

Please note that this site is currently under revision to reflect the changes brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon.

The European Parliament



Jerzy Buzek is the President of the European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) is elected by the citizens of the European Union to represent their interests. Its origins go back to the 1950s and the founding treaties, and since 1979 its members have been directly elected by the people they represent.

Elections are held every five years, and every EU citizen is entitled to vote, and to stand as a candidate, wherever they live in the EU. The latest elections were in June 2009. Parliament thus expresses the democratic will of the Union's citizens (more than 490 million people), and represents their interests in discussions with the other EU institutions. The present parliament has 736 members from all 27 EU countries.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) do not sit in national blocks, but in seven Europe-wide political groups. Between them, they represent all views on European integration, from the strongly pro-federalist to the openly Eurosceptic.

Jerzy Buzek was elected President of the EP on the 14th of July 2009 and will hold that post for two and a half years (until January 2012).

Number of seats per political group, as at 14.07.2009

Political group	Abbreviation	No. of seats
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	EPP	265
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	S&D	184
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	ALDE	84
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	Greens/EFA	55
European Conservatives and Reformists Group	ECR	55
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	GUE/ NGL	35
Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group	EFD	32
Non-attached	NA	26
TOTAL		736

Number of seats per country (2009 – 2014 parliamentary term)

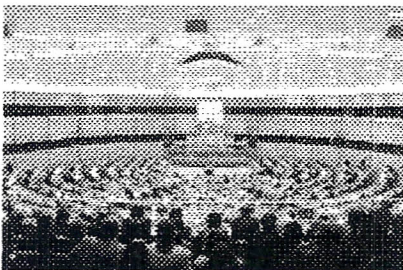
Austria	17	Latvia	8
Belgium	22	Lithuania	12
Bulgaria	17	Luxembourg	6
Cyprus	6	Malta	5
Czech Republic	22	Netherlands	25
Denmark	13	Poland	50
Estonia	6	Portugal	22
Finland	13	Romania	33
France	72	Slovakia	13
Germany	99	Slovenia	7
Greece	22	Spain	50
Hungary	22	Sweden	18
Ireland	12	United Kingdom	72
Italy	72	TOTAL	736

Where is Parliament based?

The European Parliament has three places of work: Brussels (Belgium), Luxembourg and Strasbourg (France).

Luxembourg is home to the administrative offices (the 'General Secretariat'). Meetings of the whole Parliament, known as 'plenary sessions', take place in Strasbourg and sometimes in Brussels. Committee meetings are also held in Brussels.

What does Parliament do?



The European Parliament has three places of work: Brussels (Belgium), Luxembourg and Strasbourg (France).

Parliament has three main roles:

1. **Passing European laws** – jointly with the Council in many policy areas. The fact that the EP is directly elected by the citizens helps guarantee the democratic legitimacy of European law.
2. Parliament exercises **democratic supervision** over the other EU institutions, and in particular the Commission. It has the power to approve or reject the nomination of commissioners, and it has the right to censure the Commission as a whole.
3. **The power of the purse.** Parliament shares with the Council authority over the EU budget and can therefore influence EU spending. At the end of the procedure, it adopts or rejects the budget in its entirety.

These three roles are described in greater detail below.

1. Passing European laws

The most common procedure for adopting (i.e. passing) EU legislation is 'codecision'. This procedure places the European Parliament and the Council on an equal footing and it applies to legislation in a wide range of fields.

In some fields (for example agriculture, economic policy, visas and immigration), the Council alone legislates, but it has to consult Parliament. In addition, Parliament's assent is required for certain important decisions, such as allowing new countries to join the EU.

Parliament also provides impetus for new legislation by examining the Commission's annual work programme, considering what new laws would be appropriate and asking the Commission to put forward proposals.



Plenary sessions are normally held in Strasbourg (one week per month) and sometimes in Brussels (two days only)

2. Democratic supervision

Parliament exercises democratic supervision over the other European institutions. It does so in several ways.

When a new Commission takes office, its members are nominated by the EU member state governments but they cannot be appointed without Parliament's approval. Parliament interviews each of them individually, including the prospective Commission President, and then votes on whether to approve the Commission as a whole.

Throughout its term of office, the Commission remains politically accountable to Parliament, which can pass a 'motion of censure' calling for the Commission's mass resignation.

More generally, Parliament exercises control by regularly examining reports sent to it by the Commission (the annual general report, reports on the implementation of the budget, etc.). Moreover, MEPs regularly ask the Commission questions which the commissioners are legally required to answer.

Parliament also monitors the work of the Council: MEPs regularly ask the Council questions, and the President of the Council attends the EP's plenary sessions and takes part in important debates.

Parliament can exercise further democratic control by examining petitions from citizens and setting up committees of inquiry.

Finally, Parliament provides input to every EU summit (the European Council meetings). At the opening of each summit, the President of Parliament is invited to express Parliament's views and concerns about topical issues and the items on the European Council's agenda.

3. The power of the purse

The EU's annual budget is decided jointly by Parliament and the Council. Parliament debates it in two successive readings, and the budget does not come into force until it has been signed by the President of Parliament.

Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control (COCOBU) monitors how the budget is spent, and each year Parliament decides whether to approve the Commission's handling of the budget for the previous financial year. This approval process is technically known as 'granting a discharge'.

How is the Parliament's work organised?

Parliament's work is divided into two main stages:

- **Preparing for the plenary session.** This is done by the MEPs in the various parliamentary committees that specialise in particular areas of EU activity. The issues for debate are also discussed by the political groups.
- **The plenary session itself.** Plenary sessions are normally held in Strasbourg (one week per month) and sometimes in Brussels (two days only). At these sessions, Parliament examines proposed legislation and votes on amendments before coming to a decision on the text as a whole.

Other items on the agenda may include Council or Commission 'communications' or questions about what is going on in the European Union or the wider world.