

The development of political groups of the European Parliament

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The development of political groups in the European Parliament

Before the 1979 direct elections

The Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) did not provide for political groups. Only national delegations attended the first session of the Common Assembly. However, Members very soon ignored national boundaries and began congregating in accordance with their political allegiance. This led to the formation of political groups.

On 16 June 1953, a vote in the Common Assembly approved their official existence. A new article added to the Assembly's Rules of Procedure authorised their formation under very liberal conditions: groups were constituted after a declaration giving the name of the group, the signatures of its Members and information about its Bureau was submitted to the President of the Assembly. The minimum number of Members required to form a political group was nine.

That article was integrated into the European Parliamentary Assembly's Rules of Procedure in 1958, the only difference being that the minimum number of members was altered to 17.

The first three groups formed, in order of size, were:

- Christian Democrats,
- Socialists,
- Liberals.

The number and names of the political groups have varied over the years as new political trends have emerged and new States have acceded to the European Communities.

In 1965 a fourth, new group was formed: the European Democratic Union, following the separation of the French Gaullists from the Liberals.

In 1973, following the accession of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, the British Conservative Party formed a new group: the European Conservative Group.

The European Democratic Union became the European Progressive Democrats when the French Gaullists were joined by Members of the Irish *Fianna Fáil* party.

A Communist Group was also formed.

The Socialists had almost as many Members as the Christian Democrats.

In 1975, the Socialist Group became the largest in number.

Before the first elections by direct universal suffrage (1979), the six groups, in order of size, were:

- Socialists,
- Christian Democrats,
- Liberals,
- European Progressive Democrats,
- European Conservatives,
- Communists.

After the 1979 direct elections

Between 1979 and 2004, the number of Members in the European Parliament increased from 410 to 732 as a result of successive enlargements of the European Union.

The number of political groups has hardly changed. From 7 in 1979, it increased to 10 in 1989 only to drop down to 7 again after the most recent elections in 2004.

1. The first elections by direct universal suffrage (1979)

The number of Members practically doubled from 198 to 410.

The Christian Democrats, who became the European People's Party (EPP) (108 Members), came second behind the Socialists (112 Members).

The European Conservative Group, who became the European Democrats (not to be confused with the European Progressive Democrats of 1973), held third place (64 Members), and the Communists (the Communist and Allies Group) were fourth (44 Members).

2. The 1984 elections

The Socialists were still the largest in number (130 Members), followed by the EPP (110 Members), the European Democrats (50 Members) and the Communists (41 Members).

Members of the French National Front and the Italian Social Movement formed an eighth group, the Group of the European Right (16 Members).

In 1986, with the accession of Spain and Portugal, the Socialist Group gained 42 more Members.

The group of European Progressive Democrats renamed itself the Group of the European Democratic Alliance.

3. The 1989 elections

The two largest groups, the Socialists (180 Members) and the EPP (121 Members) increased in number.

The Group of the Greens was formed (30 Members).

The Communist and Allies Group split into two separate groups: the Group for the European Unitarian Left (GUE) (28 Members) and the Left Unity Group (CG) (14 Members).

The remaining groups had a limited number of Members: the European Liberal Democratic and Reformist Group (LDR) (49 Members), the European Democratic Group (ED) (34 Members), the Group of the European Democratic Alliance (EDA) (20 Members), the Group of the European Right (ER) (17 Members) and the Rainbow Group (13 Members).

Between 1989 and 1994, the Socialists and the EPP accounted for 69 % of MEPs.

4. The 1994 elections

The Group of the Party of European Socialists (PES) (198 Members) and the EPP (157 Members) occupied the same seats, but, because of enlargement, the percentage fell from 69 % to 63 %.

The Liberals (43 Members), the Greens (23 Members) and the European Democratic Alliance (26 Members)

were reconstituted as political groups.

Four new groups were formed:

- European Radical Alliance (ERA) (19 Members),
- Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) (19 Members),
- Confederal Group of the European United Left (GUE) (28 Members), not to be confused with the GUE group of 1989,
- *Forza Europa* (FE) (27 Members).

There were also a significant number (27) of non-attached Members.

With the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995, the number of Members in the groups changed once again: PES (221 Members), EPP (173 Members), Liberals (52 Members), GUE (31 Members) and the Greens (25 Members).

5. The 1999 elections

The EPP group became the EPP-ED (Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats). For the first time since elections by direct universal suffrage began, it became the largest group with 233 Members, relegating the PES to second place (180 Members).

The Liberals took third place (50 Members) followed by the Greens (48 Members).

The number of non-attached Members (27) was the same as in 1994.

6. The 2004 elections

Following the May 2004 enlargement, 162 new Members entered Parliament and joined the groups already present.

Since the June 2004 elections, the EPP-ED has been the largest group with 268 Members, followed by the PES with 200 Members.

The Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), made up of the parties that joined the liberal group in 1999 and of a number of parties that joined the EPP in the same year, comprises 88 Members.

The Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance comprises 42 Members, the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) 41, and the Eurosceptic group IND-DEM, which replaces the EDD Group of the preceding legislature, 37.

There has not been a noticeable increase in the number of non-attached Members (29).

Last group of all, in terms of numbers, come the 27 Members of the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN).

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007 led to the creation of an eighth group that brought together various currents within the extreme right. The Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group (ITS) included 20 Members from 7 Member States. This group disappeared on 14 November 2007 following the departure of five of its members.