

Frequently Asked Questions to the Parliament's Press Service

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How do MEPs work, how much are they paid, and what are their expenses? Answers to these and other frequently-asked questions about Parliament's working methods and running costs are set out in this FAQ section.

The sections below contain a wide range of information about the day-to-day organisational running of the Parliament. The selection of questions and answers is regularly updated to include items of current and constant interest to the media.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Parliament: Parliament's powers and legislative procedures

For the vast majority of EU legislation, Parliament shapes and adopts laws jointly with the EU Council of Ministers (representing EU member states). The ordinary legislative procedure – “co- decision” – covers, inter alia, asylum, immigration, justice and home affairs, economic governance, financial services, the single market, free movement of workers, services, agriculture, fisheries, energy security, visas, 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 is 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, inter alia, to the accession of new EU member states and international trade 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.

Legislative initiative

Although it is up to the Commission to propose new EU laws, Parliament can take the initiative by requesting the Commission to submit any appropriate legislative proposal. When adopting such a "legislative initiative", MEPs may set a deadline for the submission of a proposal. If the Commission refuses to submit the proposal requested, it must explain why.

Delegated/implementing acts

When adopting a new law, MEPs and Council can task the Commission to complement the law with minor additions or changes (like technical annexes or updates) through delegated acts (acts which supplement or amend parts of the law) or implementing acts (acts giving details on how to implement the law). This way, legislation can remain simple and, if needed, be supplemented and updated without new negotiations at legislative level.

Depending on the kind of act adopted by the commission, MEPs have different options if they disagree with the measures proposed by the commission. MEPs have a veto right for *delegated acts*. For *implementing acts* MEPs can ask the Commission to amend or withdraw it, but the Commission has no legal obligation to do this.

Budget

Parliament decides, together with Council, on the EU's annual budgets. The annual budgets have to remain within the limits set by the EU's seven-year "financial framework". This long-term budget needs Parliament's approval to be adopted.

After the end of each year, MEPs scrutinize how the European Commission and EU countries have spent the money in order to decide whether to grant each institution discharge, i.e. final approval of how the budget for a specific year has been implemented.

Links

- More information: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007c895f4c/Powers-and-procedures.html>
- Subsidiarity: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/relnatparl/en/about/subsidiarity.html>

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Parliament: How are members of the European Parliament elected?

European elections are held every five years. The latest elections took place from 22-25 May 2014. Each member state has a fixed number of members of the European

Parliament (MEPs); from six for Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Estonia to 96 for Germany, making a total of 751.

The allocation of seats is laid down in the European Union treaties on the basis of the “degressive proportionality” principle: countries with larger populations have more seats than those with smaller ones, but the latter have more seats than strict proportionality would imply.

Elections to the European Parliament are largely governed by national electoral laws and traditions, but there are also common EU rules. In November 2015, MEPs initiated a reform of the EU rules, aiming at reducing the current inequalities between citizens of different EU countries and making the whole system more transparent. MEPs want the reform to be finished in good time before the 2019 elections.

If a member leaves Parliament during the mandate she or he will be replaced according to the rules of his or her country.

Links

- More information on the elections: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20150201PVL00036/Elections>
- Table with MEPs per country and political group: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/crosstable.html>
- EP starting electoral reform: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20151109IPR01698/html/EP-elections-Spitzenkandidaten-mandatory-thresholds-right-to-vote-abroad>
- Outgoing/incoming MEPs: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/incoming-outgoing.html>

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Parliament: MEPs in key functions and how they are elected

At the first plenary session after the European elections, Parliament elects a new President, 14 new Vice-Presidents and five Quaestors.

All elected offices in the European Parliament, i.e. President, Vice-President, Quaestor, Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, and Delegation Chair and Vice-Chair, are renewed every two and half years, so once at the start and once half-way through the 5-year legislative term (during the plenary session from 16 till 19 January 2017). Current office-holders can be confirmed for a second mandate.

In electing the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, account should be taken of the need to ensure an overall fair representation of member states and political views.

EP President

The President directs Parliament's activities, chairs plenary sittings and declares the budget finally adopted. The President represents Parliament to the outside world and in its relations with the other EU institutions.

The first act of a newly-elected European Parliament is to elect its President. Candidates for the Presidency may be proposed either by a political group or by a minimum of forty MEPs (Rule 15). The election is held by secret ballot. To be elected, a candidate must win an absolute majority of the valid votes cast, i.e. 50% plus one (Rule 16).

If no candidate is elected at the first ballot, the same or other candidates may be nominated for a second round of voting under the same conditions. This can be repeated at a third round if necessary, again with the same rules.

If no-one is elected at the third ballot, the two highest-scoring candidates in that round proceed to a fourth ballot, where the one receiving the greater number of votes wins. (Should there be a tie at this stage, the older candidate is declared the winner).

Vice-Presidents and Quaestors

Vice-Presidents may 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 organizational matters in Parliament. The Quaestors deal with administrative matters directly affecting MEPs themselves. (Rule 28). Parliament has 14 vice-presidents and five quaestors.

Candidates for the posts of Vice-President and Quaestor may be presented either by a political group or by at least 40 Members. The vice-presidential election is held using a single secret ballot on all candidates. The order in which candidates are elected determines the order of precedence (Rule 15).

Political group chairs

There are currently 8 political groups in the European Parliament. Each political group elects its own chair or chairs. The chairs and the EP president constitute the EP Conference of Presidents.

The Conference of Presidents organizes Parliament's business and legislative planning, decides the responsibilities and membership of committees and delegations and is responsible for relations with other EU institutions, the national parliaments and non-EU countries.

Committee chairs

During their constitutive sittings (and mid-term, when new office-holders are elected), Parliament's standing and temporary committees elect their Chairs and Vice-Chairs. Chairs and Vice-Chairs may also be confirmed for a second mandate in the elections taking place in the mid-term of the legislature. Parliament's inter-parliamentary delegations do likewise.

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

Parliament's standing interparliamentary delegations (for relations with non-EU parliaments) also elect their Chairs and Vice-Chairs, using the same procedure as for committees (Rule 212 and 214).

Coordinators in committees

The political groups elect coordinators for the parliamentary committees. Together with the chair and the vice-chairs, the coordinators organize the work in the committee.

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Parliament: How are the Commission President and Commissioners appointed?

Commission President

Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament's role in electing the Commission President is more prominent than before.

After the elections, one of the first tasks of an incoming Parliament is to elect a new President of the European Commission (the EU's executive body). When member states nominate a person for this post, they must take account of the European election results. Should he or she not obtain the support of the required majority of MEPs (at least 376 voting in favour out of the 751 members of the EP), then the member states need to propose another candidate within a month's time (European Council acting by qualified majority). Candidates for the remaining Commission portfolios have to pass a tough parliamentary vetting process too.

Commissioners

The Council, in agreement with the Commission President-elect, adopts the list of candidate commissioners.

These Commissioners-designate first appear before parliamentary committees in their prospective fields of responsibility. Each committee then meets to draw up its evaluation of the candidate's expertise and performance, which is sent to the President of the Parliament and which in the past, has prompted candidates to withdraw from the process. The Commission President, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and other members of the Commission, then need to be approved in a vote of consent by Parliament.

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 accession of a new member state, the Commissioners concerned is heard again before the relevant committees.

Links

- More information about the hearings: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/hearings>

Frequently Asked Questions

Parliament: Forming political groups

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). No MEP may belong to more than one political group.

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

Normally, Parliament does not evaluate the political affinity of group members. By forming a group, MEPs accept by definition that they have a political affinity. It is only when this is denied by the MEPs concerned that Parliament will have to evaluate whether the group has in fact been constituted in conformity with the rules.

Political groups are provided with a secretariat and administrative facilities, funded by 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 out by the Bureau.

The funds available are intended to cover the administrative and operational cost of a group's staff as well as expenditure on political and information activities in connection with the European Union's political activities.

The budget may not be used to finance any form of European, national, regional or local electoral campaign or to finance political parties at national and European level or their dependent bodies.

Links

- The groups' annual accounts: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/groups/accounts_en.htm
- More information and links to the homepages of the existing political groups: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007f2537e0/Political-groups.html>
- MEPs by Member State and political group: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/crosstable.html>

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Parliament: Intergroups

Intergroups are unofficial groupings of MEPs who are interested in a particular topic which does not necessarily fall within the scope of the European Parliament's normal work but is important to wider society. Intergroups hold informal discussions and promote exchanges between MEPs and civil society.

As intergroups are not official bodies of Parliament, they do not express Parliament's views. They must not engage in any activities which might be confused with Parliament's official activities.

Parliament's presidium has laid down conditions for establishing intergroups, which are formed at the start of each parliamentary term (for example an application must be signed by at least three political groups and a yearly declaration of financial interests is required). If these conditions are met, political groups may provide intergroups with logistical support.

Chairs of intergroups must declare any support they receive in cash or kind. These declarations must be updated every year and are held in a public file.

Links

- List of intergroups and rules on intergroups:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00c9d93c87/Intergroups.html>

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Parliament: Political parties and political foundations at European level

Political parties at European level

What is a political party at European level?

A political party at European level is composed of national parties and individuals as members represented in several EU member states. See Article 10 paragraph 4 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 224 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

How are political parties at European level funded?

Since July 2004, European political parties at European level have had the possibility to receive annual funding from the European Parliament. The funding takes the form of an operational grant. It can cover up to 85% of the expenditure of a party, while the rest should be covered by own resources, such as membership fees and donations.

What can and what cannot be paid from the grant?

The grant can be used to meet the expenditure directly linked to the objectives set out in the party's political program, such as:

- meetings and conferences,
- publications, studies and advertisements,
- administrative, personnel and travel costs, or
- campaign costs related to European elections.

The grant may not be used to meet expenditure such as:

- campaign costs for referenda and elections (except for European elections),
- direct or indirect funding of national parties, election candidates and political foundations both at national and at European level, or
- debts and debt service charges.

Political foundations at European level

What is a political foundation at European level?

A political foundation at European level is affiliated with a political party at European level and underpins and complements the objectives of that party. A political foundation at European level makes analyses and contributes to debates on European public policy issues. It also engages in related activities, such as organising seminars, training, conferences and studies.

How is a political foundation at European level financed?

Foundations were funded from October 2007 to August 2008 by action grants awarded by the European Commission under a pilot project. From September 2008, the European Parliament took over the funding and now awards annual operating grants. The grant may cover up to 85% of a foundation's expenditure, while the rest should be covered by own resources, such as membership fees and donations.

What may or may not be paid from the grant?

The grant may be used to fund expenditure directly linked to the activities set out in the foundation's programme of activities, such as:

- meetings and conferences,
- publications, studies and advertisements, or
- administrative, personnel and travel costs.

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The grant may not be used to fund expenditure such as, inter alia:

- campaign costs for referenda and elections,
- direct or indirect funding of national parties, election candidates and national political foundations, or
- debts and debt service charges.

Links

- Further information & the Financial reports of the political parties & political foundations:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00264f77f5/Grants-to-political-parties-and-foundations.html>

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Parliament: Unfinished business: what happens to legislation that has not been completed by the end of a parliamentary term?

All votes taken by Parliament in plenary before the elections, whether at first reading, or second reading, or under the consultation procedure, remain legally valid for the next Parliament. This means that after the elections the new Parliament will pick up the files where the previous Parliament left them and will continue with the next stage of the decision-making procedure.

However, for legislative business that does not reach the plenary before the elections, there is no legally valid Parliament position and Parliament's internal rules of procedure stipulate that in these cases the work done on them (in committee) during the previous parliamentary term lapses.

Nonetheless, at the beginning of the new parliamentary term, the new Parliament's Conference of Presidents – formed of the EP President and the political group leaders – may decide, on the basis of input from the relevant parliamentary committees, to continue the work already done on those files (rule 229 of the EP's rules of procedure).

Links

- More information: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007c895f4c/Powers-and-procedures.html>

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Parliament: Why does Parliament move between Brussels and Strasbourg?

The EU's national governments unanimously decided in 1992 to fix the seats of the EU institutions permanently. This decision also affected the working arrangements for the Parliament: its official seat and the venue for most of the plenary sessions would be Strasbourg; parliamentary committees would have their meetings in Brussels; and Parliament's Secretariat (its 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 28 member states and ratified by each of their national parliaments.

In a November 2013 resolution, MEPs called for a treaty change to allow Parliament to decide where it sits. Parliament said it would initiate an EU treaty revision procedure to propose the changes needed to allow Parliament itself to decide on the location of its seat and its internal organisation. It would be "more effective, cost-efficient and respectful of the environment if it were located in a single place", MEPs said.

"The continuation of the monthly migration between Brussels and Strasbourg has amongst most EU citizens become a symbolic, negative issue (...), especially at a time when the financial crisis has led to serious and painful expenditure cuts in the member states", said the resolution, which was approved by 483 votes to 141, with 34 abstentions.

MEPs acknowledged that an appropriate compromise is required whereby existing Parliament buildings can continue to be used.

What are the costs of using Strasbourg as a seat of Parliament?

A 2013 study by the European Parliament shows that €103 million could be saved per year should all EP operations be transferred from Strasbourg to Brussels (2014 prices). This is a significant amount, though it corresponds to just 6% of Parliament's budget, or 1% of the EU's administrative budget or just 0.1% of the entire EU budget.

In 2014 the Court of Auditors prepared its own, independent analysis in response to the EP's resolution of 20 November 2013. The Court confirmed the conclusions of the 2013 EP study but arrived at a total expenditure associated with the Strasbourg seat of €109 million per year. A further €5 million could be saved on missions in the budgets of the European Commission and the Council.

How did this come about?

The decision in 1992 formalised a situation which already existed at the time and which reflected compromises arrived at over a number of years.

When the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was set up a few years after WWII, in 1952, thus establishing joint management of the steel and coal reserves of six countries, including Germany and France, its institutions were located in Luxembourg. The Council of Europe (an intergovernmental body for human rights and culture, also set up in the immediate post-WW2 period), which was already based in Strasbourg, offered its plenary chamber for meetings of the ECSC's "Common Assembly" which was to develop into the European Parliament. Strasbourg became the main home of plenary sessions of the Parliament, though additional sessions were also held in Luxembourg in the 1960s and 1970s.

After the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958, much European Commission and Council of Ministers activity came 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

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groups meeting in Brussels and the main plenary sessions taking place in Strasbourg. A major part of Parliament's staff is based in Luxembourg.

Links

- 2013 study of EP: https://polcms.secure.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/fdd745f8-acd3-410f-94a7-b8ae410336fe/att_20131025ATT73477-2215267395094591320.pdf
- 2014 analysis Court of auditors: http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/PL1407_LETTER/PL1407_LETTER_EN.pdf
- EP resolution (20.11.2013): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2013-0498>

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Parliament: How many languages are used in Parliament?

MEPs have the right to speak, listen, read and write in their own language and in fact in any of the EU's 24 official languages.

It is a fundamental democratic principle that no EU citizen may be prevented from becoming a Member of the European Parliament on the grounds that he or she does not speak one of its working languages. Any citizen who becomes a Member of the European Parliament must be able to perform his or her duties without a special knowledge of languages. In order to guarantee the same working conditions for all MEPs, they must be guaranteed full access to information in their respective languages, unless they desire otherwise. Every European citizen (and journalist) also has the right to be informed about legislation and the work of Parliament in his or her language.

MEPs' speeches in one official language are simultaneously interpreted into other official languages.

The EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007, the addition of Irish as an official language on the same date and the accession of Croatia on 1 July 2013, brought the total number of official languages to 24: Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish.

The 24 languages can be combined in 552 ways (24 x 23).

In general, each interpreter and translator works in 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 330 staff interpreters and can also draw on 1,800 external accredited interpreters. Between 800 and 1,000 interpreters are on hand for plenary sittings. Parliament employs about 700 translators, who translate more than 100,000 pages each month.

In 2013, Parliament spent approximately a fourth of its total expenditure on multilingualism.

Links

- More information on multilingualism:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007e69770f/Multilingualism.html>

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Parliament: How many people work in the Parliament?

As of September 2016, the **number of officials, temporary and contract staff** working for Parliament (including its political groups) in different locations was as follows:

TOTAL	Brussels	Strasbourg	Luxembourg	Other locations
7606	4741	296	2317	252

The majority of Parliament's staff (56%) are women.

Almost nine per cent of the posts in Parliament's secretariat are occupied by staff working for the political groups (665 posts).

Parliament's staff come from all European Union member states and some other countries. Belgium accounts for the largest share, followed by France, Italy, Spain and Germany.

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.

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Parliament: How many buildings does Parliament have?

As decided by EU member states (European Council), Parliament has three places of work - Strasbourg (Parliament's official seat), Brussels and Luxembourg.

	TOTAL	Brussels	Strasbourg	Luxembourg
Number of buildings	27	16	5	6
Surface area, m2	1 160 446	618 644	343 930	197 872

Parliament has gradually been buying the buildings it uses in its main working places and now owns most of them. To meet the needs for more office space, for example as a result of the EU enlargements of 2004, it has preferred to buy rather than rent buildings where possible. The same is increasingly true of Parliament's Information Offices in the Member States.

Buying saves a lot of money – it is between 40 and 50% cheaper than renting over the long-term, according to the Court of Auditors. Overall, Parliament owns 84% of its buildings (183 000 m2 rented and 957 000 m2 owned). Renting them instead would cost around €163 million per year (figure from answers to discharge 2010).

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Parliament: How many accredited lobbyists and journalists?

On 23 June 2011 the European Parliament and the European Commission established a joint, public transparency register to provide more information than before on those who seek to influence EU policy. As intended, the register now includes law firms, NGOs and think-tanks as well as the traditional lobbyists.

From 5 January 2017, there were 10,923 people listed in this joint register, including 6,580 registered with Parliament. Registration is mandatory to obtain a lobbyist's badge to access the European Parliament.

The new register replaced a previous Commission one, in use since 2008, and Parliament's list of accredited interest group representatives. The Commission and Parliament are still working with the Council on arrangements for its possible participation.

There are also about 900 journalists accredited with all the EU institutions, and around 80 more are accredited with Parliament alone.

Links

- More information and statistics: http://europa.eu/transparency-register/index_en.htm

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Parliament: How big is Parliament's budget?

The 2016 EP budget amounts to € 1.838 billion of which 34% is for staff expenses, mainly salaries for the around 7000 officials working in the General Secretariat and in the Political Groups. Moreover, this expenditure covers interpretation costs, the costs of external translation and staff mission expenses.

As the Parliament is a democratically-elected institution, involved in making laws that are binding in all member states, an important proportion of its permanent, temporary and freelance staff are working to translate or interpret its proceedings, so that Members and citizens alike can follow them.

About 23% of the 2016 budget is dedicated to MEPs' expenses, including salaries, costs for travel, offices and the pay of personal assistants.

Expenditure on Parliament's buildings accounts for 13% of the 2016 budget. It covers rent of buildings, construction, maintenance, security and running costs in the three main places of work - Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg - as well as for its information offices in the 28 member states.

Information policy and administrative expenditure such as IT and telecommunications account for 24%. Political Group activities account for a further 6% of the budget.

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MEPs: How many MEPs?

Since 1 July 2014 there are 751 MEPs in the European Parliament, as laid down in the Lisbon Treaty.

Until 1 July 2014 there were 766 MEPs in the European Parliament, although the number of MEPs elected in June 2009, at the last European elections, was 736, as laid down in the Nice Treaty. But the number temporarily increased (as of 1 December 2011) by 18, following an agreement by the member states, and by further 12 (as of 1 July 2013) after the accession of Croatia.

In the 2014 European elections, 12 EU member states each lost one seat and none gained a seat. These reductions are needed in order to comply with the 751-seat limit set by the Lisbon Treaty and to accommodate Croatian MEPs.

12 member states – Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania – each lost one seat at the

2014 European elections. The remaining three seats came from Germany, whose share went down from 99 seats to 96, the maximum allowed by the Lisbon Treaty.

This allocation of seats should be revised before the 2019 elections on the basis of a proposal by the European Parliament presented before the end of 2016, to ensure that seats are distributed in an "objective, fair, durable and transparent way". This should respect the principle of "degressive proportionality", whereby MEPs from larger member states represent more citizens than those from smaller ones, reflect any change in the number of member states and demographic trends, and respect the overall balance of the institutional system.

Links

- List of MEPs: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/full-list.html>
- MEPs by Member State and political group: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/crosstable.html>

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MEPs: 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 government in an EU member state 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

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."*

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MEPs: Immunity

Parliamentary immunity is not a Member's personal privilege, but a guarantee of the independence and integrity of Parliament as a whole.

Members of the European Parliament cannot be subject to any form of inquiry, detention or legal proceedings in respect of opinions expressed or votes cast in their capacity as MEP.

An MEP's immunity is twofold:

- in the territory of his or her own member state, the immunities accorded to members of their national parliament; and
- in the territory of any other member state, immunity from any measure of detention and from legal proceedings. (Article 9 of Protocol n°7)

Immunity cannot be claimed when a Member is found in the act of committing an offence.

Procedure to waive or defend immunity

Following a request by a competent national authority to the European Parliament that the immunity of a Member should be lifted (or a request by an MEP or former MEP that his immunity is defended), Parliament's President will announce the request to Parliament and refer it to the parliamentary committee responsible (the Committee on Legal Affairs, during the current parliamentary term).

The committee will consider the request without delay. It may ask the authority concerned to provide any information or explanation which it deems necessary. The Member concerned will be given an opportunity to be heard, and may present any documents or other written evidence.

The committee adopts, *in camera*, a recommendation to the whole Parliament to approve or reject the request, i.e. to lift or defend the immunity. Parliament, during the plenary session following the committee decision, reaches a decision by a simple majority vote. If the recommendation of the committee responsible is rejected, Parliament is deemed to have adopted a decision contrary to the committee's position.

Following the vote, the President will immediately communicate Parliament's decision to the Member concerned and to the competent authority of the Member State concerned.

Does an MEP keep his/her seat even if his or her immunity is lifted?

Yes. The mandate of an MEP is a national mandate and cannot be taken away by any other authority. Moreover, the lifting an MEP's immunity is not a "guilty" verdict. It merely enables the national judicial authorities to proceed to undertake an investigation or a trial. And as MEPs are elected under national electoral law, if an MEP is found guilty of a criminal offence, it is for the member state's authorities to decide whether his or her mandate therefore falls.

Links

- Procedures on immunity (rule 9): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+RULES-EP+20150909+RULE-009+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

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MEPs: salaries and pensions

Salaries

Under 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 € 8.484,05 (as of July 2016). This salary comes from Parliament's budget and is subject to an EU tax and insurance contributions, after which the salary is € 6.611,42. This salary may also be subject to a national tax in the respective Member States. The MEPs' basic salary is set at 38.5% of the basic salary of a judge at the European Court of Justice, so MEPs do not, and cannot, decide on their own salary.

There are a few exceptions to the single statute: MEPs who held a mandate in Parliament before the 2009 elections could opt 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 equals 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 is met from the European Union budget.

An additional pension scheme, introduced for MEPs in 1989, was closed to new members from July 2009 and is being phased out.

Links

- More information: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/about-meps.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

MEPs: Summary of allowances

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

Travel expenses

Most European Parliament meetings, 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 upon presentation of receipts, up to a maximum of a business class (or similar) air fare, a first class rail fare or €0.50 per km for car journeys (up to a maximum of 1000 km), plus fixed allowances based on the distance and duration of the journey to cover other costs of travelling (such as motorway tolls, excess baggage charges or reservation fees).

Members are often required to travel within and outside the Member State in which they were elected, both in the performance of their official duties and for other purposes (for example, to attend a conference or take part in a working visit).

For activities outside their Member State of election, Members may be reimbursed for their travel, accommodation and related expenses up to a maximum annual amount of €4 264. For activities within their Member State of election, only travel expenses are reimbursed, up to a maximum annual amount determined on a country-by-country basis.

Daily allowance (also called “subsistence allowance”).

Parliament pays a flat-rate allowance of €307 to cover accommodation and related costs for each day that MEPs are present on official business, provided that they sign a register to attest their presence. The allowance covers hotel bills, meals and all other expenses involved. The allowance is reduced by half, if MEPs miss more than half the roll-call votes on days when plenary votes are held, even if they are present.

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 the cost of activities in the constituencies mainly, such as office rent and management costs, telephone and postal charges, representation activities, computers and telephones, the organisation of conferences and exhibitions. 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 2017 the allowance is €4 342 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.

End-of-term allowance

At the end of their term of office Members are entitled to a transitional allowance, equivalent to their salary, for one month per year they were in office. However, this allowance cannot be paid out for longer than two years. Moreover, the allowance is not paid if a Member has a mandate in another parliament or takes public office. If the Member is simultaneously entitled to an old-age or invalidity pension, s/he cannot receive both, but must choose one or the other.

Other entitlements

Frequently Asked Questions

Parliament provides equipped offices to MEPs in both Brussels and Strasbourg. MEPs may make use of Parliament's official vehicles on official business when in either city.

Links

- More information: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/about-meps.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

MEPs: Staffing arrangements: parliamentary assistants

MEPs may choose their own staff, within a budget set by Parliament. In 2017, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved is € **24,164** per MEP. None of these funds are paid to the MEP themselves.

MEPs may choose different kind of assistants:

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. MEPs can recruit three accredited assistants (under certain conditions four). A minimum of a quarter of the total budget is reserved for accredited assistants.

Assistants based in MEPs' Member States (local assistants) are administered by qualified paying agents to ensure that tax and social security requirements are properly met. Up to 75 % of the total budget can be used for these local assistants.

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

The total cost of local assistants, service providers and trainees cannot be higher than 75 % of the total amount available for assistants.

Since 2009, MEPs may no longer have close relatives among their staff. There was a transitional period for those who were employed in the previous parliamentary term, which ran out with the elections in 2014. The assistants have to avoid external activities that may create a conflict of interest.

Links

- List of Assistants:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/assistants.html;jsessionid=C224D5A11972C6FCB92B0AD6967F77D6.node1>

Frequently Asked Questions

MEPs: 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 at the start of each legislative term. For the past few terms, political groups have set like wedges in a pie chart, with the group leaders all in the first row

Frequently Asked Questions

Visitors: Visitors' groups

The European Parliament welcomes over 300,000 visitors every year, from the EU and beyond, to its Brussels and Strasbourg premises. These visitors come in around 7,000 groups, the majority of which are invited by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Such groups receive a financial contribution by the Parliament, contributing to the payment of travel cost and meals.

Why is a financial contribution paid?

The European Parliament believes that the public should have easy access to its proceedings and premises, because it sees transparency as important to the exercise of democratic rights within the European Union. As the cost of travelling to Brussels and Strasbourg may be prohibitive for many EU citizens due to the long distances involved, Parliament helps to cover their costs in order to prevent discrimination.

How is a financial contribution paid? MEP- sponsored groups

Each MEP may sponsor up to 110 visitors a year, in groups of no fewer than 10 visitors. Members may invite up to 5 groups per year to Strasbourg or Brussels.

Visitors are received by civil servants, who give them a tutorial on the EU and Parliament. They meet one or two Members of Parliament and may visit the chamber on its public gallery.

Applications and financial contributions are handled by European Parliament staff. The financial contribution is paid by bank transfer, a small part of the financial contribution (up to 40 EUR per visitor) can be paid in to the head of the group in order to maintain a certain practical flexibility on the day of the visit.

The financial contribution is calculated on the basis of the sum of the following three calculation factors that are multiplied with the number of visitors: Travel cost: kilometre-based rate (€0.09 per kilometre) for the distance between the point of departure of the group and Brussels or Strasbourg, hotel costs (60 EUR) and meal expenses (40 EUR). Only the actual costs are reimbursed.

Groups of opinion multipliers

Groups of opinion multipliers invited by the Directorate-General for Communication may receive a contribution to travel expenses equal to 50% of the per capita rate for MEP-sponsored groups.

These groups are made up of opinion multipliers such as elected officials, representatives of socio-professional groups or national or regional associations and movements, teachers, secondary school pupils and students in higher education.

Groups applying independently for visits - individual visitors

Independent visitors' groups may also apply to the Visits and Seminars Unit for a visit. They are also received by civil servants, who give a talk on the work and role of the European Parliament and may meet with Members of Parliament. No subsidy is granted for these visits.

Individuals who ask, without prior invitation, to visit the European Parliament's premises, are offered a short audio-guided visit to the gallery of the European Parliament's debating chamber in Brussels at designated times and on specific days, outside part sessions. No subsidy is granted for these visits.

Links

- Website with practical information: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en>

Frequently Asked Questions

Visitors: Parlamentarium

The European Parliament opened a new Visitors' Centre - the Parlamentarium - in October 2011. The Parlamentarium is the largest parliamentary visitors' centre in Europe and the first to be fully operational in 24 languages. It uses many interactive multimedia tools to give citizens an insight into the European Parliament and other EU institutions. Visitors enter the heart of the European Parliament, to see how the political decisions that influence our daily lives are made. The Parlamentarium works in 24 languages and sign language is available in four languages (EN, FR, NL and DE).

It is open to all citizens seven days a week without an entrance pass and free of charge. In October 2016 it welcomed its one and a half millionth visitor. In its first year it received over 270,000 visitors, in the second and third around 350.000 visitors. Interviews and guest book entries show that most visitors found it a positive experience and that it is one of the 10 most visited sights in Brussels.

The Centre is designed for adults and children of all ages. Special 1-hour tours have been created for 8-14 year olds and each stage of the visit caters for children. Children will receive their own handheld media guides to use free of charge.

Parlamentarium offers around two temporary exhibitions per year.

The Parlamentarium also hosts a popular role-play game for secondary school students, modelled on the workings of the European Parliament, in which they play the part of an MEP negotiating legislation that will affect the day-to-day lives of people living in Europe.

Booking is required via Parlamentarium@europarl.europa.eu or via the Parlamentarium web site.

The Parlamentarium had won more than ten awards including the 2012 special tourism prize awarded by the Brussels tourism agency VisitBrussels the Austrian Innovation Award, the Sinus Award, the Art Directors' Club Germany Award and the Award Art Directors' Club Europe Award in the "Environmental Design" category.

Links

- Parlamentarium web site: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/parlamentarium>

Frequently Asked Questions

Visitors: House of European History

The European Parliament is building a House of European History in Brussels, which will give visitors an opportunity to learn about European history and reflect on its meaning for the present day.

The permanent exhibition will focus on 20th century European history and the history of European integration, viewed from a broad historical perspective and bringing together contrasting experiences of Europeans in history.

The House of European History will be located in the Eastman building, which has been undergoing renovation since late 2012. The opening of the House of European History is planned for May 2017.

Developing the project costs approximately €52,4 million. This covers the conversion, extension and renovation of the Eastman building as well as the development of the permanent exhibition and first temporary exhibition.

Links

- House of European History web site: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/visits/historyhouse.html>