



European Elections 2014

FREE GUIDE

TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

BRIAN HAYES

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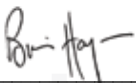
MESSAGE FROM **MINISTER BRIAN HAYES TD**



I have produced this booklet to give you clear, factual information about the European Parliament, and the work of MEPs, in the run up to the European Parliament elections on May 23rd. I have tried to provide this information in a non-political way.

Your vote at this election is vital and it is important that we all take a minute to find out what the Parliament does. This is especially true since the changes made in 2009 by the Lisbon Treaty increased the powers of Parliament.

I hope you find it interesting and informative. If you would like any further information, please contact me at www.brianhayes.ie



Brian Hayes TD

Minister of State at the Department of Finance

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WHY IS THE EU NOT MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD?

The EU's system of institutions is complex partly because it is so different from the way national governments operate, for good reason. We should not forget that the EU is working under unique conditions:

- Having to work in a multicultural environment using different languages
- Ensuring there is a balance between different countries and views
- Working with laws, governments and national parliaments unique to each country.

For anyone who is interested, there is plenty of detailed information about the way each EU institution works available on www.europa.eu

The Institutions of the European Union

The institutions that make up the EU are the Parliament, the Commission and the Council:

- The EU's priorities are set by the European Council, which brings together national and EU-level leaders
- Directly elected MEPs represent European citizens in the European Parliament
- The interests of the EU as a whole are promoted by the European Commission, whose members are appointed by national governments
- Governments defend their own country's national interests in the Council of the European Union.

Setting the agenda

The European Council sets the EU's overall political direction – but has no powers to pass laws. Led by its President – currently Herman Van Rompuy – and comprising national Heads of State or Government and the President of the Commission José Manuel Barroso, it meets for a few days at a time at least every six months.



Law-making

There are 3 main institutions involved in EU legislation:

- The European Parliament, which represents the EU's citizens and is directly elected by them;
- The Council of the European Union, which represents the governments of the individual member countries. The Presidency of the Council is shared by the Member States on a rotating basis.
- The European Commission, which represents the interests of the Union as a whole and is responsible, along with Member States, for implementing legislation.

Together, these three institutions agree between them the policies and laws that apply throughout the EU. In principle, the Commission proposes new laws, and the Parliament and Council adopt them. The Commission and the member countries then implement them, and the Commission ensures that the laws are properly applied within each country.



HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WORK?

Directly elected by EU voters every five years, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) represent the people. Parliament is one of the EU's main law-making institutions, along with the Council of the European Union which is made up of the Ministers and Heads of Government of all the Member States.

The European Parliament has three main roles:

- Debating and passing European laws with the Council
- Scrutinising other EU institutions, particularly the Commission, to make sure it is working democratically
- Debating and adopting the EU's budget with the Council.

Composition

The number of MEPs for each country is roughly in proportion to its population. Under the Lisbon Treaty no country can have fewer than 6 or more than 96 MEPs. Ireland will have 11 MEPs in the next Parliament.

Passing European laws

In many areas, such as consumer protection and the environment, the European Parliament works together with the Council (representing national governments) to decide on the content of EU laws and officially adopt them. Under the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament has more power to influence the content of laws in areas including agriculture, energy policy, immigration and EU funds.

Parliament must also give its permission for other important decisions, such as allowing new countries to join the EU.

Democratic supervision

Parliament exercises influence over other European institutions in several ways.

When a new Commission is appointed, its 28 members – one from each EU country – cannot take up office until Parliament has approved them. If the Members of the European Parliament disapprove of a nominee, they can reject the entire proposed Commission.

Parliament can also call on the Commission to resign during its period in office. This is called a 'motion of censure'.

Parliament keeps check on the Commission by examining reports it produces and by questioning Commissioners. Its committees play an important part here.

MEPs look at petitions from citizens and sets up committees of inquiry.

When national leaders meet for European Council summits, Parliament gives its opinion on the topics on the agenda.

Supervising the budget

Parliament adopts the EU's annual budget with the Council of the European Union.

Parliament has a committee that monitors how the budget is spent, and every year passes judgement on the Commission's handling of the previous year's budget.

Location

The European Parliament has three places of work – Brussels (Belgium), Luxembourg and Strasbourg (France).

- Luxembourg is home to the administrative offices (the 'General Secretariat').
- Meetings of the whole Parliament ('plenary sessions') take place in Strasbourg and in Brussels.
- Committee meetings are also held in Brussels.

HOW DOES THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS WORK?

A Member of the European Parliament, working in one of the parliamentary committees, draws up a report on a proposal for a 'legislative text' presented by the European Commission, the only institution empowered to initiate legislation. The parliamentary committee votes on this report and, possibly, amends it. When the text has been revised and adopted in plenary, Parliament has adopted its position. This process is repeated one or more times, depending on the type of procedure and whether or not agreement is reached with the Council.

In the adoption of legislative acts, a distinction is made between the ordinary legislative procedure (codecision), which puts Parliament on an equal footing with the Council, and the special legislative procedures, which apply only in specific cases where Parliament has only a consultative role.

On certain questions (e.g. taxation) the European Parliament gives only an advisory opinion (the 'consultation procedure'). In some cases the Treaty provides that consultation is obligatory, being required by the legal base, and the proposal cannot acquire the force of law unless Parliament has delivered an opinion. In this case the Council is not empowered to take a decision alone.

Parliament has a power of political initiative

It can ask the Commission to present legislative proposals for laws to the Council.

It plays a genuine role in creating new laws, since it examines the Commission's annual programme of work and says which laws it would like to see introduced.

Source: www.europarl.europa.eu
the website of the European Union.



POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Like our own Dáil, you can vote for an individual who is part of a wider group in parliament or independents. The bigger the group the more power and influence they have to get things done.



Fine Gael is part of the Group of the European People's Party (EPP) (Christian Democrats). The EPP is the largest group in the Parliament with 36% of the seats, representing centre, pro-European Parties.



The Labour Party is part of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. This is the second-largest group in the parliament with 25% of the seats. It represents social democratic and socialist Parties.



Fianna Fáil is part of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. This is the third-largest group with 11% of the seats. It includes liberal Parties like the **Liberal Democrats** in the UK.



The Green Party/ Comhaontas Glas is part of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. This is the fourth-largest group in the parliament with 8% of the seats and represents 2 groups of political Parties concerned with ecological or regional issues.



Ireland does not have a political party in the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. This is the fifth-largest party in the Parliament with 7% of the seats. Its largest group of MEPs are from the British **Conservative Party**.



Sinn Féin and the **Socialist Party** are part of the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left. This is the sixth-largest group in the European Parliament with 5% of the seats, representing socialist and communist Parties.



There is one other group with 4% of the seats called the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group. This group includes UKIP from the UK. Four per cent of the MEP are non-aligned.

ABOUT BRIAN

Ireland's recovery is linked to a strong Europe. The euro is our currency. Decisions taken in the European Parliament affect us all. We need a strong and experienced voice standing up for Dublin and Ireland.

Brian Hayes has worked closely with Michael Noonan to restore our country's reputation and to start us on the road to recovery. He knows the people and how the EU works - he has the experience.



In 2011 the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, appointed Brian Minister of State in the Department of Finance. Brian works closely with Finance Minister Michael Noonan.

"My priorities are clear and Europe can help us achieve them:

- Jobs and training opportunities for young people.
- More supports for Irish business.
- A fair deal on our legacy bank debt."

From Clontarf, Brian now lives with his family in Tallaght. Brian has represented Dublin South-West for nearly 20 years.

Brian is Minister of State at the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works.

HAYES

BRIAN

VOTE

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FOR EUROPE

FINE GAEL 

BRIAN'S POLICIES

- Brian will be a champion for Dublin; promoting Dublin as a destination city for jobs, talent, culture and quality living.
- Brian will work to create a dynamic enterprise culture in Ireland, supported by quality education, training and lifelong learning.
- Brian will promote policies supporting start-up companies and increasing the flow of credit and other financial supports to small and medium sized companies; companies with growth potential.
- Brian will work with our Eurozone partners to create a banking system fit for purpose. He will continue the campaign for a fair deal on Ireland's legacy bank debts.
- Brian supports the creation of a Single Digital Market, allowing Irish companies compete in an open online Europe.



FINE GAEL

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This booklet does not purport to be a legal interpretation of the EU Treaties.