

Organisation of the European Parliament

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Organisation of the European Parliament

The governing bodies of the ECSC Common Assembly

Article 23 of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 18 April 1951 laid down that the Assembly was to elect its President and officers from among its Members.

The Bureau of the Common Assembly consisted of a President and five Vice-Presidents who were elected by secret ballot at the opening of each ordinary session.

The Rules of Procedure of the Assembly also provided for a Committee of Presidents. This was made up of the President of the Assembly, who chaired the Committee, the Vice-Presidents and the chairmen of the general committees. It was convened in order to review the order of business set by the President and to draw up a draft agenda for sessions.

The governing bodies of the European Parliamentary Assembly

In its Rules of Procedure, the European Parliamentary Assembly, founded when the Rome Treaties came into force on 25 March 1957, laid down provisions governing the Bureau responsible for supervising its activities. It consisted of a President and eight Vice-Presidents.

The Bureau had two main functions:

(a) It acted as the supreme administrative body. It appointed the Secretary-General, determined the composition and organisation of the Secretariat, the number of civil servants, and internal financial regulations.

(b) It played a role in the setting up of committees.

The Rules of Procedure assigned a very important administrative, procedural and disciplinary role to the President of the Assembly.

The President was assisted in preparing the session agendas by a Committee of Presidents. This consisted of the President of the Assembly, who chaired the Committee, the Vice-Presidents, the committee chairmen and the political group chairmen.

The Assembly was assisted by a Secretary-General who was appointed by the Bureau. He was solely responsible for the smooth running of the administrative services and for the management of the Secretariat, the composition and organisation of which were determined by the Bureau.

The governing bodies of the European Parliament

In terms of its organisational structure, the European Parliament is the descendant of the European Parliamentary Assembly, albeit with several changes made to cope with the main changes in the development of the Community. According to the Rules of Procedure in force in February 2008, Parliament's governing bodies are as follows:

- the Bureau,
- the Conference of Presidents,
- the Conference of Committee Chairmen,
- the Conference of Delegation Chairmen.

(a) The Bureau

The Bureau consists of the President and the 14 Vice-Presidents of Parliament. The Quaestors are members in an advisory capacity. The main duties of the Bureau are:

- to take financial, organisational and administrative decisions on matters concerning Members and the internal organisation of Parliament, its Secretariat and its bodies, as well as on matters relating to the conduct of sittings,
- to decide the establishment plan of the Secretariat and lay down regulations relating to the administrative and financial situation of officials and other servants,
- to draw up Parliament's preliminary draft estimates,
- to appoint the Secretary-General,
- to lay down the implementing rules relating to the European Parliament and Council Regulation on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding.

The President directs all the activities of Parliament and its bodies. He presides over the proceedings of Parliament and ensures that they are properly conducted. The duties of the President are to open, suspend and close sittings, to ensure observance of the Rules of Procedure, maintain order, call upon speakers, close debates, put matters to the vote and announce the results of votes. The President represents the institution in international relations, on ceremonial occasions and in administrative, legal or financial matters. Should the President be absent, unable to discharge his duties, or should he wish to take part in a debate, he is replaced by one of the Vice-Presidents.

The Quaestors are responsible for administrative and financial matters concerning Members, pursuant to guidelines laid down by the Bureau.

Elected by Parliament, the term of office of the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors is two and a half years.

(b) The Conference of Presidents

The Conference of Presidents consists of the President of Parliament and the chairmen of the political groups. Non-attached Members delegate one of their number to attend meetings, without having the right to vote.

The Conference of Presidents is the body responsible in particular for organising parliamentary activities, for matters dealing with relations with other European Union bodies and institutions, with the national parliaments of Member States and with non-member countries and with non-Union organisations. It is also responsible for drawing up the draft agenda of Parliament's part-sessions.

(c) Conference of Committee Chairmen

The Conference of Committee Chairmen consists of the chairmen of all standing or temporary committees. It makes recommendations to the Conference of Presidents about the work of committees and the drafting of the agenda of part-sessions.

(d) Conference of Delegation Chairmen

The Conference of Delegation Chairmen consists of the chairmen of all standing interparliamentary delegations. It makes recommendations to the Conference of Presidents about the work of delegations.

The Parliamentary Committees

Parliament sets up **standing committees**, whose powers are defined in an annex to the Rules of Procedure (Annex VI). Their members are elected during the first part-session following the re-election of Parliament and again two and a half years thereafter.

Parliament may set up **temporary committees**, whose powers are defined at the same time as the decision to set them up is taken. It may also set up **committees of inquiry** to investigate alleged contraventions of Community law or alleged maladministration in its application.

In addition, any standing or temporary committee may appoint one or more **subcommittees** in the interests of its work and subject to prior authorisation by the Conference of Presidents.

Interparliamentary delegations

Parliament sets up **standing interparliamentary delegations**. The number of members varies according to their duties. They are elected during the first or second part-session following the re-election of Parliament for the duration of the parliamentary term. Parliament determines the general powers of the individual delegations.

The European Parliament may set up **joint parliamentary committees** with the parliaments of States associated with the Community or States with which accession negotiations have been initiated. The general responsibilities of the various committees are defined by the European Parliament and by the agreements with the third countries.

Political groups

The number of political groups represented in the 2004 elected European Parliament is seven. In Parliament's Rules of Procedure in force in February 2008, the minimum number of Members required to form a political group is 20 Members. A political group must comprise Members elected in at least one-fifth of the Member States.

The political groups are provided with a secretariat on the basis of the establishment plan of the Secretariat, administrative facilities and the appropriations entered for that purpose in Parliament's budget.

Members who do not belong to a political group (non-attached Members) are provided with a secretariat. The Bureau determines their status and parliamentary rights.

Political groups play a role in putting forward candidates for the post of President of the European Parliament and for the posts of Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, in determining the composition of committees and delegations, in appointing rapporteurs and in organising parliamentary activities in general.

European political parties

The first European federations of political parties only emerged in the 1970s, largely as a result of the holding of the first European elections by direct universal suffrage in 1979.

The 1992 Treaty of Maastricht recognises the importance of 'political parties at European level' as a factor for integration within the Union and emphasises their contribution to the forming of a European awareness and to the expression of the political will of EU citizens [Article 191 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (EC)].

For the first time, the status and funding of European political parties are laid down, in accordance with the codecision procedure, by Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003, as last amended by Regulation (EC) No 1524/2007 of 18 December 2007.

This Regulation states that a European political party is defined as a political party or an alliance of political parties recognised by the legal order of at least one Member State and must satisfy the following conditions:

- (a) it must have legal personality in the Member State in which its seat is located;
- (b) it must be represented, in at least one quarter of Member States, by Members of the European Parliament or in the national Parliaments or regional Parliaments or in the regional assemblies, or
it must have received, in at least one quarter of the Member States, at least 3 % of the votes cast in each of those Member States at the most recent European Parliament elections;
- (c) it must observe, in particular in its programme and in its activities, the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law;
- (d) it must have participated in elections to the European Parliament, or have expressed the intention to do so.

The European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR), the European Democratic Party (EDP), the European Green Party (EGP) and the Party of the European Left (EL) are some examples of parties which have been formed at European level.

They should not be confused with political groups in the European Parliament. These play a specific role within the institution and are formed solely of Members of the European Parliament who may belong to different European political parties.