



THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The origins of the European Parliament lie in the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which became the common assembly of all the three supranational European communities that existed at the time. The assembly subsequently acquired the name 'European Parliament'. Over time, the institution, whose members have been directly elected since 1979, has undergone deep change: from an assembly with appointed members to an elected parliament which is recognised as a political agenda-setter of the European Union.

LEGAL BASIS

- The original Treaties ([1.1.1](#), [1.1.2](#), [1.1.3](#), [1.1.4](#), [1.1.5](#));
- Decision and Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (20 September 1976), as amended by the Council Decisions of 25 June and 23 September 2002.

THREE COMMUNITIES, ONE ASSEMBLY

Following the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), the ECSC Common Assembly was expanded to cover all three communities. With 142 members, the new assembly met for the first time in Strasbourg on 19 March 1958 as the 'European Parliamentary Assembly', changing its name to the 'European Parliament' on 30 March 1962.

FROM APPOINTED ASSEMBLY TO ELECTED PARLIAMENT

Before the introduction of direct elections, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were appointed by each of the Member States' national parliaments. All Members thus had a dual mandate.

The Summit Conference held in Paris on 9 and 10 December 1974 determined that direct elections 'should take place in or after 1978' and asked Parliament to submit new proposals to replace its original draft convention of 1960. In January 1975, Parliament adopted a new draft convention, on the basis of which the Heads of State or Government, after settling a number of differences, reached agreement at their meeting of 12 and 13 July 1976.

The Decision and Act on European elections by direct universal suffrage were signed in Brussels on 20 September 1976. Following ratification by all Member States, the Act entered into force on July 1978, and the first elections took place on 7 and 10 June 1979.

ENLARGEMENTS

When Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the European Communities on 1 January 1973 (the first enlargement), the number of MEPs was increased to 198.

For the second enlargement, with the accession of Greece on 1 January 1981, 24 Greek Members were appointed to the European Parliament by the Greek parliament, to be replaced in October 1981 by directly elected Members. The second direct elections were held on 14 and 17 June 1984.

On 1 January 1986, with the third enlargement, the number of seats rose from 434 to 518 with the arrival of 60 Spanish and 24 Portuguese Members, appointed by their national parliaments and subsequently replaced by directly elected Members.

Following German unification, the composition of Parliament was adapted to reflect demographic change. In accordance with Parliament's proposals in a resolution on a scheme for allocating the seats of its Members, the number of MEPs rose from 518 to 567 for the June 1994 elections. After the fourth EU enlargement, the number of MEPs increased to 626, with a fair allocation of seats for the new Member States in line with the resolution mentioned above.

The Intergovernmental Conference of Nice introduced a new distribution of seats in Parliament, which was applied at the European elections in 2004. The maximum number of MEPs (previously set at 700) was increased to 732. The existing allocation of seats to the 15 old Member States was reduced by 91 (from 626 to 535). The remaining 197 seats were distributed among all old and new Member States on a pro rata basis.

With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007, the number of seats in Parliament was temporarily raised to 785 in order to welcome MEPs from those countries. Following the 2009 elections, held from 4 to 7 June, the number of seats was reduced to 736. As the Treaty of Lisbon (which entered into force on 1 December 2009) had set a maximum number of 751 MEPs, to be temporarily raised to 754 until the next elections, 18 MEPs were added to the 736 elected in June 2009 during the 2009-2014 term, following the ratification by the Member States of an amending protocol adopted at the 23 June 2010 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC). With the accession of Croatia on 1 July 2013, the maximum number of seats was temporarily raised to 766, in order to welcome the 12 Croatian MEPs who were elected in April 2013 (in accordance with Article 19 of the Act concerning the conditions of accession of the Republic of Croatia).

For the 2014 elections, the total number of seats was again reduced to 751. The distribution of seats will be reviewed again sufficiently in advance of the elections to be held in 2019. [\(1.3.3\)](#). Also, a possible withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU would take away its 73 seats, thus reducing the EP's overall size.

GRADUAL INCREASE IN POWERS

The replacement of Member States' contributions by Community own resources [\(1.5.1\)](#) led to a first extension of Parliament's budgetary powers under the Treaty of Luxembourg, signed on 22 April 1970. A second treaty on the same subject, strengthening Parliament's powers, was signed in Brussels on 22 July 1975 [\(1.1.2\)](#).

The Single European Act enhanced Parliament's role in certain legislative areas (cooperation procedure), and made accession and association treaties subject to its assent.

The Maastricht Treaty, by introducing the codecision procedure in certain areas of legislation and extending the cooperation procedure to others, marked the beginning of Parliament's metamorphosis into the role of co-legislator. It gave Parliament the power of final approval over the membership of the Commission: this represented an important step forward in terms of Parliament's political control over the EU executive.

The Treaty of Amsterdam extended the codecision procedure to most areas of legislation and reformed the procedure, placing Parliament as co-legislator on an equal footing with the Council. The appointment of the President of the Commission was made subject to Parliament's approval, thus increasing its powers of control over the executive. The Treaty of Nice further extended the scope of the codecision procedure.

The Treaty of Lisbon constitutes another important extension of both the application of qualified majority voting in the Council (using a new method as of 1 November 2014 — Article 16 TEU) and the application of the codecision procedure (now extended to some 45 new legislative domains). Codecision, now known as the ordinary legislative procedure, has become the most widely used decision-making procedure, covering particularly important areas such as the common agricultural policy and justice and security policy. Parliament's role in the preparation of future treaty amendments has become more significant (Article 48 TEU).

With the European elections of 22-25 May 2014, it became clear that Parliament had made full use of the Treaty provision of Article 14 TEU, which states: 'The European Parliament shall, jointly with the Council, exercise legislative and budgetary functions. It shall exercise functions of political control and consultation as laid down in the Treaties. It shall elect the President of the Commission'.

With the new Commission President being elected by Parliament at its sitting of 22 October 2014, the initial idea that European political parties would present to voters 'lead candidates' for the office of Commission President had prevailed.

Udo Bux
04/2017