



Facts about the European Parliament Elections 2009

When are the Elections?

The European Parliament Elections take place over a period of 4 days from 4 to 7 June 2009. This will be the 7th time that the European Parliament is directly elected by the citizens of Europe. This will be the largest ever transnational democratic election in history, electing over 700 Members of the European Parliament to represent some 515 million EU citizens¹.

The reason that there is a period of 4 days for these elections (as has been the case in previous European Parliament Elections) is that different countries vote on different days of the week.

In some countries the European Parliament Elections will be taking place at the same time as other elections; so you may be voting for your Members of the European Parliament and other things (such as local Councillors, regional representatives or, as in one case, possibly a referendum on a national issue).

How are the Members of the European Parliament elected?

Originally back in 1957 when the European Union (which was then called the European Economic Community) was founded, the members of the European Parliament were appointed by the national parliaments. But the founding treaty (called the Treaty of Rome) did make provision for direct elections and the first time such direct elections took place was 1979. The Maastricht Treaty, agreed in 1992, provides for a uniform procedure to be adopted for the elections in all Member States. The European Parliament was charged with drawing up proposals for this and this was to be agreed by the Council on the basis of unanimity. This proved impossible despite several attempts of the European Parliament. The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999 therefore agreed that there could be common principles for the elections rather than a uniform procedure. Two principles were agreed: one, that the elections had to be based on proportional representation (either a list system or the single transferable vote) and that a mandate in the European Parliament was incompatible with a mandate in a national parliament.

As a result, all Members of the European Parliament are elected on the basis of proportional representation. Some Member States have constituencies and some don't; in the latter group, each MEP is elected for the whole country (see below).

How is the Parliament constituted?

How many MEPs are there - by country?

Each country has a certain number of MEPs, depending on its size. In the current European Parliament, sitting from 2004 to 2009, there are 785 seats.

The Lisbon Treaty, which is currently undergoing ratification, changes the number of seats in the European Parliament. But so did the Nice Treaty, which is the current Treaty in force. However, the numbers of MEPs under the Nice Treaty and under the Lisbon Treaty and under the current allocation are three different numbers. Because it is not clear whether the Lisbon Treaty will be ratified by the time the elections take place, it is as yet unclear how many MEPs will be elected. The following table shows the different possibilities and the current allocation (for comparison only).

¹ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Parliament_election,_2009 accessed on 17 November 2008

Member State	current allocation	Nice Treaty	Lisbon Treaty	Change
Germany	99	99	96	-3
France	78	72	74	2
Italy	78	72	73	1
United Kingdom	78	72	73	1
Spain	54	50	54	4
Poland	54	50	51	1
Romania	35	33	33	0
Netherlands	27	25	26	1
Belgium	24	22	22	0
Czech Republic	24	22	22	0
Greece	24	22	22	0
Hungary	24	22	22	0
Portugal	24	22	22	0
Sweden	19	18	20	2
Austria	18	17	19	2
Bulgaria	18	17	18	1
Finland	14	13	13	0
Denmark	14	13	13	0
Slovakia	14	13	13	0
Ireland	13	12	12	0
Lithuania	13	12	12	0
Latvia	9	8	9	1
Slovenia	7	7	8	1
Cyprus	6	6	6	0
Estonia	6	6	6	0
Luxembourg	6	6	6	0
Malta	5	5	6	1
Total	785	736	751	15

The current allocation of seats is the one scenario that won't happen. So the comparison in terms of the change that will happen needs to be between the Nice and the Lisbon Treaty. The table clearly shows that there is only one country that will lose seats: Germany; there are 14 which will see no change, 8 which would gain 1 seat through the Lisbon Treaty, three that would gain 2 seats and one, Spain, which would gain 4.

Party Politics in the European Parliament

Members of the European Parliament, though elected at national level, represent political parties as is the case in local, regional and national elections. In the European Parliament, these political parties which (with the exception of the Green Parties in Europe) exist in reality only within each Member State, are grouped into what is referred to as 'political groups'. Each group will have among them parties from a number of Member States, though not all of them have Member States represented. Sometimes the political spectrum within a group can be quite wide, however, because of the different perspectives of political parties in different Member States.

Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats (PPE-DE) (288)
Socialist Group in the European Parliament (PSE) (217)
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) (100)
Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) (43)
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Verts/ALE) (43)
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) (41)
Independence/Democracy Group (ID) (22)
Non-attached (NI) (31)

The groups are listed here in the order of their size in the current Parliament, except for the Non-attached MEPs. Each group contains a number of different political parties from different Member States, though not all groups have members from all Member States and in their campaign literature candidates are most likely to show both the political group at European level and the Political Party at national level to which they belong. Some of the groups may have more than one Political Party from a particular country in membership.

A fuller analysis of which political parties at national level are in which political group at European Parliament level can be found in a separate document on this website: [Political Groups in the European Parliament and their Parties](#) (pdf).

This analysis shows that the political divisions, which at national level can seem quite clear, become a little more blurred in the European Parliament. Not only do all of the political groups in the European Parliament have at least some countries where their members come from different political parties, but there are also some cases where the same political party in a Member State has MEPs in different political groups. There are only a few cases of this and they are listed below:

Country	Party	Political Group A	Political Group B
Italy	Partito Democratico	PES	ALDE
Poland	Liga Polskich Rodzin	ID	NI
Poland	Platforma Obywatelska	EPP-ED	ALDE
Poland	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe	EPP-ED	UEN
United Kingdom	Conservative and Unionist Party	EPP-ED	NI
United Kingdom	UK Independence Party	ID	NI

Even more interestingly, there are 8 MEPs who describe themselves as Independent but they can be found not only in the NI group (where one would expect them) but also in the GUE/NGL, Green, ID, UEN, ALDE, and PES groups. Furthermore, 13 MEPS in the current European Parliament who do not show a national party on their profile are also distributed among a number of the political groups including ALDE, UEN, EPP-ED, PES and ID; none of these is in the NI group.

A further complication is that the political position on key issues (including the question of how much Europe, how federal a Europe and what aspects of politics should be located at European level) of parties from different Member States within one political group can vary widely. One of the more obvious examples is the EPP-ED which includes for example a pro-European party such as the Christian Democrats from Germany and a profoundly eurosceptic party such as the Conservative and Unionist Party from the UK.

What may be concluded from this is that the political landscape in the European Parliament is more complex than in most Member States, that the political groups within them have forces driving them in slightly (or even extremely) different directions and that consensus building in that environment is difficult.

New developments in the political landscape

As can be seen from the analysis above, there are no real European political parties although the Greens formed the European Greens for the 2004 elections in order to campaign on the basis of a joint manifesto. Nonetheless, their MEPs still show in their profile the national level party of which they are members.

There are a number of newer groups which have evolved since the last European Parliament elections in 2004 which are aiming to campaign in the 2009 elections. According to Wikipedia the following groups fall into this category:

NewEuropeans - info at: <http://www.newropeans.eu/index.php?lang=en>

Europe United - info at: <http://europeunited.eu/modules/start/>

Europe - Democracy - Esperanto - info at: <http://e-d-e.org/?lang=en>

Libertas - info at: <http://www.libertas.org/>

Future briefing papers in this series will report in more detail on these new initiatives and what they stand for politically. Whether there will be candidates from these 'European lists' in any given country or constituency is not known at this stage as candidates do not have to come forward until nearer the time of the election.

How do I find my MEP

This question relates to the issue of Constituency Boundaries. This varies from one country to another. It is possible to see from the way in which the MEPs are grouped on the European Parliament website whether they represent constituencies or the country as a whole. The information extracted from this source at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members.do?language=en> shows the following:

Approach	Countries adopting this approach
Single Constituency - i.e. all MEPs are elected at national level from one unified national list	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden.
Defined Constituencies in which a number of MEPs are elected	Belgium 4 Finland 4 Ireland 4 Italy 5 United Kingdom and Northern Ireland 12
Parties can decide whether to opt for a national list or lists at the level of the 16 federal states	Germany 16

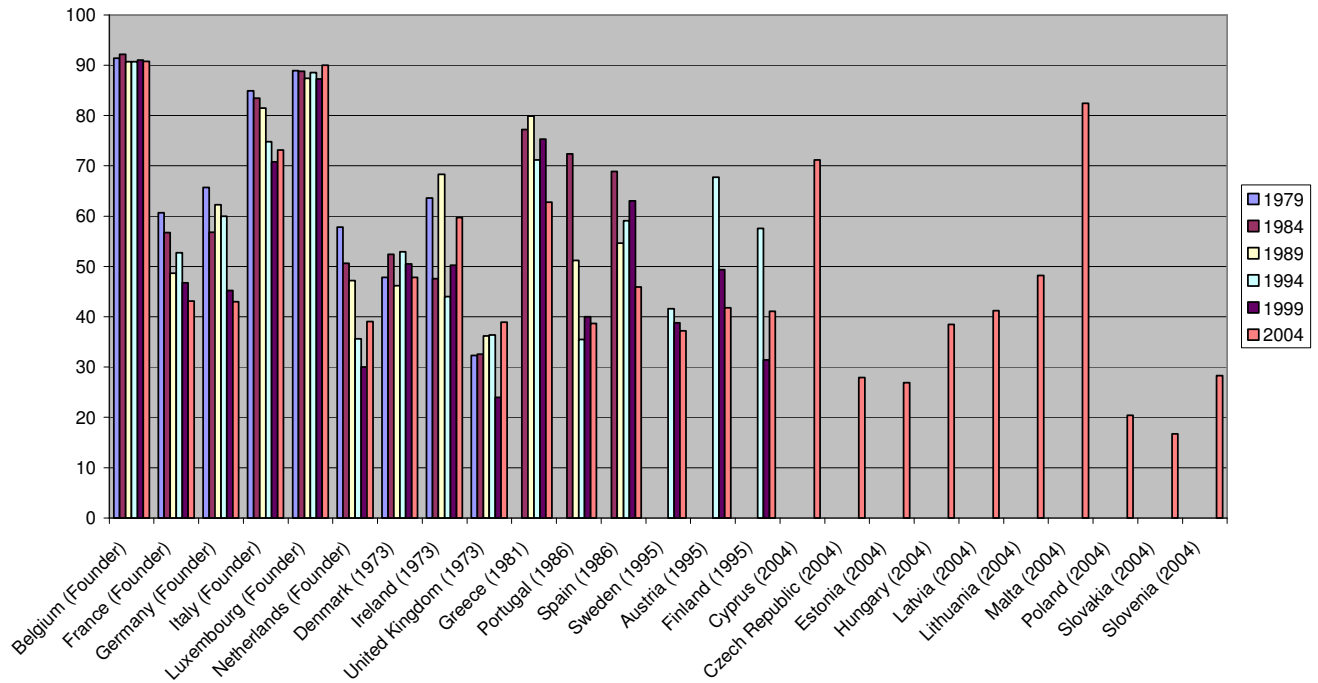
Voter Turnout

How seriously do European citizens take the elections to the European Parliament? And what does that say about the democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament?

The graph below shows the turnout at European Parliament elections² since the first direct elections in 1979. This represents 5 elections.

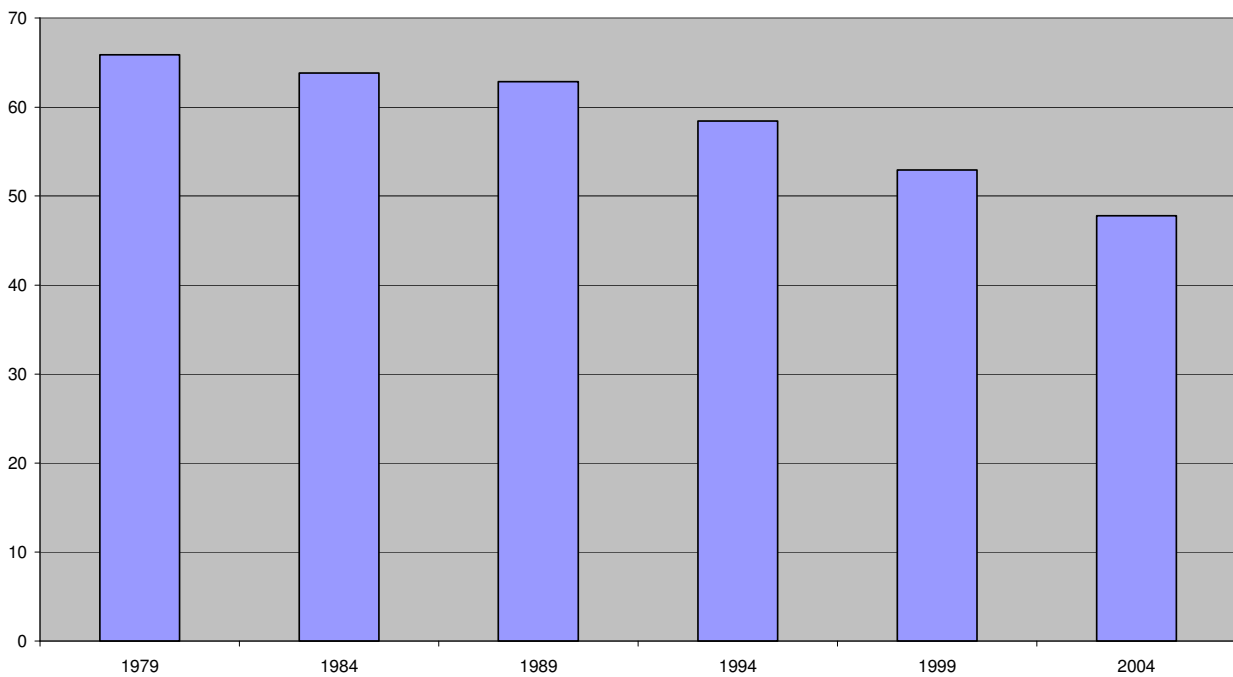
² The information on which these graphs are based are from: EurActiv accessed at: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/european-elections-outlook-2009/article-174694> on 25 November 2008

**Voter Turnout 1979 to 2004 European Elections
By Member State**



The second graph below shows the trend in terms of the average turnout for all Member States for the same period.

Average Voter Turnout - All Member States - European Elections



The graphs show an overall downward trend which is linear in terms of the average but where there are a number of ups and downs in individual Member States. Graphs showing the trend for different groups of Member States separately can be found on our website in the document called [Voter Turnout Detail](#) (pdf).

How can you become more involved?

The first thing that is important in any election is to find out who is standing for election and what they think about European issues that matter to you. QCEA will be providing further briefing material on issues we are working on together with advocacy messages that you might want to raise with candidates.

Finding out the names of MEPs is not difficult. All MEPs are listed on the website of the European Parliament, and the websites of the national information offices of the European Parliament in the Member States also have this information.

The information offices of the European Parliament in the Member States have websites and actual offices where you can find out relevant information for your country. The website addresses are:

Member State	Website
Austria	http://www.euoparl.at/
Belgium	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/brussels/
Bulgaria	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/sofia/
Cyprus	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/nicosia/
Czech Republic	http://www.evropsky-parlament.cz/
Denmark	http://www.euoparl.dk/
Estonia	http://www.euoparl.ee/
Finland	http://www.euoparl.fi/
France	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/paris/
Germany	http://www.euoparl.de/
Greece	http://www.euoparl.gr/
Hungary	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/budapest/
Ireland	http://www.euoparl.ie/
Italy	http://www.euoparl.it/
Latvia	http://www.euoparl.lv/riga/
Lithuania	http://www.euoparl.lt/
Luxembourg (no website)	Maison de l'Europe 7, Rue du Marché-aux-Herbes L-1728 Luxembourg Phone +352 / 4300 22597 Fax +352 / 4300 22457
Malta	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/valletta/
Netherlands	http://www.euopeesparlement.nl/
Poland	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/warszawa/
Portugal	http://www.parleurop.pt/PortalWeb_Parlamento/
Romania	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/bucuresti/
Slovakia	http://www.euopskyparlament.sk/
Slovenia	http://www.euoparl.si/
Spain	http://www.euoparl.es/
Sweden	http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/stockholm/
United Kingdom	http://www.euoparl.org.uk/index.htm

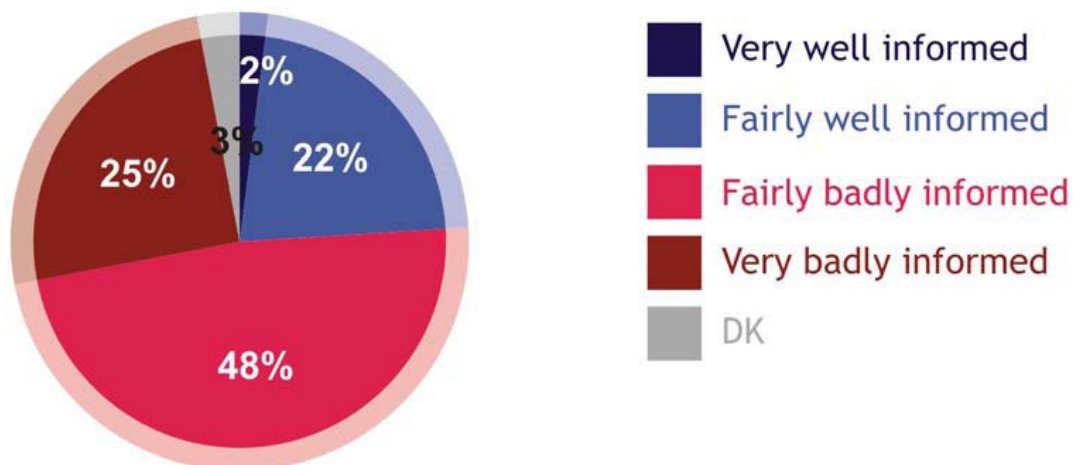
These websites and offices will have information about the candidates as it becomes available and they will also have information available about the elections and the election process in the Member State concerned. Our experience with the office in the UK has been that they are most helpful and pleased to hear from members of the voting public. Their concern is that the turnout increases to provide a degree of legitimacy to the exercise. Given that the turnout was on average below 50% in 2004, there is work to do.

Generally, the public in all the Member States is not terribly well informed about the European Parliament and about the forthcoming elections. QCEA recommends that Friends encourage people to vote; from our point of view this is not about party politics (i.e. who anyone votes for) but about political responsibility and accountability (i.e. that people vote and that those elected have a proper mandate for the next 5 years for their role in the European Parliament. To quote from Britain Yearly Meeting's Advices and Queries (34):

Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.³

The European Parliament Election campaign is an opportunity for citizens to inform themselves better of the activities, the role, the constitution and the significance of the European Parliament. Given the results of a Eurobarometer survey carried out late in 2007 and published in March 2008, this is necessary. The results in the graph below speak for themselves⁴:

Question: QB4. In general, do you consider that you are very well, fairly well, fairly badly or very badly informed about the European Parliament's activities?



Some or all of the political parties may hold public meetings in different villages, towns and cities. There may also be public debates between candidates from different political parties arranged by NGOs or others. Local radio and TV stations may also have debates in their programmes. If there are no such initiatives in your area, there is always the possibility of organising such a public debate. Other briefing papers in this series due to be published in early 2009 will provide some guidance about the issues that might be raised at such events.

³ Religious Society of Friends, Britain Yearly Meeting, Quaker Faith and Practice, section 1.02 (34)

⁴ Eurobarometer, Special Report 288, The European Parliament, March 2008, accessed at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_288_en.pdf on 25 November 2008