

Rules on political groups and non-attached Members

Members of the European Parliament may form political groups. These are not organised by nationality, but by political affiliation. At the start of the new parliamentary term there are set to be seven political groups in the Parliament, as there were in the 2009-14 period. Members (MEPs) not belonging to any political group are known as 'non-attached' (*non-inscrits*) Members.

Formation of political groups

Political groups have a prominent role in shaping the political decision-making process in Parliament, organising, coordinating and supporting the activities of their members, while respecting the principle of the independent mandate enshrined in the 1976 [Direct Elections Act](#). Through the creation of political blocs, groups make a significant contribution to the Parliament's operational capability. Political groups do not, however, have a direct basis in the EU Treaties, rather the rules for their formation are stipulated by [Parliament's Rules of Procedure](#).

To form a political group, a minimum of 25 MEPs elected from at least one-quarter of the EU's Member States (currently seven) is required (Rule 32). If during the legislative term, a group falls below the required threshold, the President, with the agreement of the [Conference of Presidents](#), may allow it to continue to exist until Parliament's next constitutive sitting, if the Members continue to represent at least one fifth of the Member States and the group has existed for a period longer than one year. This exception is not applied if there is sufficient evidence to suspect that it is being abused (Rule 32). The formation of a group must be notified to the President of the Parliament, and its details published in the Official Journal of the EU.

Non-attached MEPs (Rule 33) do not establish a separate political group, as is the case in some national parliaments which have a so called 'mixed group'. Parliament's [rejection](#) in 1999 of a Technical Group of Independent Members was confirmed, both by the [European Court of First Instance](#) and the [European Court of Justice](#), as justified, in order that Parliament be able to ensure its proper functioning. Currently, Parliament does not normally assess the political affinity of members of a group, taking this as read unless the Members concerned deny it (interpretation of Rule 32).

Rights of political groups and of non-attached Members

Although the political groups play a very prominent role in Parliament's life, individual MEPs and/or several MEPs acting together also have many rights. For instance, not just political groups but any 40 MEPs, can nominate candidates for the posts of President, Vice-President and Quaestor (Rule 15). Furthermore, although only the chairs of the political groups, together with the President, are members of the Conference of Presidents – Parliament's political body responsible *inter alia* for proposing the agenda for plenary sessions – one non-attached Member is invited to attend its meetings, but does not have a vote (Rule 26).

Any Member may table a legislative proposal on the basis of the [right of initiative](#) conferred upon Parliament under Article 225 TFEU (Rule 46). Non-attached MEPs can also table amendments for consideration in [committee](#), like any other Member (Rule 208). Moreover, they can participate, like political groups, in the oversight of other EU institutions. Acting together, 40 MEPs can, for instance, put questions to the Council or the Commission for oral answer with debate (Rule 128), whilst any Member may put questions for written answer to these and other EU institutions (Rules 130 & 131). Moreover, any Member is entitled to participate in Question Time in plenary under a ballot system (Rule 129). Members can also table a motion for resolution (Rule 133) and make explanations of vote (Rule 183). Conversely, submitting a written declaration requires at least ten Members from at least three political groups (Rule 136).

Non-attached Members can also nominate members to committees and delegations (Rules 199 and 212). They are however very unlikely to be elected to committee chairs or to be appointed rapporteurs on

significant dossiers. Belonging to a political group is also important in relation to speaking time in debates in plenary. For the first part of a debate, a first bloc of speaking time is divided equally among all political groups; a further share is divided among the political groups in proportion to their size. Finally, the non-attached Members are allocated an overall speaking time based on the fractions allocated to each political group (Rule 162). A minimum of 40 MEPs can ask for a vote to establish whether a quorum is present, whereas political groups are not entitled to make such a request (Rule 168).

Financing and staff

The [budget](#) of the European Parliament is the sole source of funding for political groups and non-attached MEPs. Intended to cover both administrative and operational expenditure and expenditure on political and information activities conducted in connection with the Union's activities, appropriations are made available under budget item 400. These are subject to [rules](#) laid down by the Bureau of the Parliament. In particular, they cannot be used to fund European political parties or electoral campaigns.

The budget is allocated at the beginning of each year by the Bureau, through a key based on the number of Members in each group (and non-attached Members) according to a proposal from the chairs of the political groups. Any changes in the composition of groups (or non-attached Members) results in a re-allocation from the beginning of the following month. In election years, the annual budget is allocated in two six-month budget periods. Up to 50% of the annual appropriations not used by groups or by the non-attached Members may be carried over to the following year. Any amount exceeding this limit is returned to Parliament.

Each political group receives its annual budget for political and information activities at the beginning of the year, and is responsible to Parliament for the management of its expenditure. In contrast, Parliament's Secretariat settles expenditure for non-attached Members either through direct payments to suppliers or through reimbursement to the Members. DG Finance verifies that all such expenditure for non-attached Members complies with the rules, and will not pay or reimburse if it does not comply with them. The audited annual statements of revenue and expenditure of the political groups, together with consolidated statements for all non-attached Members prepared by Parliament's Secretariat, are delivered to the Bureau and to the Committee of Budgetary Control, and published on Parliament's website.

Each political group is provided with a secretariat, funded from Parliament's budget. The number and grades of the, predominantly temporary, staff are determined in proportion to the number of Members in the group. Non-attached MEPs too are provided with a secretariat paid from Parliament's budget. Political groups may also employ contractual staff using funding under item 400, whereas non-attached Members may not use such funding for this purpose.

The payment of salaries to MEPs' accredited assistants is covered by separate budget items, with every MEP having the same amount at their disposal to spend on assistants regardless of group membership ([Article 33\(4\)](#), Implementing measures for the statute for MEPs).

European political parties

The role of political parties at EU level is set out in Article 10(4) TEU. The political groups in the European Parliament are not identical to the [European political parties](#). Most of the national parties represented within a given political group are also members of the corresponding political party at EU level, however in some political groups there is more than one European political party (e.g. the ALDE group, and the Greens/EFA group). MEPs can therefore normally join a political group in the Parliament, even if they do not belong to a national party which is a member of the related European political party, under conditions laid down in the rules of the group concerned.

Since July 2004, European political parties at EU level have been able to receive annual [funding](#) from the European Parliament. This 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. Parliament also grants [funding to political foundations](#) at EU level. They are affiliated to European political parties and intended to contribute to the debate on European public policy issues *inter alia* by organising conferences and conducting studies.

References:

R. Corbett, F. Jacobs, M. Shackleton, [The European Parliament](#), 8th edition, 2011.

J.P. Eickhoff, [Das Funktionsrecht des Europäischen Parlaments](#), 2008.

NB References to the Rules of Procedure use the renumbered version which applies from the start of the eighth legislative term.