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Summary

Between May 22 and May 25, 2014, the 28 member states of the European Union (EU) will hold elections for the next European Parliament (EP). The Parliament is a key EU institution that represents the citizens of the EU. It works closely with the two other main EU bodies, the European Commission (the EU's executive) and the Council of the European Union (also known as the Council of Ministers, in which the national governments of the EU's 28 member states are represented). Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) serve five-year terms, and have been directly elected since 1979. The next EP will have 751 seats.

Once limited to being a consultative assembly, the EP has accumulated more power over time. Experts assert that the EU's latest effort at institutional reform—the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on December 1, 2009—has increased the relative power of the EP within the EU considerably. The EP now shares legislative power with the Council of Ministers in most policy areas, giving the EP the right to accept, amend, or reject the vast majority of EU laws (with some exceptions in areas such as tax matters or foreign policy). The Lisbon Treaty also gives the EP the power to decide on the allocation of the EU budget jointly with the Council, the right to approve or reject international agreements, and greater decision-making authority on trade-related issues. At the same time, some analysts contend that the EP still lacks the legitimacy of national parliaments and that many European citizens remain unaware of the EP's role within the EU.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are organized into political groups, which caucus according to political ideology rather than nationality. The EP's standing committees are key actors in the adoption of EU legislation, and EP delegations maintain international parliament-to-parliament relations. In the upcoming EP elections, anti-EU or "euroskeptic" political parties—which are predominantly nationalistic, populist, and on the far right of the political spectrum, although a few are on the left or far left—appear poised to make moderate to significant gains in several EU countries. As a result, some analysts suggest that they could alter the political composition of the next EP and have implications for the EU's legislative and policymaking processes over the next five years, especially if hardline elements are able to form a new political group. Other experts question the ability of these euroskeptic parties to forge a united front in a way that would significantly affect the functioning and character of the next EP.

The EP has not been shy about exerting its new powers under the Lisbon Treaty, and in some areas, with implications for U.S. interests. For example, EP concerns about U.S. data privacy safeguards have complicated U.S.-EU negotiations in the past on several information-sharing agreements aimed at countering terrorism. Following the initial unauthorized disclosures in June 2013 of U.S. National Security Agency surveillance programs and subsequent allegations that U.S. intelligence agencies have monitored EU diplomatic offices and engaged in other surveillance activities in Europe, many analysts worry about whether future U.S.-EU information-sharing agreements will be able to secure the necessary EP approval. In addition, EP approval will ultimately be required to allow any eventual U.S.-EU agreement on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to enter into force.

Ties between the EP and the U.S. Congress are long-standing, and institutional cooperation currently exists through the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD). In light of the EP's growing role as an actor in the conduct of U.S.-EU relations, the EP and its activities may be of increasing interest to the 113th Congress. Also see CRS Report RS21372, *The European Union: Questions and Answers*, by Kristin Archick.

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The European Parliament: A Key EU Institution

The European Parliament (EP) is a key institution of the European Union (EU). The EU is a political and economic partnership that represents a unique form of cooperation among its 28 member states.[1] The EU is the latest stage of a process of European integration begun in the 1950s to promote peace and economic prosperity in Europe; the EU has been built through a series of binding treaties, and its members have committed to harmonizing laws and adopting common policies on an extensive range of issues. EU member states work together through common institutions to set policy and promote their collective interests.

As the only EU institution that is directly elected, the European Parliament represents the citizens of the EU. Once limited to being a consultative assembly, the EP has accumulated more power over time. Successive EU treaties have enhanced the EP's role and responsibilities in an attempt to improve democratic accountability in the EU policymaking process.

Experts assert that the EU's most recent treaty, the Lisbon Treaty—which took effect on December 1, 2009—has increased the relative power of the EP within the EU significantly. The Lisbon Treaty contains a wide range of internal reforms aimed at improving the effectiveness of the EU's governing institutions, increasing democratic transparency within the EU, and giving the EU a more coherent voice and identity on the world stage. Among other measures, the Lisbon Treaty strengthens the EP's role in the EU's legislative and budgeting processes, gives the EP the right to approve or reject international agreements, and bolsters the EP's decision-making authority on trade-related issues. Many Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) view the EP as one of the big "winners" of this latest round of EU institutional reform.

The EP also works closely with the two other main EU institutions—the European Commission and the Council of the European Union (also known as the Council of Ministers). Despite the EP's growing power and influence, the EP is not widely considered a legislative body in the traditional sense because it cannot initiate legislation; that right rests largely with the Commission, which functions as the EU's executive. However, the EP shares the power to adopt most EU legislation jointly with the Council, composed of ministers of the 28 member states. Some analysts contend that the EP has a limited power of legislative initiative in that the EP can ask the Commission to introduce a legislative proposal, but others note that the Commission is not required to comply with the EP's request.

Between May 22 and May 25, 2014, the 28 member states of the EU will hold elections for the next EP. The incoming EP will have 751 seats (down from the current Parliament's 766 seat count as a result of changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty). Some analysts suggest that the recent rise of anti-EU or "euroskeptic" political parties in several EU member states may have significant implications for the upcoming EP elections and the composition of the next EP.

[1] The 28 member states of the EU are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Other EU Institutions

The ***European Council*** brings together the Heads of State or Government of the member states and the President of the European Commission at least four times a year (in what are often termed "EU Summits"). It acts principally as a strategic guide and driving force for EU policy. The European Council is headed by a President, who serves as the coordinator and spokesman for the work of the 28 Heads of State or Government.

The ***European Commission*** upholds the common interest of the Union as a whole. It is independent of the member states' national governments. As the EU's executive, the Commission has the sole right of legislative initiative in most cases and implements EU decisions and common policies. It also serves as the guardian of the EU's treaties, ensuring that member states adopt and abide by their provisions. The 28 Commissioners, one from each EU country, are appointed by agreement among the member states to five-year terms. One Commissioner serves as Commission President. Each of the other Commissioners holds a distinct portfolio (e.g., agriculture, energy, trade), similar to U.S. department secretaries and agency directors.

The ***Council of the European Union (Council of Ministers)*** represents the national governments of the 28 member states. The Council enacts legislation based on proposals put forward by the Commission and agreed to (in most cases) by the Parliament; in some sensitive areas such as taxation and foreign policy, however, the Council retains decision-making authority. A minister from each country takes part in Council meetings, with participation configured according to the subject under consideration (e.g., agriculture ministers would meet to discuss farm subsidies). The Presidency of the Council rotates among the member states, changing every six months.

The ***Court of Justice*** interprets EU law, and its rulings are binding. The ***Court of Auditors*** monitors the Union's financial management. A number of other ***advisory committees*** represent economic, social, and regional interests.

Role of the European Parliament

Legislative Process

The role of the European Parliament in the legislative process has expanded steadily over time as the scope of EU policy has grown. Initially, the EP was limited to offering nonbinding opinions in a "consultation procedure." The EP began to gain more power to affect EU legislation in the "cooperation procedure" of the 1986 Single European Act.

The introduction of the "co-decision procedure" in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, however, significantly enhanced the EP's role in the EU's legislative process in some areas, especially those related to the EU's common internal market. In the "co-decision procedure," the EP and the Council of Ministers share legislative power and must both approve a Commission proposal for it to become EU law; through "co-decision," the EP has the right to accept, amend, or reject proposed EU legislation. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 extended the use of "co-decision" to many additional policy areas (ranging from the environment to social policy). As more decisions within the Council of Ministers have become subject to a complex majority voting system rather than unanimity to allow for greater speed and efficiency of decision-making, the Parliament's right of "co-decision" has come to be viewed as an increasingly important democratic counterweight at the European level to the Commission and Council.

As noted above, the Lisbon Treaty strengthens the EP's responsibilities, especially in the EU's legislative process. It roughly doubles the Parliament's right of "co-decision" to almost 80 policy areas, including agriculture and justice and home affairs issues such as immigration and police cooperation. In doing so, the Lisbon Treaty gives the EP a say—equal to that of the member states in the Council of Ministers—over the vast majority of legislation passed in the EU. Tax matters, social security, and most aspects of foreign policy, however, are among the areas in which EU member states retain decision-making authority and to which the "co-decision procedure" does not apply. The Lisbon Treaty technically renames the "co-decision procedure" as the "ordinary legislative procedure," although the term "co-decision" continues to be used frequently in practice.

The "Co-decision Procedure"

The EU's "ordinary legislative procedure," or "co-decision," can be summarized as follows: (1) if Parliament and the Council of Ministers agree on a Commission proposal, it is approved; (2) if they disagree, the Council forms a common position; the EP can then either accept the Council's common position, or reject or amend it, by an absolute majority of its members; (3) if the Council cannot accept the EP's amendments, a conciliation meeting is convened, after which the EP and the Council approve an agreement if one can be reached. If they are unable to agree, the proposal is not adopted.

Additionally, in the "consent procedure," the EP must, by a simple "yes" or "no" majority, approve the accession of new EU member states and the conclusion of agreements with third parties, such as association and trade agreements with nonmember states.[2] If the Parliament does not give its consent, such agreements cannot enter into force. The EP may also issue nonbinding resolutions, subject to a simple majority.

Budgetary Process

The EP and the Council of Ministers together constitute the EU's budget authority and are responsible for allocating the EU's annual budget; they decide, for example, on the amount of funding dedicated to infrastructure as opposed to education. However, neither the EP nor the Council can affect the size of the EU's annual budget; that amount is fixed periodically by agreement among the EU's member states as a percentage of the Union's combined gross national income (GNI).[3] The EU's 2014 budget is EUR 143 billion (roughly $195 billion) in commitments and EUR 136 billion (or $186 billion) in payments.[4]

With the entrance into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Parliament has the right to decide on the allocation of the entire EU budget jointly with the Council. Previously, the EP had the last word on "noncompulsory" expenditures, such as development aid, but the Council had the final say on "compulsory" expenditures, such as spending related to agriculture or international agreements. The Lisbon Treaty eliminates the distinction between "compulsory" and "noncompulsory" expenditures. Of particular importance, the EP gains more control over agricultural spending, which usually accounts for over one-third of the EU's annual budget.

[2] Prior to the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the "consent procedure" was known as the "assent procedure."

[3] Currently, EU member states have set an annual budget ceiling of 1.23% of the Union's gross national income. The EU budget comes from three main sources: external customs duties; a share of each member state's value added tax (VAT) revenue; and a further contribution from each member state based on the size of its individual GNI.

[4] The level of commitment appropriations is the maximum value of commitments to pay future bills, whereas the payment appropriations is the actual amounts to pay for previous commitments.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the EU's annual budgetary procedure begins with the Commission proposing a draft budget. The Council adopts its position on the draft budget, including any amendments, and sends it to the EP for its consideration. The Parliament then has 42 days to either approve the draft budget or amend it and send it back to the Council. If the Council agrees with the EP's amendments, the budget is adopted; if the Council disagrees with the EP's changes, a Conciliation Committee is convened to resolve differences and reach agreement on a joint text within 21 days. The joint text must then be approved by both the Council and the EP; however, if the joint text is rejected by the Council, the EP—subject to certain conditions—ultimately has the right to approve the budget. In the event that both the EP and the Council reject the joint text or fail to decide, the Commission must submit a new draft budget. Some EP advocates assert that the EP's position in the annual budgetary process is now stronger than that of the Council, as the Council may never impose a budget against the will of the EP, but under some circumstances, the EP may impose a budget against the will of the Council; at the same time, most experts agree that in practice, the EP would likely only exert this right in exceptional situations.[5]

In determining the EU's annual budget, the EP and the Council must also adhere to annual spending limits laid out in the EU's multi-annual financial framework, which defines the long-term political priorities for the EU and sets annual maximum amounts for each priority and expenditure category.[6] According to the Lisbon Treaty, the Council must agree unanimously on each multiannual financial framework, after having obtained the Parliament's consent. As such, the Parliament has a degree of input into the EU's overall budgetary direction and the ability to help shape the EU budget to reflect its own political priorities.

In addition, the EP examines the European Commission's implementation of previous annual budgets through the "discharge procedure." In order to close the budget books of a given year, the EP must vote to grant "discharge" based on reports of the EU Court of Auditors and a recommendation of the Council. With its decision, the EP also presents the Commission with binding recommendations and observations regarding implementation of the budget. The EP's budgetary powers are considerably greater than those exercised by most parliaments in EU member states.

Supervision and Oversight Responsibilities

The Parliament has a supervisory role over the European Commission and exercises some limited oversight over the activities of the Council of Ministers. The EP monitors the management of EU policies, can conduct investigations and public hearings, and may submit oral and written questions to the Commission and the Council. The Presidency of the Council, which rotates among the member states every six months, presents its program to the Parliament at the beginning of its term and reports on results achieved at the end of its mandate.

[5] See Fact Sheets on the European Union, "The Budgetary Procedure," available on the website of the European Parliament, at http://www.europarl.europa.eu.

[6] The EU's current multiannual financial framework covers the period 2014-2020.

Of particular note, the EP plays a role in the approval process of each new Commission and Commission President every five years. According to the Lisbon Treaty, the member states agree together (usually during a meeting of the European Council) by unanimous consent on who to designate as the Commission President, and their selection must take into account the results of the most recent EP elections. Thus, the relative strengths of the political groups in the EP can affect who is nominated by the member states to this post. For the first time, five of the EP's main political groups have nominated candidates for the next Commission President ahead of the upcoming EP elections in May 2014. Many hope that this will help to improve voter turnout by establishing a "concrete and visible" link between voting in the elections and having a say in determining the future President of the European Commission, thereby also enhancing the EU's democratic legitimacy.

Once a nominee is chosen by the member states to be the next Commission President, he or she then must be "elected" by a majority vote in the EP. Some analysts note that this "election" procedure is also largely intended to raise public awareness of the importance of EP elections and the EP's role in choosing the Commission President; in practice, they assert, it differs very little from the previous parliamentary "approval" process. For example, in both 2004 and 2009—that is, before the Lisbon Treaty's entrance into force—the EP's strongest political group successfully demanded that the Commission President be of the same political stripe. At the same time, given that no single political group in the EP has ever held a majority on its own, the support of other political groups has always been needed in order to approve the nomination. In September 2009, the EP supported the re-appointment of 2004-2009 Commission President José Manuel Barroso for the 2009-2014 term (by a vote of 382 to 219, with 117 abstentions).[7]

Beyond its role in approving the Commission President, the EP also has the power to accept or reject a newly proposed Commission as a whole, but not individual nominees. The next European Commission is scheduled to take office on November 1, 2014. Since 1995, the EP has held U.S. Senate-style confirmation hearings for newly designated Commissioners, who are nominated by the member states. In February 2010, the EP voted to approve the so-called Barroso II Commission for the term ending in 2014. Although a new Commission was supposed to have been in place by November 2009, it was held up because of delays in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by some member states. The confirmation process for the new Commission was further slowed when the initial Bulgarian nominee withdrew her candidacy in mid-January 2010 after a contentious hearing before the Parliament amid concerns about her past financial dealings and her competence for her portfolio. A similar situation occurred in 2004, when the EP essentially forced the original Italian nominee to the Commission to withdraw due to concerns about his views on homosexuality and women's rights. Some observers view these episodes as signs of the EP's growing confidence and institutional clout.

In addition, the EP may dismiss the entire Commission (although, again, not individual Commissioners) through a vote of censure. To date, the EP has never adopted a motion of censure. However, in 1999, the entire Commission opted to resign rather than face a formal censure by the EP over alleged corruption charges.

[7] Barroso, from Portugal, is a former prime minister from a conservative Portuguese political party. As such, he was backed in both 2004 and 2009 for Commission President by the EP's largest political group, which is center-right in political orientation. See also, Sebastian Kurpas, "The Treaty of Lisbon: How Much 'Constitution' Is Left?," *CEPS Policy Brief*, December 2007.

Organization of the European Parliament

EP Elections

Members of the European Parliament serve five-year terms, and have been directly elected since 1979.[8] Voting for the EP takes place on a national basis, with the number of MEPs elected in each country based roughly on population size. Germany, for example, has the largest number of MEPs (99 in the current Parliament), while Cyprus, Estonia, Luxembourg, and Malta have the fewest (with 6 each).

The last EP elections were held on June 4-7, 2009. Roughly 375 million European citizens were eligible to cast a ballot in 2009. In EP elections, EU citizens may vote or run for a seat in their country of residence, without necessarily holding citizenship in that country. Turnout has declined in every EP election, from an average of 63% in 1979 to a new low of 43% in 2009. (Voter turnout varies greatly from one EU member state to another, however, from around 90% in EU countries where it is mandatory to 20% or lower in others.) Although the average percentage is comparable to turnout in U.S. mid-term elections, some analysts contend that relatively low voter participation compared to European national elections indicates a lack of awareness and understanding about the EP.

As noted previously, the next EP elections will be held May 22-25, 2014, with 751 seats at stake. Many observers suggest that the recent rise of anti-EU or "euroskeptic" political parties in several EU member states may have significant implications for the upcoming EP elections and the composition of the next Parliament. Most of these parties are nationalistic, populist, and far right in political orientation—although a few are on the left or far left—and have been gaining traction in several EU countries, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Their ascendancy has been fueled by a combination of factors, including Europe's financial crisis and economic downturn; fears about immigration, globalization, and lost national identities; and concerns in some member states about the continued relinquishing of national sovereignty to the EU. Although there is a wide range of euroskeptic parties—from those that advocate an end to the EU and/or the Eurozone to others that seek to reform the Union into a looser entity in which member states would retain greater sovereignty—some analysts estimate that euroskeptic parties combined could make up to 20% of the next EP.[9]

Political Groups

Once elected, Members of the European Parliament caucus according to transnational groups based on political ideology, rather than by nationality. A political group must consist of at least 25 MEPs from a minimum of seven EU member states. The current EP currently has seven political groups—containing over 100 individual political parties—plus a number of "nonattached" or independent members.

[8] Prior to direct elections, MEPs were appointed by their national parliaments.

[9] Joshua Chaffin, "Europe: United By Hostility," *Financial Times,* October 15, 2013; Naftali Bendavid and Gabriele Parussini, "Anti-EU Parties Gather Strength in Europe," *Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 2014; "Latest Poll Predicts Tie in EU Parliament Race," EurActiv.com, March 20, 2014.

Membership in a political group gives MEPs more influence, as groups receive funding from the EP and more speaking time than do nonattached members. The relative size of the political groups helps to determine EP leadership positions and committee posts. The chair or cochairs of each political group also has voting rights in the Conference of Presidents, the political body in Parliament that manages the EP's internal organization. Prior to EP legislative votes, MEPs within each group study the legislative proposals in question with the support of committee reports, discuss prospective amendments, and seek to arrive at a consensus group position. However, individual MEPs are not bound to vote according to their group's position.

Table 1. Political Groups and Seats in the European Parliament: Results of the 2009 Election and Current Seat Allocations

(adjustments reflect the addition of new MEPs in 2011 and 2013)

	2009 Election Results	Current Seat Allocations
European People's Party [Christian Democrats] (EPP; center-right)	265	274
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D; center-left/socialists)	184	196
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE; centrist/liberals)	84	83
Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA; greens and regionalists)	55	57
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR; right-wing, anti-federalist)	54	57
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL; far-left and former communists)	35	35
Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD; far-right/euroskeptics)	32	31
Nonattached members	27	33
Total Number of Seats in the EP	**736**	**766**

Sources: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/index_en.html; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/eu/search.html.

As no single group has ever held an absolute majority in the European Parliament, compromise and coalition-building are important elements of the legislative process. Some analysts assert that distinct ideological definitions between groups are becoming more complicated, as voting blocs form increasingly according to specific issues and interests. Nevertheless, the two largest groups have tended to dominate the Parliament historically.

In the 2009 elections, the *Group of the European People's Party [Christian Democrats] (EPP*) retained its position as the largest political group in the EP. The EPP is center-right in political orientation. In relative terms, the strength of the EPP in the 2009 elections increased significantly due to a sizeable drop in support for center-left parties. Although circumstances and issues differed in each EU member state, some analysts interpreted these results as indicating greater public preference for the approaches of conservative and center-right parties in handling the global financial crisis and recession. However, the center-left *Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D)* remained the EP's second-largest political group following the 2009 elections.

The EPP and the S&D have a history of cross-ideological legislative partnership. As in the 2004-2009 EP (in which the S&D was called the PES—the Socialist Group in the European Parliament), the two parties have continued to cooperate closely in an unofficial "grand coalition" and together frequently shape politics in the EP. Critics argue that the consensus-seeking of the "grand coalition" makes politics in the EP stale and paradoxical. Other observers note that maximizing consensus and unity lends the EP greater institutional weight. As a general rule, most MEPs prefer consensus outcomes that are endorsed by a large and broad majority.

The third-largest group in the current EP is the *Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)*. ALDE is centrist and liberal in political orientation (in European political terminology, "liberal" connotes an emphasis on free market economics, individual rights, social equality, and de-centralized government). In the past, ALDE was viewed as the "kingmaker," able to exercise a decisive swing vote for a majority in the EP. However, as a result of some losses suffered by ALDE in the 2009 elections and the shift of the political balance in the EP largely to the right, some analysts assert that ALDE's political capital has decreased. Other observers contend that as the third-largest group, ALDE's position on a given issue has still been a crucial factor in the outcome of many EP votes.

The remaining four political groups in the current EP are smaller in size. On the left side of the political spectrum are the *Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA)*; and the *Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)*. The Greens-EFA is largely comprised of numerous European Green parties—leftist in political orientation with a strong emphasis on pro-environment politics and human rights—and several regional parties (e.g., Scottish, Welsh, Basque, and Catalonian) with a leftist or center-left outlook. Despite the overall trend in the EP to the right in the 2009 elections, the Greens-EFA attracted many voters who sought change, resulting in a significant increase in the number of their seats. The GUE-NGL consists of parties that are even farther left in orientation; some have a Green emphasis while others have roots in communism. The GUE-NGL is pro-EU and pro-integration, but strongly critical of existing EU structures, policies, and overall direction.

On the right side of the political spectrum are two groups formed following the 2009 election: the *European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)*; and the *Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD)*. The ECR came into existence after the UK Conservative Party broke with the EPP amid growing unease with the EPP's support for continued EU integration. The ECR is right-wing in political orientation, concerned about the loss of national sovereignty in the EU, and opposed to a federal Europe. Even farther to the right is the EFD, composed of euroskeptics and critics of the EU who strongly oppose further European integration.

Many of the "nonattached" or independent members in the current EP hail from far-right extremist parties, which made gains in the 2009 EP elections in a number of countries, such as Austria, Hungary, and the Netherlands. However, these far-right MEPs hold a relatively small number of seats in the current Parliament and appear to have little cohesion among themselves. Analysts note that they have been unable to form a political group and, as a result, their impact in the current EP has been minimal.[10]

[10] "Voters Steer Europe to the Right," BBC News, June 8, 2009; Stephen Castle, "Far Right Is Left Out at EU's Assembly," *International Herald Tribune*, July 15, 2009; Julia De Clerck-Sachsse, "The New European Parliament: All Change or Business as Usual?," *CEPS Special Report*, August 2009.

Composition of Political Groups in the Current European Parliament

European People's Party (EPP). The center-right EPP contains MEPs from Germany's Christian Democratic/Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU), France's Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), Spain's Partido Popular (PP), Italy's People of Freedom, Poland's Civic Platform, and numerous other Christian Democratic, conservative, center-right, and centrist national parties. The chair of the EPP is French MEP Joseph Daul.

Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D). The center-left S&D includes MEPs from Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD), France's Socialist Party, the UK Labour Party, Spain's Socialist Party, and numerous other Socialist, Social Democratic, and center-left parties. The chair of S&D is Austrian MEP Hannes Swoboda.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). MEPs in the centrist ALDE hail from the UK Liberal Democrats Party, Germany's Free Democrat Party (FDP), and Ireland's Fianna Fail. The chair of ALDE is Belgian MEP (and former Belgian Prime Minister) Guy Verhofstadt.

Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA). The leftist and pro-environment Greens-EFA includes MEPs from Germany's Alliance '90/The Greens, France's Europe Ecologie, and the Scottish National Party. The cochairs of the Greens-EFA are French MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit and German MEP Rebecca Harms.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). The right-wing ECR includes MEPs from the UK Conservative Party, Poland's Law and Justice Party, and the Czech Republic's Civic Democratic Party. The chair of ECR is UK MEP Martin Callanan.

European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL). The far-left GUE-NGL contains MEPs from Germany's Die Linke, the French Communist Party, the Portuguese Communist Party, and the all-Ireland party Sinn Fein. The chair of GUE-NGL is German MEP Gabriele Zimmer.

Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD). The largest contingents in the euroskeptic EFD are from the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which advocates UK withdrawal from the EU, and Italy's Lega Nord. The cochairs of EFD are British MEP Nigel Farage and Italian MEP Francesco Enrico Speroni.

Note: This box is meant for illustrative purposes; it is not a definitive or exhaustive list of all the political parties comprising each political group in the European Parliament.

As discussed earlier, a wide spectrum of euroskeptic parties appear poised to make moderate to significant gains in the upcoming EP elections, with more extreme or "hardline" euroskeptics likely to win between 40 to 50 seats. EU officials and mainstream MEPs have expressed concerns that the formation of a far-right, hardline euroskeptic political group could help block legislative initiatives, create gridlock, and hamper efforts toward further EU integration, especially if such a group worked closely with the ECR and the EFD. However, many analysts doubt that the hardliners will be able to meet the EP's numerical and, especially, its geographic requirements for establishing a political group. Those of this view contend that such parties are extremely disparate, with competing nationalist agendas and personalities, as well as a diverse range of social and economic positions based on different traditions and local politics. Moreover, some far-right euroskeptic parties that do not have roots in fascism have been keen to distance themselves from those that do. For example, UKIP has rejected overtures to work with France's far-right, anti-EU, anti-immigration *Front National* because of its racist and anti-Semitic past, while *Front National* (which has been attempting to reinvent itself) has asserted that it would not work with parties that it considers to be neo-Nazi, such as Hungary's *Jobbik* and Greece's Golden Dawn.

While some recent press reports claim that a new prospective hardline "European Alliance for Freedom" may have enough MEPs from enough EU member states to form a political group, most observers believe it is not yet a done deal. Analysts also point out that even if the hardline euroskeptics can forge a political group in the next EP and form voting alliances with the ECR, the EFD, and some nonattached members, they will still be a collective minority. The EPP and the S&D combined are expected to retain a clear majority of roughly 400 seats. Even a fully united euroskeptic front would have to gain the support of other political groups to block legislation, and most experts assert that it is unlikely that they could create wholesale gridlock.[11]

Others assert that regardless of whether the hardline euroskeptics are able to form a political group, their presence in the EP could have still some significant implications. With or without a group, hardliners could use the EP as a venue from which to espouse their anti-EU views—thereby threatening current EU efforts to restore public faith in the EU project in the wake of the Eurozone crisis—and as a platform from which to advance themselves in national politics in their home countries. In addition, some analysts suggest that the euroskeptic parties (on both the right and left) could shift certain EU economic and social policies if they prompt mainstream EP political groups and established EU leaders to embrace similar positions in order to protect their own national bases of support. Such political dynamics could produce a greater emphasis in the next EP and in the EU more generally on economic growth rather than austerity measures, tighter EU immigration policies, and slower progress toward further EU enlargement or integration.[12]

The EP President

Every two-and-a-half years (twice per parliamentary term), MEPs vote to elect a President of the European Parliament. The majority coalition in the EP (previously and currently an unofficial "Grand Coalition" between the EPP and the Socialists) has traditionally agreed to split the position of EP president over each five-year term. At the opening session of the current EP in mid-July 2009, Members elected Polish MEP Jerzy Buzek of the EPP as President for the first half of the 2009-2014 parliamentary term. Buzek, a former prime minister of Poland, was the first ever EP President from one of the Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004. In January 2012, German MEP Martin Schulz of S&D took over as EP President for the second half of the EP's current term. Schulz has been an MEP since 1994 and was the leader of S&D until his election as EP President.

The President of the EP represents the Parliament externally and in relations with the other EU institutions. The President oversees the work of the Parliament and is responsible for ensuring that its rules of procedure are followed. The President is assisted in managing the Parliament's internal organization and affairs by a Conference of Presidents (composed of the EP President and the chairs of the political groups) and by a Bureau (composed of 14 Vice-Presidents and five Quaestors, responsible for administrative and financial matters). The signature of the EP President is the final step in approval of the EU budget, and the EP President cosigns, together with the appropriate representative of the Council of Minister's rotating presidency, legislation adopted under the co-decision procedure.

[11] Andrew Higgins, "Right Wing's Surge in Europe Has the Establishment Rattled," *New York Times*, November 8, 2013; "Turning Right," *The Economist*, January 4, 2014; Cas Mudde, "The Le Pen-Wilders Alliance and the European Parliament," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2014; Thomas Seymat, "How the European Elections Could Redesign the Eurosceptic Landscape," Euronews.com, April 10, 2014.

[12] Naftali Bendavid and Gabriele Parussini, "Anti-EU Parties Gather Strength in Europe," *Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 2014; "Turning Right," *The Economist*, January 4, 2014; "Latest Poll Predicts Tie in EU Parliament Race," EurActiv.com, March 20, 2014.

Committees

The EP has 20 standing committees, each addressing specific issues such as education, the environment, and economic and monetary affairs. The EP may also set up subcommittees and special committees, which investigate or oversee specific issues for a limited period of time. For example, in 2006, the EP established a special committee to examine the role of EU member states in hosting secret CIA detention facilities and aiding CIA flights related to the rendition of terrorism suspects. Only the EP's foreign affairs committee currently has subcommittees (one focuses on human rights, the other on security and defense issues).

EP committees vary in size, usually containing from 20 to 80 MEPs. Each committee has a chairman, four vice-chairmen, and a secretariat to guide its work. The political makeup of the committees reflects that of the EP as a whole, and committee posts are allocated proportionally to the respective size of the political groups; for example, the EPP currently chairs eight committees, the S&D six, and the ALDE two.

EP committees are key actors in the adoption of EU legislation. In terms of their importance and strength, EP committees rival those in the U.S. Congress and surpass the role of committees in most national European legislatures. EP committees consider legislative proposals put forward by the Commission and the Council of Ministers. The appropriate committee (e.g., the Committee on the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety would deal with legislation on pollution) appoints a MEP as "rapporteur" to draft a report on the legislative proposal under consideration. The rapporteur submits a draft report to the committee for discussion, which the committee then votes on and possibly amends. The committee's report is then considered in a plenary session of the entire Parliament, amended if necessary, and put to a vote. The EP thus adopts its position on the proposed EU legislation. Committees may also draw up their "own initiative" reports, in which they recommend action in a particular area by the Commission or the member states.

Delegations

The European Parliament plays a role in the EU's international presence through a total of 41 delegations that range in size; most have between 20 and 50 MEPs. These delegations maintain parliament-to-parliament contacts and relations with representatives of many countries and regions around the world. For example, the EP has interparliamentary delegations for relations with the United States and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, as well as with Russia, Iran, Israel, the Palestinian Legislative Council, China, India, and the Korean Peninsula.

Administration

A Secretariat of almost 5,000 nonpartisan civil servants provides administrative and technical support to the Parliament. In addition, MEPs and political groups have their own staffs.

Location and Schedule

Strasbourg, France (near the German border), is the official seat of the EP; plenary sessions are held there for one week a month. For two weeks a month, the EP's standing committees meet 300 miles to the northwest in Brussels, Belgium, where the European Commission and the Council of Ministers are located. There are also occasional "part plenary" sessions (two days) in Brussels. One week each month is set aside for meetings of the political groups, which are usually held in Brussels. MEPs must have offices and lodgings in both cities. The EP's Secretariat is based in both Brussels and Luxembourg, which is about mid-way between Strasbourg and Brussels.

Languages

Simultaneous interpretation of all parliamentary and committee debates is provided in the EU's 24 official languages. All parliamentary documents are translated into 22 of these languages (Irish and Maltese are sometimes excepted), and some documents must be translated into all 24. Such extensive translation and publication services represent significant administrative costs. However, many EU and EP officials consider such costs to be a price worth paying, both on democratic grounds—to enable MEPs to scrutinize and vote on draft EU laws in the languages they understand best—and on grounds of cultural and linguistic diversity within the Union.

Growing Influence and Ongoing Challenges

As noted previously, EP advocates assert that "co-decision" and its institutional supervisory roles have substantially enhanced the Parliament's influence. The Lisbon Treaty, in effect, gives the EP veto authority over the vast majority of EU legislation and a greater say over the EU's budget. In addition, the Lisbon Treaty gives the EP the right to approve or reject all international agreements by a simple majority and expands the EP's decision-making authority over trade-related issues. Analysts observe that the EP has not been shy about exerting its new powers under the Lisbon Treaty. Over the last two years, for example, the annual budget negotiations between the EP and the Council of Ministers have gone down to the wire and MEPs are increasingly (and successfully) demanding greater input during the drafting and negotiation stages of the EU legislative process.

Supporters also claim that the EP's influence has been growing even in consultative areas, such as the EU's common foreign policy, where the "co-decision procedure" does not apply and where decisions rest largely with the member states. They maintain that the EP has become a forum for debate on international issues, and uses its power of consent on cooperation accords with third parties and Parliamentary resolutions to promote its views and highlight issues such as human rights. For example, many observers credit the EP's opposition in 2005 to ending the EU's arms embargo on China (on both human rights and strategic grounds) as one factor that eventually dissuaded member states from lifting the embargo. More recently, some experts assert that the agreement reached between the EP and the other EU institutions on the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS)—the new EU diplomatic corps called for by the Lisbon Treaty—has the potential to greatly increase the EP's voice in the foreign policy realm. The EP fought for and largely won considerable oversight of the EEAS by demanding scrutiny over its political appointments, staffing, and budget.

At the same time, a number of analysts suggest that the enhanced powers granted to the EP by the Lisbon Treaty, and the EP's resulting newfound assertiveness, could lead to greater interinstitutional rivalry. This could make the EU's legislative and decision-making processes even more complex as the EP, the European Commission, and the Council of Ministers all vie to protect their own institutional turf. For example, some observers contend that wrangling between the EP and the other EU institutions regarding the EEAS delayed its establishment. Others counter that a main aim of the Lisbon Treaty was to improve democratic accountability within the EU, and that the EP is merely seeking to defend its parliamentary prerogatives and the interests of EU citizens. As such, they view the debate among the various EU institutions over the establishment of the EEAS as part of the democratic process.

Despite the EP's new powers and growing influence following the Lisbon Treaty, the EP still faces several challenges of public perception. A November 2011 opinion poll found that 45% of people across all EU member states had a "neutral" opinion of the EP, but that 26% had a "negative" view (up 9 percentage points compared to a similar 2008 poll).[13] Some skeptics contend that the EP, despite being a directly elected body, lacks the legitimacy of national parliaments. They argue that the EU's legislative process is overly complex and often focused on highly technical issues, leading to a lack of public understanding about the role of the EP. Limited public awareness of the EP's activities, they maintain, is reflected in the consistently declining turnout in European Parliament elections. And while studies on voting behavior in the EP show that ideology holds greater influence than nationality (with MEPs voting with their party groups the vast majority of the time), many MEPs campaign for the European Parliament on national rather than European issues. Many voters also tend to view EP elections as national mid-term elections—an indication of voter opinion on the performance of the national government—rather than as a vote on Europe-wide issues.[14]

Another major concern is costs, which the EP has long been under public pressure to reduce. The fact that MEPs and their staffs regularly shuttle between three cities leads to sizeable travel and hotel bills; current outside estimates suggest that such commuting costs total roughly $285 million a year.[15] Yet, the suggestion that the EP should consolidate its operations in one city continues to meet with strong opposition in the host countries of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, which fear the loss of symbolism and prestige, in addition to jobs and other economic benefits. The French city of Strasbourg, which is close to the German border, was originally chosen as the seat of the EP to serve as a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the two countries, and both argue it should continue to do so. Construction of multi-million-dollar buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg in the late 1990s to accommodate the growth in MEPs following the addition of 10 new members in 2004 also stirred public controversy.

In addition, the EP continues to battle against a "gravy train" image and charges that it lacks transparency. Until 2009, for example, the EP had a flat-rate expense regime and MEPs did not have to submit for reimbursement for business and travel expenses. Recently, the EP has been beset by a "cash-for-amendments" scandal, in which several MEPs have been accused of accepting money in exchange for introducing amendments on legislation pending in the EP. In response, the EP approved a new code of conduct in December 2011 aimed at tightening rules on MEPs' financial declarations and on their contacts with lobbyists. Critics contend, however, that the new code of conduct contains a number of loopholes, with MEPs still able to engage in some paid outside activities and permitted to accept certain gifts of hospitality without having to disclose them.[16]

[13] Eurobarometer, *Parlemeter 2011*; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2012/76-3/report_EN.pdf.

[14] Simon Hix and Abdul Noury, "After Enlargement: Voting Patterns in the Sixth European Parliament," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, May 2009; Julia De Clerck-Sachsse and Piotr Maciej Kaczynski, "The European Parliament: More Powerful, Less Legitimate," *CEPS Working Document*, May 2009.

[15] As quoted in Suzanne Daley and Stephen Castle, "A Parliament on the Move Grows Costly," *New York Times*, June 28, 2011.

[16] "MEPs Approve New Code of Conduct," EurActiv.com, December 2, 2011; James Kanter, "Europeans Losing Faith in Their Parliament," *New York Times*, November 5, 2012.

The United States and the European Parliament

Implications of the EP's Evolution for U.S. Interests

Policy makers and analysts on both sides of the Atlantic assert that the European Parliament's enhanced powers following the entrance into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 has made the EP an increasingly important actor in the conduct of U.S.-EU relations. As noted previously, the EP has been keen to exert its new powers under the Lisbon Treaty, and this has had implications for U.S. interests, especially with respect to the approval of several U.S.-EU or international agreements. In February 2010, for example, by a vote of 378 to 196 (with 31 abstentions), the EP rejected a U.S.-EU accord aimed at countering terrorism; the so-called SWIFT agreement, negotiated by the European Commission and approved by the Council of Ministers, would have continued allowing U.S. authorities access to European financial data in an effort to help prevent or investigate terrorist attacks. Prior to the Lisbon Treaty, the EP did not have the authority to veto such an accord.

Observers attribute the EP's rejection of the U.S.-EU SWIFT accord to several factors. Many MEPs had long claimed that the U.S.-EU SWIFT agreement did not contain sufficient protections to safeguard the personal data and privacy rights of EU citizens; thus, many saw the "no" vote as unsurprising on substantive grounds. In addition, however, some MEPs reportedly sought to send a message to the Commission and Council, conveying that the EP's position—in light of the changes brought about by the Lisbon Treaty—must now be taken into account during (and not after) the negotiation of international agreements or the drafting of new legislative proposals. Although the EP eventually approved a revised U.S.-EU SWIFT agreement in July 2010, it did so only after several EP demands related to strengthening data privacy protections were agreed to by the United States, the European Commission, and the Council of Ministers.

Some experts also worried that another U.S.-EU anti-terrorism measure related to sharing Passenger Name Record (PNR) flight data might be rejected by the EP. Since 2004, the United States and the EU had concluded several agreements permitting airlines operating flights between Europe and the United States to provide U.S. counterterrorism and law enforcement authorities with PNR data. These PNR accords were controversial in Europe, and especially in the EP, because of privacy and data protection concerns. Until the Lisbon Treaty, however, the EP did not have a role in approving these accords.

After the Lisbon Treaty, it became evident that a PNR agreement dating from 2007, which had been provisionally in force, required EP approval (by majority vote) in order for it to remain in force. In December 2010, the Obama Administration agreed to renegotiate some elements of the 2007 PNR accord, largely in recognition of the fact that the EP was unlikely to approve the existing 2007 agreement. U.S.-EU negotiations on a revised PNR accord were concluded in November 2011. After some contentious debates, the EP approved the revised U.S.-EU PNR agreement in April 2012 (by a vote of 409 to 226, with 33 abstentions). U.S. officials assert that while the new PNR agreement includes several innovations aimed at meeting EP concerns and better safeguarding passengers' personal information, it also preserves and in some cases improves the accord's operational effectiveness.

EP concerns about data privacy have been heightened further in the wake of the June 2013 disclosures of U.S. National Security Agency surveillance programs, press reports suggesting that U.S. intelligence agencies have monitored EU diplomatic offices, and subsequent allegations of other U.S. intelligence operations in Europe (including reported phone record collection efforts in France and Spain as well as the past monitoring of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile phone). Consequently, many analysts worry that future U.S.-EU information-sharing agreements may not be able to secure the necessary EP approval. The U.S.-EU SWIFT accord will be up for renewal in 2015, and the PNR agreement in 2019. EP approval will also be required for any eventual U.S.-EU data privacy and protection agreement (DPPA), under negotiation since 2011; the DPPA is intended to bridge U.S.-EU differences in the application of privacy rights and make the negotiation of future data-sharing accords easier in the law enforcement context.[17]

In response to the NSA programs and other spying allegations, the EP established a special working group (within the EP's civil liberties committee) to conduct an in-depth investigation into U.S. surveillance activities (as well as similar, related intelligence collection efforts by EU member states). The EP's working group was chaired by Claude Moraes, a British MEP from the S&D political group. In March 2014, the full Parliament adopted the so-called "Moraes report" (with 544 votes in favor, 78 opposed, and 60 abstentions), concluding the EP's inquiry into the alleged surveillance activities.[18]

The "Moraes report" is deeply critical of the NSA's alleged mass surveillance programs, as well as those purportedly carried out by the UK's signals intelligence agency, and asserts that such mass surveillance activities could have potentially severe implications on fundamental freedoms and the privacy rights of EU citizens. The report also contains a long list of recommendations, some of which pertain to U.S.-EU political, security, and economic relations. In particular, the report urges the United States to revise its legislation to recognize the privacy rights of EU citizens and to provide judicial redress; reiterates previous EP calls for the immediate suspension of the U.S.-EU SWIFT agreement and notes concerns about the PNR accord; and calls on the European Commission to suspend the U.S.-EU Safe Harbor agreement (which dates from 2000 and enables U.S. companies to process European customer data). The resolution approving the "Moraes report" is not binding on the European Commission or the member states, which do not appear inclined at present to take action against SWIFT; similarly, the Commission has rejected suspending Safe Harbor because, in its view, doing so could adversely affect EU and U.S. business interests. Nevertheless, the "Moraes report" does express the "sense" of the Parliament on these issues, and thus carries a degree of political weight.

[17] For more information on the SWIFT and PNR accords, and on the DPPA negotiations, see CRS Report RS22030, *U.S.-EU Cooperation Against Terrorism*, by Kristin Archick.

[18] European Parliament resolution P7_TA(2014)0230, adopted March 12, 2014, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu. The full text of the "Moraes report" is contained in this resolution.

The alleged U.S. surveillance activities have also prompted MEPs to demand that EU data protection reforms, which have been under discussion in the EP since January 2012, include even stronger safeguards than those initially proposed by the European Commission for personal data transferred outside of the EU. In March 2014, the Parliament approved several changes to the Commission's proposal on data protection reforms that would essentially require U.S.-based Internet and social media companies to obtain the approval of European officials before complying with any U.S. warrants for the personal data of EU citizens; significant monetary fines would be imposed should companies fail to comply. U.S. officials and industry representatives are concerned that such provisions could impede U.S.-European law enforcement cooperation, be overly burdensome for U.S. businesses, and put U.S. firms in a difficult situation, in which they would be forced to choose between complying with U.S. legal demands for data and EU rules that may prohibit its transfer. The EP's version of the proposed data protection reforms, however, must still be approved by the EU member states.[19]

Meanwhile, a key U.S.-EU-led effort to protect intellectual property rights (IPR), especially as they apply in the digital environment, has been complicated by the EP. In July 2012, the EP rejected the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), by a vote of 478 to 39, with 168 abstentions. ACTA was negotiated over the course of three years by the United States, the EU, and several other countries to strengthen IPR protection and enforcement measures worldwide. MEPs opposed to ACTA cited concerns that it was too vague and could jeopardize civil liberties, including Internet free speech. The EP's rejection of ACTA prevents the EU and its member states from joining the agreement in its current form, and the accord's future prospects are unclear.[20]

In addition, EP approval will ultimately be required to allow a future U.S.-EU accord on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to enter into force. The EP has strongly supported the TTIP concept as a way to boost economic growth and stimulate job creation on both sides of the Atlantic. U.S.-EU negotiations on TTIP were launched in July 2013. However, following the disclosures of the NSA surveillance programs and the other allegations of U.S. intelligence collection activities in Europe, MEPs have cautioned European Commission officials to ensure that EU data protection standards are not undermined by any potential measures agreed to as part of TTIP, such as those governing transatlantic trade in services delivered over the Internet. The "Moraes report" also warns that the consent of the EP to the final TTIP agreement could be endangered if the United States does not take steps to address EU concerns about U.S. safeguards for EU citizens' personal data, and that EU data protection legislation cannot be deemed as a trade discrimination measure during the course of the TTIP negotiations.[21]

[19] James Fontanella-Khan, "MEPs Call for Clause to Limit American Internet Snooping," *Financial Times*, June 19, 2013; Michael Birnbaum, "EU Fury on Allegations of U.S. Spying," *Washington Post*, June 30, 2013; European Parliament Press Release, "MEPs Tighten Up Rules To Protect Personal Data in the Digital Era," March 12, 2014.

[20] For more information, see CRS Report R41107, *The Proposed Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement: Background and Key Issues*, by Shayerah Ilias Akhtar.

[21] For more information on TTIP, see CRS Report R43387, *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) Negotiations*, by Shayerah Ilias Akhtar and Vivian C. Jones.

Congress-Parliament Relations

Ties between the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress date back to 1972, when a U.S. congressional delegation first visited the EP in Brussels and Luxembourg. Since then, with a few exceptions, congressional-EP exchanges have taken place twice a year, and have provided the opportunity for sustained dialogue. The U.S. Congress-EP exchange is the oldest and widely considered the most prestigious of the EP's interparliamentary dialogues.

In 1999, the EP and the U.S. Congress launched the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD) as their official response to the U.S.-EU commitment in the 1995 New Transatlantic Agenda to enhance parliamentary ties between the EU and the United States. With the TLD, the two sides have committed to regular meetings twice a year to discuss a wide range of topical political and economic issues. In the EP, the TLD is led by a chairman and EP participants in the semi-annual TLD meetings are drawn from the EP's Delegation for Relations with the United States. In Congress, the TLD is headed by a chair and vice-chair and U.S. participants are from the House only. The most recent TLD meeting took place March 24-26, 2014, in Washington, DC (the venue for the TLD usually alternates between the United States and Europe). However, some U.S. analysts observe that the TLD remains relatively obscure in Congress, with ambiguity regarding which Members actually belong, and no role given to the U.S. Senate.

Many MEPs would like to enhance cooperation with the U.S. Congress further. In March 2009, the EP adopted a resolution, which among other measures, asserted that the U.S. Congress and the EP should promote closer ties between legislative committees and should create a reciprocal legislative "early-warning" system to identify potential legislative activities that could affect relations between the United States and the EU. In January 2010, the EP established a liaison office with the U.S. Congress in Washington, DC; EP staffers deployed as part of this office seek to keep the EP better informed of legislative activity in the U.S. House and Senate by attending hearings, following legislation, and establishing working relationships with Members of Congress, committees, and their staffs.[22]

Especially in light of the EP's new powers as a result of the Lisbon Treaty, some U.S. officials and analysts suggest that it is in U.S. interests for Congress to forge stronger ties with the EP. Those of this view note that in the past, there have been instances in which legislation passed by either Congress or the EU has contributed to U.S.-EU tensions. In 2002, for example, U.S.-EU frictions surfaced over the Sarbanes-Oxley Act to reform corporate accounting practices; EU officials claimed that the U.S. legislation did not take into account differences in European corporate governance and financing mechanisms. More recently, U.S. officials and many Members of Congress have strongly objected to the inclusion of aviation in the EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS) and oppose its application to U.S. air carriers. Some experts assert that tensions over such issues could have perhaps been avoided—or at least reduced—if both sides' legislative bodies had consulted more ahead of time.

[22] European Parliament resolution A6-0114/2009, adopted March 26, 2009.

On the other hand, skeptics doubt the need to establish a closer relationship between Congress and the EP. They assert that structural and procedural differences could make effective legislative coordination difficult, and that there are some issues in which the EP may have a legislative say, but Congress does not, and vice-versa. For example, the EP had to give its consent to the U.S.-EU agreements on SWIFT and PNR, but these accords were not subject to equivalent congressional approval because they were negotiated by the United States as executive agreements under existing U.S. law. Others maintain, however, that even in matters in which only one side has a direct legislative role, closer ties and personal relationships between Members of Congress and their counterparts in the EP could help sway the debate and perhaps produce more favorable outcomes. Some believe that the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, as well as data privacy issues, may help to heighten Congress-EP engagement in the years ahead.[23]

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[23] For more information, see CRS Report R41552, *The U.S. Congress and the European Parliament: Evolving Transatlantic Legislative Cooperation*, by Kristin Archick and Vincent L. Morelli.