



# European Elections

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European  
Movement  
International

Posted by: **European Movement International**



In the run-up to the European Parliament elections in 2014, the European Movement International (EMI), starting as early as 2009, advocated for transnational lists, ‘spitzenkandidaten’, European-wide election manifestos, lowering the voting age to 16, and generally, making the European democratic process more participatory. Shortly after the elections, these proposals were compiled and translated into a comprehensive Policy Position on European Political Parties and Electoral Reform. EMI has subsequently engaged in various advocacy actions directed towards the European Parliament and with the 2019 elections on the horizon, is seeking to renew and reinvigorate its approach to improving European democracy.

EMI continues to campaign for reform of the European political system towards greater democratic participation in general. We hope that the current discussion about this reform will inspire ideas and produce innovations that will strengthen our democracy. We stand ready to inform the big debates of our time, involve citizens and stakeholders in the decisions that affect them and influence the direction our Union takes.

EMI supports the adoption of the latest resolution on a composition of the European Parliament that establishes a new allocation of seats in the

Parliament and opens the way for the ‘spitzenkandidaten’ process during the 2019 elections.

## Composition of the European Parliament

### Vote Breakdown



**292** votes required to pass.

*The resolution was voted on 7 February 2018 and passed with 400 votes in favour. Responsible co-rapporteurs were Danuta Maria Hübner (EPP) and Pedro Silva Pereira (S&D).*

## Key issues

### Electoral reform

Following the start of the new legislature, in 2015 the Committee on Constitutional Affairs published a new own-initiative report on Electoral Reform for More Transparent and More ‘European’ Elections. Co-rapporteurs Danuta Hübner (EPP, Poland) and Jo Leinen (S&D, Germany) led the effort to amend the electoral act, which was already unsuccessfully attempted with the 2011 own-initiative report from rapporteur Andrew Duff (ALDE, United Kingdom).

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The report on the [Reform of the Electoral Law of the European Union](#) (Leinen

and Hubner) was adopted by the European Parliament in November 2015 and included the following proposals for changing the 1976 European electoral act:

- Visibility of European Political Parties on ballot papers;
- Common deadline for nomination of candidates by national parties and nomination of lead candidates by European political parties;
- A joint ending day and time of the electoral period;
- Allowing all EU citizens to vote for the European Parliament elections, respective of their place of residence or citizenship.

You can read the detailed analysis of the vote [here](#).

The issue of electoral reform was also raised by rapporteur Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, Belgium) in the [Report on Possible Evolutions and Adjustments of the Current Institutional Set Up of the European Union](#) adopted in February 2017. The report repeats the call for formalising the process of lead candidates and the extension of electoral rights.

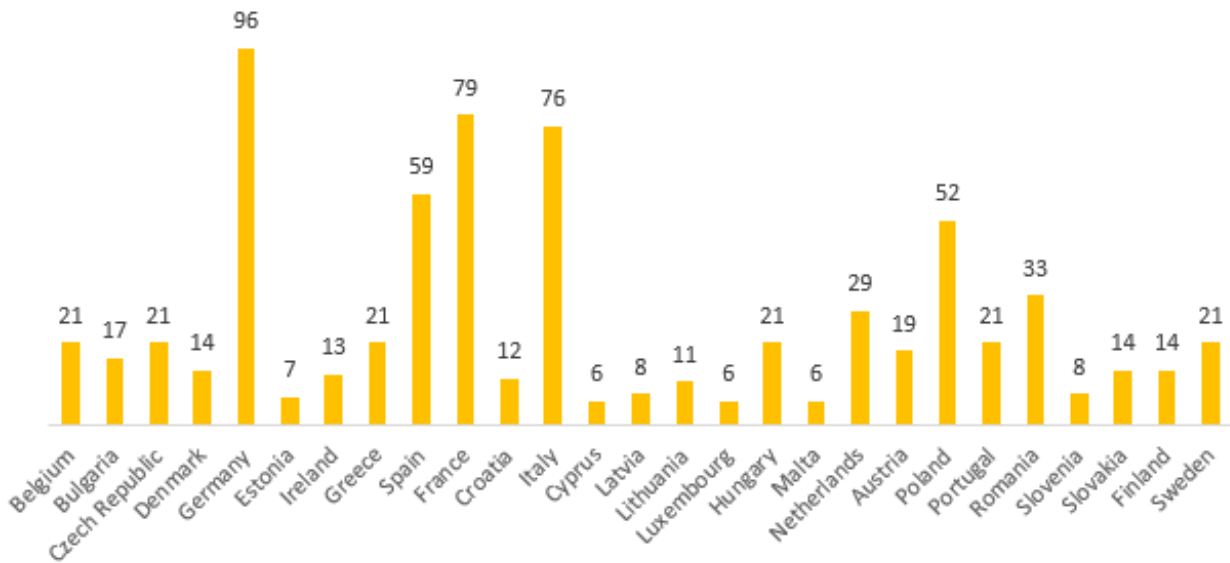
As part of a further development of the reform, a resolution on the composition of European Parliament was adopted in February 2018. The resolution covered a vast array of issues, such as the after-Brexit allocation of seats in the EP, introduction of transnational lists and ‘spitzenkandidaten’ process.

Since the current allocation of seats in the European Parliament only applies to the 2014-2019 parliamentary term, it was essential to start the process of preparing a new decision on the composition of the European Parliament for the 2019-2024 parliamentary term. According to a resolution, 73 seats vacated upon the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union will facilitate the adoption of a new allocation of seats based on the principle of degressive proportionality. The new allocation would allow for a reduction in the number of MEPs from 751 to 705. This would leave 46 seats for the potential future members of the EU.

The number of representatives in the EP from each Member State for the next parliamentary term will be as follows:

## **Number of Representatives in the European**

## Parliament per Member State



You can find more information on the resolution on the composition of the European Parliament [here](#) and [here](#). You can also view [the legislative train](#) of the 2015 Report of the Electoral Law of the EU.

### Transnational lists

The proposal for a transnational list, which would compliment existing national lists and have candidates compete for European seats in the European Parliament, was discussed both in the context of the Leinen/Hübner and the Verhofstadt reports but because of a failure to gain majority support for the move, was not included in either report.

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The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union by March 2019 has however reopened the debate on the division of seats in the European Parliament. In preparation for the next elections, the European Parliament

adopted a resolution on the Composition of the European Parliament which included a decision on what to do with the 73 former UK seats. EU lawmakers rejected a proposal for transnational lists and instead decided to reduce the number of MEPs and to redistribute the vacant seats between existing Member States.

## Transnational Lists

### Vote Breakdown



You can find more information on transnational lists and analysis of the vote [here](#).

## Spitzenkandidaten

The European elections in 2014 saw the first experiment with 'Spitzenkandidaten' or lead candidates from the European political parties. The European Parliament and the European Commission encouraged the nomination of candidates for the post of President of the European Commission by the European political parties, and subsequently the nomination of the candidate of the winning party as President-elect of the European Commission.

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the practical arrangements

of lead candidates ahead of the elections and all parties nominated a lead candidate. The European Green Party even held an open primary to select its candidate. Though not supported by all Member States, the candidate of the winning party, Jean-Claude Juncker of the EPP, nevertheless became European Commission President. This happened by decision of national leaders in the European Council, which needed support of the majority of members of the European Parliament. This experiment did not necessitate any change to the European electoral act.

According to the [Resolution of 7 February 2018 on the Composition of the European Parliament](#), the lead candidate process may be repeated during the 2019 elections. This decision was also supported by a large majority of MEPs; a resolution was adopted by 457 votes to 200. Many hope that this will lead to the breakthrough of lead candidates and generate higher interest through media coverage, primaries, etc. The measure also has the potential to introduce greater diversity in the President selection process.

Despite all of the above, some national governments, including those of France and Eastern Europe still harbour suspicions about and openly oppose 'spitzenkandidaten.' Additionally, the leading candidate process has not been formally enshrined in EU treaties and is not legally binding in any way.

## **E-democracy**

Fostering citizens' participation in the European democratic process is a key objective of EMI, which is why we believe that another crucial part of the electoral reform should be dedicated toward the development of e-democracy tools. New opportunities presented by the proliferation of technological advances should be grasped to stimulate citizens' involvement in the democratic process. Together with 'offline' measures to improve citizens' participation, online engagement can contribute towards closing the perceived gap between the European Union on the one hand, and citizens and representative organisations on the other.

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In March 2017, the European Parliament adopted a report entitled [e-Democracy in the EU: potential and challenges](#). The report provides some general proposals for harnessing the potential benefits of e democracy. It suggests that e democracy tools can help foster more active citizenship and build trust by improving participation, transparency and accountability in decision-making. Nevertheless, the purpose of e-democracy is not to establish an alternative democratic system, nor can it ensure political participation on its own. It constitutes one of many tools that can be employed to enable and widen citizens' inclusion and facilitate democratic participation.

The adoption of this report was the first step towards achieving a more inclusive Europe. However, in order to ensure that the opportunities that technological progress offers are seized, the report has to be followed by concrete proposals and action plans, coupled with a willingness to act from all EU institutions.

## **Looking towards 2019**

### **What can be expected in terms of changes to the electoral procedures?**

With regards to electoral reform, negotiations between the Parliament and the Council on the report on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union have not progressed. The Council Working Party on General Affairs discussed the report several times after its adoption, but do not feel 'bound' by the EP proposal and many if not all of its key provisions seem unlikely to count on unanimity in the Council.

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In February 2018, the MEPs also voted against the introduction of **transnational lists**. It has become, however, a topic that re-emerges whenever electoral reform or the division of European Parliament seats is being discussed and is likely to attract further attention in future discussions on these issues. EMI supports the creation of a European joint constituency in the future. We believe it could help strengthen public engagement in the European democratic process, countering the low turnout at European elections, and encourage the European political parties to engage the citizens of the Union on European as well as national issues.

Regarding the '**Spitzenkandidaten**', the 2019 elections will possibly feature lead candidates of European political parties again. As all stakeholders begin formulating plans for the 2019 elections, this year will prove crucial in paving the way for another round of lead candidates and European-wide debates. Whereas European political parties are gearing up for selection of their lead candidates and consider holding European-wide primaries, Member States remain sceptical about the idea and have expressed a preference for picking the Commission President behind closed doors. Meanwhile, in the latest decision on the revision of the Framework Agreement on relations between the EP and the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament stated that they are ready to block any candidate for the President of the Commission if he or she is not nominated as a 'spitzenkandidat'.



## **How to make future elections more European and participatory?**

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- Further development of the 'spitzenkandidaten' process, including implementation of primaries on a regular basis;
- Adoption and use in national campaigns of European party programmes or manifestos by European political parties;
- Expansion of individual membership of European political parties;
- Enhanced coordination between the European political parties and the European parliamentary groups to create a closer link between the elections and the parliamentary work, and increase the accountability of MEPs to voters;
- A clear focus on European themes in the European elections, based on the European party programmes and selection of lead candidates;
- Making the affiliation of national parties with a European political party visible on the ballot paper and campaign materials;
- Increasing the presence of European political parties in media and public debates, also aided by the selection of lead candidates and European-wide used party programmes;
- The creation of a European constituency in addition to the national party lists and voting procedures;
- Selection of candidates for the European constituency by European political parties, to increase the connection between MEPs and their European political parties.

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**For more information on the European Movement Position on electoral reform, have a look at:**

[Statement in support of European electoral reform](#)

[2016 Policy Position Citizens' participation in the digital age: e-democracy](#)

[2014 Resolution on European Political Parties](#)

[EMI Policy Positions](#)

[Previous EMI resolutions \(on electoral reform\)](#)

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