

KS4: The European Parliament



Part 1

What it does

The Parliament is the single directly elected group in the EU government. Its job is to debate ideas put forward by the Commission and in co-operation with the Council of Ministers decide what should be made law.

In some ways it's just like any other parliament in a member state:

- Its members are elected,
- There are political parties,
- It votes on proposed new laws.

In other ways it's different.

In other parliaments, the largest party or a group of parties, forms the government. Parliament passes all laws and can propose laws.

The European Parliament doesn't form a government and there is therefore no party or parties of government. It can't make laws on its own. It works in conjunction with the Council of Ministers.

The Parliament also approves the appointment of the Commissioners who run the Commission

The Parliament meets in two places: in Strasbourg when it votes on draft laws as a parliament, in Brussels for committee work.

In full sessions of Parliament MEPs speak in their own language. Simultaneous interpretation is provided in all 23 official languages.

Part 2

Who the members are

There are 736 members. They are called MEPs (Members of the European Parliament).

The number from each member country is broadly in proportion to size of population. The UK has 72.

They are elected for a period of five years. The next election will be in June 2014.

There are five main political groups:

- The European Peoples Party (EPP). These people think rather like British Conservatives.
- The Party of European Socialists, similar to the British Labour Party.
- The Alliance of Liberal Democrats for Europe, similar to our Liberal Democrats.
- The European Green Party, similar to our Green Party.
- And a newly formed group called European Conservatives and Reformists. They are against giving any more power to Brussels.

The Parliament elects one of its members as President of the Parliament. The President chairs debates and signs most new laws.

The President is elected from one of the two major parties. He or she holds the job for two and a half years.

The current President is Jerzy Buzek, former prime minister of Poland, and a member of the EPP.