THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

David Ramiro Troitiño
Tallinn University of Technology
Submitted on April 10, 2013
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7220/2029-4239.11.1

SUMMARY

The article covers the foundation, historical development, current situation and future of the European Parliament. The scientific analysis is based on a multidisciplinary approach with emphasis on the political role of the institution as it is starting to play a central role in the European integration. The future of the EU parliament is a key question for the future of the Union and is addressed by different proposals developed in this article.

KEYWORDS

European Parliament, subsidiarity, co-decision, future reforms.

INTRODUCTION

The European Parliament started with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. The first European Community had similar institutions to the current institutions of the European Union: a High Authority, similar to the European Commission, but more powerful; a Council, where the member states were represented, but it was less important than the current European Council; a Court of Justice; and a Common Assembly, the modern European Parliament. The members of the Assembly were chosen by the national parliaments, and normally according to the internal composition of the national parliaments. So, if a national parliament was composed 40 % of socialists and 60 % conservatives, the same percentage was sent to the Common Assembly. This system also worked for the Common Assembly of the European Economic Community, but with some exceptions. For example, the Italians did not send Communists to the Common Assembly, and hence were not respecting the composition of their national parliament.

---

1David Ramiro Troitiño, an associate professor, the Department of International Relations, Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration, Tallinn University of Technology. Research interest: European Union political issues. E-mail perdices57@yahoo.es. CV and publications: <https://www.etis.ee/portal/isikuCV.aspx?TextBoxName=david%20ramiro%20troitiino&PersonVID=60601&lang=en&FromUrl0=isikud.aspx>.
The creation of this Common Assembly was clearly a sign given by the architects of the Communities of the nature of European integration, the future State of Europe. According to their political beliefs, all political structure should have a Parliament as the expression of the democratic will of the European people. So, it was important to create a Common Assembly as an embryo of the future European Parliament, even when the power given to the new institution was merely of a consultancy nature. Further integration would give more power to the institution step by step until the creation of a full parliament with powers similar to those of the national parliaments, as the major institution of the European state.

This slow process is still presently halfway to its goal and has been working well in the sense that the current European Parliament has much more power, and has become one of the central institutions of the Union. Nevertheless, it has created confusion and distrust among European citizens. The role of the EP has changed from the former emptiness to the current importance, but it is still not as powerful as the national parliament, and many Europeans think that it is useless, just another institution for bureaucracy with no real power in their everyday lives. This situation could be changed by providing more information to the European people about the nature of the European building process and the role of the Parliament in it. Even though the study of European integration reveals the clear target of the creation of some kind of European state as the more likely future scenario, it seems forbidden to say so to European citizens, maybe because they would reject it, but would accept, on the other hand, smaller movements, smaller steps towards integration. It has become common practice to bring to the European public opinion the new achievements in the integration as a means in itself, and not as what they really are – further steps to the real means, the European state. It makes the resistance smaller and smoother; it clearly helps the idea of a European state, but it also creates problems of information. One of the biggest problems of the Union nowadays is the lack of information and understanding on the part of European citizens about the European institutions. The European Union is seen almost as an alien power located in nebula Brussels, far from citizens and their day-to-day problems and worries. It is clearly a dichotomy: not all the information can be given in order to advance integration, but at the same time more information is needed in order to bring the European Parliament closer to European people. Both necessities should be balanced, and the European Parliament could then become the central institution of the Union, or at least the key democratic institution of the European Union with influence over the organization and over European citizens.

3 Mainly following the neo-functionalist theory of European integration.
THE FIRST EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

After the years of a powerless Common Assembly with more consultative powers, the member states decided to increase the role of the Assembly by fully democratic European elections to choose the representatives of the European people. The first European elections took place in 1979. They were seen as a great step in European integration because it was the first time that people got involved in the process besides the enlargement referendums. It was the time when the Parliament became an active institution with members who were really believers in European integration, as Spinelli and his Crocodile group of federalists. The influence of the members of the Parliament who were actively looking for deeper integration and the consecution of the European state was huge in this first Parliament, as we saw when the plenary session voted to support the Spinelli plan for accelerating integration and hence supporting the creation of a European state. This influence can be felt still today, as the Parliament is an active institution in terms of integration, it is pursuing more power, as it sees itself as the central institution of the future state of Europe.

After the elections, the first president of the European Parliament was Simone Veil, a French survivor of Nazi concentration camps and the first woman to hold the presidency of the European Parliament. The elections increased the role of the Parliament in European society, as it became a more well-known institution because of the first political campaign on a European level.

Participation in the first European elections was the highest in European history, as 61.99% of the voters participated. But soon afterwards a big deception was felt by the European population with the Parliament, as the role of the EP was minor in the working system of the Union, and the federalists led by Spinelli soon clashed with the Council and lost their credibility as a real alternative to the power of the member states in the Union. Also, nationality was still important within the Parliament, as was shown in one of the first problematic issues dealt with in the EP – the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy – where all the French members of the Parliament independent of their political affiliation voted against it.

---

6 Alan Ahearne et al., Global Governance: An Agenda for Europe: Bruegel Policy Brief No. 37 (Brussels: 2006).
Results of an inquiry about awareness about the European Parliament: 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Have you ever heard about the European Parliament?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the euphoria of the first elections, participation in European elections has been decreasing to 58.98% in 1984, 58.41% in 1989, 56.67% in 1994, 49.51% in 1999, 45.47% in 2004 and 43% in the last elections of 2009, showing an important decrease of people’s interest in European elections even though nowadays the EP is more powerful after the different European treaties approved since 1979.

---

The new member states of the Union normally have higher participation than the older members, as their interest in the Union is higher, as in the case of Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, with the exception of Sweden, where the society was divided about the benefits of joining the Union. On the other hand, it is worrisome how low the participation of the new members from Central and Eastern Europe was. It shows a lack of interest in European affairs in these countries and could have a negative effect of slowing the path of the integration in Europe. The highest participation belongs to member states where voting is compulsory, as Belgium or Luxembourg, and the lowest belongs to Central and Eastern European member states, as Lithuania, Slovakia, or Rumania, with participation even lower than in the UK, a traditionally more skeptical country in European integration terms.

The Federalists group in the Parliament after the elections of 1979 was pushing for deeper integration, as they saw the Parliament as the only institution in the European Communities able to lead the process of integration because it was the only European institution chosen by the European people.\(^{10}\) The already traditional confrontation of the EP with the Council to increase the powers of the institution and decrease the rule of the member states in the organization started at this moment. During many years the political fight was centered on the budget of the Union because it was one of the few areas were the Parliament could influence European integration. The creation of the annual budget was based on a system where the three main institutions of the Communities collaborated to draft and approve the annual budget of the Union. The first draft was done by the European Commission according to the normal expenditures of the organization and the expectations for the following year, and this draft was passed to the Council and the Parliament. The agreement of both institutions was needed in order to approve the new budget. If they disagreed, the budget of the previous year was applied until both institutions finally reached an agreement. The Parliament traditionally has pushed for increasing the Union’s budget against the will of the member states represented in the Council.\(^{11}\) The Parliament argued about the increasing role of the Union, as more policies where included in the area of influence of the Community, especially after the development of the Single Market, but at the same time the economic resources of the Union were growing very slowly, with more policies and almost the same money. The Council, on the other hand, supported an idea of less growth in the budget because the Union already had enough income to fulfill its needs. But in reality, it was a political struggle about who will control the Union, as money will define the possibilities of integration, and controlling the budget meant controlling the organization. The conflict was important in the beginning of the ‘80s as the Parliament was trying to ensure its position in the Communities against the influence of the Council, and in some years there was no agreement about the budget, creating problems for the organization. After 1988 some reforms were introduced, but the problems still persists today, always with the Parliament demanding more money for the Union and the Council decreasing these aspirations.\(^{12}\)

---

The power of the EP changed after the inclusion of the co-decision system in the Union and its expansion to most of the policies of the European Union. Previously, the Parliament had no more power than control of the budget, but as integration increased, it was necessary to link it with democracy, and hence with the Parliament. Previously, most of the decisions had been taken under other procedures where the EP was just advising the Council with non-binding reports; but since the Treaty of Maastricht, the Parliament has been standing on an equal footing with the Council in the legislative process, and an agreement of both organizations is needed in order to approve any legislation under the co-decision procedure.

Since this reform the European Parliament has been growing in power since each treaty, and its influence is huge in European integration and in the current duality of the organization, as the Council stands for the national interests of the member states and the Parliament for the European interest, giving to the Union its special shape of a supranational organization, where there is an equilibrium between the national and European interests.

Still, nowadays the power of the member states is bigger than the power of the Parliament, plus the fact that normally the national governments are the expression of the majority of their citizens, and hence the political party in the government is also the most represented in the Parliament, controlling many decisions of their members through their political party discipline. The current German government belongs to the CDU, and this political party has 17 members out of the 50 representing Germany in the Union, and it is not likely that they will adopt decisions against their political party in charge of the German national government. Similar proportions are found in the rest of the member states, so the balance of power tilts toward the member states, but the tendency is leading to a stable balance of power between both institutions in the future European state, creating a new political system in the world based on both organizations plus a stronger Commission.

THE POWERS OF THE PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament has broad powers in the Union, and its role is increasing after each treaty. The main areas of influence of the Parliament are:

1. Constitutional type powers and powers of ratification: Since the Single European Act, new enlargements and association agreements need the approval of the EP. Also, international agreements with important budgetary implications need the approval of the Parliament. This gives an important international dimension to the EP, because most of the international actions

---

13 ANDREAS FOLLESDAL AND PETER KOSŁOWSKI, eds., Democracy and the European Union (Ethical Economy) (Springer, 2010).
of the Union are focused on enlargements and international agreements. There have not been major conflicts in this area, as the EP is keen on accepting more members into the Union, sometimes against the will of the people they represent, as we see in the strong support for Turkish membership from the European Parliament, when an important part of the European population is suspicious about it.

2. Participation in the legislative process: There are different procedures where the Parliament intervenes in the legislative process of the Union. They range from merely advisory powers to an equal footing with the Council. Nevertheless, the growing number of policies under the co-decision system, and hence under the influence of the Parliament, is remarkable. The procedures are:

Co-decision: New legislation is started by the European Commission, and afterwards there is a first and a second reading in the Council and in the Parliament, where amendments are introduced. Both institutions have to agree after the first or second reading to pass the legislation. If they do not, there is a conciliation procedure, or third reading. This means that if there is disagreement between the Council and the Parliament after the third reading, the legislation will not be approved. For the period 1999-2004, we see that under the co-decision system 28% (115 pieces of legislation) of new legislation was approved after the first reading, 50% (500 pieces of legislation) after the second reading, 22% (84 cases) after the third reading or the conciliation procedure, and just two cases were rejected. There were 1344 amendments approved by Parliament in the second reading, and 23% (307) were passed under the conciliation procedure without changes, 60% (809) were approved after some modifications, and 17% (228) were withdrawn in the conciliation procedure. All this data gives us a look at the co-decision system and its implications for the Union and makes clear that the system works, because most of the legislation initiated by the Commission is passed after negotiations between the Council and the Parliament. 17 With the Treaty of Lisbon in force, the co-decision procedure is the ordinary legislative procedure. More than forty new policies are subject to this procedure, for example, freedom, security and justice, foreign trade, environmental policy, and the CAP.

Co-decision system.¹⁸

Consultation: Here the Parliament needs to be consulted about different legislation, but its opinion is not binding, and the Council can take or leave the opinion of the Parliament. This procedure was more important before, but as more policies are included in the co-decision system, consultation just applies in policies where the member states do not want to share their sovereignty with the European institutions. The consultation procedure continues to apply in taxation, competition, harmonization of legislation not related to the internal market, and some aspects of social policy. The procedure previously applied to the new ‘framework-decision’ instrument created by the Amsterdam Treaty under the third pillar for the purpose of approximation of laws and regulations.

Cooperation: The cooperation procedure was introduced by the SEA and extended under the Maastricht Treaty to most areas of legislation where the Council acts by majority. This procedure obliges the Council to take into account at a second reading those of Parliament’s amendments that were adopted by an absolute majority, in so far as they have been taken over by the Commission. This marked the beginning of real legislative power for Parliament. Its importance has been diminished by the general use of the co-decision procedure under the Amsterdam Treaty. It survives only in four provisions of the Economic and Monetary Policy, but with the Treaty of Lisbon it is abolished.

Assent: The Council can adopt any legislative proposal of the Commission if Parliament gives its consent, but the EP cannot make amendments, just accept it or reject it. Anyway, there is a conciliation committee where some negotiations can be done in order to influence the process. Since the Maastricht Treaty, the assent procedure applies to the few legislative areas in which the Council acts by unanimous decision. Since the Amsterdam Treaty it is limited to the Structural and Cohesion Funds. Under the Treaty of Lisbon some new subjects fall under this procedure, now generally named consent, such as measures to be adopted by the Council when action by the Union is considered necessary and the treaties do not provide the necessary powers.

Right of initiative: The treaty of Maastricht gave this power to the Parliament. This does not mean that the European Commission has lost the monopoly of starting new legislation, but now the EP can ask the Commission to start new legislation if it considers it necessary. ¹⁹

---

3. Budget power: Parliament stands equally with the Council in elaborating the budget. The first draft is done by the Commission, then the Council and the Parliament, in different readings, introduce amendments, and both institutions reach an agreement. The Parliament also monitors implementation and gives a discharge on implementation of the budget.20

4. Control over the executive: Parliament has different ways of controlling the European Commission. It basically comes from the democratic roots of the Parliament and the technocratic or political essence of the Commission. So, it means a democratic control over the executive of the Union.

Investiture of the Commission: Parliament participates in the process of electing the Commission. Its power is smaller than that of the Council, but lately it has been increasing its muscle, forcing the member states to choose adequate candidates for the Commission, and hence taking it more seriously than before.

Motion of censure: Parliament has this power since the Treaty of Rome, and it is another way to control the Commission. Parliament can force the Commission as a whole, never just one or more Commissars, to step down if it loses its confidence in it. There have been 8 motions of censure, but none of them have been adopted. Anyway, the Commission of Santer just resigned when it was clear that Parliament was going to approve a motion of censure. So, even if it has never happened, it is an important tool to influence the Commission and control it.

Parliamentary questions: The EP can ask information from the Council or the Commission, and both institutions have to reply to the petition.

Committees of inquiry: The European Parliament can start a temporal committee to analyze alleged contraventions or maladministration in the implementation of Community law. Once they reach a result, their conclusions will pass to the plenary session of Parliament and the institution will take the appropriate measures.

Control over Common Foreign and Security Policy: Parliament is entitled to be kept informed in these areas and may address questions or recommendations to the Council. It must be consulted on the main aspects and basic choices of the common foreign and security policy. Implementation of interinstitutional agreement on budgetary discipline and sound financial management has also improved CFSP consultation procedures as far as financial aspects are concerned. After the Lisbon Treaty’s coming into force, almost all aspects of police and judicial cooperation as well as other policies in the area of Freedom, Justice and Security are subject to the procedure of co-decision. As to foreign policy, the creation of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy enhances Parliament’s influence because she

is also vice-president of the Commission. But anyway, the influence of Parliament in this field is minimal because the states are not willing to lose control over a policy that is still developing and needs much more integration before it is an effective policy. Under current conditions, the CFSP is just an agreement of minimums between the member states, and hence the influence of Parliament is much reduced also.

Appeals to the Court of Justice: The EP has here similar powers to the rest of the European institutions. Parliament cannot decide by itself if there is any action against treaties, but can go to the Court, and then has to accept the ruling.

Petitions: European citizens have the right to make petitions on a subject related with the activity of the Union. The citizens address these petitions to the president of the Parliament.

Appointing the Ombudsman: The Parliament elects the European ombudsman, who investigates complaints about maladministration related with the EU institutions. It is the person who defends European companies and citizens if their rights are not respected by the EU institutions.  

THE COMPOSITION OF THE PARLIAMENT

There are currently 754 members of the Parliament, who are elected every 5 years. They belong to the 27 member states and are chosen by direct democratic elections all over Europe. But according to the Treaty of Lisbon, the limit is 751 members, and hence Germany will lose 3 members of Parliament in the next elections of 2014. The number of members of the Parliament is decided by the population of the countries, but the Treaty of Lisbon established a maximum of 96 and a minimum of 5 members of the Parliament per each member state. It raises the question of Turkey: if the country finally joins the European Union, it will have the same number of members of Parliament as Germany. At present the German population is bigger than the Turkish, but the demographic growth of Turkey is much faster, and the Turkish population is younger than Germany’s. As we can see in the table below, most of the member states of the Union are likely to reduce their population, with the notable exception of the UK and France. It will close the gap between Germany and France, and will make easier the non-written rule of the Union about the equal standing of both countries within the Union. On the other hand, the Turkish population growth is bigger than that of any other member of the Union, and it is likely to be the most populated country of the 28 states before 2025, and then it will have the same number of members in the EP as Germany if Turkey finally joins the Union. On the other hand, we see how some countries will lose representatives in the EP as their population has negative growth, especially Italy, leaving the big four of the current EP, Germany, France,

---

the UK, and Italy, and decreasing the number of the main countries in terms of population in the Union to three.

**Total Population: Various EU member states and candidates, and total EU 25, EU 27 and EU 28; UN estimates 2003-2050**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2025</th>
<th>2050</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>1051</td>
<td>1022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6014</td>
<td>6284</td>
<td>6416</td>
<td>6423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>8247</td>
<td>8249</td>
<td>8195</td>
<td>7914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td>1094</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>5742</td>
<td>5550</td>
<td>5293</td>
<td>4487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1614</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>1712</td>
<td>1695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>3858</td>
<td>3817</td>
<td>3733</td>
<td>3300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>2233</td>
<td>2164</td>
<td>2080</td>
<td>1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4106</td>
<td>4116</td>
<td>4036</td>
<td>3733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5925</td>
<td>6127</td>
<td>6328</td>
<td>6616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>7132</td>
<td>8215</td>
<td>8899</td>
<td>9775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total EU 25</td>
<td>45418</td>
<td>45687</td>
<td>45442</td>
<td>43124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total EU 27</td>
<td>48441</td>
<td>48569</td>
<td>48183</td>
<td>45455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total EU 28</td>
<td>55574</td>
<td>56784</td>
<td>57083</td>
<td>55231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Including Turkey)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey as % of EU 28</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

23 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs World Population Division, *World Population Prospects: the 2002 Revision*. 
Parliament has a president, and 14 vice presidents, plus the MEPs. The president is elected for a two and a half year term and represents the EP in the international arena and leads the relations of Parliament with the other European institutions. He is assisted by the vice presidents organizing the internal life of Parliament. The members of the EP unite according to their political beliefs, and not because of their nationality, in political groups, as the Conservatives in the European People’s Party and the Social Democrats in the Socialists & Democrats. Currently there are 7 political groups in the EP, and normally they vote together after internal deliberations, but the internal cohesion sometimes is broken because of national issues. There are 20 parliamentary committees on different matters, as Budget, Environment, or the Internal Market, that prepare reports for the plenary session of the Parliament. They are really important because they control what is presented to the plenary sessions of the Parliament, and hence they control the agenda of the institution. The EP has 41 international delegations for conducting its international relations, especially with candidate countries, countries with association agreements, and other important international partners of the Union. Finally, the internal composition of the EP counts, with the Secretariat, some 4,600 officials who work for the institution.24

The plenary sessions are held in Strasbourg, the committees meet in Brussels, and the Secretariat is located in Luxembourg and Brussels. The institution thus has three locations, plus the constituencies of the MEPs. It makes 4 different working places for the MEPs, an irrational organization. It has its explanation because the ECSC community had its institutions located in Luxembourg, a country that rejected the new institutions of the new communities created by the Treaty of Rome, that were then allocated to Brussels and Strasbourg. The Parliament has its general meetings in France, but as they need to work closely with the European Commission, the committees meet in Brussels and the most important work or the real center of the EP is Brussels.

PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE FUTURE REFORMS OF THE EP

As the Parliament is becoming a more important institution after each reform or new treaty, its role in European integration is bigger, but the European people do not feel it in the same way, as participation in the European elections is very low, and most of the Europeans cannot even name their representatives in Strasbourg. The EP should have a stronger link with the people in order to get their loyalty, and hence facilitate a deeper transfer of power from the member states to the Union.25 In order to achieve this, Parliament should be reformed to be the real representative of Europeans in European issues. Here we provide some ideas:

1. Currently the EP is located in three main locations, confusing for European citizens, plus inconvenient for the MEPs who have to travel constantly. Luxembourg and France are not willing to give up on this issue because of the economic and political benefits they get for having the EP on their soil, and unanimity is required in the Council, but it would be much more logical to have just one location and the real decision making center of the Union in Brussels.26

2. The elections of the European Parliament are done according to national rules, and it creates distortions in the system, as, for example, the age of voting is 16 in Austria and 18 in the rest of the members. There are some common rules, but national differences are still big. If the EP is chosen by the European people, and it represents the people of Europe, it should have a common procedure in its elections. Nevertheless, the Council needs unanimity to implement a single electoral system in Europe for the European elections, and this could not be achieved because of the reticence of some member states. Unless Europe has the same system, the elections are likely to be defined by national patterns, against the idea of the EP itself.27

3. Creation of European political parties. At the moment there are just political groups that are created by the political affinity of the MEPs, but the European elections are dominated by the national political parties, and hence the discussion during the campaign is more about national issues than European problems. As the member states are already represented in the Council, the EP should work according to the European interest, and hence European political parties are needed. It should be done in such a way that any political party concurring to the European elections should be present in at least 40% of the territory of the Union, or in areas where more than 40% of the European population lives. It will force the creation of European political parties on the basis of the national ones, but their perspective would be much more European, focusing on European issues, and more independent from national problems.28

4. In order to have European political parties, there should be one common language. Europe, and especially the EP, are afraid of having a common language because it is seen as an attack to the national differences in the Union. But the society has already chosen English as the lingua franca of Europe. The reform will just be the representation of the reality. Having a common language, as English, will help communication between the MEPs and simplify the current system. The European Parliament is distinguished from other international organizations by its obligation to offer full

multilingualism. Parliament works in all the official languages of the European Union – 23 since Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU and Irish was recognized as an official language of the EU in 2007. All documents dealt with in a plenary must be translated into 22 of these languages. A partial exception currently applies to the Irish language – only legislative documents have to be translated into it. The European Parliament also provides an interpretation service, so that every Member is able to speak in his/her mother tongue. This makes the European Parliament the world’s largest employer of interpreters and translators, who account for one third of the institution’s staff. Protection of the national languages of the Union is gratifying, but in practical terms it reduces the efficacy of communication between the MEPs, the debates, and the working system of the organization. English is already widespread in the Parliament, but it lacks official recognition. The introduction of one common language would mean reform in the national states, making English co-official. Of course this initiative will have many enemies, mainly from nationalist grounds showing it as an attack on the national identity, but it will be just a complement to the national identity, creating a European working system in the already international language of the world, English. The main resistance comes from the French speakers, who have seen a diminishing the role of their language within the European Communities. It also will require a big investment in education to give the same opportunities to all European citizens, and its implementation should be gradual. It will help to make the EP a real European Parliament and to defeat the most nationalistic forces that stop European integration.

5. European referendums about EU issues under the control of the European Parliament. It is strange that many measures are not discussed on a European level when they have an influence over the citizens of the Union. If the EP could organize European referendums, people would feel the presence of this institution much more, and that their opinion is represented. It would help the EP and the Union as a whole. As national states organize referendums on national issues, the EU should be able to do it as well on European issues. As the EU is not a national state, the European referendums should be more restrictive and respect the balance of power of the European institutions, and hence the approval of the Council should be obligatory.

End of the corruption and maladministration in the EP: The MEPs are famous all over Europe for their perks and benefits. If the EP wants the loyalty of Europeans, it should be an example of good manners. There are many examples of MEPs taking advantage of their privileges, as, for example, in the case of travel allowances. The MEPs need to travel very often because of the different locations of the EP and also because they need to go to their own electoral base. Previously, they got free plane tickets, and most of them travelled in first class; when they got an amount of money instead of the tickets, suddenly most started traveling in tourist class. There have also been some scandals with the personal staff of the MEPs, who used to hire relatives to keep the money, or the fact that the most applied for committee is that of international affairs, because the MEPs travel around the world. Nevertheless, the main corruption cases have been related with the co-decision voting system, where the EP stands equally with the Council, and can make amendments to the European legislation. Big companies and lobbies have paid MEPs to make changes in the legislation favoring them, and it makes the citizens doubtful of the power of the EP, because it makes no sense to give it more power if it is corrupt. For example, Ernst Strasser, MEP from Austria, had to resign in 2011 because of one of these cases, and other MEPs, as the Spanish Pablo Zalba, or Severin and Thaler, also did this. The net salary of the MEPs is around 6,000 euros a month, plus 4,000 euros in different concepts, so citizens have problems understanding these cases of corruption. The situation does not help for the identification of the people with the EP, for if the MEPs themselves do not take their work seriously, the people will not do so either. At the end of 2011 a new rule was approved to forbid the MEPs accepting presents of more than 150 euros, along with other measures to avoid corruption in the Parliament.

Promoting the EU via Education. There should be one subject in the European schools about the EU paid for by the Union under the supervision of the Parliament, and explaining to the European people what the Parliament does. It is difficult because it would interfere with national policies of education, but the benefits in terms of integration would clearly surpass the political effort. At the moment, the educational measures are done via the national institutions, which produce very differing results in terms of the perception of European people about the EU and the European Parliament.

LITERATURE

BOOKS


UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs World Population Division. World Population Prospects: the 2002 Revision.


PERIODICALS


INTERNET SOURCES


OTHER SOURCES


SANTRAUKA

EUROPOS PARLAMENTAS: PRAEITIS, DABARTIS IR ATEITIS

Šis straipsnis apima Europos Parlamento įsteigimą, istorinį vystymąsi, dabartinę padėtį ir jo ateitį. Jame mokslinė analizė yra grindžiama požiūriais iš skirtingų disciplinų, pabrėžiant šios institucijos politinį vaidmenį, kadangi Europos integracijos procese ji pradeda vykdyti pagrindinę rolę. ES Parlamento ateitis yra esminė Sąjungos ateitčiai, dėl jos šiame straipsnyje pateikiama įvairių pasiūlymų.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI

Europos Parlamentas, subsidiarumas, bendro sprendimo procedūra, ateities reformos.