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European Parliament: peculiarities, composition and internal organisation

I. Peculiarities of the European Parliament

The European Parliament is one of the main institutions of the European Union. It is the assembly where the representatives of the citizens of the Member States of the European Union meet.

It has been elected by direct universal suffrage since 1979. Although there is no single electoral procedure throughout the Union, elections are held between a Thursday and a Sunday of the same week every five years (Art. 223.1, §1 TFEU). In Spain, the procedure is regulated by the Organic Law on the General Electoral System (*Ley Orgánica de Régimen Electoral General*).

The European Parliament is the embodiment of the democratic principle in the European institutional structure (art. 10 TEU). It is considered a special parliament, neither national nor international. On the one hand, it is the assembly of an international organisation, but with greater powers. It is composed of representatives of the citizens of the Union who are



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organised by political ideology rather than by nationality, as is usually the case in international organisations.

On the other hand, it enjoys fewer powers than a national parliament. For example, its competence in the normative function is shared. The ordinary legislative procedure requires co-decision between the Parliament and the Council. It also has limited powers to exercise political control, as it can only bring a motion of censure against the Commission, but not against other institutions such as the Council or the European Council, whose legitimacy lies with their electors at the national level.

II. Composition

The European Parliament is composed of members known as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), elected for a five-year term (art. 12.2-4 TEU).

The composition of the European Parliament has varied throughout the history of the European Union to ensure proportionality between Member States, as well as to take account of the various enlargement reforms.

Following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, it was established that the number of MEPs would not exceed 750 plus the President. However, this was subsequently modified by the accession of Croatia and the departure of the United Kingdom.

The table shows in red the total number of MEPs per Member State after the UK's exit.

As I noted earlier, in the European Parliament, MEPs are organised not by nationality, but in political groups that bring together representatives of different member states according to their political affinities.

According to Parliament's rules, a political group must be composed of at least 25 MEPs from at least a quarter of the Member States (i.e. seven). MEPs can belong to only one political group, but they can choose not to belong to any political group, in which case they are included in the so-called "non-attached" groups.

III. Internal organisation

Parliament enjoys considerable power of internal self-organisation under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which translates into the power to decide its own rules of procedure (art. 232 TFEU).

Its seat is threefold: plenary sessions are held in Strasbourg, including the budget session; additional sessions and parliamentary committees meet in Brussels; and the Parliament's Secretariat General is officially located in Luxembourg.

The organisational structure of the European Parliament is very complex. There are, very briefly, three types of bodies: the governing bodies, the committees and the political groups.

The leadership is ensured by the appointment from among its members of a President, a Bureau, fourteen Vice-Presidents, a College of Quaestors, and the

Conference of Presidents. This election takes place at the first session following the European elections.

The committees are of various types, such as standing committees, special committees, and committees of enquiry.

Finally, the political groups are, as mentioned above, the groupings into which the MEPs are grouped.



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