

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ECSC Common Assembly becomes common to all the three Communities and acquires the name of "European Parliament". Over time, this institution recorded numerous changes that make it nowadays notably an equal partner to the Council in the legislative procedure. This institutional role will be significantly extended through the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

LEGAL BASIS

- The original treaties (*1.1.1.);
- Decision and Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (20 September 1976), amended by the Council Decision of 25 June and 23 September 2002.

THREE COMMUNITIES, ONE ASSEMBLY

Following the creation of the EEC and Euratom, the ECSC Common Assembly was expanded to cover all three Communities. With 142 Members, the Assembly met for the first time in Strasbourg on 19 March 1958 as the 'European Parliamentary Assembly', changing its name to 'European Parliament' on 30 March 1962.

FROM APPOINTED ASSEMBLY TO ELECTED PARLIAMENT

Before direct election MEPs were **appointed** by each of the Member States' national parliaments. All Members thus had a dual mandate.

The Summit Conference in Paris on 9-10 December 1974 decided that **direct elections** 'should take place in or after 1978' and asked Parliament to submit new proposals to replace its draft Convention of 1960. In January 1975 Parliament adopted a new draft, on the basis of which the Heads of State or Government, after settling a number of differences, reached agreement at their meeting of 12-13 July 1976.

The Decision and Act on European elections by direct universal suffrage were signed in Brussels on 20 September 1976. After ratification by all the Member States, the text came into force on 1 July 1978. The first elections took place on 7 and 10 June 1979.

SUBSEQUENT ENLARGEMENTS

When Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the European Communities on 1 January 1973 (the first enlargement), the number of MEPs was increased to 198.

For the second enlargement, with the accession of Greece on 1 January 1981, 24 Greek Members were delegated to the EP by the Greek Parliament, to be replaced in October 1981 by directly elected Members. The second direct elections were held on 14 and 17 June 1984.

On 1 January 1986, with the third enlargement, the number of seats rose from 434 to 518 with the arrival of 60 Spanish and 24 Portuguese Members, appointed by their national parliaments

and subsequently replaced by directly elected Members. The third direct elections were held on 15 and 18 June 1989.

Following German unification, the composition of the European Parliament was adapted to demographic change. In accordance with Parliament's proposals in a resolution on a scheme for allocating the seats of its Members, the number of MEPs elected in June 1994 increased from 518 to 567. After the fourth EU enlargement, the number of MEPs increased to 626, with a fair allocation of seats for the new Member States, in line with the resolution mentioned above.

The Intergovernmental Conference in Nice introduced a new distribution of seats in the European Parliament which was applied at the European elections in 2004. The maximum number of Members (previously set at 700) was increased to 732. The number of seats allocated to the 15 old Member States was reduced by 91 (from 626 to 535). The 197 remaining were distributed among all old and new Member States on a pro rata basis.

With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007 the number of seats in the European Parliament was temporarily raised to 785 in order to accommodate MEPs from these countries. After the 2009 elections the number of seats will be reduced to 736. However, the Treaty of Lisbon would provide for a maximum number of 751 Members.

Since 1 January 2007, membership of the European Parliament has been as follows:

Belgium	24
Bulgaria	18
Czech Republic	24
Denmark	14
Germany	99
Estonia	6
Greece	24
Spain	54
France	78
Ireland	13
Italy	78
Cyprus	6
Latvia	9
Lithuania	13
Luxembourg	6
Hungary	24
Malta	5
Netherlands	27
Austria	18
Poland	54
Portugal	24

Romania	35
Slovenia	7
Slovakia	14
Finland	14
Sweden	19
United Kingdom	78
Total	785 (absolute majority: 393)

GRADUAL INCREASE IN POWERS

Replacement of Member States contributions by the Community's own resources (*1.5.1.) led to a first extension of Parliament's budgetary powers under the Treaty of Luxembourg, signed on 22 April 1970. A second treaty on the same subject, strengthening Parliament's powers, was signed in Brussels on 22 July 1975 (*1.1.2.).

The Single Act enhanced Parliament's role in certain legislative areas (cooperation procedure) and made accession and association treaties subject to its consent.

The Maastricht Treaty, by introducing the codecision procedure in certain areas of legislation and extending the cooperation procedure to others, marked the beginning of Parliament's metamorphosis into the role of co-legislator. It gave Parliament the power of final approval over the membership of the Commission, which was an important step forwards in Parliament's political control over the European executive.

The Treaty of Amsterdam extended the codecision procedure to most areas of legislation and reformed the procedure, putting Parliament as co-legislator on an equal footing with the Council. With the appointment of the President of the Commission being made subject to Parliament's approval, Parliament further increased its control over the executive power.

The Treaty of Nice extended the scope of the codecision procedure in seven provisions of the EC Treaty: measures to support antidiscrimination action of the Member States (Art 13 EC), certain measures for issuing visas (Article 62 (2) (b) (ii) and (iv) EC), measures on asylum and on certain refugees matters (Article 63 EC), measures in the field of judicial cooperation in civil matters (Article 65 EC), support measures in the industrial field (Art 157 EC), actions in the field of economy and social cohesion (Article 159 EC) and regulations governing political parties at European level and in particular the rules regarding their funding (191 EC).

The Treaty of Lisbon represents a further important extension of both the application of qualified majority in the Council (using a new principle) and of the application of the codecision procedure to some 45 new legislative domains. Codecision thus becomes the most-used decision-making procedure and would cover especially important subjects such as the common agricultural policy and justice and security policies.

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