Chapter III

Parliamentary Committees and Political Participation

The current chapter highlights the various activities of the different committees of the European Parliament. It studies the voting day and voting procedures of the Parliament which are not uniform. It also deals with that why this procedure adopted and what are its implications vis-a-vis the Parliament’s efficiency and power. As early as 1960 the European Parliament adopted proposals for a "uniform procedure" of its members elections, to be used by all member states (Westlake, 1998, pp. 32-33).

The European Parliament is still far from a uniform procedure for elections. In some states (Denmark, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Sweden) voters can choose only a party list, while in the others (France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) they can cast a vote for an individual candidate. In states like (Germany, Spain, France, Greece and Portugal) they can rank the candidates, while in the others (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden) they can choose to split the vote between two or more parties or candidates. Some states (Belgium, France, Italy and the United Kingdom) require a balance between the number of male and female candidates while the law in other states (Finland, Ireland and Luxembourg) is gender blind (http://europa.eu/legislation_en.html).

Since the European Union (EU) cannot agree on a common election day, British, Danish and Dutch voters vote on Thursday, the Irish vote on Friday, and most of the rest of Europe votes on Sunday. While some voters cast their votes using simple paper ballots, several member states use various types of electronic voting devices. Although the European leaders are stressing the importance of the harmonisation of the EP election procedure, it has hardly been successful (Woods 1999, pp.201-205).

Thus, as one of the first studies carried out after the elections of 1979 underlined, that these are not "European" elections but rather separate elections in each of the Member States organized according to nationally determined electoral laws and principles. The
chapter describes the relationship between the three levels of the law governing elections in European Union i.e. the law of European Convention of Human Rights, the law of European Union and the national law of individual member states (Coultrap 1999, pp.23-26).

Section I: Elected European Parliament

In 1979, its members were directly elected for the first time. This set it apart from similar institutions such as those of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe or Pan-African Parliament which are appointed. After that first election, the parliament held its first session on 11 July 1979, electing Simone Veil MEP as its President. Veil was also the first female President of the Parliament since it was formed as the Common Assembly (Mourer 1999, pp.67-70).

The Parliament quickly made use of its legitimacy. For example in 1984, inspired by its previous work on the Political Community, it drafted the "draft Treaty establishing the European Union". Although it was not adopted, many ideas were later implemented by other treaties. Further more the Parliament began holding votes on proposed Commission Presidents from the 1980s, before it was given any formal right to veto. Since the election the membership of the European Parliament has simply expanded whenever new nations have joined (the membership was also adjusted upwards in 1994 after German reunification). Following this the Treaty of Nice imposed a cap on the number of members to be elected, 736. Like the other institutions, the Parliament's seat was not yet fixed. The provisional arrangements placed Parliament in Strasbourg, while the Commission and Council had their seats in Brussels. In 1985 the Parliament, wishing to be closer to these institutions, built a second chamber in Brussels and moved some of its work there despite protests from some states (Mather 2001, pp. 21-23).

A final agreement was eventually reached by the European Council in 1992. It stated the Parliament would remain in Strasbourg but must also hold part sessions in Brussels. This two seat arrangement was contested by Parliament but was later enshrined in the Treaty of Amsterdam. To this day the institution's locations are a source of contention
The parliamentarians are known as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). They are elected every 5 years by universal adult suffrage and sit according to political allegiance, about a third are women. Prior to 1979 they were appointed by their national parliaments.

MEPs in Parliament are organised into seven different parliamentary groups i.e. the European People's Party (EPP), group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens–EFA), European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL), Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD), including over thirty non-attached members known as non-inscrits. The two largest groups are the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED) and the Party of European Socialists (PES). These two groups have dominated the Parliament for much of its life, continuously holding between 50 and 70 percent of the seats together. No single group has ever held a majority in Parliament (Majone 2002, pp. 75-76). Groups are often based around a single European political party such as the socialist group.

However, they can, like the liberal group, include more than one European party as well as national parties and independents. For a group to be recognised, it needs 20 MEPs from six different countries. Once recognised groups receive financial subsidies from the parliament and guaranteed seats on Committees, creating an incentive for the formation of groups. However some controversy occurred with the establishment of the Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS) due to its ideology; the members of the group are far-right, so there were concerns about public funds going towards such a group (Weiler 1999, pp.54-55). There were attempts to change the rules to block the formation of ITS, however that never came to fruition. They were, however, blocked from gaining leading positions on committees a right that is meant to be afforded to all parties. When this group engaged in infighting, causing the withdrawal of some members, its size fell below the recognisable limit causing its collapse (Casey and Rivkin 2001, pp.106-109).
Table 3.1 (page No. 81-82) Distribution of seats by Political Groups (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>EPP-ED</th>
<th>PES</th>
<th>ALDE</th>
<th>UEN</th>
<th>Greens/EFA</th>
<th>GUE/NGL</th>
<th>IND/DEM</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium(BE)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria(BG)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic(CZ)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark(DK)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany(DE)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia (EE)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland (IE)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece(EL)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain (ES)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France(FR)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy(IT)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus(CY)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia(LV)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania(LT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg (LU)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary (HU)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta (MI)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (NL)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria (AT)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland (PL)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal (PT)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania (RO)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia (SI)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia (SK)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland (FI)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (SE)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (UK)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coalition Politics and Its Impact on European Parliament

Given that the Parliament does not form the government in the traditional sense of a Parliamentary system, its politics have developed along more consensual lines rather than majority rule of competing parties and coalitions. Indeed for much of its life it has been dominated by a grand coalition of the People's Party and Socialist Party. The two major parties tend to co-operate to find a compromise between their two groups leading to proposals endorsed by huge majorities. However there have been some occasions where real party politics have emerged, for example over the resignation of the Santer Commission (Dehousse 2002, pp.212-215).

When the initial allegations against the Commission emerged, they were directed primarily against Edith Cresson and Manuel Marin, both socialist members. When the parliament was considering refusing to discharge the Community budget, President Jacques Santer stated that a no vote would be tantamount to a vote of no confidence. PES supported the Commission and saw the issue as an attempt by the EPP to discredit their party ahead of the 1999 elections. PES leader, Pauline Green MEP, attempted a vote of confidence and the EPP put forward counter motions. During this period the two parties took on similar roles to a government-opposition dynamic, with PES supporting the executive and EPP renouncing its previous coalition support and voting it down (Egeberg 2001, pp.76-78).

The above discussion reveals that politics in the European Parliament is becoming increasingly based around party and ideology. Voting is increasingly split along left-right lines, and the cohesion of the party groups has risen dramatically, particularly in the fourth and fifth parliaments. So there are likely to be policy implications here too. During the fifth term, 1999 to 2004, there was a break in the grand coalition resulting in a centre-right coalition between the Liberal and People's parties. This was reflected in the Presidency of the Parliament with the terms being shared between the EPP and the ELDR, rather than the EPP and PES. In the following term the liberal group grew to hold 88 seats, the largest number of seats held by any third party in Parliament (Moravcsik 2001, pp.31-33).
Participation in European Parliamentary Elections, 1979-2004

Graph 3.1


Elections have taken place, directly in every member-state, every five years since 1979. Occasionally, when a member joins mid-term, a by-election will be held to elect their members. This has happened four times; the last time was when Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007.

Elections take place across several days according to local custom and, aside from having to be proportional, the electoral system is chosen by the member state. This includes allocation of sub-national constituencies; while most members have a national list, some, like the UK and France, divide their allocation between regions. Seats are allocated to member-states according to their population, with no state having more than 99, but no fewer than 5, in order to maintain proportionality (Siedentop 2001, pp. 11-13).
The Union-wide elections to the European Parliament were held in 2004 where nearly 400 million citizens were eligible to vote. The proportion of MEPs elected in 2004 who were female was 30.2 percent; in 1979 it was just 16.5 percent. There are a number of proposals to "dress up" the next elections to attract greater public attention to them. These include most notably the idea of linking them more closely to the Commission presidency. This would be by having political parties running with candidates for the job, so the largest party would essentially be forming the government, as in the parliamentary system of government (Bogdanor 2006, pp.41-44).

This was attempted in 2004, however only the European Green Party, which was the first true pan-European party to be established with a common campaign, proposed the name of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a candidate for the post of President. It is hoped such changes would add legitimacy and counter the falling turnout which has dropped consistently every year since the first election, and from 1999 it has been below 50 percent. In 2007 both Bulgaria and Romania are electing their MEPs in by-elections, having joined at the beginning of 2007. The Bulgarian and Romanian elections saw the lowest ever turnout for a European election, just 28.6 percent and 28.3 percent respectively (Egeberg 2002, pp.27-29).

Elections to the European Parliament were held in the 27 member states of the European Union (EU) between 4 and 7 June 2009. A total of 736 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were elected to represent some 500 million Europeans, making this the biggest trans-national elections in history. This was the first European Parliament election that Bulgaria and Romania participated in at the same time as the other member states. When they joined the EU in 2007, they held elections for MEPs outside the normal electoral calendar (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009, 10 January, 2010).

At the previous election (2004) member states were granted a fixed allocation of seats for election as determined under the provisions of the Treaty of Nice. The admission of Bulgaria and Romania midway through the previous Parliament's term had increased the overall size of the assembly to 785, and under the terms of the Treaty of Nice it was
mandated that the seat allocations be modified for this election, dropping 49 seats to keep the overall size of the Parliament down.

The Treaty of Lisbon (initially known as the Reform Treaty) is an international agreement that amends the treaties governing the European Union (EU). The Lisbon Treaty was signed by the EU member states on 13 December 2007, and entered into force on 1 December 2009. It amends the Treaty on European Union (more commonly known as the Maastricht Treaty) and the Treaty establishing the European Community (the Treaty of Rome). In this process, the Rome Treaty was renamed to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/index, 12 January, 2010).

Prominent changes included the move from required unanimity to double majority voting in several policy areas in the Council of Ministers, a more powerful European Parliament as its role of forming a bicameral legislature alongside the Council of Ministers becomes the ordinary procedure, a consolidated legal personality (law to have the status of the person) for the EU and the creation of a long-term President of the European Council and a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The Treaty also made the Union's bill of rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, legally binding.

The stated aim of the treaty was "to complete the process started by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and by the Treaty of Nice (2001) with a view to enhancing the efficiency and democratic legitimacy of the Union and to improving the coherence of its action." Opponents of the Treaty of Lisbon, such as former Danish Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Jens-Peter Bonde, argued that it would centralise the EU, and weaken democracy by moving power away from national electorates (http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm, 18 March, 2010).

Negotiations to modify EU institutions began in 2001, resulting first in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, which was abandoned after being rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2005. After some modifications the Lisbon Treaty was proposed as an amendment of the existing Treaties which implemented many of the
reforms included in the European Constitution. It was originally intended to have been ratified by all member states by the end of 2008. This timetable failed, primarily due to the initial rejection of the Treaty in 2008 by the Irish electorate, a decision which was reversed in a second referendum in 2009 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/html, 28 March, 2010).

The legislative power of the European Parliament increases, as the codecision procedure with the Council of the EU is extended to new areas of policy. This procedure is being slightly modified and renamed ordinary legislative procedure.

In the few remaining areas, called "special legislative procedures", Parliament now has either the right of consent to a Council of the EU measure, or vice-versa, except in the few cases where the old Consultation procedure applied, wherein the Council of the EU will need to consult the European Parliament before voting on the Commission proposal and take its views into account.

It will not be bound by the Parliament's position but only by the obligation to consult it. Parliament would need to be consulted again if the Council of Ministers deviated too far from the initial proposal. The Commission will have to submit each proposed budget of the European Union directly to Parliament, which must approve the budget in its entirety (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6901353.stm, 12 April, 2010).

The Treaty changes the way in which MEP seats are apportioned among member states. Rather than setting out a precise number (as it was the case in every previous treaty), the Treaty of Lisbon gives the power to the Council of the EU, acting unanimously on the initiative of the Parliament and with its consent, to adopt a decision fixing the number of MEPs for each member state. Moreover the treaty provides for the number of MEPs to be digressively proportional to the number of citizens of each member state (http://openeuropeblog.blogspot-lisbon-treaty.html, 20 April, 2010).
Section II: Increasing Role of the European Parliament

Since 1979 successive European treaties have increased the powers of the European Parliament. It now has equal weight with the Council (representing the EU governments) when it comes to drafting the EU budget and laws designed to facilitate the movement of persons, goods, services and capital within the EU or to protect the environment, and consumers. It also has the power to approve and dismiss the European Commission. Citizens can petition Parliament with requests or complaints concerning the application of European law. Members of European Parliament elect a European Ombudsman who investigates citizens’ complaints against the EU for maladministration.

They can set up a committee of inquiry if they believe EU law has been broken. Internationally, Parliament participates in EU foreign policy. Its assent is required for any international treaty the EU signs up to as well as for any enlargement of the EU. It regularly debates human rights issues and sends observers around the world to check that elections are conducted freely and fairly. The most recent revision of the treaties, agreed at the European Council meeting held in Lisbon in December 2007, further increases Parliament’s powers in many areas (Dehousse 2002, pp.189-192).

In common with all parliaments, the European Parliament debates and adopts laws. That might seem absolutely normal, but for a long time it wasn’t the case. Initially, Members of the European Parliament were only able to give an opinion on legislative proposals from the European Commission; ultimately, it was always the Council of Ministers, representing the Member State governments, who had the last word on adopted laws.

Over the years, with the adoption of successive treaties, the role and powers of the European Parliament have grown substantially, to the point where it is now a key player in the process of making Community law. Nowadays, in most cases, if a European regulation or directive is to come into being, Parliament and the Council must first agree on its content in a procedure known as ‘co-decision’. And before a European law can be
applied in the EU’s Member States, it must first be signed by the President of the European Parliament and the President of the Council (Prodi 2001, pp.77-79).

II.i The European Parliament, a Full-fledged Legislator

Co-decision is the legislative procedure currently used for the vast majority of European laws, including those relating to the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons within the EU’s single market. It also applies in fields such as environmental protection, consumer rights and transport safety, and following the revision of the treaties, should be extended to other areas, such as agriculture. Furthermore, Parliament plays a fundamental role in defining development policy and support programmes for research, education and culture, and in promoting public health (Hayes and Wallace 1999, pp.171-175).

Members of European Parliament have the right to make policy initiatives by suggesting to the Commission that it should submit a legislative proposal on a particular subject. They regularly ask the Commission and the Council to develop existing policies or devise new ones. For example, it was the European Parliament which asked the Commission to submit a draft law regulating and facilitating transnational inheritance procedures. It encouraged the adoption of a European private company statute to help small and medium-sized firms operate in Member States other than their own. In both cases Members of European Parliament made detailed recommendations on how to implement the relevant legislation (Lodge 2003, pp. 82-86).

The European laws are about making people’s lives easier within the European Union and promoting equal opportunities, rights and obligations for all Europeans. They also promote trade in goods and services by establishing equivalent conditions for companies in all member states. So when, every five years, European citizens elect their representatives to the European Parliament they are participating in the process of creating laws that concern them directly. Under the revised treaties, it will be possible for
one million citizens to come together to ask the EU to propose new laws (Schmitter 2000, pp.220-222).

II.ii Promoting Sustainable Economic Development and the Interests of Citizens

Every year the Members of European Parliament spend long months negotiating with the Council, on the basis of proposals from the Commission, to fix the Union’s expenditure for the following year. The budget finally agreed on, which must comply with multiannual ceilings, is important because it determines the level of financial support given by the EU in all its areas of activity to ensure solidarity, sustainable economic growth and social cohesion.

Parliament has the power to reject the budget and demand a new draft if it does not believe sufficient consideration has been given to its priorities. A large part of the Community’s budget is used to boost economic growth and reduce disparities between Europe’s various regions i.e. constructing motorways, railways linking, helping small firms and supporting technological research and innovation projects (e.g. for developing renewable energies), etc. Agriculture, which is the only policy entirely administered at EU level, receives a large share of the budget (Baldwin and Richard 2004, pp. 108-111).

However, with the European Parliament’s support, other areas are growing in importance, such as preservation of the environment, particularly through the creation of regional natural parks, the conservation of protected species, the management of water resources and efforts to combat climate change.

Some of the EU budget is spent on funding economic development in other parts of the world and on humanitarian aid to help countries afflicted by natural disasters and crises. The fight against global epidemics such as AIDS or avian flu can be more effectively waged by countries acting together. The EU, encouraged by Parliament, is therefore playing an increasingly active role in the area of public health, including financing research projects to develop new medicines. In recent years Members of European
Parliament have made use of their powers to expand programmes promoting European cultural diversity and to encourage the distribution of artistic and cultural products and works in areas such as cinema, music, painting, photography and theatre (Nicholson 2004, pp.232-234).

The European Parliament has a say on the multi-annual financial framework, which sets the expenditure ceilings in each area of EU policy. For example, during the negotiation of the framework for the period up to 2013, Members of European Parliament will have to fight hard with the member states to secure additional funding for projects which European citizens see as important; projects such as the Erasmus programme, which every year enables over 1,50,000 students to study at a foreign university, European transport networks and, more generally, research and innovation (Vanistendael 2002, pp.215-217).

The EU budget is financed mainly by contributions from the Member States calculated on the basis of their national wealth, but some money comes from part of the Value Added Taxes (VAT) levied throughout the EU on goods and services and from customs duties levied at the Union’s external borders on industrial and agricultural products imported from outside the EU. Parliament is pushing for a new system of financing that would establish a direct link between the European Union and European taxpayers, without, however, increasing their taxes. With the help of the European Court of Auditors, Parliament continually checks that the budget is being properly managed and ensures that action is taken should any fraud be discovered (Smith 2001, pp.87-90).

Each year the European Commission and the other EU institutions are required to demonstrate to Parliament that they have made appropriate use of the EU money made available to them. This is known as the ‘budget discharge’ procedure. The Commission must take into account any recommendations made by Members of European Parliament.
II.iii European Parliament as Guardian of Liberties and Democracy

The European Parliament takes very seriously its role as a guardian of liberties and democracy, both in Europe and throughout the world. The Members European Parliament task is primarily to represent citizens at European level and pass on their views to EU leaders and the institutions of the Union. The European Charter of Fundamental Rights brings together in a single document the civil, political, economic and social rights hitherto enshrined in a number of national, European and international acts.

Drafted by a Convention including MEPs and members of national parliaments, the Charter was formally proclaimed in December 2000 at a European Summit in Nice. In December 2007 in Lisbon, with the signing of the new treaty, the EU's Heads of State or Government agreed to make it legally binding, as called for by the European Parliament. Certain Member States, such as the United Kingdom and Poland, have however obtained an opt-out in respect of its legal status. With the principle of human dignity at the core of their political action, MEPs invoke this Charter whenever they condemn human rights violations in the European Union (Nicolaides 2003, pp.244-246).

Parliament is particularly sensitive to the issue of tolerance, and fights determinedly against all forms of discrimination, whether on the basis of sex, race, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, political opinion, disability, age or sexual orientation. It takes a stand against racism and xenophobia, never misses an opportunity to highlight the need for compliance with European gender equality standards and uses its power to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are respected.

II.iv Combating All Forms of Exploitation of Women

Efforts to combat all forms of violence against women, combat trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and help women escape poverty are in many cases initiated by the European Parliament. Parliament does all it can to promote gender equality, and was instrumental in setting up the European Gender Institute, which is responsible for
monitoring progress in this area. Through its plenary resolutions it keeps up pressure on EU governments and institutions to improve the lot of all women (Alistair 2003, pp.149-152).

Following the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the USA and those in Madrid in March 2004 and in London in July 2005, EU member states stepped up their cooperation in the fight against terrorism. While Parliament supports the efforts to coordinate police and judicial action, which is the only effective way of countering these cross-border threats, it refuses to allow citizens’ rights to bear the brunt of a policy based entirely on security considerations.

Members of European Parliament believe that the fight against terrorism must respect individual freedoms, so as not to jeopardise the core values of European democracy. This is their constant message on every issue they deal with in this area, from agreements with the United States on the transfer of air passengers’ personal data, to call data retention by telephone companies or the exchange of bank transfer data. Members of European Parliament also supported the revision of the money laundering directive to cover the financing of terrorism (Mario 2004, pp.321-330).

Parliament played a major role in the creation of the new European Fundamental Rights Agency, which is based in Vienna and is responsible for ensuring that fundamental rights are protected in the Member States. It liaises closely with the European Data Protection Supervisor, whose role is to monitor the protection of personal data and privacy throughout the Union.

Any citizen of the European Union or resident of an EU Member State may, individually or in association with others, submit a petition to the European Parliament on a subject which comes within the European Union’s fields of activity and which affects them directly. The petition may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter (Meunier 2000, pp.401-405).
Many petitions highlight difficulties in connection with the application of existing EU directives, notably in the areas of the environment, social security, recognition of qualifications and some aspects of the functioning of the EU single market. Generally, they bear witness to problems encountered by citizens with the way in which EU legislation combines with national law or with the incorrect interpretation of the areas in which EU law applies. Parliament helps to resolve these problems.

Two petitions were submitted to the European Parliament in 1998 highlighting the negative health effects of silicone breast implants and calling for them to be banned immediately. The ensuing debates in Parliament, its resolutions on the subject and a study commissioned by Members of European Parliament led the Commission to clarify and strengthen the provisions on information for patients, tracking and surveillance. A directive adopted in 2003 substantially enhanced the quality and safety checks to be carried out before breast implants can be placed on (Lawrence 2001, pp.169-171).

II.v The Ombudsman

The European Parliament elects an Ombudsman to examine cases of maladministration by EU institutions which are brought to his attention by citizens and companies with a view to settling disputes. The Members of European Parliament determine the rules and general conditions governing the performance of the Ombudsman’s duties. He works from offices on the European Parliament’s premises. The Council Presidency regularly meets the chairmen of Parliament’s political groups and attends part sessions to explain its programme, report on the results and debate them with Members of European Parliament (Miert 2000, pp.256-259).

The Presidency also often attends meetings of the parliamentary committees. Parliament’s President states its key policy recommendations at the start of each EU summit or European Council, where national leaders agree on overall policy guidelines. At a plenary session or in writing, Member European Parliament may put questions to the
Council Presidency on any topic, including the need for urgent action to remedy breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Members of European Parliament scrutinise the management of Europe's single currency by inviting the President of the European Central Bank (ECB) to come and explain his policies before its Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee. Moreover, the ECB President and all the other members of the executive board must be approved by Parliament (Delacotte 2003, pp. 267-270).

II.vi Cooperating Closely with National Parliaments

Finally, the European Parliament is involved in building and maintaining close links with national parliaments in the European Union. This inter-parliamentary cooperation is intended essentially to reinforce the parliamentary dimension of the EU by extending democratic scrutiny of and accountability for decisions at EU level, thus ensuring more transparency and openness in the decision-making process. It improves the democratic legitimacy, quality and efficiency of the European Union’s legislative process. The reform of the Treaties includes provisions designed to involve the national parliaments even more closely in the institutional process. Members of European Parliament scrutinise the management of Europe's single currency by inviting the President of the European Central Bank (ECB) to come and explain his policies before its Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (Marise 2003, pp.157-159).

II.vii The European Parliament and EU Foreign Policy

The European Parliament is making its influence increasingly felt in EU foreign policy. Its approval is required for new countries to join the European Union and most of the EU’s international agreements must be approved by Members of European Parliament. By promoting joint parliamentary assemblies Members of European Parliament maintain close links with lawmakers around the world, and the European Parliament’s chamber is an important stage for international leaders and other eminent persons.
The European Union cannot accept new member states without the European Parliament’s assent. It is up to the Council and the Commission to negotiate with the applicant countries and to set the date of accession, but Members of European Parliament monitor the procedure until the very day of the accession to make sure that all the conditions for membership of the EU are met. Before a country can join, Members of European Parliament must vote on whether it has met the strict criteria governing European Union membership (Michelle 2000, pp.228-232).

Table 3.2 The EU Member States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Belgium, West Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Spain and Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Reunification of Germany, integration of former GDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Austria, Finland and Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Bulgaria and Romania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Members of European Parliament’s assent is required for most of the international agreements which the EU enters into a number of financial protocols with non-EU countries have been rejected by Parliament on human rights grounds. Furthermore, MEPs make recommendations to the Commission concerning the trade negotiations conducted under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and those recommendations carry a great deal of weight as Parliament has to approve the outcome of negotiations in the WTO.

Parliament is consulted by the Council on major foreign-policy decisions. MEPs can ask questions about the Council’s policies and make recommendations. The Union’s High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy is regularly invited to report to plenary on the EU’s activities around the world. In development policy, MEPs give priority to fighting poverty and promoting good governance, democracy and human rights (Elisabetta and Laura 2002, pp. 89-92). The following section will highlight some of these issues.

II.viii Defending Human Rights

The European Parliament acts to uphold human rights, freedoms and democracy. It sends observers to the four corners of the planet to monitor elections for irregularities. Members of European Parliament ensure that human rights are protected in the EU’s external economic and trade agreements, and each year they award the Sakharov Prize to people who fight for freedom of thought. Parliament ensures that human rights issues are at the top of the European agenda. It takes specific initiatives in a range of areas, such as preventing torture, the protection of minorities, conflict prevention, promoting women’s and children’s rights, the protection of human rights activists and the rights of indigenous peoples. Parliament actively supports the establishment and work of international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Court or the tribunals specially set up to judge the perpetrators of war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (Bergh and Roger 1997, 159-163).
V.ix Condemning Violations of Human Rights

At each plenary session in Strasbourg, MEPs review the human rights situation in various parts of the world. Parliament regularly adopts resolutions calling on the EU institutions or governments to take immediate action to put an end to violations of fundamental rights. Parliament publishes an annual report on the human rights situation around the world. In these reports it has condemned, for example, the genocide in Darfur, violations of freedoms in China and the crimes committed in Chechnya. The European Parliament strongly condemns the use of the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances. Its members have repeatedly called for a worldwide, unconditional moratorium on executions, to be established through a UN resolution (Allen David 1999, pp.203-207).

They believe this would contribute to the enhancement of human dignity and to the progressive development of human rights. Parliament condemned, for instance, the verdict of the Libyan court sentencing to death five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor. The European Parliament has the power to withhold its assent, which is required for the conclusion of important agreements with nonmember countries, if it finds evidence of breaches of human rights and democratic principles. By the same token, it insists on strict compliance with the human rights clauses that are systematically included in such agreements and which provide for an agreement to be terminated in extreme cases (Alfredo and Garcia 2002, pp.311-313).

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named after Russian scientist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, is intended to honour exceptional individuals or organisations that defend human rights, democracy and freedom of expression and combat intolerance and oppression anywhere in the world. Established in 1988, the Prize is awarded each year by the European Parliament at a solemn sitting in Strasbourg. The parliamentary calendar permitting, it is awarded as close as possible to 10 December, the anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Previous winners include Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Alexander Dubcek (Czechoslovakia), Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Argentina), Wei Jingsheng (China),
Section III: Working Procedure of the European Parliament

The European Parliament has 20 standing committees, each specialising in a particular field, such as the environment, transport, industry or the budget. The make-up of these committees reflects the political trends in Parliament as a whole and the number of MEPs they contain varies from committee to committee. They are responsible for preparing the work for plenary sessions. In committee meetings MEPs hold a series of debates and votes on reports, thereby expressing their opinion on proposed laws or on the draft EU budget for the following year. They draw up 'own-initiative reports' in which they recommend action to be taken in a particular area by the Commission or the Member State governments (Koln Jacques 2004, pp.304-308).

If necessary, Parliament can set up temporary committees and committees of inquiry. For example, following the sinking of the oil tanker Prestige, MEPs set up a committee in 2003 to look into ways of improving maritime safety. In 2006 a committee investigated the CIA's activities in Europe following press revelations about the extraordinary rendition and illegal detention of suspected terrorists in a number of European countries by the US secret services. Ten years earlier a committee of inquiry had been asked to check whether the Commission and the governments had properly handled the 'mad cow disease' epidemic (Vandenbrouke 2002, pp.352-357).

III.1 Plenary Sessions

The plenary session is the highlight of the parliamentary month. This is when all the MEPs assemble in the chamber in Strasbourg or, for additional, shorter sessions, in Brussels. The reports adopted in committee are once again debated, amended and put to the vote to set out Parliament's official position. Other than reports, MEPs adopt resolutions and directly question Commission or Council representatives on topical
issues. Plenary sessions may be attended by heads of state and eminent persons from all over the world.

MEPs form groups on the basis of political affiliation rather than nationality. A minimum number of MEPs from at least one fifth of the Member States is required to form a political group, a requirement which does not prevent all political tendencies from being represented, from the most fervent advocates of European integration to the most Eurosceptical. MEPs that do not belong to any group are known as ‘non-attached’. During ‘group weeks’, which generally come the week before plenary sessions, each political group coordinates and formulates the positions it will take in the assembly on each of the subjects on the agenda (Trubek-Mosher 2003, pp.120-125).

A number of weeks a year are set aside for MEPs to return to their constituencies to deal with local matters and meet their electorate or to travel on mission to other parts of the world. During these weeks no meetings are planned in Brussels or Strasbourg. All Parliament’s plenary sittings and meetings are fully multilingual i.e. members can speak in any official language of the EU, and everything they say is simultaneously interpreted. Thanks to the translation service, Parliament’s working documents are available in all official languages of the European Union, reflecting and promoting its cultural diversity and making MEPs’ work accessible to everyone.

The President of the European Parliament plays a key role. He or she directs Parliament’s activities, chairs plenary sittings and signs the budget and laws adopted together with the Council. The President represents Parliament in the outside world and in its relations with the other EU institutions. Parliament elects 14 Vice-Presidents, each with a specific area of responsibility. The Conference of Presidents is made up of the chairmen of the political groups and the President of the European Parliament. It organises and schedules the work of Parliament, including the calendar of and agendas for plenary sessions and the composition of committees and delegations. The Bureau is the body responsible for dealing with Parliament’s administrative, staffing and organisational matters (Scharpf 2002, pp. 255-257).
It comprises the President of Parliament, the Vice-Presidents and the Quaestors who are elected by Parliament. The Bureau is responsible for Parliament’s budget. MEPs and Parliament are assisted by a large administration. The Secretariat has the task of coordinating the legislative work and organising plenary sittings and other meetings. It consists of almost 5000 people a third of who are translators and interpreters who work in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg and in the information offices. Adding the staff of the political groups, about 6 000 people altogether keep Parliament’s wheels turning.

In the context of the ‘period of reflection’ following the French and Dutch rejections of the draft European Constitution, the European Parliament recommended a series of initiatives to help bridge the gap between the EU institutions and the public. As part of that process, MEPs called for a number of conferences and meetings to be held at local and national levels called citizens’ forums and parliamentary forums as a way of moving discussion on the future of the EU forward by focusing on subjects of common interest (Radaelli Claudio 2003, pp.66-69).

III.ii Parliamentary Committees

Preparatory work for the Parliament’s plenary sittings takes place in Parliament’s 20 committees which cover everything from women’s rights to health and consumer protection. A committee consists of between 28 and 86 MEPs, and has a chair, a bureau and a secretariat. Parliament can also set up subcommittees and temporary committees to deal with specific issues, and committees of inquiry under its supervisory remit. Committees can also set up sub-committees (e.g. the Subcommittee on Human Rights) and temporary committees to deal with a specific topic (e.g. on extraordinary rendition). When co-decision was introduced it increased the Parliaments powers in a number of areas, but most notably those covered by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Previously this committee was considered by MEPs as a "Cinderella committee", however as it gained a new importance, it became more professional and rigorous attracting more and more attention to its work (Jacobsson 2002, pp.143-148).
Delegations of the Parliament are formed in a similar manner and are responsible for relations with Parliaments outside the EU. There are 34 delegations made up of around 15 MEPs, chairpersons of the delegations also cooperate in a conference like the committee chairs do. They include "Interparliamentary delegations" (maintain relations with Parliament outside the EU), "joint parliamentary committees" (maintaining relations with parliaments of states which are candidates or associates of the EU), the delegation to the ACP EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Hodson 2001, pp.213-222). MEPs also participate in other international activities such as the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue and through election observation in third countries.

The Parliament is based in three different cities with numerous buildings. A protocol attached to the Treaty of Amsterdam requires that 12 plenary sessions be held in Strasbourg (none in August but two in September), which is the Parliament's official seat, while extra part sessions as well as committee meetings are held in Brussels. Luxembourg hosts the Secretariat of the European Parliament (Heritier 2001, pp.119-123). The Strasbourg seat is seen as a symbol of reconciliation between France and Germany (Strasbourg having been fought over by the two countries in the past).

However it is questioned over the cost of having two seats for the parliament. While Strasbourg is the official seat, and sits alongside the Council of Europe (with which the "mutual cooperation" is being continuously fostered), but Brussels is home to nearly all other major EU institutions, with the majority of Parliament's work already being carried out there. Therefore despite Strasbourg being the main seat, it is the one most questioned, although some do believe Strasbourg should be the single capital (Giovanni 2004, pp.333-337).

Critics have described the two-seat arrangement as a "traveling circus", and there is a strong movement to establish Brussels as the sole seat. This is due to the fact that the other political institutions (the Commission, Council and European Council) are located there, and hence Brussels is treated as the 'capital' of the EU. This movement has received strong backing through numerous figures, including the Commission First-Vice President.
who stated that "something that was once a very positive symbol of the EU reuniting France and Germany has now become a negative symbol of wasting money, bureaucracy and the insanity of the Brussels institutions" (Goetschy 1999, pp.83-88).

The Green party has also noted the environmental cost in a study led by Jean Lambert MEP and Caroline Lucas MEP; in addition to the extra 200 million euro spent on the extra seat, there are over 20,268 tonnes of additional carbon dioxide, undermining any environmental stance of the institution and the Union. The campaign is further backed by a million-strong online petition started by Cecilia Malmstrom MEP (Ferrera 2004, pp.271-279).

In 2006 there were allegations of irregularity in the charges made by the city of Strasbourg on buildings the Parliament rented which harmed the city's image further. A poll of MEPs also found 89 percent of the respondents (39%) wanting a single seat, and 81 percent preferring Brussels. Another, more academic, survey found 68% support. However the Parliament, the only assembly in the world with more than one seat, does not have the right to choose its own meeting place, this is left up to the Council with the possibility of a change being vetoed by one state (Matsaganis 2002, pp.56-59).

III.iii Parliamentary Delegations

Relations with countries outside the European Union are vital for the European Parliament. It therefore has a series of delegations which interact with the parliaments of countries that are not members of the European Union. They play an important role in helping to develop Europe's influence abroad. There are different types of delegations;

i) Inter-parliamentary delegations, whose task is to maintain relations with the parliaments of countries outside the European Union that have not applied for membership;

ii) Joint parliamentary committees, which maintain contact with the parliaments of countries that are candidates for accession to the European Union and states that have association agreements with the Community;
iii) The European Parliament’s delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, linking Members of European Parliament and parliamentarians from African, Caribbean and Pacific states;
iv) The European Parliament delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Euromed);

The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) sit in political groups these are not organised by nationality, but by political affiliation. A political group comprises Members elected in at least one fifth of the EU countries and has a minimum of 20 Members. There are currently seven political groups in the European Parliament. Members who do not belong to any of the groups are known as ‘non-attached Members’. Political groups have their own staff and the Members have parliamentary assistants (Cohen 1997, pp.29-32).

III.iv Committee of the Regions

Established in 1994, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a political assembly providing local and regional bodies (Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER), Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS), Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE), Commission for Culture and Education (EDUC), Commission for Constitutional Affairs and European Governance (CONST), Commission for External Relations (RELEX), with a voice in the European Union. The treaties require the Commission and the Council to consult the Committee of the Regions whenever new proposals are made in areas that have repercussions at regional or local level. These areas include economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture, employment policy, the environment and transport. The Committee has 344 members, who are often regionally elected officials or mayors, appointed by the Council for four years, having been nominated by the Member States (Grainne and Zeitlin 2003, pp. 168-170).
III.v European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, is a consultative assembly representing the various economic and social interest groups. In certain areas, including employment policy, social policy, education, health policy, consumer protection and economic and social cohesion, the treaty stipulates that a decision may be taken only after the Council or Commission has consulted the EESC. It has 344 members who are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a renewable four year term of office (Biaggi 2000, pp.89-90).

Section IV: The President of European Parliament

The Conference of Presidents is made up of the chairs of the political groups and the President of the European Parliament. To organise practical aspects of Parliament’s work and decides on all questions relating to legislative planning, including;
1. The time table and agenda for plenary sittings;
2. The composition of the committees and delegations, and their remits;
3. Legislative programming.

It also has an important role to play in the relations between the European Parliament and the other Community institutions, third countries and extra Community organisations. The Bureau is made up of the President of the European Parliament, the 14 Vice-Presidents and the six Quaestors with observer status, elected by the assembly for a renewable period of two and a half years. It guides Parliament’s internal functioning, including;

i) The European Parliament’s budget estimates;
ii) Administrative and financial organisation;
iii) The Secretariat and its sub-departments.
The Quaestors are responsible for administrative and financial matters of direct concern to Members. The six Quaestors sit on the Bureau in an advisory capacity. They ensure that Members have the infrastructure necessary to exercise their mandate. The current President, Hans-Gert Pöttering MEP of the EPP, is essentially the speaker of the Parliament. He or she presides over the plenary when it is in session and the President's signature is required for all acts adopted by co-decision, including the EU budget. The President is also responsible for representing the Parliament externally, including in legal matters, and for the application of the rules of procedure. He or she is elected for two-and-a-half-year terms, meaning two elections per parliamentary term (Bertozzi and Bonoli 2002, pp.201-203). In most countries, the protocol of the head of state comes before all others, however in the EU the Parliament is listed as the first institution, and hence the protocol of its President comes before any other European, or national, protocol.

President Josep Borrell MEP of Spain gave his counterparts a crystal cup created by an artist from Barcelona which had engraved upon it parts of the Charter of Fundamental Rights among other things. A number of notable figures have been President of the Parliament and its predecessors. The first President was Paul-Henri Spaak MEP, one of the founding fathers of the Union. Other founding fathers include Alcide de Gasperi MEP and Robert Schuman MEP. The two female Presidents were Simone Veil MEP in 1979 (first President of the elected Parliament) and Nicole Fontaine MEP in 1999, both Frenchwomen (Schmitter 2005, pp.385-388).

During the election of a President, the plenary is presided over by the oldest member of the Parliament. In 2004 and 2007 this was Giovanni Berlinguer MEP. While the oldest member is in the chair, they hold all the powers of the President, but the only business that may be addressed is the election of the President (Wolfgang and Lamers 2008, pp.36-37). Below the President, there are 14 Vice-Presidents who chair debates when the President is not in the chamber. There are a number of other bodies and posts responsible for the running of parliament besides these speakers. The two main bodies are the Bureau, which is responsible for budgetary and administration issues, and the Conference of Presidents which is a governing body composed of the presidents of each of the
parliament's political groups. Looking after the financial and administrative interests of members are six Quaestors (Thomas 2005, pp. 43-45).

IV.i List of Political Groups

1. Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats (EPP-ED)

2. Socialist Group in the European Parliament (PES)

3. Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

4. Union for Europe of the Nations Group (UEN)

5. Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)

6. Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)


Table 3.3 (President of the elected parliament, 1979-2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term of office</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>A party</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979-1982</td>
<td>Simone Veil</td>
<td>ELDR</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-1984</td>
<td>Piet Dankert</td>
<td>PES</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1987</td>
<td>Pierre Pflimlin</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-1989</td>
<td>Lord Plumb</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>United kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1992</td>
<td>Enrique Crespo</td>
<td>PES</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-1994</td>
<td>Egon Klepsch</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-1997</td>
<td>Klaus Hansch</td>
<td>PES</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-1999</td>
<td>Mara Gil Robles</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2002</td>
<td>Nicole Fontaine</td>
<td>EPP-ED</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2004</td>
<td>Pat Cox</td>
<td>ELDR</td>
<td>Republic of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2007</td>
<td>Josep Borrell</td>
<td>PES</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2009</td>
<td>Hans Gert Pottering</td>
<td>EPP-ED</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV.ii The Uniform Election Procedure of European Parliament

The European Parliament is the only directly-elected body of the European Union. The 785 Members of the European Parliament are there to represent the citizen. They are elected once every five years by voters right across the 27 Member States of the European Union on behalf of its 492 million citizens. The work of the European Parliament is important because in many policy areas, decisions on new European laws are made jointly by Parliament and the Council of Ministers, which represents Member States.

Parliament plays an active role in drafting legislation which has an impact on the daily lives of its citizens: For example, on environmental protection, consumer rights, equal opportunities, transport, and the free movement of workers, capital, services and goods. Parliament also has joint power with the Council over the annual budget of the European Union (Antonia and Jaroslaw, 2005, pp. 59-62). The European Parliament is the parliament which represents Europe’s citizens. It is a place where lively political debates are held. Since the first direct elections in 1979, it has gained more and more parliamentary powers, particularly as a co-legislator and budgetary authority. Parliament exercises these powers in the interests and for the benefit of Europe’s citizens and to shape our common future.

The European Parliament is the only multinational parliamentary assembly in the world elected by universal suffrage and, since June 1979, the European Union’s only directly elected institution. Elections are held every five years and the number of Members has increased in line with the successive enlargements of the EU. In 2007, Parliament had 785 Members from 27 countries, sitting in groups formed on the basis of political affiliation rather than nationality. The election to be held in June 2009 will mark the 30th anniversary of European elections by universal suffrage (Paszkal and Maren 2004, pp.78-79).

The European Parliament’s official seat is in Strasbourg, on the border between France and Germany, a location that symbolises reconciliation in Europe after two world wars.
As decided by the Member States of the EU, Parliament holds 12 plenary sessions every year in Strasbourg. Its committees meet in Brussels, where additional plenary sessions are also held. Debates in Parliament's chamber are conducted in all the EU’s official languages, reflecting its commitment to a varied and multicultural Union which is 'united in diversity' (Kuklinski 2005, pp.103-104).

IV.iii Role of the Parliamentary Committee on EU Affairs

Within the framework of the exercise of parliamentary control over the actions of the executive, the Committees examine the overall policy of the executive with regard to the general obligations arising from the harmonization of legislation with the EU policies. It should be noted that, the adoption of any Directive at the EU level, in principle, creates an obligation to the executive to submit implementing legislation or regulations before the Parliament. The endeavour of the Committee is to timely pinpoint to the executive the obligations arising from the adoption of Community Directives, irrespective of any other mechanisms created by the government aimed at monitoring the above matter (Fischer and Joschka 2000, pp.175-178). The Committees develop activity at the interparliamentary level with the European Parliament as well as the Parliaments or the corresponding committees of the member states of the EU. In specific, the Committee participates in conferences and meetings such as the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC). Furthermore, the Committee cooperates and meets with the Parliamentary Committees on European Affairs of the member states of the EU and those of the candidate states as well as the European Parliament (Gerhard and Holden 2002, pp.77-79).

The Committee formulated a subcommittee, which took up the task of initiating a social dialogue with the citizens on matters concerning the EU under the auspices of the House of Representatives, from February 2002 through to May 2005. The usurpation of the role of communication with the citizens on matters concerning the EU is deemed a necessary activity for the national parliaments of the member states of the EU and is recognized as a means contributing towards the diminution of the democratic deficit of the EU (Farrell
and Adrienne 2005, pp. 186-187). As in the national Parliaments, various committees have been set up within the European Parliament to prepare the proceedings of the full House. The core legislative work of Parliament is done in these committees. The members of each committee are elected from among the Members of Parliament at the beginning of and half-way through each parliamentary term, according to their political affiliation and their expertise.

The European Parliament's Rules of Procedure specify that the Members of Parliament set the number of committees and determine their powers. For the sixth parliamentary term (2004-2009), it was decided to increase the number of specialised standing committees from 17 to 20, dealing with different areas of activity (internal market, agriculture, employment, industry, culture, constitutional and legal affairs etc.). Parliament can also set up sub-committees, temporary committees and committees of inquiry if it considers it necessary. Committees of inquiry look into possible infringements of Community law or cases of maladministration in its implementation. For example, a committee of inquiry was set up in 1997 to investigate the delay in the European response to the 'mad cow' crisis. Temporary committees are set up for a period of 12 months, but can be renewed indefinitely.

Their remit need not be restricted to the implementation of Community law. The main function of the standing committees is to debate proposals for new legislation put forward by the European Commission and to draw up own-initiative reports. For any proposal for legislation or other initiative, a rapporteur is nominated by agreement between the political groups that make up Parliament. His or her report is discussed, amended and voted on within the parliamentary committee and then placed before the plenary assembly, which meets once a month in Strasbourg, and which debates and votes on the basis of this report. As preparation for Parliament's vote of approval of the European Commission, the parliamentary committees also conduct hearings of the Commissioners designate in their specialised areas.