

Article – How it works: Parliament's plenary sessions



The 751 MEPs elected to the European Parliament meet 12 times a year in plenary sessions in Strasbourg, with additional sessions in Brussels.

Plenary is a complicated undertaking, with debates and votes in the EU's 24 official languages on a wide variety of topics, from trade agreements and the EU budget to votes on EU laws and debates on topical issues.

Debates

The plenary agenda is decided by the [Conference of Presidents](#), made up of the Parliament's President and the leaders of the political groups. Parliament constantly responds to what is happening beyond its doors, so the agenda changes to allow MEPs to discuss issues of importance to the people who elected them.

For example, MEPs agreed to add debates on the danger of violent right-wing extremism in the wake of the terrorist attack in Germany's Halle, the Turkish military operation in northern Syria and the impact of the Thomas Cook bankruptcy to [October's plenary agenda](#).

Plenary sittings are chaired by the President or one of the 14 vice-presidents.

Speaking time is divided among the [political groups](#) depending on the size of the group. The size of the group also determines the order in which they speak. The so-called catch-the-eye procedure allows MEPs who have not been

allocated time by a group the chance to have their say via short, one-minute speeches.

Members can also raise a blue card during debates in order to ask the MEP speaking a question. The speaker may refuse to accept a question.

Voting

The President or vice-presidents also preside over the voting, which can be fast-paced, as MEPs might have to vote on hundreds of amendments if the legislation is complicated. For example, there are often lots of amendments to the budget. Voting usually takes place at midday after the morning's debates.