

Electing the European Parliament's President

At the January 2022 plenary sitting, the European Parliament (EP) is due to elect its 31st President, to hold office for the second half of the current term, up to the next European elections, following which the new Parliament will elect its President in July 2024. The President has an important and increasingly visible function in the EU institutional and international setting, mirroring the influential role of the Parliament as shaper of EU policies and as co-legislator.

Election procedure

Until 1979, EP Presidents were chosen on an annual or biennial basis. Since the first EP election by universal suffrage in 1979, the President is elected to the office for a renewable period of two and a half years. During each legislative term, a first election is normally held in July, immediately after the election of the new Parliament, and a second mid-term election is held two and a half years later, in January. It is currently envisaged that the January 2022 session will be held with Members present, but to ensure physical distancing, two additional rooms may be used simultaneously with the hemicycle.

According to [Article 14\(4\)](#) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the European Parliament elects its President from among its Members. The Parliament's [Rules of Procedure](#) (RoP), as last revised in [2020](#) and [2021](#), set out the procedure for this election.

The President is elected based on nominations, which may be handed in before each round of the ballot, with the nominees' consent. Candidates are [proposed](#) by political groups, but may also be nominated by a number of Members reaching at least the 'low threshold', i.e. one-twentieth (36) of Parliament's Members, ([Rules 15](#) and [179](#)). During the first plenary sitting after the election of a new Parliament, or at the sitting designated to elect the President for the mid-term election, the procedure is chaired by the outgoing President, or by one of the outgoing Vice-Presidents in order of precedence or, in their absence, by the MEP having held office for the longest period ([Rule 14](#)). The Parliament cannot deal with any other activity until the election of the new President is concluded (Rule 14(2)).

The vote is by secret ballot (Rule 15). Prior to January 2017, Rule 15 provided that, if the number of candidates (for President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors) was less than or equal to the number of seats to be filled, the election *may* be held by acclamation. [Rule 15](#) now provides that, in those circumstances, the election *shall* be held by acclamation unless a number of Members or political group(s) reaching at least the 'high threshold', i.e. one-fifth of Members (141), request a secret ballot. This provision is, however, unlikely to apply to the presidential election, where traditionally more than one nominee runs for the seat.

[Rule 16](#) provides that after nominations have been handed to the provisional chair of the plenary sitting, the latter announces them in plenary. The President is elected by an absolute majority of votes cast, i.e. 50 % +1, which can be less than an absolute majority of all Members since abstentions and spoilt or blank [votes](#) do not count. Rule 16 provides for a maximum of four ballots. If, after the third ballot, no absolute majority is reached, the fourth ballot is confined to the two candidates who obtained the highest number of votes in the third ballot, in which case the victory is attributed to the candidate (among the two) with the higher score. In the case of a tie at the fourth ballot, Rule 16(1) assigns the presidency to the older candidate. In electing the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, account should be taken of the need to ensure a fair representation of political views, geographical balance and gender balance (Rule 15(2)). The elected President is the sole person entitled to give an opening address.

Duties of the President

The President enjoys executive and representative powers, as well as responsibility for ensuring the rules of procedure are respected. The President directs all of Parliament's activities, including the duty to 'open, suspend and close sittings; to rule on the admissibility of amendments and other texts put to the vote, as well as on the admissibility of parliamentary questions'. Order is maintained during sittings by the President giving the floor to speakers. The President also closes debates, puts matters to the vote, announces the

results of votes and makes relevant communications to committees. The President's responsibility extends also to the security and inviolability of the Parliament's premises ([Rule 22](#)). Rule 22(4) attributes to the President the power to represent Parliament in international relations, on ceremonial occasions and in administrative, legal and financial matters, although some of these powers may be delegated.

The powers of the President, however, extend far beyond the mere letter of Rule 22. They also include, for example, the power to convene the conciliation committee, under both ordinary legislative procedure and in the budgetary procedure, in agreement with the President of the Council, and to chair Parliament's delegation to the conciliation committee (although under the ordinary legislative procedure this duty has often been delegated); to chair formal sittings when visiting heads of state address the Parliament; and during important votes or debates.

Since the late 1980s, the practice of the EP President addressing the European Council at the opening of all its meetings has developed, a sign of the increased visibility and recognition of the role in relation to the other institutions and the outside world. The President chairs both the EP Bureau and the Conference of Presidents, and may cast a deciding vote in the Bureau in the event of a tie. One significant symbol of the extent to which Parliament's powers have evolved is that the [EP President co-signs](#), with the President of the Council, legislative acts adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure ([Article 297\(1\)](#) TFEU). And, at the end of the annual budgetary procedure, it is the EP President who declares the EU budget adopted ([Article 314\(9\)](#) TFEU).

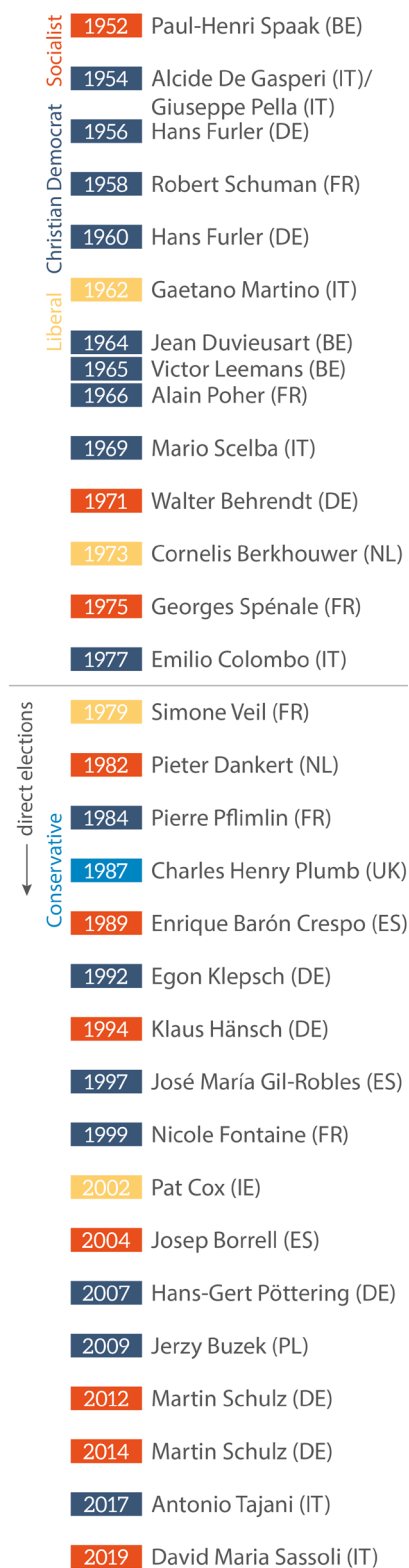
Election of Vice-Presidents and Quaestors

[Rule 15](#) makes it explicit that, after the election of the President, Members then elect the other main political office-holders of the Parliament – required for the correct functioning of the institution's activities. First the 14 Vice-Presidents, and then the 5 Quaestors, are elected in plenary. Nominations are made on the same basis as for the President (Rule 15). Under [Rule 17](#), the 14 Vice-Presidents are elected in a single ballot by a majority of votes cast. If the number of successful candidates is less than 14, a second vote is held to assign the remaining seats under the same conditions (absolute majority of votes cast). If a third vote is necessary, a [relative majority](#) is sufficient to fill the remaining seats (abstentions and spoilt votes do not count). Vice-Presidents take precedence in the order in which they are elected and, in the event of a tie, by age. If voted by acclamation, a vote by secret ballot determines the order of precedence. The election of Quaestors follows the same procedure as that for the election of Vice-Presidents ([Rule 18](#)).

In practice, the political groups aim to ensure that the Parliament's Bureau, made up of the Vice-Presidents, and the Quaestors, broadly reflect the numerical strength of the groups, including taking into account the results of the election of the President.

This is a further update of an [‘at a glance’ note](#), the most recent edition of which was published in June 2019.

Figure 1 – European Parliament Presidents



Data source: *The European Parliament* (9th edition), Corbett, Jacobs & Neville, 2016; with more recent data from EPRS.

