

# Parliament's Rules of Procedure: what will change

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A wide-ranging overhaul of Parliament's rule of procedure, prepared by Richard Corbett (S&D, UK), was approved by the plenary on Tuesday 13 December. The key features of the reform are enhanced transparency within Parliament and changes in the organisation of plenary sessions.

It also includes measures to improve efficiency, enable groups to propose current affairs debates, tougher penalties for racist and defamatory language or behaviour, and provisions for implementing the 13 April 2016 [inter-institutional agreement on better law-making](#).

Under Rule 227, the approved amendments will enter into force on the first day of the part-session following their adoption, i.e. on 16 January 2017.

## Contacts

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# Background

## **Improving transparency- First reading agreements between Parliament and the Council (Rule 73 a)**

First-reading agreements will remain possible. A committee will still be able to decide by an absolute majority to begin negotiations with the other institutions, but such a decision shall be announced in plenary session and:

- if groups or at least one-tenth of Members object, a confirmation vote shall be held in plenary session;
- failing majority confirmation in plenary session, the report shall be entered on the agenda of the next plenary part-session, with a deadline for amendments.

# Background

## Code of Conduct update

This includes:

- enabling rapporteurs to attach a ‘legislative footprint’ to their reports,
- a ban on Members taking up paid positions as lobbyists (Annex I, Rule 2),
- more detailed statements of Members’ financial interests, to be regularly updated and checked (Annex I, Rule 2),
- an obligation for former Members to inform Parliament when they take a new job as a lobbyist (Annex I, Rule 6),
- withdrawing the access rights of registered lobbyists who breach the rules (Rule 11), and
- a recommendation that the only lobbyists that Members meet should be those who are registered in the Transparency Register (Rule 11 1a new).

# Background

## **New penalties and plenary session organisation**

Penalties against Members who use defamatory, racist or xenophobic language or behaviour, or compromise the smooth conduct of parliamentary business, will be strengthened in serious cases (ranging from a reprimand to forfeiting the daily allowance for 2 to 30 days and/or exclusion from Parliament's work, without prejudice to voting rights. These sanctions would be doubled in the event of a recurrence (currently 1 to 10 days), and would include forfeiting the right to represent Parliament externally).

Political groups will be able to add one or two current affairs debates (Rule 53 a) of at least an hour each on a topic of major interest for European Union policy in each part session.

# Background

## Composition of committees

When forming committees (Rule 199), Members will no longer be formally appointed to the committee posts by plenary, but by political groups, according to the number of seats to which they are entitled (the more Members a group has, the more committee seats it will have). As a result, if a member leaves a group, his or her committee seat will remain with the group. This provision will take effect only in the next legislature.

# Background

## Implementing the inter-institutional agreement on better law-making

The overhaul includes changes needed to implement this agreement. It creates, inter alia:

- a possibility for the President to negotiate the annual joint declaration on legislative priorities with the Commission and the Council (Rule 37 1a),
- a possibility for a committee to fast-track a legislative procedure if it is declared a priority by the three institutions (Rule 47a);
- an obligation for the Commission to debate any proposed withdrawal of its proposals with the competent committee, then, failing an agreement, in plenary session before proceeding with the withdrawal (Rule 37 4a).

# Background

## Improving efficiency

### New limits

Each member may submit up to 20 written questions over a rolling period of three months (Rule 130 – instead of 5+4 per month maximum). The number of motions for resolution tabled will be limited to one per member per month (Rule 133). Written declarations (old Rule 136) will be abolished. Each group will be limited to 100 requests per session for roll-call votes. (Rule 180).

### Rationalised voting thresholds

The Rules of Procedure used to stipulate up to 37 thresholds by type of procedure. The overhaul rationalises most of them into three sizes (Rule 168a), but would allow them to be revised after a year:

- low threshold: a group or individual Members together representing a twentieth of all Members,
- medium threshold: one or more groups or individual Members together representing a tenth of all Members, and
- high threshold: one or more groups or individual Members together representing a fifth of all Members.