THE 2014 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: THIS TIME IT’S DIFFERENT

The countdown has started: there are 100 days to go until the first polling stations open for the 2014 European elections. In the second biggest democratic exercise in the world, 400 million people can cast their vote for a new European Parliament. The 751 MEPs taking up their seats in July will not only set the course of European policies for the next five years but also elect the leader of the EU's executive body, the European Commission President.

Why these elections are different

The increase in the European Parliament's powers since 2009 has started to make itself felt as the European Union sought to pull through the economic crisis and MEPs drew up legislation, inter alia on effective budgetary discipline, the winding down of failing banks and caps on bankers' bonuses. The May European elections therefore will allow voters to contribute to strengthening or changing the direction that Europe takes in tackling the economic crisis and in many other issues affecting people’s daily lives.

For the first time, the composition of the new European Parliament will determine who will lead the next European Commission, the EU's executive body, which initiates legislation and supervises its implementation. Under the new rules, EU government leaders, who will propose a candidate for the post of the future Commission President, must do so on the basis of the election results.

The European Parliament will elect the new Commission President by a majority of the component members, i.e. at least half of the 751 MEPs to be elected (376). European political parties will therefore, or have already, put forward their candidates for this leading position in the EU before the European elections, thus allowing citizens to have a say over next Commission President.

The new political majority emerging from the elections will also shape European legislation over the next five years in areas from the single market to civil liberties. The Parliament - the only directly elected EU institution - is now a linchpin of the European decision-making system and has an equal say with national governments on virtually all EU laws. Voters will be more influential than ever.
Further information
- Election press kit
- Election infographics
- EuroParlTV video

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THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

22-25 May 2014: election days

June: formation of political groups; verification of credentials

1-3 July: EP constitutive session: MEPs officially take up their seats in the Parliament. Election of EP president, vice-presidents and quaestors

7-10 July: official political group meetings

14-17 July: session of the Parliament - election of Commission President

September: hearings of designated commissioners

October (tbc): Vote on the full Commission

What happens after the elections?

Once all the official results are in, the competent national authorities inform the European Parliament of the names of the members elected. After verification of their credentials by the Parliament administration, the 751 newly-elected MEPs can take up their seats at the opening of the first session, 1 July 2014.

Before the constitutive plenary session in July, the newly elected MEPs will come together and meet according to political affiliations. The official political groups forming the Parliament should be created by late June.

1. Meetings in the political groups - June

In June, MEPs from different EU countries form political groups on the basis of their political affinities. To get the formal status of a political group it must consist of at least 25 MEPs, elected in at least one-quarter of the Member States (i.e. at least 7).

2. The constitutive session 1-3 July 2014, Strasbourg

The first session of the new Parliament will be dedicated to the formal constitution of the Parliament, when the new MEPs elect their President, 14 Vice-presidents and six quaestors. The opening of the session will be presided by the outgoing President, if re-elected. Otherwise this task is performed by one of the outgoing Vice-Presidents in order of precedence or, in the absence of any of them, the Member having held office for the longest period (Rule 12 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure).
Election of the EP President

Candidates for the Presidency of the European Parliament may be proposed either by a political group or by a minimum of forty MEPs (Rule 13). The election is held on the first session day by secret paper ballot. To be elected, a candidate must win an absolute majority of the valid votes cast, i.e. 50% plus one (Rule 14). If after three rounds no candidate has obtained an absolute majority of the votes cast, only the two members with the most votes can take part in the fourth ballot.

The newly-elected President will take the chair and may make an opening address (although s/he may also choose to make just a few short remarks, with a more formal speech at a later date), before presiding over the election of the Vice-Presidents and Quaestors.

Election of Vice-Presidents and Quaestors

Candidates for the posts of Vice-President or Quaestor must also be proposed either by a political group or by at least 40 Members. The vice-presidential election takes place on the second session day and is held in a paper-based secret ballot as well.

Role of Vice Presidents and Questors

The role of the Vice-Presidents is to replace the President in performing his or her duties when necessary, including chairing plenary sittings. (Rule 21) They are also members of the Bureau, the body responsible for all administrative, staff and organisational matters in Parliament. The five Quaestors deal with administrative matters directly affecting members. (Rule 26).

3. Constitution of Committees 7-10 July (Brussels)

In the week following the constitutive session of Parliament, its standing committees will elect their Chairs and Vice-Chairs. Parliament's inter-parliamentary delegations will do likewise.

Each standing committee elects its Bureau, consisting of a Chair and of Vice-Chairs. The number of Vice-Chairs to be elected is determined by the full Parliament upon a proposal by the Conference of Presidents.

4. EP Session, 14-17 July, Strasbourg
Election of the President of the Commission

Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament elects the Commission President. The European Council, composed of the EU's heads of state and government, must take into account the results of the European Parliament elections when making its proposal for Commission President. This will be made easier for the governments, as the new political groups distribution in the Parliament should be known by mid-June.

When the European Council has made its proposal for the Commission President, a period of negotiations with the Parliament on his/her political priorities and programme could take place.

The second plenary session of July will offer to the European Parliament the first occasion for taking a vote. The successful candidate will need a support of a majority of the members, i.e. at least half of the 751 MEPs to be elected (376).

The vote is taken by secret ballot. Should the candidate be rejected, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, has one month to propose a new candidate.

(Lisbon Treaty, Article 17, 7, EP Rules of procedure Rule 105).

Once the Commission President has been elected, the Council, in agreement with the Commission President-elect, adopts the list of commissioners designated.

5. September/October 2014 (tbc) - Brussels/Strasbourg

Hearings of the Commissioners-designate and vote

The Commissioners-designate appear before the parliamentary committee(s) relevant to their prospective fields of responsibility. The hearings are held in public. Afterwards, each committee meets in camera to draft its evaluation of the candidate's expertise and performance, which is sent to the President of the Parliament. In the past, these hearings have led to candidate commissioners withdrawing or having their portfolio changed.

After this vetting process, the Commission's President presents the full College of Commissioners and its programme at a session of Parliament. The Commission President, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and other members of the Commission need to be approved by a vote of consent by Parliament. If Parliament approves the President and Commissioners, they can be appointed by the Council, acting by qualified majority.

Should there later be a substantial shuffle within the Commission or vacancies arise, the Commissioners concerned or the candidates need to appear (again) before the relevant committees.

Further information
More detailed information can be found in the FAQs online
EUROPEAN ELECTION NIGHT 2014: RESULTS FROM 10 PM

After four days of voting across the EU, the big question is what the new European Parliament will look like. On 25 May at 22.00, when the last polling stations in Europe close, the first projections of the composition of the new Parliament will be announced. And some minutes later the first actual results will be shown, to be updated throughout the evening. The results will feed directly into a pie chart of the new Parliament and its political make-up.

For the first time, Parliament will provide the first projections of the political composition of the new Parliament as soon as the last polling stations close, at 22.00. Figures will gradually be updated when actual voting results come in throughout the evening. The continuously updated data on of the new Parliament will be available online, in the press room and elsewhere in the Parliament. Media can also receive results directly onto their own platforms.

The Election Night starts by day

Over the entire day the European Parliament in Brussels will feature a wide range of debates, briefings, press conferences and other events linked to the elections, enabling journalists to follow developments as they unfold. From the beginning of the afternoon, outgoing and incoming MEPs, EC presidential candidates and former or tipped political group leaders will participate in debates and will be available for comment on the incoming results either from Brussels or other European capitals.

Results website and the election results in open data format

All data including turnout, estimates of the distribution of seats and various statistics will be available in real time on a dedicated website: results-elections2014.eu. The website will be live from 1st April. Media can freely use this information and embed it in their own platforms. There will also be a mobile version of the website, an embeddable widget, XML files available for partners. If you wish to receive election results in XML format or have any other questions on the results, contact dgcomm-webmastersupport@ep.europa.eu

Registration for journalists
Working spaces for journalists will be available beyond the press room and there will be ample facilities for radio and TV stations. During the entire evening numerous multiplex/interactive press conferences will be organised, and a large number of stand-up positions will be set up for TV-stations.

Media organisations interested in attending the election night are asked to submit their expression of interest. Written media can obtain special accreditation by writing to presse-conf@ep.europa.eu, attention Edel Connor, and mentioning 25 May accreditation. The deadline is 15 May, but it is best not to wait until the last moment.

Bookings for audio-visual workspaces should be sent to bookingsEE2014@ep.europa.eu by the end of February. Confirmation of allocation and slots will follow.
100 DAYS TO GO TO THE ELECTIONS: RACE TO FINALISE LEGISLATION

Members of the current European Parliament will gather for its last plenary session in mid-April. Until then, tensions will build as MEPs strive for agreements between political groups and with EU member states to finalise important items of legislation. Will e-cigarettes be banned, will the banking union be put in place?

Committee and plenary agendas will be packed with negotiations on the single resolution mechanism for failing banks, financial services, railways, data protection, aid for the most deprived and other near-final legislation... MEPs are determined that their drive to overhaul EU rules will not run out of steam in the last 100 days. Any legislation not voted through in the final plenary session will fall.

On the economy, MEPs are set to vote on key components of the banking union: deposit guarantees, resolution funds and the single resolution mechanism. But the outcome of talks on the SRM is as yet uncertain. Also, many draft laws for the financial services industry (Markets in Financial Instruments Directive, money laundering, information to investors, access to banking services, insurance ...) are for now only in the pipeline.

Then there is Parliament's inquiry into the efforts of the EU Commission/European Central Bank/IMF “Troika” to rescue EU countries from the economic crisis The Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee report will be followed with interest, notably in countries where the Troika's decisions have had the biggest impact on people's daily lives

On social policy, legislation on the posting of workers is still under negotiation with the Council. The final vote on the fund for the most deprived may take place at the end of February.

In the civil liberties field, Parliament is to vote its position on data protection without having reached an agreement with EU member states. It will pass its amendments on to the next Parliament for further talks with them. Its non-legislative but nonetheless influential report on US National Security Agency surveillance of EU citizens could be put to a vote early in March in Strasbourg.

Food safety issues such as food and feed inspections and animal health and welfare rules are now being debated in the Environment and Agriculture committees and may make it on to the mid-April plenary agenda. Draft consumer protection rules, inter alia on "made in" labelling, and the latest telecoms package, which would further reduce mobile roaming charges, are also in the pipeline.
The draft tobacco directive, as informally agreed with member states, will be put to a final vote in February. MEPs will also have their final say on targets for reducing car CO2 emissions. The "climate change package", the overhaul of the Emissions Trading System and review of air quality legislation will be passed on for the next Parliament to finalise.

Clear political differences with the Council over proposals for the railways (4th liberalisation package) and port services persist for now Parliament is likely to vote its positions on these at the February and March plenary sessions, but work will need to be continued under the next legislature.

Selected topics for coming plenary sessions

Tobacco (February tbc)
Railway package (February tbc)
Car CO2 emissions (February tbc)
Fund for most deprived (February tbc)
Data protection regulation and directive (March tbc)
Report on the NSA surveillance activities (March tbc)
Money laundering (March tbc)
Port services (March tbc)
Telecom package (April tbc)
Banking Union (April tbc)
Report on the "Troika" (April tbc)
Posting of workers (April tbc)
Fuel quality (April tbc)