

1/3 – How are the Members of the European Parliament elected and what are their functions?

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By Thara Safi Couplet

On the eve of the 2019 European elections, Lighthouse Europe is offering a series of articles to help you understand how the European Parliament works and what are the challenges of this electoral period. The series is made up of three articles, published every Wednesday:

1/3 – How are the Members of the European Parliament elected and what are their functions?

2/3 – European political groups in Parliament

3/3 – Digital players at the heart of the European elections

► Organization of the elections

From **May 23 to 26**, European elections will be held in the 28 Member States of the European Union (EU). Since 1979, the "*representatives of the Union's citizens*"¹ have been elected by **direct universal suffrage** for a renewable **five-year term**. The last European elections were held in 2014. The **751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)** – then 705 following Brexit – are elected by **proportional representation** in order to best reflect the choice of Europeans. The citizens of each Member State appoint, according to national electoral rules, between 6 and 96 members of Parliament. For instance, on May 26 France will elect **79 MEPs**. Five of them will take office only after the Brexit scheduled at the latest for October 31. French candidates are registered on their **party's national list**, which must obtain at least **5% of the votes cast** to be represented in the European Parliament.

► Powers of the European Parliament

The Parliament has three powers:

◆ The legislative power

Together with the Council of the European Union, the Parliament is the EU's legislative body. The two institutions **amend and then vote on law proposals by the European Commission**. This is the **ordinary legislative procedure** as defined by the [Treaty of Lisbon](#). The European Parliament first decides on the text, followed by the EU Council. If the latter does not agree with the opinion of the MEPs, Parliament shall proceed to a second reading of the text. It may adopt, reject or amend it. If Parliament amends

¹ Article 14(2) of the Treaty on European Union



it, the text is sent back to the Council, which approves it or convenes the Conciliation Committee (composed of Members and members of the Council) in the event of disagreement. This committee tries to find a text that will then be submitted for a third reading or definitively rejects the proposal. Following this last reading, the act is definitively adopted or rejected.

◆ **The budgetary power**

Each year the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union vote, on a proposal from the Commission, on the **EU's annual budget**. Each year before September 1, the Commission shall submit a draft budget to the Parliament and the Council. The latter has one month to forward it to Parliament's Committee on Budgets, which adopts or amends it. In the latter case, the draft is referred to the Council for adoption. In case of refusal, the Conciliation Committee shall meet to reach an agreement. If this step does not allow the budget to be adopted, the European Commission has to propose a new draft budget.

◆ **The power of supervision**

One of the Parliament's function is to supervise and control the other institutions. Among their responsibilities, MEPs approve **the composition of the Commission**, the EU's executive body. The European elections thus have an impact on the formation of the European Commission since the MEPs must agree on the college of European Commissioners. On a proposal of the European Council, the MEPs shall appoint the **President of the Commission**. The European Council must consider the results of the European elections to reinforce the legitimacy of the President.

The President of the European Commission is elected from a list of candidates or "**Spitzenkandidaten**", nominated by each party before the elections. Candidates selected in primaries are eligible for this position, allowing European citizens to know, before they vote, which candidates could potentially be the future European Commission President. Jean-Claude Juncker was the "**Spitzenkandidaten**" of the European People's Party (EPP), the leading party at the last European elections. This procedure is not legally binding, but could, as in 2014, contribute to the appointment of the President of the future Commission.

Below are some **key dates** for the European Parliament:

May 23-26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elections of Members of Parliament in each Member State
May 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start of negotiations on the formation of European political groups
July 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First plenary session of the new European Parliament• Election of the President of the European Parliament
July 8-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Validation of the composition of Parliament's committees
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appointment of the President of the European Commission
October 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assumed date of the Brexit
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Validation of the composition of the Commission by Members of Parliament