

# European parliament essay sample



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Founded in 1952 as the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and renamed the European Parliamentary Assembly in 1958, it became the European Parliament in 1962. The first direct elections took place in 1979. The current MEPs were elected during the 2009 elections and will serve until 2014.

The evolution of the Parliament is closely linked to a succession of treaties culminating in the current Lisbon Treaty. These treaties define the rules and scope of the Union and have turned the ECSC of old into what is now known as the European Union.

Over the years, milestones like the introduction of the euro and European enlargement have left their mark on the European Parliament, its powers and its composition.

A key player and witness to EU history, the Parliament now houses central historical archives that provide unique perspectives on our common history, including early debates from the assembly and archives of former EP Presidents.

### Organisation and work

The European Parliament is the only directly-elected EU body and one of the largest democratic assemblies in the world. Its 754 Members are there to represent the EU's 500 million citizens. They are elected once every five years by voters from across the 27 Member States.

Do you want to know how the Parliament is organised? Once elected, Members organise along political lines. They form political groups to better defend their positions. Currently there are seven groups.

Most of Parliament's in-depth work is done in specialised committees that prepare reports that will later be voted on in the plenary.

The Parliament's rules of procedure provide a detailed framework for the Parliament at work. Being a representative of all European citizens, the assembly's multilingualism has become one of its most important aspects. Parliamentary documents are published in all the official languages of the EU and every MEP has the right to speak in the official language of their choice.

#### Power and functions

The European Parliament has been steadily gaining power over recent decades and now acts as a co-legislator for nearly all EU law. Together with the Council, the Parliament adopts or amends proposals from the Commission. Parliament also supervises the work of the Commission and adopts the European Union's budget. See how it all works here.

Beyond these official powers the Parliament also works closely with national parliaments of EU countries. Regular joint parliamentary assemblies allow for a better inclusion of national perspectives into the Parliament's deliberations.

How does the legislative process work in practical terms?

A Member of the European Parliament, working in one of the parliamentary committees, draws up a report on a proposal for a 'legislative text' presented by the European Commission, the only institution empowered to initiate legislation. The parliamentary committee votes on this report and, possibly, amends it. When the text has been revised and adopted in plenary, Parliament has adopted its position. This process is repeated one or more times, depending on the type of procedure and whether or not agreement is reached with the Council.

In the adoption of legislative acts, a distinction is made between the ordinary legislative procedure (codecision), which puts Parliament on an equal footing with the Council, and the special legislative procedures, which apply only in specific cases where Parliament has only a consultative role.

On certain questions (e. g. taxation) the European Parliament gives only an advisory opinion (the 'consultation procedure'). In some cases the Treaty provides that consultation is obligatory, being required by the legal base, and the proposal cannot acquire the force of law unless Parliament has delivered an opinion. In this case the Council is not empowered to take a decision alone.

Parliament has a power of political initiative.

It can ask the Commission to present legislative proposals for laws to the Council.

It plays a genuine role in creating new laws, since it examines the Commission's annual programme of work and says which laws it would like to see introduced.

#### Budgetary procedure

Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament now shares the power to decide on the entire annual budget of the EU with the Council of the European Union and it has the final say.

#### Supervisory powers

The European Parliament has a range of supervisory and control powers. These allow it to exercise oversight over other institutions, to monitor the proper use of the EU budget and to ensure the correct implementation of EU law.

The President of the European Parliament has the right to speak at the start of each European Council, setting out Parliament's position on the subjects to be addressed by the heads of state and government.

After each summit the President of the European Council presents a report to Parliament on the outcome.

The European Parliament has the right to approve and dismiss the European Commission. Since 1994, commissioners-designate have been required to appear before an EP hearing. Under the Lisbon Treaty, EU heads of state propose a candidate for Commission President, taking into account the results of European elections. The candidate is elected by the EP. The EP can

censure the Commission and ultimately dismiss it. The EP ensures democratic control over the Commission, which regularly submits reports to Parliament including an annual report on EU activities and on the implementation of the budget.

Parliament can ask the Court to take action against the Commission or Council if they have acted in a way that is contrary to the spirit of EU law.

Parliament, together with Council, can ask the Court of Justice to set up specialised courts. For example, the European Union Civil Service Tribunal was established in 2005 to deal with disputes between the EU and its civil service.

Parliament must be consulted before the President, Vice-President and Executive Board of the European Central Bank (ECB) are appointed by the European Council.

The ECB President presents the bank's annual report in plenary and takes part in a regular monetary dialogue with the Economics Committee.

The Court of Auditors presents the annual report on the previous year's budget to the Council and European Parliament. Based on the report, Parliament decides whether or not to approve the way the Commission handled the EU budget by granting the budget discharge.

Parliament must be consulted before the appointment of the members of the Court of Auditors by the Council.

Any EU citizen, resident, company or organisation can submit a petition to the European Parliament about EU law.

Parliament can set up a committee of inquiry to look into violations of EU law by member states.

### Political groups

MEPs in Parliament are organised into seven different parliamentary groups, including thirty non-attached members known as non-inscrits. The two largest groups are the European People's Party (EPP) and the Socialists & Democrats (S&D). 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.[69] As a result of being broad alliances of national parties, European groups parties are very decentralised and hence have more in common with parties in federal states like Germany or the United States than unitary states like the majority of the EU states.[45] Although, the European groups, between 2004 and 2009, were actually more cohesive than their US counterparts.[70][71]

Groups are often based on a single European political party such as the socialist group (before 2009). However they can, like the liberal group, include more than one European party as well as national parties and independents.[72] For a group to be recognised, it needs 25 MEPs from seven different countries.[73] 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 short-lived Identity, Tradition,

Sovereignty (ITS) due to its ideology; the members of the group were far-right, so there were concerns about public funds going towards such a group.

[74] There were attempts to change the rules to block the formation of ITS, but that never came to fruition. They were, however, blocked from gaining leading positions on committees — traditionally (by agreement, not a rule) shared among all parties.[75] When this group engaged in infighting, causing the withdrawal of some members, its size fell below the recognisable limit causing its collapse.

| Group | Sub-parties | Leader(s)|

Seat

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.[11] The European Parliament is the only assembly in the world with more than one meeting place and one of the few that does not have the power to decide its own location.[121]

The Strasbourg seat is seen as a symbol of reconciliation between France and Germany, the Strasbourg region having been fought over by the two countries in the past. However it is questioned over the cost and inconvenience 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”),[122] Brussels is

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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.[123]

Critics have described the two-seat arrangement as a “ travelling circus”, [124] and there is a strong movement to establish Brussels as the sole seat. This is because 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”. [125] 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.[124] The campaign is further backed by a million-strong online petition started by Cecilia Malmström MEP.[126]

### Traineeships in the European Parliament

Parliament offers several options for traineeships within its Secretariat, to provide opportunities for vocational training and for learning more about what the European Parliament is and does.

The traineeships may be paid or unpaid and are of the following types: a general option, a journalism option and traineeships for translators.

1. Eleven out of the 12 UK euro-constituencies fall entirely within the UK. The exception is the South West England constituency, which includes Gibraltar. MEPs have a strict time limit for speaking in plenary debates but Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt was allowed to speak for 50 minutes.

2. The European Parliament, along with the European Commission, is the world's largest employer of interpreters and translators. About one third of the European Parliament staff – 1, 500 people – work on translating documents and interpreting speakers in debates and meetings. 3. The EU has 23 official languages and all European Parliament debating sessions are interpreted in all of them. Number-crunchers will realise that this means a total of 506 possible language interpretation combinations. 4. The European Parliament's total budget for this year is £1. 32 billion – about £2. 60 per person. 5. The European Parliament meets in two places – Brussels and Strasbourg. But while 3, 279 of its 6, 166 staff are based in Brussels, only 80 are based in Strasbourg. Where are the rest? In Luxembourg, naturally.

6. Eurosceptics say as much as 75% of all legislation affecting the UK is made by EU legislators. But europhiles say that, according to House of Commons statistics, only 9% of our laws come from Brussels.

7. The majority (60%) of European Parliament staff are women – but of the MEPs they serve, only 31% are women.

8. MEPs and their increasing legislative powers make them a routine target for interest groups: there are no fewer than 4,322 lobbyists registered with access to the European Parliament, representing 1,699 organisations.

9. The European Parliament is the only EU institution to be awarded Environmental Management Scheme (EMAS) certificates for efficient use of energy, water and paper. One innovation, in one of the Parliament's Brussels buildings, is the installation of a 145,000 litre rainwater collector – for flushing toilets.

10. If you want to exercise your right to apathy by not voting in the euro-election, be grateful you aren't a citizen of Belgium, Luxembourg, Cyprus or Greece – the four EU member states where voting is compulsory.