

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: THE CITIZEN'S VOICE IN THE EU



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015

Print: ISBN 978-92-823-7181-7 doi:10.2861/180729 QA-04-15-385-EN-C

PDF: ISBN 978-92-823-7215-9 doi:10.2861/730291 QA-04-15-385-EN-N

Manuscript completed in July 2015.

Illustrations: Jing Zhang/© European Union

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Printed in Belgium

PRINTED ON ELEMENTAL CHLORINE-FREE BLEACHED PAPER (ECF)



PREFACE BY THE PRESIDENT

The European Union is based on a fascinating idea of peace, freedom, stability and prosperity. After centuries suffering under devastating conflicts and the catastrophe of two world wars, a new era dawned with the foundation of the European Communities. The absence of war, together with Europe's open borders, has made one of humankind's oldest dreams come true. A war between EU Member States is unthinkable today. The common market is a daily reality for half a billion Europeans. Today we live in a free, open Europe — a Europe which can be proud of its cultural diversity, its commitment to defending citizens' rights and common values.

We managed to turn enemies into friends, overcome national, religious and philosophical differences and grow together as a united Europe. This is because we realised that our interests

can no longer be separated from those of our neighbours; either we all lose — or we all win.

What does this mean in practice? It means resolving disputes through dialogue and consensus, basing decisions on the principles of solidarity and democracy, and not simply deferring to the more powerful; reconciling the interests of the smaller and larger Member States, of northern and southern Europe, and of eastern and western Europe; and placing the common good above individual interests.

But we must never take the EU or the European integration project for granted. These are turbulent times in our history. For many people in Europe, they are hard times. In the wake of the financial and economic crisis, people are losing faith in politics and its institutions.

This crisis of confidence also affects the European integration process. We must grasp the fact that people in Europe have little time for institutional debates because they are too busy worrying about their children's future, their jobs and their pensions.

If the EU wants to be a project that is fully alive again, it needs to demonstrate its ability to solve problems that are important to its citizens. This European Parliament is the forum for democracy and debate about its future political course.

Members of the European Parliament are your advocates and as president I am particularly proud of that fact and proud to preside over such a committed and open legislature. The European Parliament is a body through

which you can be heard, as you elect your representatives to defend your key interests. And we want to listen to you.

Let us now work for a Europe for ourselves and for coming generations which holds out the promise of an economically strong, socially just, free and democratic home for all Europeans.

This Parliament is the heart of democracy at the EU level. It will always be on the side of the people, working to improve the daily lives of hundreds of millions of Europeans. The European Parliament will work in a dignified and fair manner based on respect and non-discrimination.

Martin Schulz

President of the European Parliament

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Martin Schulz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M' and 'S'.

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A SHORT GUIDE TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



THE EUROPEAN UNION: WHAT AND WHY

The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political partnership comprised of 28 European Member States. It was created after the Second World War to foster economic cooperation: the idea being that countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent and thus more likely to avoid conflict. The EU is based on the rule of law: everything that it does is founded on treaties, agreed by all Member States. Some of the main achievements of the EU are illustrated in the infographic.

The EU remains focused on keeping its institutions transparent and democratic. The European Parliament is a unique multinational parliamentary assembly elected directly by the citizens. The 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) represent over 500 million citizens from 28 Member States. European citizens can take part in the political process in a number of ways. For instance, they can vote in elections, contact their MEP, petition the European Parliament or launch a citizen's initiative requesting the European Commission to prepare a legislative proposal.

Petition the European Parliament:

europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00533cec74/Petitions.html

THE MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



1. Half a century of peace, stability and prosperity; factors that have considerably improved the living standards of millions of Europeans.



6. A common foreign and security policy, which enables the EU to speak with a single voice in world affairs. The EU also acts as one in delivering development aid to non-EU countries, following human rights issues around the world and managing trade relations with non-EU countries.



2. Thanks to the abolition of border controls between EU Member States, people can travel freely throughout most of the continent. And it's become much easier to live and work abroad in Europe.

3. The single market enables most goods, services, money and people to move freely within the EU and represents the EU's main economic engine.

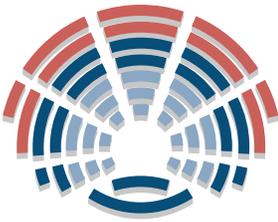
4. The launch of a single currency — the euro — used in a majority of EU Member States further facilitated trade and travel.

5. The values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights are set out in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU's institutions and EU governments are legally bound to uphold them whenever they apply EU law.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

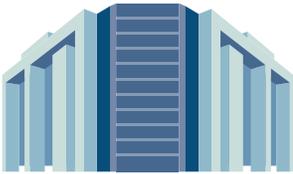
INSTITUTIONS

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN EU INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR FUNCTION



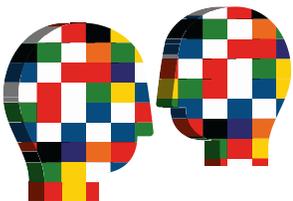
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The only directly elected EU body. It represents the EU's 500 million inhabitants and plays a key role in electing the President of the European Commission. It shares power over the EU budget and legislation with the Council of the European Union.



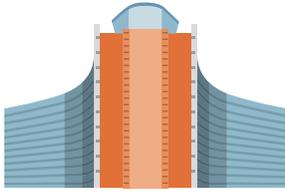
THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The EU's broad priorities are set by the European Council, which brings together national and EU-level leaders. It is led by its president and comprises national Heads of State or Government and the President of the Commission.



THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Council of the European Union represents the governments of the individual Member States. The Presidency of the Council is shared by the Member States on a rotating basis.



THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The EU's executive body, it is responsible for proposing and implementing EU laws, monitoring the treaties and the day-to-day running of the EU.



THE COURT OF JUSTICE

The highest court in matters of EU law. It interprets and ensures equal application of EU law across all Member States.



THE COURT OF AUDITORS

The Court of Auditors audits EU finances. As an external auditor, it contributes to improving EU financial management and acts as the independent guardian of the financial interests of EU citizens.



THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK

The central bank for Europe's single currency, the euro. The ECB's main task is to maintain the euro's purchasing power and thus price stability in the euro area.

Find out more about European institutions and bodies:
europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, ITS POWERS AND ROLES

The European Parliament (EP) is a unique example of multinational and multilingual democracy at work. The elected MEPs engage in public debates and play a crucial role in shaping the policy of the EU. The principal areas of their work include the following.

LAWS

The EP decides jointly with the Council of the EU on laws that affect the daily lives of the European Union's citizens. These include topics such as freedom of travel, food safety and consumer protection, the environment and most sectors of the economy. Member States still have a veto right in areas such as taxation and foreign affairs/defence. Some areas require the Council to

obtain the European Parliament's assent before making a decision. However, even areas where the Member States decide alone — such as education and culture — are often the subject of EU support measures, such as the Erasmus+ programme, which provides young Europeans with opportunities to study, volunteer, train or gain work experience abroad.

Get involved in European policymaking:
europa.eu/eu-law/have-your-say/index_en.htm



IN 2012, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FAMOUSLY REJECTED THE CONTROVERSIAL ANTI-COUNTERFEITING TRADE AGREEMENT (ACTA)

This multinational treaty aimed to establish international standards for enforcing intellectual property rights. However, organisations representing citizens and non-governmental interests argued that ACTA could infringe a number of fundamental rights including freedom of expression and privacy.

Furthermore, the secret negotiation of the agreement excluded civil society groups, developing countries and the general public from the process.

The signature by the EU and many of its Member States resulted in widespread protests across the EU. Following pressure from civil society, which included five petitions, one of which had 2.8 million signatures, the European Parliament carefully scrutinised and finally rejected the agreement.

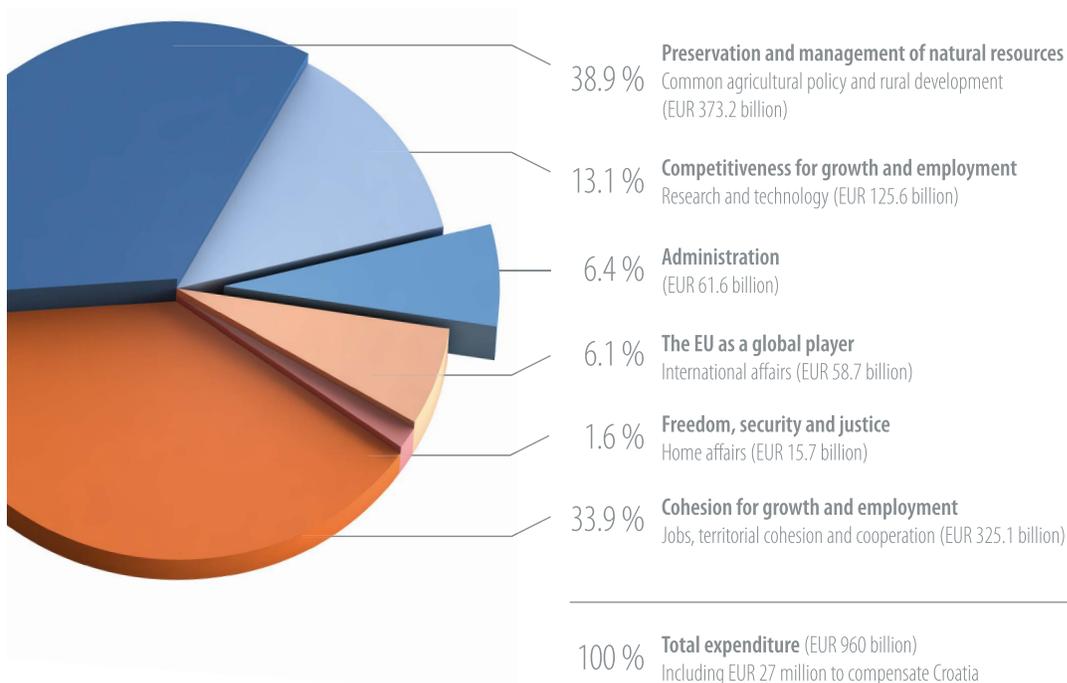
This put an effective end to ACTA and meant that the text could not be adopted by any of the Member States of the EU.

BUDGET

Budgetary powers are the key prerogative of every parliament — whoever allocates the funds has the power to set political priorities. At EU level, this power is shared between the EP and the Council. Together

they adopt a multiannual financial framework every 7 years and scrutinise and approve the annual budget for the next year, as well as the spending from the previous year.

THE EU'S LONG-TERM BUDGET FOR 2014-2020
Expenditure ceilings (in EUR) for 7 years



More on the EU budget:

europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/003dcd4001/The-budget-procedure-explained.html

CONTROL

The European Parliament monitors the correct use of EU funds. The results of EP elections are taken into account in the nomination of the President of the European Commission, but Parliament also has to elect the president and approve the appointment of the Commission (president and College of Commissioners) and can force it to resign. Commissioners are often asked to defend their policies before the Parliament, and the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the

Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy regularly appear in Parliament to brief the MEPs and answer their questions. Over the last couple of years, Parliament has considerably increased the discussions it holds with all leading decision-makers involved with the euro in a bid to shed more light on the way monetary decisions are being taken. In this sense, the EP has become one of the only forums acting to improve the transparency of the governance of the euro area.



More on the EP's powers and procedures:

europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007c895f4c/Powers-and-procedures.html

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND ITS DEFENCE OF LIBERTY AND DEMOCRACY

As the only elected institution of the EU, Parliament takes its role as a guardian of liberties, human rights and democracy, both in Europe and beyond, very seriously. The task of its members is primarily to represent the citizens at EU level and defend their interests to EU leaders and the institutions of the European Union.

The EP's approval is required for most international agreements concluded by the EU, and Parliament is also involved in shaping the EU's development and humanitarian aid policy. MEPs are increasingly exerting their influence on European foreign policy and maintain close links with lawmakers around the world.

MEPs often act as election observers in countries around the world in order to monitor for irregularities. They ensure that human rights are protected in the EU's external economic and trade agreements and award the Sakharov Prize to honour individuals or organisations who defend human rights, democracy and freedom of expression and combat intolerance and oppression anywhere in the world. Past winners include Malala Yousafzai, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi.

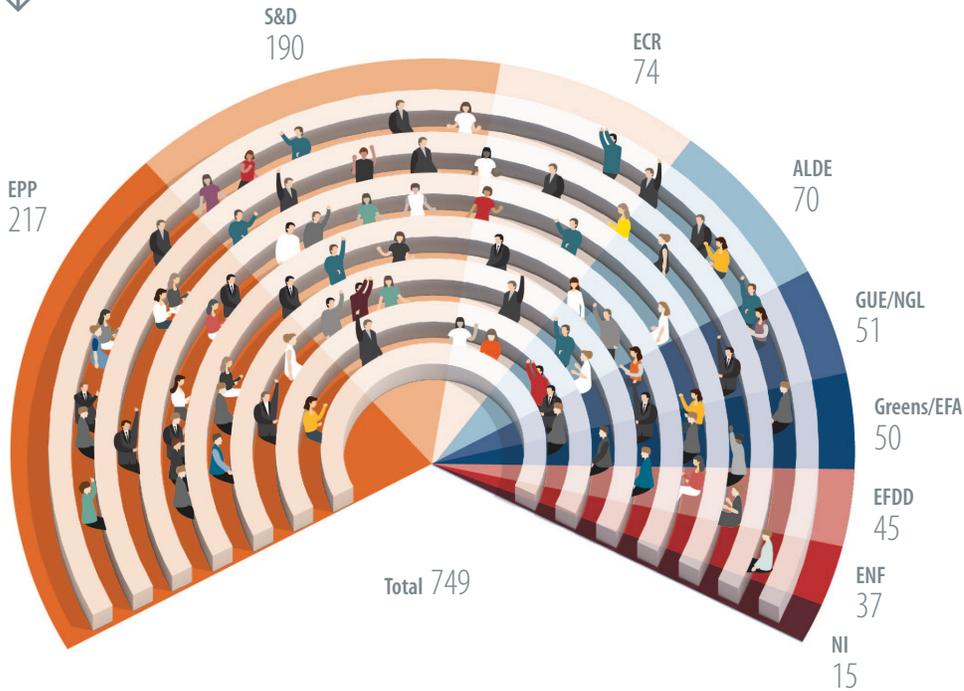


More on the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize:
europarl.europa.eu/sakharov



THE STRUCTURE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MAKE-UP OF THE EP
BY POLITICAL GROUP (14.7.2015)



EPP Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)

S&D Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

ECR European Conservatives and Reformists Group

ALDE Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

GUE/NGL Confederal Group of the European United Left/ Nordic Green Left

Greens/EFA Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance

EFDD Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group

ENF Europe of Nations and Freedom

NI Non-attached members

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS BY POLITICAL
GROUPS AND MEMBER STATES (14.7.2015)



| | EPP | S&D | ECR | ALDE | GUE/ NGL | Greens/ EFA | EFDD | ENF | NI | Total |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-------------|----------------|------|-----|----|-------|
| Belgium | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | | 2 | | 1 | | 21 |
| Bulgaria | 7 | 4 | 2 | 4 | | | | | | 17 |
| Czech Republic | 7 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | | 1 | | | 21 |
| Denmark | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | | | 13 |
| Germany | 34 | 27 | 8 | 4 | 8 | 13 | | | 2 | 96 |
| Estonia | 1 | 1 | | 3 | | 1 | | | | 6 |
| Ireland | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | | | | | 11 |
| Greece | 5 | 4 | 1 | | 5 | | | | 5 | 20 |
| Spain | 17 | 13 | | 8 | 11 | 4 | | | 1 | 54 |
| France | 20 | 13 | | 7 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 21 | 2 | 74 |
| Croatia | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | | | 11 |
| Italy | 15 | 31 | 2 | | 3 | | 17 | 5 | | 73 |
| Cyprus | 2 | 2 | | | 2 | | | | | 6 |
| Latvia | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | | 8 |
| Lithuania | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | | 1 | 1 | | | 11 |
| Luxembourg | 3 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 6 |
| Hungary | 12 | 4 | | | | 2 | | | 3 | 21 |
| Malta | 3 | 3 | | | | | | | | 6 |
| Netherlands | 5 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 2 | | 3 | | 25 |
| Austria | 5 | 5 | | 1 | | 3 | | 4 | | 18 |
| Poland | 23 | 5 | 19 | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 51 |
| Portugal | 7 | 8 | | 2 | 4 | | | | | 21 |
| Romania | 13 | 16 | | 3 | | | | | | 32 |
| Slovenia | 5 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 8 |
| Slovakia | 6 | 4 | 3 | | | | | | | 13 |
| Finland | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | | | | 13 |
| Sweden | 4 | 6 | | 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | | | 20 |
| United Kingdom | | 20 | 21 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 22 | 1 | 1 | 73 |
| Total EU | 217 | 190 | 74 | 70 | 51 | 50 | 45 | 37 | 15 | 749 |

GET TO KNOW THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BETTER VISIT ...

Interested in how proposals are turned into laws and where your MEP takes part in making decisions that affect your daily life?

The EP in Brussels and Strasbourg provides visitors with a variety of interactive opportunities to better understand the institution, its history and the context of the EU as a whole. You can find further information on all the activities and resources listed below on the EP website: europarl.europa.eu

PARLAMENTARIUM (BRUSSELS):

Find out more about the history of European integration and the EU's influence on our daily lives through fun and interactive multimedia tools. Doors are open 7 days a week and it is not necessary to book in advance.

HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY (BRUSSELS):

The House of European History gives visitors the opportunity to learn about 20th century European history and understand its meaning for the present day.

CHAMBER TOURS FOR INDIVIDUALS:

Visit the plenary chamber in Brussels with the help of a practical multimedia guide (there are two tours per day and there is no need to book in advance) or attend a meeting during a plenary session in Strasbourg from the visitors' gallery.

PARLIAMENT VISITS FOR GROUPS:

Attend a presentation by a staff member on the role and work of the EP. The visit includes a tour of the chamber in Brussels or Strasbourg (weekdays, by reservation only, for groups of 20 or more).

ROLE-PLAY GAMES FOR SCHOOLS (BRUSSELS):

A chance for students to step into the shoes of an MEP for 2.5 hours and learn, in an innovative and entertaining way, about decision-making processes in the European Parliament (weekdays, by reservation only, for groups of 16 to 32 students).

EUROSCOLA PROGRAMME (STRASBOURG):

From the benches of the EP's chamber, secondary school pupils get the unique opportunity to experience EU decision-making in the form of a multilingual European Youth Parliament.

PARLIAMENT NEAR YOU:

Visit information events, exhibitions and debates on European issues, organised by the information offices of the European Parliament in all Member States.

Information office in ...

ÉIRE/IRELAND — DUBLIN

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Fax +35316057999
epdublin@europarl.europa.eu
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FOLLOW US ON TWITTER:

twitter.com/europarl

FOLLOW ALL MEPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN REAL TIME:

epnewshub.eu

If you've already visited the European Parliament, you can send your email address to **vissem-en@europarl.europa.eu** to stay in touch with the other members of your visitor group, exchange photos and receive a newsletter about current developments in the EP.





For more information visit:

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