How does the European Parliament work?

The European Parliament is the only multi-national institution in the world (27 countries represented).

Why the European Parliament matters?
It is the only EU institution directly elected by European citizens every 5 years. The next elections will be held from 6 to 9 June 2024.

Powers

**Legislative**
Co-decision with the EU Council of Ministers on all legislation proposed by the European Commission (in areas where the European Union has competences)

**Budget**
Adoption of the Union’s annual and multiannual budgets

**Control**
Investiture of the European Commission elected by the European Parliament, after hearings of the future Commissioners, power of censuring the Commission and setting up temporary special committees and committees of enquiry

Members are not aggregated by nationality but by political group.

There are currently eight political groups in the European Parliament:

1. European People’s Party (EPP) - 178 MEPs
2. Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) - 141 MEPs
3. Renew Europe (Renew) - 101 MEPs
4. Greens/Free Alliance Group European (Greens/EFA) - 70 MEPs
5. European conservatives and reformists (CRE) - 67 MEPs
6. Identity and democracy (ID) - 60 MEPs
7. The Left in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL) - 37 MEPs
8. Non inscrits - 49 MEPs
The European Parliament has 20 standing committees, as well as a number of special committees and committees of enquiry, whose work has been completed:

**SPECIAL COMMITTEES**
- Foreign interference in the democratic processes of the European Union, including disinformation (INGE)
- COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons learned and recommendations for the future (COVI)
- Special Committee on interference and disinformation and on strengthening the integrity of the EP (INGE2)
- Artificial intelligence in the digital age (AIDA)
- Fight against cancer (BECA)

**COMMITTEES OF INQUIRY**
- Protection of animals during transport (ANIT)
- Use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware (PEGA)
- Special Committee on interference and disinformation and on strengthening the integrity of the EP (INGE2)

Each MEP is a member of one or more standing committees, in which the European Commission’s proposals are studied before being forwarded to the political groups who prepare the votes in plenary.

**THE GRAND COALITION**
In previous legislatures, the EPP (centre-right) and S&D (centre-left) had a two-party majority to pass most legislation. Since 2019, they no longer have an absolute majority together, and form a “grand coalition” with the Renew group (centre). When this grand coalition is not operational, other majorities may be formed (approximately one in four cases).

**A CULTURE OF NEGOTIATION AND COMPROMISE**
The culture of negotiation and compromise: since no political group has a majority on its own, it has to form alliances with other groups and seek compromises in order to achieve majorities. As a result, political groups have developed a strong culture of negotiation and compromise. This parliamentary culture of compromise is already at work in many countries, where governments (and therefore parliaments) are multi-party coalitions.
Examples of votes in the 2019-2024 legislature

**DID YOU KNOW?**
The European Parliament has continued to operate throughout the Covid-19 period. MEPs were able to vote remotely.

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**EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL**

**European Climate Law**

442 in favour
203 against
51 abstentions

EU countries must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. The aim is to make the EU climate neutral by 2050.

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**EUROPEAN HEALTH PASS (COVID-19)**

**European health pass**

546 in favour
93 against
51 abstentions

Member States are called to introduce a Covid European digital certificate in order to restore freedom of movement within the EU by July 1, 2021.

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**SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE**

Parliament’s position on the proposed Ukraine facility

512 in favour
45 against
63 abstentions

Support of almost €50 billion for the recovery, reconstruction and modernisation of Ukraine over the period 2024-2027.
**Digital Markets Act**

- **588 in favour**
- **11 against**
- **31 abstentions**

The DMA aims to fight the anticompetitive practices of the digital giants and correct the imbalances in their dominance of the European market.

**Digital Services Act**

- **539 in favour**
- **54 against**
- **30 abstentions**

The DSA wants to put into practice the principle that "what is illegal offline is illegal online": content (hate, child pornography, terrorism, etc.) and illegal (counterfeit) products.

**Adequate Minimum Wages**

- **505 in favour**
- **92 against**
- **44 abstentions**

The aim of the directive is not to introduce a European minimum wage but to speed up the convergence of different minimum wages in Europe.

**Making the Budget Conditional on the Respect for the Rule of Law**

At the initiative of the European Parliament, a mechanism has been created to make the granting of European funds in member countries conditional on the respect for the rule of law (independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, etc.).
In addition to its legislative and budgetary role, the European Parliament plays a major role in appointing the President of the European Commission on a proposal from the European Council and the College of Commissioners, who are elected by the European Parliament.

In particular, it conducts hearings of future Commissioners, with the possibility of refusing them, which has already happened on several occasions!

Since 2014, the European political families have been putting forward proposals for candidates for the Presidency of the Commission ("Spitzenkandidaten" system).

The European Parliament’s international role is limited by the Treaties. But through its functions as co-legislator and budgetary authority, it exerts influence in large areas of the EU’s external action (for example through the common commercial policy, or development cooperation and humanitarian aid). Its diplomatic approach is proactive (for example, in the area of human rights and the promotion of democracy, such as the annual award of the Sakharov Prize).

As a place of power, the European Parliament attracts the interest of many non-EU countries, at the risk of foreign interference. It has embarked on a process of internal reform in response to this.
Open questions for the future

**RIGHT OF INITIATIVE OR NOT?**

The European Parliament would like to have a direct right of legislative initiative like many national parliaments.

Under the Treaties, only the European Commission has a monopoly on the right of initiative. This sensitive issue could come back on the agenda in the context of a possible institutional reform.

Today, the European Commission often draws inspiration from the European Parliament’s own-initiative reports when preparing its proposals.

225 own-initiative resolutions from the European Parliament have been replied to by the Commission.

**ROLE ON ENLARGEMENT TO INCLUDE NEW MEMBERS?**

The European Parliament is not involved in negotiations for the accession of a new Member State. However, its essential role is to give its assent before the signing of the Accession Treaty. Its vote is therefore binding.

It nevertheless accompanies the process through reports and resolutions. It can also receive members of parliamentary observers from the candidate countries.

**EXTEND THE SCOPE OF CO-DECISION?**

In the wake of the Conference on the Future of Europe and ongoing discussions on potential Treaty changes, particularly with a view to future enlargements, the question arises of a possible extension of the scope of qualified majority voting in a number of areas (foreign and security policy in particular), with a consequent extension of the scope of co-decision.

**HARMONISATION OF ELECTORAL LAWS?**

The Member States have not yet reached agreement on harmonising the conditions under which elections to the European Parliament are held, with a view to giving a more European dimension to election campaigns, nor on the principle of transnational lists.

The question remains open for the future...