groups of countries. The same is true of the final decision on the appointment of the European Commission.
How many MEPs?

The number of MEPs elected in June 2009 was 736, as laid down in the Nice Treaty.

The Lisbon Treaty increases the number of MEPs will to 751, but only with effect from the next elections in 2014. EU Member States have agreed a treaty change to allow the additional MEPs to join the Parliament sooner, but this modification still needs to be ratified in all 27 Member States.

The plan is that as a transitional measure, the three MEPs whom Germany is set to lose under the Lisbon Treaty will stay until the end of the term, temporarily increasing the Lisbon Treaty number of MEPs from 751 to 754.

The additional 18 MEPs ("Lisbon" 751 minus "Nice" 736 plus the three German MEPs not yet deducted), would come from France (2), UK (1), Italy (1), Spain (4), Poland (1), Netherlands (1), Sweden (2), Austria (2), Bulgaria (1), Latvia (1), Slovenia (1) and Malta (1).
How are the Commission President and Commissioners appointed?

**Commission President**

Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament's role in electing the Commission President, will in future be more significant, because it will require a qualified majority, i.e. at least half of all MEPs to vote in favour, rather than just half of those voting, as was previously the case.

The European Council, acting by a qualified majority, will propose to Parliament a candidate for Commission President, taking account of European Parliament election results and after holding appropriate consultations.

The Commission President will then be elected by a majority of Parliament's component members.

If the candidate does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, would have one month in which to propose a new candidate (Lisbon Treaty Article 9 D, paragraph 7).

**Commissioners**

The Council, by common accord with the President-elect, adopts the list of designated members of the Commission.

These Commissioners-designate first appear before parliamentary committees in their prospective fields of responsibility. The hearings are held in public. The Commissioners-designate make statements and answer questions.

The Commission President-elect next presents the College of Commissioners and its programme at a sitting of Parliament. The statement is followed by a debate. The President, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and other members of the Commission are then subject as a body to a vote of consent by Parliament.

Parliament may defer the vote until the following sitting (European Parliament Rule 99).

After the President and Commissioners have been approved by Parliament, they are appointed by the Council, acting by a qualified majority.

In the event of a substantial portfolio change during the Commission's term of office, the filling of a vacancy or the appointment of a new Commissioner following the accession of a new Member State, the Commissioners concerned again appear before the relevant committees.
Parliament in numbers

The European Parliament is the largest democratic parliamentary chamber in the world. Here are some statistics to illustrate its activities during the July 2004 - May 2009 parliamentary term.

**Workflow**

Under the **co-decision procedure**, Parliament adopts legislative acts together with the EU Council of Ministers (representing EU Member States), both institutions having equal powers. In the 2004-2009 term, Parliament amended and voted on **483 co-decision texts**, of which 351 at the first reading, 110 at the second reading and 22 after conciliation procedures.

Under the **assent** procedure, the Parliament could adopt or reject, but not amend, the act. This procedure is used mainly for international agreements and for approving new EU members. In the 2004-2009 term, Parliament took **63** such votes. Under the Lisbon Treaty, a similar “consent” procedure now applies to a wider range of agreements where Parliament previously did not have a binding vote.

Under the **consultation** procedure, the Parliament could vote and state its opinion, but the final decision is taken by the Council of Ministers. This applied during the previous term to decisions concerning taxation, agriculture and justice, among others, though the last two are now within the co-decision procedure. Between July 2004 and May 2009, Parliament took **633** such votes.

The Parliament also has an equal say with Member States in deciding on the EU **budget** and its spending, as well as in approving EU accounts (so-called “discharge”). In the 2004-2009 term Parliament adopted **216** such decisions.

Besides its legislative and budget decisions, Parliament adopted **660 own-initiative reports** and **593 resolutions**, in which it gave non-binding opinions on issues it considered important. In addition, **37 written declarations** were signed by over half the Members and hence officially approved.

A total of **2,924 texts** were approved in plenary session during the 2004-2009 term, **1,355** of which were legislative documents.

Parliamentary committees, political groups of groups of MEPs tabled **48,747 amendments** in plenary session. **30,067** of these amendments were approved, **15,189** of which were to co-decision texts.

Parliament also held **49 formal sittings**, in which prominent guests gave speeches. The shortest formal speech in the 2004-2009 parliamentary term was delivered by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands on 26 October 2004 (19 minutes), and the longest was by the Colombian politician Íngrid Betancourt on 8 October 2008 (50 minutes).
**Staff**

As of May 2009, the **number of officials and temporary staff** working for Parliament (including its political groups) in different locations was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Brussels</th>
<th>Strasbourg</th>
<th>Luxembourg</th>
<th>Other locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6166</td>
<td>3270</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2568</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of Parliament's staff (60%) are women.

On average, officials are 47 years old. The average age of staff from the old Member States is 50, while from the new ones it is just 34.

The biggest Directorate-General is DG Translation, accounting for **21.5% of posts** in Parliament's secretariat. Adding interpreters and lawyer-linguists brings language-related posts to **one-third of the staff total**.

In May 2009, MEPs had **1,510 accredited assistants**.

Private employees work in Parliament's building management, IT, cleaning and canteen services. Journalists, visitors and lobbyists also swell the numbers of people on Parliament's premises, sometimes to over 10,000 in the three main places of work.

**Budget**

Parliament's budget for 2011 is around €1 675 million (around €3.34 per EU resident). Of this total, €320 million will go on buildings, furniture, equipment and similar expenses, €563 million on staff (permanent and temporary), €218 million on MEPs’ salaries and allowances, €187 million on their assistants, and €135 million on other staff and outside services.

**Buildings**

As decided by EU Member States (European Council), Parliament has three places of work - Strasbourg (Parliament’s official seat), Brussels and Luxembourg.
Accredited lobbyists and journalists

There are 4,322 lobbyists registered with Parliament, representing 1,699 organisations (May 2009). There are also about 1,000 journalists accredited with all the EU institutions, and 100 more are accredited with Parliament alone.
How many languages are used in Parliament?

MEPs have the right to speak, listen, read and write in any of the EU's 23 official languages. Their speeches in one official language are simultaneously interpreted into the other official languages. The EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007 and the addition of Irish as an official language on the same date brought the total number of official languages to 23: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish. The 23 languages can be combined in 506 ways (23 x 22).

In general, each interpreter and translator works into his/her mother tongue. However, to cope with all possible language combinations, Parliament uses a system of "relay" languages: a speaker or a text is first interpreted or translated into one of the most widely used languages (English, French or German), and then into others.

**Interpreting** and **translating** are different professions: interpreters render one language into another orally in real time during meetings; translators work with written documents, producing a completely accurate version of the document in the target language.

Parliament employs about 430 staff interpreters and can also draw on 2,500 freelance interpreters. Between 800 and 1,000 interpreters are on hand for plenary sittings.


Parliament's spending on multilingualism amounted to €484 million for 2008, i.e. one third of its total expenditure.
MEPs salaries and pensions

Salaries
With the single Statute for Members in force since July 2009, MEPs all receive the same salary.

The monthly pre-tax salary of MEPs under the single statute is, in 2011, €7 956.87. The salary is paid from Parliament's budget and is subject to an EU tax, after which the salary is € 6 200.72. Member States can also subject the salary to national taxes. The basic salary is set at 38.5% of the basic salary of a judge at the European Court of Justice.

MEPs who sat in Parliament before the 2009 elections were given the opportunity to keep the previous national system for salary, transitional allowance and pensions, for the entire duration of their membership of the European Parliament.

Pensions
Members are entitled to an old-age pension from the age of 63. The pension will be 3.5% of the salary for each full year's exercise of a mandate but not more than 70% in total. The cost of these pensions will be met from the European Parliament budget.
Summary of MEPs allowances

Much of MEPs' work means being away from home and a number of allowances are available to cover the costs involved.

Travel expenses

Most meetings of the European Parliament, such as plenary sessions, committee meetings and political group meetings, take place in Brussels or Strasbourg. MEPs are refunded the actual cost of their travel tickets for attending such meetings on presentation of receipts, up to a maximum of a business class air fare, a first class rail fare or €0.50 per km for car journey, plus fixed allowances based on the distance and duration of the journey to cover the other costs of travelling (such as motorway tolls, excess baggage charges or reservation fees, for example).

MEPs can also be refunded up to €4,243 per year for other travel outside their own Member State undertaken as part of their work, and be reimbursed for up to 24 return journeys within their own Member State. The pre-June 2009 system of a flat-rate travel allowance for journeys to Brussels and Strasbourg has been abolished.

Daily allowance (also called “subsistence allowance”).

Parliament pays a flat-rate allowance of €304 for each day that MEPs attend on official business as long as they sign an attendance register. This covers hotel bills, meals and all other expenses involved. On days when plenary votes are held, if MEPs miss more than half the roll-call votes this allowance is reduced by half.

For meetings outside the EU, the allowance is €152 (again subject to signing a register) with hotel bills refunded separately.

General expenditure allowance

This flat-rate allowance is intended to cover expenditure such as office rent and management costs, telephone and postal charges, computers and telephones. The allowance is halved for Members who, without due justification, do not attend half the number of plenary sittings in one parliamentary year (September to August).

In 2011, the allowance is €4 299 per month.

Medical costs

MEPs are entitled to a reimbursement of two-thirds of their medical expenses. Apart from the proportion of reimbursement, the detailed rules and procedures of this system are the same as that which covers EU civil servants.

Other entitlements

Parliament provides equipped offices to MEPs in both Brussels and Strasbourg. MEPs can make use of Parliament's official vehicles on official business when in either city.
Staffing arrangements: Parliamentary Assistants

MEPs can choose their own staff within a budget set by Parliament. Accredited assistants, based in Brussels (or Luxembourg/Strasbourg) are administered directly by Parliament’s administration, under the conditions of employment for non-permanent EU staff. Assistants based in MEPs’ Member States are handled by qualified paying agents, guaranteeing the proper tax and social security arrangements.

In 2011, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved is €21,209 per MEP. None of these funds are paid to the MEP themselves.

Up to a quarter of this budget can be used for services from service providers chosen by the MEP, such as ordering an expert study on a particular subject.

In general, MEPs can no longer have close relatives among their staff, though there is a transitional period for those who were employed in the previous parliamentary term.
Why does Parliament move between Brussels and Strasbourg?

The EU's national governments unanimously decided in 1992 to fix permanently the seats of the EU institutions. This decision included the working arrangements for the Parliament: that its official seat and the venue for most of the plenary sessions is Strasbourg; that Parliamentary committees have their meetings in Brussels; and that Parliament's secretariat (the administrative staff) would be based in Luxembourg. In 1997 this whole arrangement was incorporated into the EU treaty.

Any change in the current system would need to be part of a new treaty, agreed unanimously by all 27 Member States and ratified by each of their national parliaments.

How much does it cost?

The additional cost involved in dividing Parliament's political business between Brussels and Strasbourg amounts to about €10 million for each of the 12 main plenary sessions per year.

How did this come about?

The decision in 1992 formalised the situation which already existed at the time. This was itself a compromise which had built up over a number of years.

When the European Coal and Steel Community was set up in 1952, its institutions were located in Luxembourg. The Council of Europe (the intergovernmental body set up in the immediate post-WW2 period) was already based in Strasbourg and offered its plenary chamber for meetings of the ECSC's "Common Assembly" which was to develop into the European Parliament. Strasbourg became established as the main home of plenary sessions of the Parliament, though extraordinary sessions were also held in Luxembourg in the 1960s and 1970s.

After the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958, much of the activity of the European Commission and the Council (of Ministers) began to be concentrated in Brussels. Since Parliament's work involves closely monitoring and interacting with both these institutions, over time Members decided to organise more of their work in Brussels. By the early nineties the present arrangement was more or less in place, with committees and political groups meeting in Brussels and the main plenary sessions taking place in Strasbourg. A major part of Parliament's administrative staff is based in Luxembourg.

In the 1990s, the Belgian authorities backed the building of a parliamentary chamber and offices for the EP in Brussels, while the French authorities constructed a new building in Strasbourg. Parliament initially rented these facilities, but has since bought them, which means lower recurring costs.
Forming political groups

MEPs may form political groups according to their affinities. A political group must comprise at least 25 MEPs, elected in at least one-quarter of the Member States (i.e. at least 7). No MEP may belong to more than one political group.

When a group is set up, the President must be notified in a statement specifying the name of the group, its members and its bureau.

Parliament need not normally evaluate the political affinity of group members. By forming a group, MEPs accept by definition that they have political affinity. Only when this is denied by the MEPs concerned is it necessary for Parliament to evaluate whether the group has been constituted in conformity with the rules.

Political groups are provided with a secretariat and administrative facilities, funded from Parliament's budget. Parliament's Bureau sets the rules for how these funds and facilities are managed and audited.

“Non-attached” MEPs (i.e. those who do not belong to a political group) are also provided with a secretariat and have rights under the rules set by the Bureau.

The groups’ annual accounts are published here: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/groups/accounts_en.htm

Seating in the Chamber
The decision as to how seats in the Chamber are allocated among political groups, non-attached MEPs and representatives of EU institutions is taken by the Conference of Presidents of political groups.
Verifying the credentials of new MEPs

Newly-elected MEPs' credentials are verified to establish that they do not hold an office that is incompatible with membership of the European Parliament. "Incompatible" offices include being a member of an EU Member State government or parliament, the European Commission, the Court of Justice, the European Central Bank Board of Directors, the Court of Auditors, or the European Investment Bank. Active officials of EU institutions or bodies set up under the EU treaties to manage Community funds are also barred from being MEPs.

After an election, the European Parliament's President asks EU Member States for the names of those who have won a seat and asks them to take the necessary measures to avoid any incompatibility of offices.

Before taking their seats, new MEPs whose election has been notified to Parliament must declare in writing that they do not hold any office incompatible with that of an MEP, within the meaning of Article 7(1) or (2) of the Act concerning the election of Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (20 September 1976). This declaration needs to be made no later than six days before Parliament's constitutive sitting, i.e. by 8 July.

New MEPs' credentials are checked by Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee, which draws up a report based on notifications from the Member States, and verified by Parliament, which rules on the validity of the mandate of each newly-elected MEP and on any disputes pursuant to the Act of 20 September 1976, except those based on national electoral laws.

Where it is established that an MEP holds an incompatible office, Parliament "shall establish that there is a vacancy."
Cutting Parliament's carbon footprint

A plan to reduce Parliament's carbon "footprint" by 30% by 2020 was approved by the Bureau in October 2008.

Parliament cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 17% when it switched to all "green electricity" in 2008, and it is the only EU institution to have been awarded Environmental Management Scheme (EMAS) certificates for promoting efficient energy, water and paper usage at all its places of work (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg).

Parliament has over one million square metres of buildings to ventilate, heat and maintain. Its energy consumption breaks down as follows: energy and natural gas (32%), passenger transport (28%) equipment and services (20%), fixed assets such as buildings and IT hardware (19%) and cooling (1%).

Environment-friendly buildings

Parliament has recently opened two buildings in Brussels – the Willy Brandt and József Antall buildings – which have a 145,000 litre basin that catches rainwater for flushing toilets. They also have eight rotating solar panels to heat water and offices and detectors that automatically switch off lights, heating and ventilation when an office is empty.