

EP delegations: strengthening external relationships (3 April 2012)

Caption: This press release issued by the European Parliament on 3 April 2012 describes the major role played by European Parliament delegations in European foreign policy.

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EP delegations: strengthening external relationships

MEPs regularly travel in delegations to other countries as part of the EP's contribution to the EU's foreign policy. This week, for example, there are delegations in Montenegro and Iceland to discuss the two countries' prospects of joining the EU with parliamentarians there. Another delegation is in Baku, Azerbaijan, at the Euronest assembly to discuss further integration between the EU and its Eastern European Partners. Find out more about what delegations are and how they work in our article.

What do they do?

Like parliamentary committees, EP delegations consist of MEPs charged with a specific task. In this case it is about maintaining contacts with their counterparts in parliaments of countries outside the EU. And unlike committees, delegations do not prepare resolutions for the plenary to discuss or vote on. Instead they focus on exchanging information and developing the Parliament's international relations. They also help to strengthen contacts with states that are considered the EU's traditional partners and promote EU values such as respect for human rights, liberty and democracy.

How do they work?

Each delegation normally holds an interparliamentary meeting once a year with parliamentarians or representatives of civil society from a country outside the EU. They work closely together with the parliamentary committees on foreign affairs, development and international trade. The delegations consult the chairs of these committees before interparliamentary meetings take place and submit reports afterwards. The chairs of the delegations also come together in the Conference of Delegation Chairs to discuss matters regarding the running of the delegations.

Who can be in them?

There are 41 delegations, varying in size from 12 to more than 70 members. MEPs are usually full members of one or more delegations and can be substitute members in others. Delegations, which are set up to be a fair representation of member states and political groups in the EP, have a chair and usually two vice-chairs.

Types of delegations

- Delegations to multilateral parliamentary assemblies such as the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly are the largest ones
- Joint parliamentary committees are set up with parliaments of countries that are candidates or have association agreements with the EU
- Parliamentary cooperation committees: with states that are neighbourhood countries or strategic partners of the EU
- Other interparliamentary delegations: with a specific country or covering a whole region (e.g. Maghreb or South Asia)