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Frequently Asked Questions

Elections 2014: When are the elections taking place and how will they work?

European elections are held every five years. The next elections will take place 22-25 May 2014. Each member state has a fixed number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

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.

For the 2014 election, under the Lisbon Treaty, the number of MEPs ranges from six each for Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Estonia to 96 for Germany, making a total of 751.

Elections to the European Parliament are largely governed by national electoral laws and traditions. Thus, each Member State decides whether to use an open or a closed list system. Some Member States divide their territory up into regional electoral districts, while others have a single electoral district.

However, there are common EU rules which lay down that the elections must be by direct universal suffrage as well as free and confidential. MEPs must be elected on the basis of proportional representation.

The election period is determined at EU level but countries may decide on the exact day of the elections according to their voting traditions. European elections usually span four days, with voting in the UK and the Netherlands taking place on Thursday and residents of most other countries casting their vote on Sunday.

EU citizens living in an EU country other than their country of origin are entitled to vote and stand in European elections in their country of residence but national law may lay down specific procedures for how to do this.

One of the first tasks of the incoming Parliament will be to elect a new President of the European Commission (the EU's executive body). The Lisbon Treaty states that the choice for this post must take account of the election results. Candidates for the remaining Commission portfolios will have to pass a tough parliamentary vetting process too.

More information on the elections: www.elections2014.eu

Elections 2014: 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.

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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

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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.

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

Elections 2014: 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 political affinity. Only when this is denied by the MEPs concerned Parliament will have to evaluate whether the group has in fact been constituted in conformity with the rules.

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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 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.

The groups' annual accounts are published here:

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>

Elections 2014: 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 prominent. The European Council, composed of the EU's heads of state and government, need to base their proposal for a candidate Commission President on the results of the European Parliament elections. The European Parliament will then vote on the proposed candidate, who will need a qualified majority, i.e. at least half of all MEPs, to be elected.

If the candidate does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, will have one month in which to propose a new candidate.

(Lisbon Treaty Article 9 D, paragraph 7).

Commissioners

The Council, in agreement with the Commission 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. Each committee then meets in camera 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. The Commission's President-elect next presents the College of Commissioners and its programme at a sitting of

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Parliament. 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.

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.

Elections 2014: 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 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 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.

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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>

Elections 2014: 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 exchanges of views and promote exchanges between MEPs and civil society.

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As intergroups are not official organs 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.

List of intergroups and rules on intergroups:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00c9d93c87/Intergroups.html>

Elections 2014: What happens to legislation unfinished at the end of this parliamentary term?

Although MEPs do their utmost to finish legislative procedures before the current parliamentary term ends, inevitably some legislation will remain pending before the May 2014 elections. To accommodate this, the so-called "principle of continuity" establishes that all legislation voted in plenary, whether in first or second reading or in consultation, will keep its legal status for the next Parliament. MEPs in the new Parliament are legally bound by the text approved in the previous term.

This means that after the elections, the Council can approve the previous Parliament's first reading and thus bring the legislation into force.

This differs from what happens in most of the EU's national parliaments, where all unfinished legislation dealt with by the previous parliament falls.

However, Rule 59 of the European Parliament's rules of procedure allows the new Parliament (upon request by a committee and in agreement with the Conference of Presidents - the EP President and political group leaders) to ask the Commission to refer its proposal(s) to Parliament again, so as to allow the new House to take its own position.

In the event of changes in procedures or legal basis (as happened with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty when many topics for which Parliament previously was merely consulted came under the co-decision procedure), the new Parliament may take a new position on any of those files.

All non-legislative resolutions fall with the change of term.

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Parliament: Parliament's powers and legislative procedures

For the vast majority of EU legislation, Parliament adopts 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 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 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/007c895f4c/Powers-and-procedures.html>

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.

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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.

How much does it cost?

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

A recent study by the European Parliament shows that €103 million could be saved each year if all European Parliament operations were transferred from Strasbourg to Brussels (2014 figures).

The yearly cost of the Strasbourg infrastructure (leasing parking space, office equipment, cleaning, energy consumption and security) is €35.7 million in 2014, with an additional €13.6 million for projects, mainly for the renovation of the recently acquired Vaclav Havel building. The European Parliament pays no rent on these buildings, because it owns them.

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 if Parliament travels to Strasbourg.

What is the cost of having three workplaces (Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg) 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 four-day monthly plenary sessions held in Strasbourg, a number of 2-day sessions are held in Brussels, where the committee and political group meetings also take place. A major part of Parliament's administrative staff is based in Luxembourg.

The additional annual costs resulting from the Parliament's geographic dispersion (between Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg) are calculated at €119.9 million.

However, in calculating the costs that could be saved when consolidating the three places of work into one, in e.g. in Brussels, one needs to take into account that Parliament would need to buy office space for the staff currently located in Luxembourg (2482). These costs are estimated at €14 million

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annually. The one-off costs of moving Parliament's Luxembourg operations to Brussels are estimated at €58.6 million.

Thus, having just on place of work for the European Parliament would result in savings of €88.9 million per year. This is 4.96% of the draft budget of the European Parliament for 2014.

The CO₂ emissions associated with transfers to and from the three working locations have been estimated at 11,000 tonnes (2011 figures), which is 11% of Parliament's total carbon footprint in 2011.

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

Parliament: How many languages are used in Parliament?

MEPs have the right to speak, listen, read and write 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) has also a right to be informed about legislation and the work of Parliament in his or her language.

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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 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.

In 2013, Parliament spent around one fourth of its total expenditure 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>

Parliament: How many people work in the Parliament?

As of May 2013, 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
6,817	4,036	100	2,445	236

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

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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. Belgium accounts for the largest share, followed by Italy, France, Germany and Spain.

In June 2013, MEPs had **1,566 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.

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	28	16	4	8
Surface area, m ²	1,115 000	561 000	342 000	212 000

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 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).

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

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policy. As intended, the register now includes law firms, NGOs and think-tanks as well as the traditional lobbyists.

As of 17 June 2013, there were 5,750 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.

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

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

Parliament: How big is Parliament's budget?

Parliament's budget for 2013 is set at €1,750 million, including the costs of the new MEPs coming from Croatia. Of this total, €358 million will go on buildings, furniture, equipment and similar expenses, €583 million on staff (permanent and temporary), €208 million on MEPs' salaries and allowances, €187 million on their assistants and €116 million on other staff and outside services.

In 2011 it was already 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% in 2012.

More information: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/data/LBL2013/EN/SEC01.pdf>

MEPs: How many MEPs?

At the moment there are 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.

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.

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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).

On 1 July 2013, twelve Croatian MEPs joined the European Parliament until the end of the 2009-2014 term of the European Parliament, bringing the total number to 766 until the next European elections.

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

And after the elections?

In the 2014 European elections 12 EU member states will each lose one seat and none will gain any. These reductions are needed in order to comply with the 751-seat limit set by the Lisbon Treaty and to make room for Croatia's MEPs.

12 member states – Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania – will each lose one seat at the next European elections. The remaining three seats have to come from Germany, whose share must go 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.

Table with the allocation of seats: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=IM-PRESS&reference=20130610IPR11414&format=XML&language=EN>

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 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

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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."

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 immunity

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

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The committee will consider the request without delay. The committee may ask the authority concerned to provide any information or explanation which the committee 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. .

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 (June 2013, as in 2011 and 2012). 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/0081ddf4a4/MEPs.html>

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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.

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 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 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 2013 the allowance is €4 299 per month (as in 2011 and 2012).

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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

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>

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MEPs: 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 2013, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved is € 21,209 per MEP (as in 2011 and 2012). 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=C224D5A11972C6FCB92B0AD6967F77D6.node1>

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.

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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 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 socio-professional groups or national or regional associations and movements, teachers, secondary school pupils and students in higher education.

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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>

Visitors: Parliamentarium

The European Parliament opened a new Visitors' Centre - the Parliamentarium - in October 2011. The Parliamentarium 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 Parliamentarium works in 24 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 year it received over 270,000 visitors, in the second 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 Parliamentarium 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 Parlamentearium@europarl.europa.eu or via the Parliamentarium web site.

By July 2013, the Parliamentarium had won more than ten awards: for example 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.

Parliamentarium web site: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/parlamentearium>

Visitors: House of European History

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The European Parliament is building a House of European History in Brussels which will give visitors an opportunity to learn about European history and join in critical reflection 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 autumn 2015.

The estimated costs for the 2011-2015 development phase are €31 million to renovate and extend the building, €21.4 million for the permanent exhibition and the first temporary ones (€15.4 million for fitting out exhibition and other spaces, €6 million for multilingualism) and €3.75 million to build up the collection.

House of European History web site:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/visits/historyhouse.html>