



ΕΒΡΟΠΕΪΚΗ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤΟ ΕΥΡΩΠΕΟ ΕΥΡΩΠΣΚΪ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΟΠΑ-ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤΕΤ  
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# Frequently Asked Questions

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# Frequently Asked Questions

## **MEPs salaries and pensions—the system from July 2009**

### ***Salaries***

With the single Statute for Members in force in July 2009, MEPs will all receive the same salary.

The monthly pre-tax salary of MEPs under the single statute is, in 2009, €7,665.31. The salary will be paid from Parliament's budget and is subject to an EU tax, after which the salary will be €5,963.33. Member States can also subject the salary to national taxes. The basic salary is set at 38.5% of the basic salary of a judge at the European Court of Justice.

There will be some exceptions: MEPs who sat in Parliament before the 2009 elections may opt to keep the previous national system for salary, transitional allowance and pensions, for the entire duration of their membership of the European Parliament. Member States may also decide that all their MEPs will continue to earn a national MP's salary for up to two terms (i.e. 2019), though so far none has done so.

### ***Pensions***

Under the statute, former Members are entitled to an old-age pension from the age of 63. The pension will be 3.5% of the salary for each full year's exercise of a mandate but not more than 70% in total. The cost of these pensions will be met from the European Parliament budget.

An additional pension scheme, introduced for MEPs in 1989, has been closed to new members from July and is being phased out. It will continue to exist for a finite period to cover its members' existing entitlements. Only a handful of existing members may continue to contribute and acquire rights under this scheme, because to do so, they must meet all the following conditions: having sat in the previous Parliament, not being covered by the new salary and pension arrangements, and not being covered by a national parliamentary pension scheme.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Summary of MEPs allowances from July 2009

Much of MEPs' work means being away from home and a number of allowances are available to cover the costs involved.

### ***Travel expenses***

Most meetings of the European Parliament, such as plenary sessions, committee meetings and political group meetings, take place in Brussels or Strasbourg. MEPs will be refunded the actual cost of their travel tickets for attending such meetings on presentation of receipts, up to a maximum of a business class air fare, a first class rail fare or €0.49 per km for car journey, plus fixed allowances based on the distance and duration of the journey to cover the other costs of travelling (such as motorway tolls, excess baggage charges or reservation fees, for example).

MEPs can also be refunded up to €4,148 per year for other travel outside their own Member State undertaken as part of their work, and be reimbursed for up to 24 return journeys within their own Member State. The pre-June 2009 system of a flat-rate travel allowance for journeys to Brussels and Strasbourg (and other EU destinations) has been abolished.

### ***Daily allowance (also called “subsistence allowance”).***

Parliament pays a flat-rate allowance of €298 for each day that MEPs attend on official business as long as they sign an attendance register. This covers hotel bills, meals and all other expenses involved. On days when plenary votes are held, if MEPs miss more than half the roll-call votes this allowance is reduced by half.

For meetings outside the EU, the allowance is €149 (again subject to signing a register) with hotel bills refunded separately.

### ***General expenditure allowance***

This flat-rate allowance is intended to cover expenditure such as office rent and management costs, telephone and postal charges, computers and telephones. The allowance is halved for Members who, without due justification, do not attend half the number of plenary sittings in one parliamentary year (September to August).

In 2009, the allowance is €4 202 per month.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## ***Medical costs***

MEPs will be entitled to a reimbursement of two-thirds of medical expenses incurred by themselves and their families. Apart from the proportion of reimbursement, the detailed rules and procedures of this system are the same as that which covers EU civil servants.

## ***Other entitlements***

Parliament provides equipped offices to MEPs in both Brussels and Strasbourg. MEPs can make use of Parliament's official vehicles on official business when in either city.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Transitional allowance (for outgoing MEPs)**

MEPs leaving Parliament at the 2009 elections who have served at least three years are entitled to a transitional allowance after leaving office, for between 3 months and two years, depending on their length of service. The entitlement to a transitional allowance lapses when a former member takes up public office or is elected to a national parliament or a regional parliament with legislative power in an EU member state. They cannot receive both this allowance and a parliamentary pension at the same time.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Staffing arrangements: Parliamentary Assistants**

The following summarises the system from July 2009 onwards.

MEPs can choose their own staff within a budget set by Parliament. Accredited assistants, based in Brussels (or Luxembourg/Strasbourg) are administered directly by Parliament's administration, under the conditions of employment for non-permanent EU staff. Assistants based in MEPs' Member States are handled by qualified paying agents, guaranteeing the proper tax and social security arrangements.

In 2009, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved is €17,540 per MEP. None of these funds are paid to the MEP themselves.

Up to a quarter of this budget can be used for non-staff services from service providers chosen by the MEP, such as ordering an expert study on a particular subject.

In general, MEPs can no longer have close relatives among their staff, though there is a transitional period for those who were employed in the previous term.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Why does Parliament move between Brussels and Strasbourg?**

The EU's national governments unanimously decided in 1992 to fix permanently the seats of the EU institutions. This decision included the working arrangements for the Parliament: that its official seat and the venue for most of the plenary sessions is Strasbourg; that Parliamentary committees have their meetings in Brussels; and that Parliament's secretariat (the administrative staff) would be based in Luxembourg. In 1997 this whole arrangement was incorporated into the EU treaty.

Any change in the current system would need to be part of a new treaty, agreed unanimously by all 27 Member States and ratified by each of their national parliaments.

## ***How much does it cost?***

The additional cost involved in dividing Parliament's political business between Brussels and Strasbourg amounts to about €10 million for each of the 12 main plenary sessions per year.

## ***How did this come about?***

The decision in 1992 formalised the situation which already existed at the time. This was itself a compromise which had built up over a number of years.

When the European Coal and Steel Community was set up in 1952, its institutions were located in Luxembourg. The Council of Europe (the intergovernmental body set up in the immediate post-WW2 period) was already based in Strasbourg and offered its plenary chamber for meetings of the ECSC's "Common Assembly" which was to develop into the European Parliament. Strasbourg became established as the main home of plenary sessions of the Parliament, though extraordinary sessions were also held in Luxembourg in the 1960s and 1970s.

After the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958, much of the activity of the European Commission and the Council (of Ministers) began to be concentrated in Brussels. Since Parliament's work involves closely monitoring and interacting with both these institutions, over time Members decided to organise more of their work in Brussels. By the early nineties the present arrangement was more or less in place, with committees and political groups meeting in Brussels and the main plenary sessions taking place in Strasbourg. A major part of Parliament's administrative staff is based in Luxembourg.

In the 1990s, the Belgian authorities backed the building of a parliamentary chamber and offices for the EP in Brussels, while the French authorities constructed a new building in Strasbourg. Parliament initially rented these facilities, but has since bought them, which means lower recurring costs.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is Parliament's budget and how many staff does it have?**

The EP's budget for 2009 is around €1.53 billion.

In 2008, Parliament had just under 6,000 staff – this includes about 800 posts in the secretariats of the political groups, but not the MEPs' assistants.

Around a third of Parliament's staff have roles related to the multilingual environment of the European Parliament with its 23 official languages (i.e. translators, interpreters and support staff). These services also account for about a third of the budget.

Just under half of the staff are based in Luxembourg, and a slightly smaller number in Brussels. Those based in Strasbourg and in the information offices in the 27 Member States together make up about 5% of the total.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Forming political groups - rules as of July 2009**

MEPs may form political groups according to their affinities. A political group must comprise at least 25 MEPs, elected in at least one-quarter of the Member States (i.e. at least 7). No MEP may belong to more than one political group.

When a group is set up, the President must be notified in a statement specifying the name of the group, its members and its bureau.

Parliament need not normally evaluate the political affinity of group members. By forming a group, MEPs accept by definition that they have political affinity. Only when this is denied by the MEPs concerned is it necessary for Parliament to evaluate whether the group has been constituted in conformity with the rules.

Political groups are provided with a secretariat and administrative facilities, funded from Parliament's budget. Parliament's Bureau sets the rules for how these funds and facilities are managed and audited.

"Non-attached" MEPs (i.e. those who do not belong to a political group) are also provided with a secretariat and have rights under the rules set by the Bureau.

The groups' annual accounts are published here:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/groups/accounts\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/groups/accounts_en.htm)

## ***Seating in the Chamber***

The decision as to how seats in the Chamber are allocated among political groups, non-attached MEPs and representatives of EU institutions is taken by the Conference of Presidents of political groups.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## How many languages are used in Parliament?

MEPs have the right to speak, listen, read and write in any of the EU's 23 official languages. Their speeches in one official language are simultaneously interpreted into the other official languages.

The EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007 and the addition of Irish as an official language on the same date, brought the total number of official languages to 23: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish.

The 23 languages can be combined in 506 ways (23 x 22).

In general, each interpreter and translator works into his/her mother tongue. However, to cope with all possible language combinations, Parliament has put in place a system of "relay" languages: a speaker or a text is first interpreted or translated into one of the most widely used languages (English, French or German), and then into others.

Interpreting and translating are different professions: interpreters render one language into another orally in real time during meetings; translators work with written documents, producing a completely accurate version of the document in the target language.

Parliament employs about 430 staff interpreters and can also draw on 2,500 freelance interpreters. Between 800 and 1,000 interpreters are on hand for plenary sittings.

Parliament employs about 700 translators, who translated 1,220,775 pages in 2007.

Parliament's spending on multilingualism amounted to €484 million for 2008, i.e. one third of its total expenditure.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Cutting Parliament's carbon footprint**

A plan to reduce Parliament's carbon "footprint" by 30% by 2020, thus going beyond the EU undertaking to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, was approved by the Bureau in October 2008.

Parliament cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 17% when it switched to all "green electricity" in 2008, and it is the only EU institution to have been awarded Environmental Management Scheme (EMAS) certificates for promoting efficient energy, water and paper usage at all its places of work (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg).

Parliament has over one million square metres of buildings to ventilate, heat and maintain. Its energy consumption breaks down as follows: energy and natural gas (32%), passenger transport (28%) equipment and services (20%), fixed assets such as buildings and IT hardware (19%) and cooling (1%).

## ***Environment-friendly buildings***

Parliament has recently opened two buildings in Brussels - the Willy Brandt and József Antall buildings, which have a 145,000 litre basin that catches rainwater for flushing toilets. They also have eight rotating solar panels to heat water and offices and detectors that automatically switch off lights, heating and ventilation when an office is empty.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Parliament's powers and legislative procedures

The **co-decision procedure** (Treaty Article 251) empowers Parliament to adopt laws jointly with the Council of the EU. It covers three quarters of EU legislation including: free movement of workers, the right of establishment of businesses, services, the single market, education (incentive measures), health (incentive measures), consumer policy, trans-European networks (guidelines), environment (general action programme), culture (incentive measures) and research (framework programme), social exclusion, public health and the fight against fraud affecting the European Community's financial interests, incentives to combat discrimination, judicial co-operation in civil matters, specific industrial support measures, economic and social cohesion actions (outside the Structural Funds), the statute for European political parties and measures relating to visas, asylum and immigration.

The **consultation procedure** (Treaty Article 192) enables Parliament to give its opinion on a proposal from the Commission. In these cases, the Council must consult Parliament before voting on the Commission proposal, but it is not bound by the Parliament's position. Parliament must be consulted again if the Council deviates too far from the initial proposal.

The most prominent areas where consultation applies at present are agriculture and taxation. The latter also require unanimous agreement in the Council if legislation is to be adopted. The Lisbon Treaty would bring a number of policy areas, including agriculture, into the co-decision procedure.

The **assent procedure** (Treaty Article 192) requires the Council to obtain Parliament's assent before certain important decisions are taken. Parliament may accept or reject a proposal but cannot amend it. If Parliament withholds its assent, the act cannot be adopted.

The assent procedure applies mainly to the accession of new Member States (Treaty Article 49), association agreements and other fundamental agreements with third countries.

It is likewise required with regard to citizenship, the specific tasks of the European Central Bank (ECB), amendments to the Statutes of the European System of Central Banks and the ECB, the Structural and Cohesion Funds, and the electoral procedure for elections to the European Parliament (Treaty Article 190).

Lastly, Parliament must give its assent for sanctions to be imposed on a Member State for a serious and persistent breach of fundamental rights (Treaty Article 7) and for closer co-operation in fields subject to the co-decision procedure.

Parliament's assent is generally given by a simple majority of votes cast. However, an absolute majority of MEPs is required for votes on accession of a new Member State and the electoral procedure.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Parliament in numbers

The European Parliament is the largest democratic parliamentary chamber in the world. Here are some statistics to illustrate its activities during the July 2004 - May 2009 parliamentary term.

### *Workflow*

Under the **co-decision procedure**, Parliament adopts legislative acts together with the EU Council of Ministers (representing EU Member States), both institutions having equal powers. In the 2004-2009 term, Parliament amended and voted on **637 co-decision texts**, of which 494 at the first reading, 140 at the second reading and 23 after conciliation procedures. By May 2009, **404 co-decision acts** had been signed into law.

Under the **assent** procedure, the Parliament may adopt or reject, but not amend, the act it. This procedure is used mainly for international agreements and for approving new EU members. In the 2004-2009 term, Parliament took **63** such votes.

Under the **consultation** procedure, the Parliament must vote and state its opinion, but the final decision is taken by the Council of Ministers. This currently applies to decisions concerning agriculture, taxation and justice, among others. Between July 2004 and May 2009, Parliament took **633** such votes.

The Parliament also has a say in deciding on EU **budget** and its spending, as well as in approving EU accounts (so-called "**discharge**"). In the 2004-2009 term Parliament adopted **216** such decisions.

Besides its legislative and budget decisions, Parliament adopted **660 own-initiative reports** and **593 resolutions**, in which it gave non-binding opinions on issues it considered important. In addition, **37 written declarations** were signed by over half the Members and hence officially approved.

A total of **2,924 texts** were approved in plenary session during the 2004-2009 term, 1,355 of which were legislative documents.

Parliamentary committees, political groups of groups of MEPs tabled **48,747 amendments** in plenary session. **30,067** of these amendments were approved, **15,189** of which were to co-decision texts.

Parliament also held **49 formal sittings**, in which prominent guests gave speeches. The shortest formal speech in the 2004-2009 parliamentary term was delivered by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands on 26 October 2004 (19 minutes), and the longest was by the Colombian politician Íngrid Betancourt on 8 October 2008 (50 minutes).

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Members

Currently there are **785** Members of Parliament. After the elections, there will be 736 as foreseen in the Nice Treaty. According to the Lisbon Treaty, the number would go up to 751. And if the Lisbon Treaty comes into force during the next term, the number would go up to 754, on a temporary basis.

Over **240 national political parties** are represented in the outgoing European Parliament. They formed seven political groups according to their political affiliations. There were also non-attached members.

In the outgoing Parliament, **31.46% of MEPs are women**, a higher percentage than in most national parliaments. In 1979, when Parliament was first directly elected, only 16.5% were women. Parliament then elected its first female President, Simone Veil (1979-1982). Its second was Nicole Fontaine (1999-2002).

The **oldest current member** is Giovanni Berlinguer from Italy (Socialist Group), born on 9 July 1924; he was present at the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The **youngest** is Dimitar Stoyanov from Bulgaria (non-attached), born on 17 May 1983, who joined the Parliament in 2007.

## Staff

As of May 2009, the **number of officials and temporary staff** working for Parliament (including its political groups) in different locations was as follows:

TOTAL	Brussels	Strasbourg	Luxembourg	Other locations
6166	3270	80	2568	248

**The majority of Parliament's staff (60%), are women.**

On average, officials are 47 years old. The average age of staff from the old Member States is 50, while from the new ones it is just 34.

**The biggest Directorate-General is DG Translation**, accounting for **21.5% of posts** in Parliament's secretariat. Adding interpreters and lawyer-linguists brings language-related posts to **one-third of the staff total**.

In May 2009, MEPs had **1,510 accredited assistants**.

Private employees work in Parliament's building management, IT, cleaning and canteen services. Journalists, visitors and lobbyists also swell the numbers of people on Parliament's premises, sometimes to over 10,000 in the three main places of work.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Budget**

**Parliament's budget for 2009 is €1.53 billion (just over €3 per EU resident).** Of this total, €294 million will go on buildings, furniture, equipment and similar expenses, €503 million on staff (permanent and temporary), €190 million on MEPs' expenses, €185 million on their assistants, and €101 million on other staff and outside services.

## **Buildings**

As decided by EU Member States (European Council), Parliament has three working places - Strasbourg (official seat), Brussels and Luxembourg.

	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Brussels</b>	<b>Strasbourg</b>	<b>Luxembourg</b>
Number of buildings	<b>24</b>	14	4	6
Surface area, m <sup>2</sup>	<b>1,069,569</b>	532,104	338,659	198,806
Meeting rooms (including the Chamber)	<b>156</b>	97	51	8

## **Accredited lobbyists and journalists**

There are 4,322 lobbyists registered with Parliament, representing 1,699 organisations (May 2009). There are also about 1,000 journalists accredited with all the EU institutions, and 100 more are accredited with Parliament alone.