

EBPOΠΕЙСКИ ПАРЛАМЕНТ PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EVROPSKÝ PARLAMENT EUROPA-PARLAMENTET
EUROPÄISCHES PARLAMENT EUROOPA PARLAMENT EYPΩΠΑΪΚΟ KOINOBOYΛΙΟ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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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 EU Council of Ministers.(representing EU Member States). The ordinary legislative procedure – "co-decision" – covers, inter alia, economic governance, financial services, 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, inter alia, 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.

More information:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/0076b966cf/Powers-and-functions.html

How many MEPs?

At the moment there are 754 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.

The Lisbon Treaty increases the number of MEPs to 751, but only with effect from the next elections in 2014. EU Member States have agreed a treaty change to allow the additional 18 MEPs to join the Parliament sooner. After ratification by all parliaments in the EU, the 18 new MEPs were able to join from 1 December 2011.

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), 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).

List of MEPs: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/full-list.html

Accession of Croatia/observer MEPs

MEPs approved Croatia's accession as the 28th member of the EU 1 December 2011. On 22 January 2012, Croatia held a referendum and now the treaty must be ratified by all 27 Member States. The country is expected to join the EU on 1 July 2013. Twelve Croatian MEPs will then join the EP (from the date of accession until the end of the 2009-2014 term of the European Parliament).

In April 2012, 12 "observer" members from Croatia, appointed by the Croatian parliament to prepare for Croatia's EU accession, joined the European Parliament.

The 12 observers may take part in meetings of committees and political groups and may also take the floor, in accordance with Parliament's rules of procedure, but they do not have the right to vote or to stand for election to positions within the European Parliament.

Croatian observers, as always in these cases, do not receive any salary or administrative allowances from the European Parliament, with the exception of the daily attendance benefit and reimbursement of travel costs, based on the costs actually incurred.

List of observers: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/observers.html

How are the Commission President and Commissioners appointed?

Commission President

Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament's role in electing the Commission President has become more significant, because it requires 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 106 (5)).

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.

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How are the EP President and committee chairs appointed?

At the first plenary session after the European elections Parliament elects a new President. The 14 new Vice-Presidents and Quaestors are also elected.

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 in the 5-year legislative term. 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 first act of a newly-elected European Parliament is to elect its President. If s/he is re-elected, the outgoing President will preside over the election of his or her successor. 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).

Candidates for the Presidency may be proposed either by a political group or by a minimum of forty MEPs (Rule 13).

The election is held by secret ballot. Unusually for a vote in the European Parliament, MEPs take part by marking their preferred candidate on a paper ballot and placing it in a ballot box. The process is overseen by eight tellers, chosen by lot from among the MEPs.

To be elected, a candidate must win an absolute majority of the valid votes cast, i.e. 50% plus one (Rule 14). Blank or spoiled ballots do not count in calculating the majority required.

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).

The newly-elected President then takes the chair and is entitled to 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.

Vice-Presidents and Quaestors

Candidates for the posts of Vice-President and Quaestor may also be presented either by a political group or by at least 40 Members. The vice-presidential election is also held using a paper-based secret ballot, with a single ballot paper. Candidates must obtain the support of an absolute majority of

those casting valid ballots, with a second round held under the same conditions if all 14 posts are not filled on the first round. A third round may then be held if there are still vacancies, at which point a relative majority is enough for election to one of the remaining positions.

The order in which candidates are elected determines the order of precedence (Rule 15). If the number of candidates proposed is the same as the number of positions to be filled - fourteen - then they will be elected by acclamation, with a vote held simply to determine the order of precedence. A similar procedure is followed for the election of the Quaestors (Rule 16).

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 organisational matters in Parliament. The five Quaestors deal with administrative matters directly affecting MEPs themselves. (Rule 26).

Committee chairs

After the constitutive sitting of Parliament (and after the part session in the mid-term, when office-holders are elected), Parliament's standing committees will 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 will do likewise.

Each standing 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.

Where the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats, the election may take place by acclamation. If this is not the case, the election takes place by secret ballot. If there is only one candidate, he or she will have to be backed by an absolute majority of the votes cast, including votes for and against.

If, at the first ballot, there is more than one candidate for each seat, the candidate who obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast, including votes against and in favour, is elected. At the second ballot, the candidate who obtains the highest number of votes is elected. In the event of a tie, the oldest candidate prevails. As is the case for electing the President, in the event of a second ballot, new candidates may be nominated.

EP standing interparliamentary delegations will also elect their Chairs and Vice-Chairs, using the same procedure as for committees (Rule 191 and 198).

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 first half of the 2009-2014 parliamentary term, i.e. from July 2009 until January 2012.

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. From July 2009 until January 2012, Parliament amended and voted on **238 co-decision texts**, of which 204 at the first reading, 36 at the second reading and 6 after conciliation procedures.

Under the **assent** procedure, the Parliament may adopt or reject, but not amend, the act. This procedure is used mainly for international agreements and for approving new EU Member States. 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. From July 2009 until January 2012, Parliament held **2** such votes.

Under the **consultation** procedure, the Parliament may vote and state its opinion, but the final decision is taken by the Council of Ministers., From July 2009 until January 2012, Parliament held **71** 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**"). From July 2009 until January 2012 Parliament adopted **98** such decisions.

Besides its legislative and budget decisions, Parliament adopted **258 own-initiative reports** and **281 resolutions**, in which it gave non-binding opinions on issues it considered important. In addition, **28 written declarations** were signed by over half the Members and hence officially approved.

A total of **380 legislative documents** were voted in plenary session from July 2009 until January 2012. Parliamentary committees, political groups of groups of MEPs tabled **13,398 amendments** in plenary session. **6,633** of these amendments were approved, **6,496 rejected.** From July 2009 until January 2012, Parliament also held **13 formal sittings**, in which prominent guests gave speeches.

More information/ statistics: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sed/statistics.do

Background note on key legislation approved from 2009-2011: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20111205BKG33270/html/The-European-Parliament-2009-2011-key-legislation-approved-by-MEPs

Staff

As of May 2012, the **number of officials and temporary staff** working for Parliament (including its political groups) in different locations was as follows:

TOTAL	Brussels	Strasbourg	Luxembourg	Other locations
6,616	3,793	98	2,489	236

The majority of Parliament's staff (59%) are women.

On average, officials are 46 years old. The average age of staff from the old Member States is 48, while from the new ones it is just 36.

The biggest Directorate-General is DG Translation, accounting for 23.5% of posts in Parliament's secretariat (1,234 posts). Adding interpreters and lawyer-linguists brings language-related posts to more than one-third of the staff total.

Fourteen per cent of the posts in Parliament's secretariat are occupied by staff working for the political groups (924 posts).

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

In 2011, MEPs had 1,554 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 2012 is set at €1,732 million, including preparatory costs for Croatia and costs related to the arrival of 18 more MEPs. Of this total, €351 million will go on buildings, furniture, equipment and similar expenses, €576 million on staff (permanent and temporary), €209 million on MEPs' salaries and allowances, €186 million on their assistants and €115 million on other staff and outside services.

With a view to the EU's 2013 budget, MEPs agreed that the European Parliament's budget should be frozen for 2013, at least in real terms (excluding the costs for the Croatian enlargement), and scrutinized for possible further savings.

They also agreed that all the individual allowances for MEPs will be frozen until the end of this Parliament's term of office. All travel-related budget lines, including those for staff, will at the very least be frozen at 2012 levels. The overall travel budget had already been cut by 5% for 2012.

More information: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00059f3ea3/The-budget-of-the-European-Parliament.html

Buildings

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

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	TOTAL	Brussels	Strasbourg	Luxembourg
Number of buildings	26	14	4	8
Surface area, m ²	1,078,124	544,795	338,660	194,669
Meeting rooms (including the Chamber)	156	99	52	8

Parliament has gradually been buying the buildings it uses in its main working places and now owns most of them. To meet needs for more office space, for example following 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 83% of its buildings. Renting them instead would cost around €163 million per year (figure from answers to discharge 2010).

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.

As of 12 July 2012, there were 5,184 people listed in this joint register, including 2,858 registered with Parliament. Registration is mandatory to obtain a lobbyist's access badge for 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.

More information: http://europa.eu/transparency-register/index en.htm

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

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) has also a 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 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).

When Croatia joins the EU, the number of languages will rise to 24, making 552 language combinations possible (24x23).

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 employs about 700 translators, who translate more than 100,000 pages each month.

Parliament plans to spend €443 million, i.e. one fourth of its total expenditure, for 2013, on multilingualism.

The Bureau decided on 26 September 2011 to introduce the concept of "resource-efficient full multilingualism" and agreed on cuts of roughly €21 million in interpretation and translation services.

More information on multilingualism:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007e69770f/Multilingualism.html

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 €7,956.87 (July 2012, as in 2011). This salary is paid from Parliament's budget and is subject to an EU tax, after which the salary is €6, 200.72. Member States may also subject this salary to national taxes. 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.

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 is met from the European Parliament budget.

More information: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/0081ddfaa4/MEPs.html

Summary of MEPs' 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.

On 26 October 2011, MEPs decided to freeze their allowances for 2012. In February 2012, they decided to extend this freeze on allowances until the end of the legislative term, so until mid-2014.

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 air fare, a first class rail fare or €0.50 per km for car journeys, 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, for example).

MEPs may 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, provided that 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 2012 the allowance is €4 299 per month (as in 2011)

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 may make use of Parliament's official vehicles on official business when in either city.

More information: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/0081ddfaa4/MEPs.html

Staffing arrangements: parliamentary assistants

MEPs may 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 administered by qualified paying agents to ensure that tax and social security requirements are properly met.

In 2012, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved is € 21,209 per MEP (as in 2011). None of these funds are paid to the MEP themselves

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

In general, MEPs may no longer have close relatives among their staff, though there is a transitional period for those who were employed in the previous parliamentary term.

List of Assistants:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/assistants.html;jsessionid=C224D5A11972C6FCB92B0AD6 967F77D6.node1

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 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.

In a February 2012 vote on the guidelines for the 2013 budget procedure, MEPs adopted an amendment pointing out that "the real and biggest saving could be made by having a single seat for the European Parliament" (329 in favour, 223 against, 23 abstentions). They therefore want the situation to be reassessed without further delay.

See the resolution: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0050+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

How much does it cost?

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

The yearly cost of the Strasbourg infrastructure (leasing parking space, office equipment, cleaning, energy consumption and security) is €33.5 million. The European Parliament pays no rent on these buildings, because it owns them.

The yearly operating costs of 12 Strasbourg sessions amount to €89.3 million.

So the cost of using Strasbourg as a seat is €122.8 million per year or €10.23 million for each session.

What are the extra costs of using Strasbourg as a seat of Parliament, deducting the costs that would be incurred if the session were to be held in Brussels?

Since the European Parliament owns its buildings in Strasbourg and most of those it uses in Brussels, many of the operating costs incurred during a Strasbourg session would also be incurred, at least in part, if the session were to be held in Brussels (for example: MEPs' travel expenses, interpretation and translation costs, audiovisual costs....).

Other costs, such as those of transporting documents to Strasbourg or mission costs for Parliament's staff or MEPs' assistants, are incurred only Parliament travels to Strasbourg. These costs amount to about €1.5 million per session.

So, in total, the operating costs of the 12 annual sessions held in Strasbourg are €18 million greater than they would be if the 12 sessions were to be held in Brussels.

The total extra cost of using Strasbourg as a seat of Parliament is therefore €51.5 million per year (€33.5 million for infrastructure and €18 million in operating costs).

What is the cost of having three workplaces instead of one?

The costs of using Strasbourg as a seat of Parliament are different from those incurred due to the fact that it has three workplaces. Besides the plenary sessions held in Strasbourg, committee and political group meetings are held in Brussels and a major part of Parliament's administrative staff is based in Luxembourg.

In 2010 the estimated cost of having three workplaces (Brussels, Strasburg and Luxemburg) instead of just one was €180 million a year. This figure is lower than in 2006, when the costs were estimated to be €204 million, due inter alia to the purchase of the Strasbourg buildings and information technology improvements.

How did this come about?

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

When the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was set up in 1952, its institutions were located in Luxembourg. The Council of Europe (an intergovernmental body 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 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 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 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.

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 an organisation with a political programme, which is composed of national parties and individuals as members and which is 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 been able to receive annual funding from the European Parliament. The funding takes the form of an operating 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 can not 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 programme, such as:

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

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

- 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 an organisation affiliated with a political party at European level which underpins and complements the objectives of that party. A political foundation at European level observes, analyses and contributes to debate 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.

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.

For further information and the Financial reports of the political parties and political foundations see: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00264f77f5/Grants-to-political-parties-and-foundations.html

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

The European Parliament recognises that it has a duty to make a positive contribution to sustainable development as a long-term goal, not only through its political role and its role in legislative procedures, but also in the context of how it operates and its day-to-day decisions.

The Bureau therefore launched the Environmental Management Scheme (EMAS) project in Parliament in 2004 and since 2007, Parliament has been awarded EMAS certificates for promoting efficient energy, water and paper usage at all its places of work (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg).

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

Between 2006 and 2011, Parliament has achieved a 23.4 % reduction in carbon emissions per employee-equivalent.

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%).

Since 2008, 100% of the electricity supplied to Parliament's buildings in the three places of work has come from renewable sources: those in Luxembourg and Strasbourg use hydroelectricity from Norway and those in Brussels use hydroelectricity from in France.

More information: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007d28c907/Environmental-management-system.html

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 may be subsidized by the Parliament so as to contribute to the payment of travel cost and meals.

Why are subsidies 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 are subsidies 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 subsidies are handled by European Parliament staff. Subsidies are paid either by bank transfer or cash after the visit, to the head of the group upon production of his/her passport and the list of actual participants.

The travel cost subsidy is calculated on a kilometre-based rate for the distance between the point of departure of the group and Brussels or Strasbourg.

This rate is €0.09 per kilometre per visitor. In addition to this there is a meal expenses subsidy of €40 per visitor. Under certain conditions - if a group comes from more than 200 kilometres away and stays overnight - a contribution of €60 per visitor may be paid to help cover hotel costs.

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 socioprofessional 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.

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

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 23 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 23 languages and can provide sign language in four (EN, FR, NL, and DE).

It is open to all citizens seven days a week without an entrance pass and free of charge. In its first eight months it received over 170,000 visitors. Interviews and guest book entries show that most visitors found it a positive experience and is one of the 10 most visited sights in Brussels.

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 Parlamenarium@europarl.europa.eu or via the Parlamentarium web site.

By July 2012, the Parlamentarium had won five awards: 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.

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