



The European Parliament: **The voice of citizens** in the European Union

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PREFACE

BY THE PRESIDENT

The European Parliament is the only directly elected European institution, with the core purpose of representing you and standing up for your views on the European stage. Your elected representatives work to create the Europe you want. I am proud of this Parliament's achievements and of our European Union.

Together we have built a story of peace and prosperity. We have come a long way over the past 70 years, but there are always things we can improve on.

Progress has no end point. We must continue to develop and upgrade our European Union. We must recapture a sense of belief and enthusiasm for our project. A belief to make our shared space safer, fairer, more just and equal for all. A belief that together we are stronger and better equipped to face the future.

This will require an effort from every one of us. This does not just mean voting in elections – it means staying informed, active and engaged in our democracy. Our role in this Parliament is to fulfil and repay the trust that you have placed in us. It is our job to work for you and deliver on promises made.

I know that many Europeans feel that the EU institutions are too distant from the people they represent. As the house of European democracy – your house – we want to bridge that gap, to ensure that everyone in Europe will be heard.

As we look ahead, the importance of working together is becoming increasingly evident. Each year seems more packed with change than the last. The speed of world events demand a quick and coordinated response. We have seen this during the pandemic and with Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. As a parliament, we must recognise the danger in complacency and inaction. We are faced by the global threat of climate change,

conflict and pressure on Europe's borders and fast-paced developments in all areas, from digitisation to consumer protection, and the challenges to our society this brings. It is clear that we cannot confront these issues alone – we can only succeed if we are united.

However, this Parliament is ready. We have always been at the forefront of tackling Europe's challenges. Together, our Union has stood up for our values: the rule of law, democracy and freedom. We have done this by supporting Ukraine and by imposing unprecedented sanctions on the Kremlin. We have decided to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and

we are empowering people and businesses as we move into a more digital future. The Europe of today is confident and capable. We have a clear direction and a steady moral compass.

We have seen proof – time and time again – that what happens here in our Parliament matters in all of Europe. As President of this house, I would like to see us continue to work together to improve our common home and to construct a better future for ourselves and the next generation of Europeans.

Roberta Metsola

President of the European Parliament



The European Parliament:
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in the European Union**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND YOU

The European Parliament makes an important, often decisive, contribution to the drafting of laws and policies which enhance the day-to-day lives of hundreds of millions of EU citizens. Just imagine for a moment your daily life without the laws and policies which the Parliament has approved.

Products that are dangerous to the environment and your health would be much less effectively monitored – and banned – than they are today. Your online privacy would be far less protected. There would be no financial or administrative support to help you work or study abroad. There would be no coordination between EU countries on fighting terrorism more effectively. Not to mention having to queue up at the border again, carry a passport

and get foreign currency every time you travel to another EU Member State. And, of course, you would still be paying roaming fees to use your mobile phone in those countries. And the list doesn't end there ...

Your concerns as citizens are at the heart of what the European Parliament does. Indeed, any EU citizen can lodge a petition for EU law to be applied and for their rights to be upheld.

Failure to uphold fundamental freedoms, incoherent local and regional planning, health hazards and environmental risks are just some of the issues raised in the 1 000 or so petitions which the Parliament's Petitions Committee receives every year.

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A close-up photograph of a person's arm and hand in a dark, textured jacket, casting a ballot into a white box. The person is holding a black pen and is in the process of inserting a white ballot paper into the slot of the box. The jacket has a small, circular gold-colored patch on the sleeve. The background is blurred, showing a dark interior space.

THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT,
ELECTED
BY THE CITIZENS
FOR THE
CITIZENS



As an example of cooperation, the European Union is without parallel anywhere in the world. It is an economic area in which not only goods but also workers and students can move freely. But it is also a community of values, which include a ban on the death penalty, the defence of democracy, human rights, gender equality and the organisation of a collective response to the threats posed by climate change.

In this Union, the European Parliament holds a special place as the only European institution whose Members are elected directly by the citizens, which makes it one of the main democratic foundations of the EU. As citizens of the European Union, you have your own legitimate representatives in the Members of the European Parliament. This ensures that decisions which affect you are adopted not by faceless bureaucrats, but by democratically elected representatives. It is in the Parliament that political ideas and tendencies from across Europe come together in often very lively debates.

WHAT ARE THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S **POWERS?**

It adopts EU laws

The Parliament adopts laws proposed by the European Commission, amending them where appropriate. It shares this power with the Council of the European Union. The two institutions first carefully scrutinise the wording of proposed legislation before conducting intense negotiations to try to reach an agreement. In each 5-year parliamentary term the Parliament adopts on average over 1 000 legislative acts having a direct impact on your daily life as an EU citizen.

It adopts the budget

The Parliament, like the Council, examines the annual budget proposal submitted by the Commission for the following year, i.e. the total amount and breakdown of the money allocated for implementing EU policies. This procedure involves often intense negotiations before a joint text is arrived at and the EU's annual budget – the primary objective of which is to stimulate growth and employment – can be adopted.

EU spending benefits citizens in numerous areas: it helps millions of students, thousands of researchers and many cities, regions and associations; it also ensures that farmers can enjoy a decent income.

The European Parliament is a decision-making institution whose votes have an impact on the daily lives of 447 million EU citizens.

It has four main areas of competence.

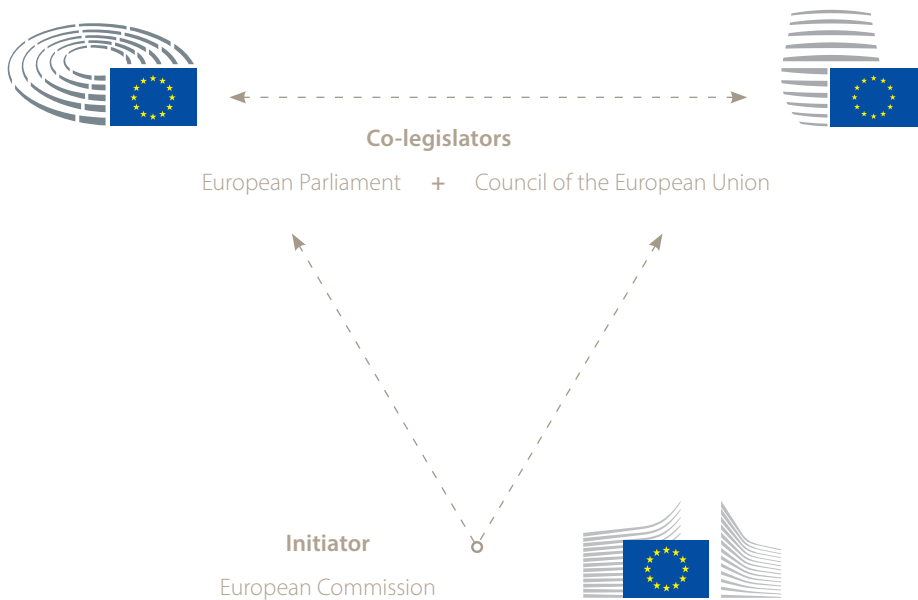
It approves international agreements

Some issues have implications which go beyond Europe, for example climate change, our energy supply or trade interests. The Parliament sets out the guidelines for negotiations on international agreements. These agreements are then submitted for its assent and cannot be concluded without its approval. The same applies to any enlargement of the European Union to include new countries.

It oversees the executive

The Parliament exercises democratic oversight over all EU institutions, in particular the EU's executive body, the European Commission. This scrutiny is intended to ensure that EU law is correctly applied and that the budget is used effectively. Other important prerogatives of the Parliament are that it elects the President of the Commission, conducts hearings of all nominee Commissioners and can pass a motion of censure requiring the Commission to resign.





HOW DOES PARLIAMENT WORK TOGETHER **WITH THE OTHER EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS?**

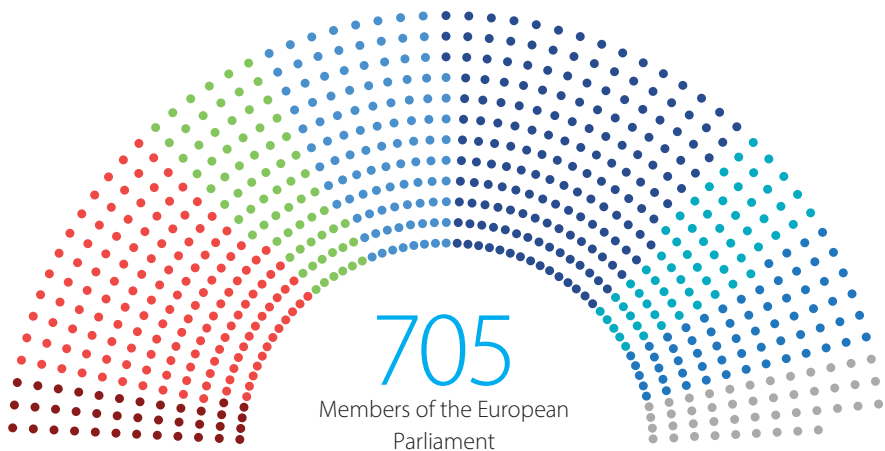
The Commission begins the process by submitting legislative proposals. The Parliament, representing the citizens, and the Council of the European Union, representing the Member States, then work together, battling back and forth a series of amendments to the proposals, which are modified and then adopted or rejected. In most areas of legislation, the Parliament and the Council thus share the power to create EU rules (directives or regulations).





COMPOSITION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

12 December 2022






































In the chamber, MEPs sit together not by nationality but by political affiliation, in different groups representing all shades of opinion. The number of MEPs from each Member State is proportional to its population, with guarantees for sufficient representation in the case of small countries such as Luxembourg or Malta.

When the United Kingdom left the European Union on 31 January 2020, its seats became free. This required adjustments in the number of seats (from 751 to 705) and in their distribution.

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS BY POLITICAL GROUP AND MEMBER STATE

12 December 2022

	EPP	S&D	Renew	Greens/ EFA	ID	ECR	The Left	NI	Total
									
 Belgium	4	3	4	3	3	3	1		21
 Bulgaria	7	5	3			2			17
 Czechia	5	1	5	3	2	4	1		21
 Denmark	1	3	6	2	1		1		14
 Germany	30	16	7	25	9	1	5	3	96
 Estonia	1	2	3		1				7
 Ireland	5		2	2			4		13
 Greece	7	2	1			1	6	4	21
 Spain	13	21	9	4		4	5	3	59
 France	8	7	23	12	18		6	5	79
 Croatia	4	4	1			1		2	12
 Italy	10	17	3	3	25	8		10	76
 Cyprus	2	2					2		6
 Latvia	3	2	1			1		1	8
 Lithuania	4	2	1	2		1		1	11
 Luxembourg	2	1	2	1					6
 Hungary	1	5	2					13	21
 Malta	2	4							6
 Netherlands	6	6	7	3		5	1	1	29
 Austria	7	5	1	3	3				19
 Poland	16	7	1	1		27			52
 Portugal	7	9		1			4		21
 Romania	14	10	8			1			33
 Slovenia	4	2	2						8
 Slovakia	4	3	4			1		2	14
 Finland	3	2	3	3	2		1		14
 Sweden	6	5	3	3		3	1		21
 EU	176	146	102	71	64	63	38	45	705



HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT **OPERATE?**

The work of the European Parliament perfectly illustrates the EU's motto of 'United in diversity'. In addition to differing political beliefs, it also has to accommodate a wide range of cultures and languages.

Each of the 24 official languages is equally important: all parliamentary documents are published in all the official languages of the EU and all MEPs have the right to speak in the official language of their choice.

Let's take a look at how the Parliament operates

First, the European Commission, on its own initiative or at the request of other EU institutions, submits a legislative proposal. As not all Members of the European Parliament are experts on all subjects, the proposal is then analysed by a parliamentary committee made

up of Members who specialise in the relevant field: consumer protection, international trade, civil liberties, the environment and so on. Then, Members from each political group try to adjust the proposal in line with their

priorities by tabling amendments to the Commission's text.

After a first vote in the parliamentary committee, the Parliament meets in plenary, in the main debating chamber, where the committee's report is publicly debated by the political groups. At the end of the plenary debate, the political groups meet and the group chairs try to reconcile the various national interests to reach a common position on the amendments that have been tabled. The groups may then try to forge coalitions to obtain a majority on the hundreds of amendments tabled for the final vote.

When the vote takes place, a Member of each group makes a hand signal to indicate the voting recommendation to all group colleagues, to remind them of the joint position taken by the group as a whole on the matter in question.

MEPs therefore have multiple tasks: first of all, analysing the proposals, then debating the ideas put forward, negotiating and seeking a compromise and, finally, voting.

The work of the parliamentary committees is done in Brussels. The Parliament meets in plenary session 12 times a year in Strasbourg. Six 2-day mini sessions are held in Brussels.



On 24 October 2018, MEPs voted by a clear majority in favour of banning certain single-use plastic products, such as plates, cutlery, cotton buds, stirrers, straws and balloon sticks, which account for more than 70 % of marine waste. MEPs also included on this list of products which were banned in the EU from 2021 products containing oxo-biodegradable plastics, such as bags and packaging, and expanded polystyrene fast food containers.

Protecting human rights is a priority for the European Parliament. It is a staunch defender of democracy, freedom of expression, free elections and the rule of law in Europe and around the world.

It fights against violations of these rights, in particular by making legislative proposals to incorporate human rights clauses into trade agreements, by observing elections and by holding debates on human rights every month in Strasbourg.

The Parliament also supports human rights through the annual Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. For more than 30 years, it has awarded the prize to individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the struggle for human rights. In so doing, it has drawn attention to violations of those rights and supported the laureates and the causes they have been fighting for.

THE DEFENDER OF **FREEDOM** AND **DEMOCRACY**





ABOLITION OF ROAMING CHARGES AND **LOWER PRICES** **FOR INTERNATIONAL CALLS**

Since 15 June 2017, we have been able to make calls, send text messages and surf the internet using our mobile devices when travelling anywhere in the European Union for the same price as in our home country. The Parliament insisted that the legislation should not simply cover a limited period of time spent abroad, but should be based on the principle of 'reasonable use'. This means that as long as you spend more time using your phone in your country of origin than abroad, you can enjoy roaming in the EU at national tariffs as often as you want.

In addition, in late 2018 Parliament approved a text which, as of 15 May 2019, capped the cost of telephone calls to other European countries at 19 cents per minute.



LEARN MORE VISIT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



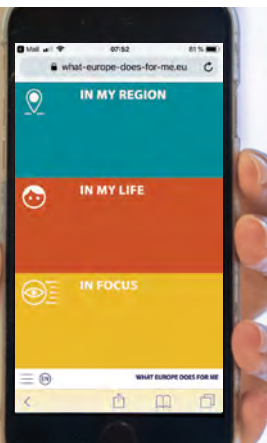
Architectes: Architecture Studio

Would you like to find out how EU legislation is drawn up and adopted? Do you want to know how and where your MEPs take decisions affecting your daily life?

The European Parliament offers various visitor experiences in Brussels and Strasbourg to give everyone the opportunity to discover more about the way it operates, its history and the general context of the EU. All the relevant information about these activities can be found on the European Parliament's website (europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/).



WHAT EUROPE DOES FOR ME



How does Europe affect our everyday lives? What impact does it have on our jobs, families, healthcare, hobbies, travel, consumer choices and social rights? And how does Europe make its presence felt in our towns, cities and regions? The website <https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/en> provides a series of brief notes describing the achievements and work of the European Union in your region or city and in the areas of particular interest to you.

Contact the European Parliament through the liaison office in your country. Stay informed, take part in the activities it organises and be part of its network.

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THE PARLIAMENT NEAR YOU



If you have any questions, please do not
hesitate to contact

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CITIZENS' APP EUROPE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND



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In person

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On the telephone or in writing

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- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696,
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EU publications

You can view or order EU publications at op.europa.eu/en/publications. Multiple copies of free publications can be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local documentation centre (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex (eur-lex.europa.eu).

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