

'Parliament 2024': ambitious reforms to strengthen European democracy

The European Parliament has introduced changes in the way it works to improve its efficiency and respond better to citizens' expectations.



MEPs will hold special scrutiny debates with commissioners without a pre-defined theme every plenary session.

The European Parliament is at the heart of European democracy as the only directly elected EU institution. It is the voice of European citizens, and in the EU's institutional balance co-legislator, arm of the budgetary authority as well as a guarantor of political and financial accountability and transparency.

Citizens understand Parliament's importance and want it to play a more prominent role, as consistently shown in [numerous Eurobarometer surveys](#). The ambitious series of reforms entering into force in July 2024 aim to ensure that Parliament can make full use of every tool

available to respond even more effectively to the citizens it represents.

In January 2023, Parliament embarked on the reform process launched by Roberta Metsola, President of the Parliament, echoing the plea she made in her pre-election speech, one year earlier: “Parliament is an institution that is unique in the world. We need to strengthen it. We cannot be afraid to reform.”

Following several months of intense analysis, reflection, and debate, the cross-party working group chaired by President Metsola, and backed by the leaders of the political groups in the [Conference of Presidents](#), put forward a package of proposals that the plenary [approved in April 2024](#).

As President Metsola said when presenting her proposals, “These reforms will make this House more efficient and more effective. With these measures in place the European Parliament will be on a much stronger footing starting from the next mandate.”

Five areas requiring reform were identified: legislation, scrutiny, budgetary powers and budgetary control, plenary proceedings, and external relations.

Legislative process: better checks and balances

The allocation of new legislative proposals to committees will be more efficient and reduce conflicts of competence. Cooperation between lead and opinion-giving committees is made simpler, to increase Parliament’s effectiveness, while contributing to delivering final overall positions that are more cohesive.

The Conference of Presidents will also have the possibility to suggest setting up a temporary legislative committee, in exceptional cases where a broad issue falls within the competence of multiple committees. This new Rule 214 of the [European Parliament’s Rules of Procedure](#) requires plenary approval and is foreseen as a measure of last resort.

Furthermore, recourse to the “urgent procedure” (revised Rule 170) is now clearer, to ensure MEPs’ legislative prerogatives are respected.

Increasing scrutiny

A new accountability mechanism aims at better scrutinising the European Commission when it invokes Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This article bypasses the ordinary legislative procedure, which can undermine Parliament as a co-legislator if employed unnecessarily. The new Rule 138 of the Rules of Procedure will provide Parliament with a possibility for a political response and enable it to exercise political control.

Special scrutiny hearings, subject to the approval of the Conference of Presidents, will allow Parliament to call commissioners to speak on issues of “major political importance”. This key reform element (new Rule 141 of the Rules of Procedure) strengthens the institution’s ability to

hold the executive to account.

MEPs also approved the principle of organising special scrutiny debates with commissioners once per plenary session, without a pre-defined theme (Rule 143 on Question Time).

In the run-up to the confirmation hearings for Commissioners-designate, the Commission President-elect will be invited to provide details on the planned structure, portfolios, responsibilities and gender balance, thus making the process more transparent (revised Rule 129 and Annex VII to the Rules of Procedure). This will also allow Parliament to simplify and speed up the allocation of responsibilities for committees in the context of the confirmation hearings by clarifying their role.

Invigorating plenaries

“Parliament statements” are a new tool that will give the institution the opportunity to express its position on matters without having to react to remarks by the Council or the Commission.

Ensuring that Commissioners answer questions relevant to their portfolio will improve “Question Time” sessions in the plenary chamber.

Stronger budgetary functions

All legislative proposals affecting the EU budget will undergo an in-depth assessment to verify whether the Parliament’s policy priorities are properly taken into account.

The Parliament will also improve the cooperation between the sectoral policy committees and the budgetary and budgetary control committees to allow for a meaningful combination of information gathered throughout the entire budgetary cycle (budget and discharge phases). This reinforced link will be beneficial for the legislative and scrutiny work of the sectoral committees and also enhance the scrutiny of instruments that are “non-traditional” or outside the EU budget.

External affairs

Parliament’s approach to external relations will be reshaped, with a clearer focus on key issues when it comes to the plenary agenda, as well as greater coordination and cooperation between committees and standing delegations, to strengthen the coherence of Parliament’s external action and to take fully into account the interlinkages between the internal and external dimensions of EU policy.

More reform

The Conference of Committee Chairs has updated the committees’ working methods and practices based on the reform.

The over 10-year old [Framework Agreement on relations between the Parliament and Commission](#) is also being revised in negotiations between the two institutions, more specifically

on elements affecting interinstitutional cooperation and to ensure adequate scrutiny of the Commission by Parliament.

Looking ahead

The European Parliament responded quickly and effectively to overlapping crises throughout its ninth term from 2019 to 2024. Nevertheless, these crises also guided the work on identifying areas where Parliament needs to become even better and more efficient.

The new rules coming into force as of 16 July 2024 improve internal operations and strengthen the institutional balance, which is essential in making the European Union work for all Europeans.