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Around Europe political parties are campaigning for votes so they can send Members to the European Parliament. If elected they form a group, not with people from the same country, but with other parties from other countries who hold similar views. So for example Socialists sit with one another in a political group in the Parliament. The European Parliament receives many questions about the political parties. Here are some of the most frequently asked.

What are the party programmes?

You can take a look at the programmes and priorities of the EP's political groups on their websites - see the links below. Most MEPs are elected on party lists in their country of election and most parties adhere to a political group in the European Parliament, thereby endorsing common political principles. The political groups form the basis of political life in the European Parliament.

Formally, however, members "shall not be bound by any instructions and not receive a binding mandate for example from their Member State or from any private person", according to Parliament's Rules of Procedure. Ultimately therefore, MEPs are responsible only to their electorate.

What is the political composition of Parliament now?

MEPs sit in political groups – they are not organised by nationality, but by political affiliation. There are currently 7 political groups in the European Parliament, the biggest being the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats group with 288 (of a total of 785 MEPs) and the smallest the Independence/Democracy Group with 22 members. Some 30 MEPs - the non-attached - do not belong to any political group.

How can a new party be constituted?

After the 2009 elections the minimum number of MEPs allowed to form a political group will be 25 representing at least seven countries.

How are political parties financed for the elections?

That depends on each member states' laws. Every party gets funds according to the national rules for the elections.

The EP has, however, a special fund for "European level political parties", defined as organisations following a political programme, composed of national parties and individuals which is represented in several countries. For example, it must be represented in at least a quarter of all countries by MEPs or MPs from national or regional Parliaments or regional assemblies.

How many MEPs will there be in the new Parliament?

The elections on 4–7 June will be the biggest transnational elections ever. Some 375 million Europeans in 27 EU countries will elect 736 MEPs to represent them. The total number of MEPs has steadily grown as the EU has enlarged, rising provisionally to the current total of 785 with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007.

Since 1979 MEPs have been elected by direct universal suffrage for a five-year period. The seats are, as

a general rule, shared out proportionately to the population of each Member State. Each country has a set number of seats, the maximum being 99 (in Germany) and the minimum 5 (Malta).