

'More flexible rules' from EUmagazin (2002)

Caption: In July 2002, the European Parliament adopts new Rules of Procedure incorporating changes to its structure and modus operandi.

Source: EUmagazin. Unabhängige Zeitschrift für Wirtschaft, Recht und Politik in der Europäischen Union. Hrsg. Schwarz, Volker; König, Heinz ; RHerAusgeber Zeller, Horst; Grittmann, Gunter. 2002, 34. Jahrgang, Nr. 9. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. ISSN 0946-4689. "Europäisches Parlament: Flexiblere Regeln", auteur:Hausmann, Hartmut , p. 26.

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European Parliament

More flexible rules

Before the summer recess, the European Parliament was discussing the reform of its Rules of Procedure. Very considerable adjustments are required, not only as a result of the enlargement of the EU but also because of the need to make the image of the Parliament more attractive in its perception by the public.

The increase in the size of the European Parliament from its present 626 Members to more than 730 Members following the enlargement of the EU certainly does not in itself guarantee that the Parliament will be held in higher esteem by the citizens of Europe. In fact, there are somewhat mixed expectations associated with the next direct elections in mid-2004, in which the citizens from several applicant countries will participate for the first time. This is why simpler rules are now intended to make the political debates more interesting for the outside observer and to ensure that the work on legislation is more transparent.

The most important innovation concerns the composition of the political groups and is intended to take account of their supranational character. While there were previously a number of different possibilities for the formation of political groups, offering a choice of three different combinations of a minimum number of representatives and the total number of their countries of origin, in future, the only requirement will be that the MEPs in a political group have to come from at least one fifth of the total number of Member States and that the political groups must have no fewer than 16 Members.

There was also broad agreement that the system of political groups should not be permitted to lead to discrimination against MEPs who do not wish to belong to any political group. For example, it is no longer regarded as defensible that only political groups may table motions for resolutions. This also applies to the exclusion of non-attached Members from preparatory meetings of the delegation to the Conciliation Committee, when work on legislation is taking place under the codecision procedure. In addition, two representatives of the non-attached Members will be entitled to attend meetings of the Conference of Presidents, with voting rights. There was therefore no chance of success for a proposal whereby the non-attached Members of the European Parliament would be forced to join a mixed political group or have to form a 'technical group', regardless of their political affiliations.

Nevertheless, the political groups are also to retain some special rights as compared with the non-attached Members in future, such as the possibility of tabling a motion for a resolution to wind up the debate on the election of the Commission or the right to give a declaration of vote of no more than two minutes' length.

One innovation will be the possibility of sanctions in the event of serious misconduct by office-holders elected by Parliament. The Conference of Presidents may propose to Parliament, on the basis of a three-fifths majority — representing at least three political groups — that the office of the President, of a Vice-President, of a Quaestor, of a Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a committee, or of any other elected office-holder be terminated in the event of serious misconduct. A two-thirds majority of the votes cast is required for the approval of such a proposal.

There was very serious controversy about the proposal from the British rapporteur Richard Corbett (Labour Party) that more power should be given to the committees in work on legislation in order to increase the scope for major political debates in the plenary sittings. Under this proposal, a 90 % majority secured in committee would, in future, mean that it would no longer be necessary for a vote to be taken in plenary. Own-initiative reports drawn up by Parliament — i.e. covered by debates not involving a Commission proposal — should still be put to the vote in the House, but there would be no opportunity for tabling amendments. An objection to this proposal put forward by Christa Randzio-Plath (SPD), Chairman of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, concerned a fear of tactical voting in committee, so that a particular subject was put before the House after all. Mr Corbett's proposals were ultimately accepted. However, it will be possible for a debate to be held on an amendment tabled in the plenary, if this is requested by at least 36 Members or by a political group.

Protests against the proposal to replace topical and urgent debates by other instruments came from Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (PDS) and Bernd Posselt (CSU), because these debates about human rights violations all over the world have frequently been successful in ensuring the release of people from unjustified imprisonment.

In order to smooth the arrival of new Members from Eastern Europe, without costs being excessively increased, there will also be provision for a number of economy measures. For example, in plenary sittings in future, simultaneous interpretation will be provided only into 'other' official languages instead of into 'all' the official languages.

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