

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT UPDATE

June 2009



Welcome to the first edition of a series of Hill & Knowlton European Parliament updates!

For the 7th time since 1979 Europe's voters have been asked to make their choice. For the 1st time, voters in Romania and Bulgaria voted as part of the general European Parliament election. Whilst eurosceptics are keen to point out the once again less than impressive turnout 43.09% (45,47% in 2004), European Parliament insiders stress it compares favourably to US midterm election results (which are usually well below 40%).

The Parliament will be a strong force in EU decision-making over the next five years and - should the Lisbon Treaty be ratified - its powers will grow further on issues such as asylum and immigration policy, criminal matters, structural funds, fisheries and agriculture, as well as the EU budget. Also, for 50% of those elected it will be their first time as a member of the European Parliament. This means that champions on many key issues are yet to be determined.

In terms of balance of power under the new legislature the following features stand out:

1. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) remains the largest group with 36.6% despite the prospect of losing the UK Conservatives from their ranks. A powerful EPP strengthens the chances of a re-nomination of Commission President José Manuel Barroso;
2. The European Socialists (PES) has lost 6 percentage points and at 21.6% is now closer in size to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group (11%) than the EPP;
3. The Greens have made a slight gain in their share of the vote from 5.5% to 6.9% and now have over 50 seats;
4. Securing majorities will become more complex than ever given the increase in eurosceptic MEPs elected;
5. The final balance of power remains unclear as 90 MEPs are currently not affiliated to any political group and there is also a chance that the Independent – Democrats (IND-DEM) and the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) groups may not survive in their current forms in the next Parliament

Next steps

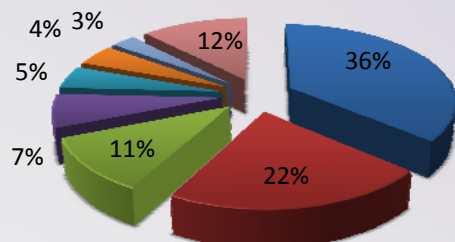
- 8- 12 June:** formation of national delegations
- 15-24 June:** constitution of political groups
- 24 June – 3 July:** definition of list for political appointments
- 3–14 July:** negotiations amongst group leaders
- 14 – 17 July:** first plenary with election of President of the Parliament, Vice-Presidents, and quaestors
- 20-23 July:** election of committee and delegation leaders

Did you know that

- The **longest-standing MEP** is current European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering (DE) - the only person to have served in all 7 legislatures since direct elections began in 1979, when the **youngest MEP** - 26 year old Bulgarian Dimitar Stoyanov - wasn't even born
- The **oldest MEP** is Jean-Marie Le Pen (FR, 80 years) who will be glad that he comes from a region from where he needn't travel far to plenary sessions in Strasbourg
- Not so for the **MEP with the furthest distance to travel**, Maurice Ponga, from New Caledonia. The distance from New Caledonia is 16100 km to Brussels and 16500 km to Strasbourg so he might be forgiven if he is occasionally late to sign in for work
- There is a **sporty feel** to the new Parliament which now counts among its ranks Peter Šťastný (SK), a former professional ice-hockey player; Pál Schmitt (HU), a former Olympic fencing champion; and Jean-Marie Dedecker (BE), a former judo coach
- Although MEPs tend to be a cosmopolitan and well travelled lot not many have ventured as far afield as the first **European astronaut MEP** Vladimír Remek (CZ)
- As ever there are some big political names now trying their hand at European politics and among the new MEPS are:
 - **1 former Head of State:** Vytautas Landsbergis (LT)
 - **5 former Prime Ministers:** Guy Verhofstadt (BE), Jean-Luc Dehaene (BE), Ivars Godmanis (LV), Theodor Stolojan (RO), Alojz Peterle (SL).
 - **5 former Commissioners:** Louis Michel (BE), Meglena Kuneva (BG), Michel Barnier (FR), Viviane Reding (LU), and Danuta Hübner (PL), although it remains to be seen how many will take up their seats.

Balance of power in the new EP

■ EPP - ED ■ PES ■ ALDE ■ GREENS
■ UEN / EC ■ EUL/NGL ■ ID ■ Others



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EP President – spotlight on the frontrunners

Representing the all conquering EPP Group, candidate **Jerzy Buzek** would be the first EP President from a new Member State and would be only the second president with a background in natural sciences. Buzek's political career started relatively late in life but at the high-end as Prime Minister from 1997-2001.

Buzek will face opposition for the Presidential candidacy within his own group from **Mario Mauro**, already vice-president of the European Parliament, who has the backing of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

The socialists offer Berlusconi's "good friend" German Social democrat **Martin Schulz**. Born in 1950 in Hehlrath, Germany, close to the Belgian and Dutch borders, Schulz has never sought a career in national politics as he considers himself a true European. The poor showing by the Socialists this weekend may diminish his chances for the Presidency.

The Liberal Democrat's multilingual Scottish liberal **Graham Watson** declared his candidacy in a newspaper article in which he claimed that he wanted to end the culture of jobs "pour les garçons" and break the cosy duopoly of the EPP and PES groups. Elected an MEP in 1994, the former interpreter was among the first British liberals to join the European Parliament and has headed the liberal political group (first "ELDR" then "ALDE") since 2002.



Jerzy Buzek



Mario Mauro



Martin Schulz



Graham Watson

EPP – shift in power centres

Within the EPP, although still the biggest party in the European Parliament in terms of overall seats, the German delegation has shrunk whilst France, Poland (a massive victory for ruling Platforma Obywatelska) and Italy (thanks to Forza Italia's marriage with Gianfranco Fini's *Allianza Nazionale*) have done very well. The Partido Popular (in Spanish opposition) gained slightly and re-conquered its position as strongest party in Spain, after the ruling Socialists dropped by almost 5% points to 38.5%.

Eurosceptics – the unknown quantity

Many Member States witnessed a strengthening of the vote for Eurosceptic parties. Right-wing extremist Geert Wilders and his Partij voor de Vrijheid took second place in the Netherlands after the ruling Christian Democrats. In Austria, former-journalist Hans-Peter Martin's list did better than expected, coming third. In the UK, Nigel Farage's eccentric UK Independence Party increased its tally of MEPs, as did the UK's now largely Eurosceptic Conservative Party. The UK also, for the first time, elected representatives from the fascist British National Party. However, Irish showman Declan Ganley and his Libertas "movement" failed to do as well as hoped, winning only one seat (in France) despite running candidates across the continent. The overall increase in Eurosceptic parties begs the question of how far these different forces will succeed in working together in the Parliament - cooperation being a skill they haven't yet had ample opportunity to practice.

ALDE-PES – spoil for choice

Whilst Italy's centre-right has decided which European group to get into bed with, the centre-left face a dilemma of too many choices: PES, ALDE or Greens? For a long time ALDE looked like the most likely option which could give the group an extra 22 seats. However, rumour has it that Gordon Brown himself is keen on changing the PES into a social and liberal alliance to accommodate the new arrivals – though it remains to be seen how this would go down with French and German Socialists! In terms of ALDE's leadership, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, the photogenic head of the German delegation, is said to have aspirations to challenge Graham Watson after helping to increase liberal support in Germany by more than 50%.

Coming soon

Watch out for upcoming Hill & Knowlton European Parliament Updates where we will focus on the new makeup of the political groups, a busy two weeks of appointments in July and the outlook for key dossiers and sectors under the new legislature

Are you ready for change?

To help you assess what the new European Parliament means for your organisation, Hill & Knowlton offers you:

- A tailored analysis of the new Parliament, including:
 - Profiles of the most relevant MEPs, outlining their political background, their position on key policy issues and degree of influence within the new Parliament
 - An assessment of the political balance within key Committees
- Analyses and timelines of key dossiers
- Ongoing political intelligence, with flash updates on relevant developments
- Outreach support to help you be among the first to establish meaningful contacts with those MEPs who matter most

To find out how Hill & Knowlton can help your organisation on EU policy matters, please contact: Elaine Cruikshanks, Head of Global Public Affairs, CEO Brussels

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