

**January 2022**

Since its inception in 1951, the European Parliament has come a long way. Initially a consultative body composed of delegations of national parliaments, it became a directly elected institution, obtained budgetary and legislative powers, and now exercises influence over most aspects of EU affairs. Together with representatives of national governments, who sit in the Council, Parliament co-decides on European legislation, in what could be seen as a bicameral legislature at EU level. Together with the Council of the EU, it adopts the EU budget and controls its implementation. Another core set of European Parliament prerogatives concerns the scrutiny of the EU executive – mainly the European Commission. Parliament has a say over the very foundations of the EU. Its consent is required before any new country joins, and before a withdrawal treaty is concluded if a country decides to leave. Most international agreements the EU enters into with third countries also require Parliament's consent.

European Parliament elections and composition

European Parliament: Facts and Figures

Briefing by Sabbati, G., Killmayer L., Chahri S., EPRS, October 2021

This briefing is designed to present key facts and figures about the European Parliament. It looks at both the current parliamentary term (July 2019 to June 2024) and the eight previous five-year terms since direct elections were introduced in June 1979.

Transnational electoral lists: Ways to Europeanise elections to the European Parliament

Study by Díaz Crego M., EPRS, February 2021

Amongst the proposals to enhance the European dimensions of the elections to the European Parliament, the idea to create a pan-European constituency, with a number of Members of the European Parliament being elected from transnational electoral lists, has frequently been put forward. This study analyses the design of the electoral system and the legal reforms necessary at European and national levels for the creation of transnational electoral lists and elections in the European constituency.

Taking stock of the 2019 European elections

'At a glance' note by Díaz Crego M., EPRS, November 2020

The 2019 European elections had the highest turnout since 1994 and improved the gender balance among Members of the European Parliament. However, disparities between Member States on turnout and gender balance persist and improvement is possible. Ahead of the next elections in 2024, specific aspects of the European electoral system should be adapted and the *Spitzenkandidaten* process should be reformed to enhance the European dimension.

The European Elections of May 2019: Electoral systems and outcomes

Study by Oelbermann K., Pukelsheim F., July 2020

This study analyses how votes were cast, how seats were distributed among the different political parties, and how they were distributed to determine the candidates elected in the 2019 European Parliament elections. The study furthermore presents 2019 election data separately for each Member State and analyses the data from a

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Union-wide perspective. It finally suggests that further harmonisation of the electoral-system is necessary if the aim to make European elections a more effective instrument of Union-wide democratic legitimation.

European Union electoral law: Current situation and historical background

Briefing by Kotanidis S., EPRS, October 2019

As the EU's electoral system derives from a combination of national and EU rules, no harmonisation on the electoral procedure exists across Member States. As a result, rules on the minimum age for active or passive voting, or practical methods for casting a vote, or even whether the right to vote is optional or obligatory, remain matters for national legislation. This briefing provides an overview of the electoral procedure, sets out the EU rules, and discusses the 'Europeanisation' of electoral process via the *Spitzenkandidaten* process.

2019 European elections: National rules

Infographic by Sabbati G., Sgueo G., Dobрева A., April 2019

This infographic provides a visual representation of the national rules of Member States during the 2019 European Parliament elections. For each Member State, it details: the election day, the applicability of compulsory voting, the number of Members and voting system, the number of seats after Brexit, the electoral threshold, the methods for voting from abroad, and the minimum age of candidates.

Composition of the European Parliament

'At a glance' note by Kotanidis S., EPRS, June 2018

After the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, 73 seats in the European Parliament became vacant. A proposed partial re-distribution would have resulted in no loss of seats for any Member State and taken recent demographic shifts into account, with 46 seats made available for possible transnational constituency and/or potential future EU enlargement. At the time of writing, the Parliament and the European Council were due to give their consent to this proposal. This note provides an overview of the redistribution of seats for 2019-2024.

European Parliament powers and roles

The powers of the European Parliament

Briefing by Tilindyte L., EPRS, November 2019

Since its inception in 1951, the European Parliament has come a long way. Initially a consultative body composed of delegations of national parliaments, it became a directly elected institution, obtained budgetary and legislative powers, and now exercises influence over most aspects of EU affairs. This briefing looks at the powers of Parliament as legislator, budgetary authority and at Parliament scrutiny powers.

The European Parliament's investigative powers: Committees of inquiry in context

In-depth Analysis by Díaz Crego M., EPRS, November 2021

The European Parliament's oversight powers include the right to establish committees of inquiry. However, few inquiry committees have been set up. Parliament has repeatedly called for revision of the legal framework for committees of inquiry. This analysis provides an overview of the current legal framework and the controversy surrounding the Parliament's 2012 proposal. It also presents the different types of inquiries and the investigative powers of the Parliament's inquiry committees, and compares them to such committees in national parliaments.

Committee hearings in the European Parliament and United States Congress

Briefing by Díaz Crego M., Del Monte M., EPRS, July 2021

European parliamentary committee hearings are used to obtain evidence on specific subjects to inform their work and as public forums to give citizens access to information on policy issues. Committee hearings can be used for oversight, legislative and investigative purposes, or as pre-appointment hearings in the procedure to

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appoint the members of the European Commission. This briefing provides an overview of how the different committee hearings are organised and conducted in both the European Parliament and the US Congress.

The European Parliament's appointing powers

Briefing by Del Monte M., EPRS, May 2021

The European Parliament's role and the prerogatives have evolved and increased over time, not only as regards legislative powers and oversight but also in relation to the procedures for nominating, vetting and appointing people to senior positions in EU institutions, agencies and other bodies. Parliament's role varies depending on the legal basis, but demonstrates that Parliament uses its political leverage to expand and formalise its power to nominate and appoint the holders of senior positions in EU institutions, agencies and other EU bodies.

Nomination to the European Court of Auditors: Role of the Parliament in the appointment procedure

Briefing by Kowald K., EPRS, December 2020

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) examines the accounts of all Union revenue and expenditure, and that of all bodies, offices and/or agencies set up by the Union. The ECA consists of one national from each of the EU's Member States. This briefing examines the European Parliament's nomination, assessment and appointment of ECA members, and discusses the Parliament's rejection of several nominees. Even though the opinion delivered by Parliament is not legally binding, it has become a powerful tool of democratic scrutiny.

Parliament's right of legislative initiative

Briefing by Kotanidis S., EPRS, February 2020

While the legislative initiative in the European Union lies with the European Commission, the European Parliament has an 'indirect' initiative right, as it may invite the Commission to submit legislative proposals. This briefing looks at the Parliament's initiative rights and the procedure, the new channels for the Parliament to increase its influence on EU legislation, and recent developments in the enhancement of Parliament's legislative powers.

Discharge procedure for the EU budget: Political scrutiny of budgetary implementation

Briefing by D'Alfonso A., EPRS, May 2020

The decision whether to grant discharge for the execution of the EU budget is made by the European Parliament, which acts on a non-binding recommendation from the Council, the other arm of the EU budgetary authority. The discharge procedure has proved to be a powerful tool, with an impact on the evolution of the EU's budgetary system, while helping to increase Parliament's political leverage. Recent years have shown a trend towards a greater focus on results and performance, strongly supported and promoted by the Parliament.

Article 17 TFEU: Dialogue with churches, and religious and philosophical organisations

Briefing by Pasikowska-Schnass M., November 2020.

The EU institutions engage in regular structured dialogue with representatives of churches, and religious, non-confessional and philosophical organisations, on the basis of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The European Parliament stresses the importance of constant dialogue among, and with, religious and non-confessional and philosophical communities, and seeks to give substance to the Article 17 provisions by organising dialogue on subjects of interest for the EU and its citizens.

Connecting parliamentary and executive diplomacy at EU and Member State level

Briefing by Zamfir I., EPRS, September 2019

Parliamentary diplomacy (a broad range of activities with external partners and non-EU countries) is growing at both EU and Member State level. It increases the democratic legitimacy of external policies, enables more direct contact with stakeholders, opens new channels of communication and allows for the transmission of

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more sensitive messages. At both EU and national level, both executives and diplomatic services are committed to providing official delegations traveling abroad with extensive organisational and political support.

The European Parliament's evolving soft power – From back-door diplomacy to agenda-setting: Democracy support and mediation

Briefing by Bentzen N., Immenkamp B., EPRS, September 2019

Over the years, the Parliament's role in EU foreign policy has increased significantly. Its democracy support activities, part of its 'soft power' approach to international relations, fall into three broad thematic areas: capacity building, mediation and dialogue support, and support for human right actions. This briefing sets out Parliament's evolving democratic role and looks at EU democracy support to Ukraine, North Macedonia and Tunisia.

Annual EU budgetary procedure: An introduction to the steps in the European Parliament

Briefing by Mazur S., EPRS, July 2019

The EU budgetary authority consists of the Parliament and Council and, together with the Commission, they decide on the annual EU budget. The annual budget funds EU policies and programmes following the EU's political priorities and legal obligations. This briefing outlines the procedures for the establishment of the annual budget, the key actors involved, and the possible scenarios for (non-) adoption of the annual budget.

Replacement of individual European Commissioners

'At a glance' note by Díaz Crego M., Del Monte M., EPRS, September 2020

The resignation of Commissioner Phil Hogan, on 26 August 2020, led to the replacement of an individual member during the Commission's term. The replacement applies for the remainder of the term of office, but the Council may unanimously decide to not fill a vacancy if the remaining time of office is short. The vacancy has to be filled by a new Commissioner of the same nationality. This note briefly outlines the procedure for replacing individual Commissioners.

Vote of investiture for the European Commission

'At a glance' note by Díaz Crego M., EPRS, November 2019

Once European elections are held, the European Council, acting by qualified majority, proposes a candidate for the Presidency of the Commission, who then needs to be elected by a majority of the members of the European Parliament. This note describes the Parliament's role in the appointment of the von der Leyen Commission.

Role and election of the President of the European Commission

Briefing by Kotanidis S., EPRS, July 2019

The European Parliament elects the Commission President, and the Commission as a whole is answerable to the Parliament. The Commission Presidency has become a much more politicised office and the President has also gained greater influence than the other members of the Commission. This briefing discusses the politicisation of the Presidency and the historical development of the election process, as well as the 2014 and 2019 elections and the respective Barroso and Juncker Presidencies.

Election of the President of the European Commission Understanding the *Spitzenkandidaten* process,

Briefing by Tilindyte L., EPRS, April 2019

The *Spitzenkandidaten* process is a procedure whereby European political parties, ahead of the European elections, appoint lead candidates for the role of Commission President. The candidate of the political party with the most parliamentary support will be elected as Commission President. The procedure was first used in the 2014 elections, resulting in the appointment of Jean-Claude Juncker as Commission President. However, the procedure has also been met with criticism, as some argue that it grants too much power to the Parliament.

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Parliamentary scrutiny of the European Commission: Implementation of Treaty provisions

Study by Remac M., EPRS, July 2019.

The Treaties provide the European Parliament with several opportunities to exercise its powers of political oversight of the European Commission and its actions. The European Parliament's application of these prerogatives increases the democratic legitimacy of the European Union, and the transparency and accountability of the European executive.

European Parliament scrutiny of Frontex

Briefing by Del Monte, M. and Luyten, K., EPRS, November 2021

The transformation of Frontex into the European Border and Coastguard Agency in 2019 also brought developments in Parliament's tools to oversee the agency. This briefing sets out the various tools at Parliament's disposal, as well as looking at its work in respect of recent allegations of Frontex staff not respecting fundamental rights. The tools include Parliament's role in appointing the agency's director, and its rights to receive information from Frontex. In addition, as with all EU agencies, the Parliament's budgetary prerogatives apply.

EU trade policy: Frequently asked questions

In-depth Analysis by Titievskaia J., EPRS, October 2019

The European Union's common commercial policy, or trade policy, focuses on the enhancement of fair and free trade, furthering market access and supporting the multilateral, rules-based trading system. This analysis outlines key academic debates and other difficult questions on EU trade policy, in an effort to make the complex concepts and themes of EU trade policy understandable. Furthermore, it provides references to potentially useful further resources.

A guide to EU procedures for the conclusion of international trade agreements

Briefing by Puccio L., EPRS, October 2016

Over time, the EU has diversified its trading partners, and is now negotiating trade agreements with partners from every continent. Through the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament was given a stronger role in the procedure of concluding trade agreements, and it modified the EU's competences in trade. This briefing explains the different stages of conducting and concluding international trade agreements in the EU, and discusses some of the key issues in the current EU trade policy debate.

The right to petition the European Parliament

Briefing by Atanassov N., EPRS, June 2015

The right to petition the European Parliament was formally set out in the Maastricht Treaty as one of the rights of EU citizenship. Petitions addressed to Parliament's Committee on Petitions (PETI) and then transferred to the Commission can potentially lead to infringement procedures against Member States. This briefing looks at the rights of petition and the procedure, as well as the infringement procedure, and discusses several issues and proposed changes in the European Parliament's treatment of petitions.

European Parliament organisation

Statute and funding of European political parties under Regulation 1141/2014

Study by Anglmayer I., EPRS, June 2021

European political parties are transnational political alliances made up of national parties from the same political family. The current Regulation 1141/2014 tightened the requirements for parties' recognition, funding and spending. As some parties found loopholes in the legal framework, amendments to the regulation were

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adopted in 2018 and 2019. This study examines the legal framework and its application, ahead of the legislative revision announced by the European Commission.

Vacancy for a Parliament Vice-President

'At a glance' note by Del Monte M., EPRS, November 2020

The 14 Parliament Vice-Presidents are elected for a two and a half year term during the first sitting of the parliamentary session (and again at mid-term), immediately after the election of the President. The duties of a Vice-President include replacing the President in the discharge of his/her duties, for instance to chair plenary sittings when the President is absent, and sitting as a member of the Parliament's Bureau. This note looks at the procedure to replace a Vice-President.

Remote voting in the European Parliament and national parliaments

'At a glance' note by Del Monte M., EPRS, March 2020

With the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, alternative ways for Members of the European Parliament to exercise their public duties had to be found, such as, attending plenary sessions and voting. Provisions have been put in place for the Parliament to hold meetings at a distance and to vote remotely. This note looks at the European Parliament's response to the pandemic and its organisation of remote voting, and discusses the responses of several Member States (Spain, Italy, Germany, Romania, Poland and France).

The European Parliament after Brexit

Infographic by Grosek K., Sabbati G., EPRS, January 2020

This infographic provides a visual representation of the distribution of seats in the European Parliament before and after Brexit. The infographic also includes a provisional projection of the changes the 27 new Members were likely to bring to the number of seats obtained per EU political group, since the new Members could still change their political affiliation at the time the infographic was composed.

Understanding European Parliament delegations

'At a glance' note by Bentzen N., EPRS, September 2019

Members of the European Parliament form official groups – delegations – with ties to regions and organisations, as well as parliaments, in non-EU countries. Parliament has expanded its impact EU in foreign policy in recent decades, and its delegations are a key component of its diplomatic work. This note looks at the composition and work of European Parliament delegations.

Understanding the d'Hondt method: Allocation of parliamentary seats and leadership positions

Briefing by Kotanidis S., EPRS, June 2019

A mathematical formula that translates cast votes proportionally into whole seats within a parliament, the d'Hondt method provides a slight advantage for parties that gain most votes. The method is used in 16 Member States for the elections to the European Parliament, and within the Parliament to distribute the committee and delegation chairs. This briefing explains how the d'Hondt method operates, its effects, its use in elections to the European Parliament, for the allocation of chairs and other leadership positions in national parliaments.

Rules on political groups in the European Parliament

Briefing by Tilindyte L., EPRS, June 2019

Members of the European Parliament may form political groups, which are organised by nationality, rather than political affiliation. Since the first direct elections in 1979, the number of political groups has fluctuated between 7 and 10. Belonging to a political group is particularly relevant to the allocation of key positions in Parliament's political and organisational structures, e.g. committee and delegation chairs and rapporteurships on important files. This briefing looks at the rule for forming a political group and at their role within Parliament.

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Electing the European Parliament's President

'At a glance' note by Kotanidis S., EPRS, January 2022

The European Parliament's President enjoys executive and representative powers, as well as responsibility for ensuring respect of the rules of procedure. This note details the other powers and duties of the President, Vice-President and Quaestors. Furthermore, it explains the election procedure for Parliament's President, who is chosen twice per Parliamentary term.

Political groups in the European Parliament since 1979: Key facts and figures

Study by Salm C., EPRS, June 2019

This study compiles figures on the development of the European Parliament's political groups from the Parliament's first direct election in 1979 until the elections in May 2019. The study mainly focuses on the different political group memberships by nationality, budgets, staff, and their representation in the European Parliament as a whole and in parliamentary committees over time.

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