

Stock-taking of the European Elections 2024

KEY FINDINGS

The European Electoral Act decrees that the Members of the European Parliament shall be elected on the basis of proportional representation, using the list system or the single transferable vote. There is much leeway for a Member State to turn terms like “proportional representation” or “the list system” into executable rules. As a result, Member States differ considerably as to their electoral provisions.

The briefing presents an overview of the vote patterns used by the Member States, of the apportionment methods to convert the votes of a domestic electorate into seats for the competing parties, and of the ways in which the seats of a party are assigned to this party's candidates.

This briefing singles out five recommendations:

- (1) Domestic parties that are affiliated with distinct European political parties should submit distinct lists of candidates at the election. List-alliances of such parties misdirect the electorate and should be inhibited.
- (2) Domestic parties should be obliged to exhibit the European political party to which they are affiliated, to commit their European orientation.
- (3) European political parties and their affiliated domestic parties should be remunerated for their coordination at European elections, through a new European Electoral Authority or the existing Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations.
- (4) The composition of future Parliaments should be determined by an objective, fair, durable and transparent procedure.
- (5) Efforts should be enhanced to focus European elections on the political body that is up for election: the European Parliament. Several possibilities exist in order to introduce a Union-wide element into the election, among them the creation of transnational lists that would stand in parallel with the extant elections in the Member States. Alternatively, transnational lists could be used towards proportional completion of the extant elections in the Member States. Whichever way is chosen, Parliament must have an agreed procedure at its disposal of how to settle its composition, i.e., how to allocate a preordained number of seats between the Member States.



Challenges of the electoral process

Article 223 TFEU¹ decrees that the European Parliament shall propose provisions for its election

in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States or in accordance with principles common to all Member States.

The first option, a uniform electoral procedure in all Member States, to date appears too demanding for realization, even though it has been part of the deliberations ever since Parliament debated its electoral provisions.² Instead, it chose to follow the second option, introducing common electoral principles for implementation by all Member States.³ Accordingly, this briefing focusses on enhanced commonality of electoral principles rather than on procedural unification.

Overview on the different EU electoral systems

Article 1 of the European Electoral Act⁴ reads as follows:

In each Member State, members of the European Parliament shall be elected on the basis of proportional representation, using the list system or the single transferable vote.

Indeed, the European Parliament is elected “in each Member State” separately. There is plenty of leeway for a Member States to turn the Act’s requirements, such as “proportional representation” or “the list system”, into operable rules in its domestic electoral provisions. Consequently, Member States differ significantly with respect to their domestic provisions.

A 64-pages breakdown from votes to party-seats to MEPs, covering each of the 27 Member States separately, is provided online.⁵

This briefing presents an overview on the different systems employed. The following section explains the diverse vote patterns implemented. The next two sections discuss pertinent thresholds for a political party to take part in the seat apportionment process, and review the apportionment methods in use.⁶ Turning back from institutions, i.e. parties, to individuals, i.e. candidates, the last section lists various rules how the seats of a political party may be filled with this party’s candidates.

¹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, 47–199 [149].

² George Anastassopoulos [Geórgios Anastasópoulos]: *The Debate on the System of Electing the Members of the European Parliament. From a Uniform Procedure to the Common Principles of the Treaties. A Contribution to the Problem of Enhancing the Democratic and Representative Nature of the European Parliament. Foreword by Professor Dimitris Tsatsos, MEP.* Athens, 2002.

³ Andrew Duff: The electoral reform of the European Parliament. Pages 32–51 in: *Report on a Proposal for a Modification of the Act Concerning the Election of the Members of the European Parliament by Direct Universal Suffrage of 20 September 1976 (2009/ 2134(INI))*. European Parliament, Committee on Constitutional Affairs, A7-0176/2011, 28.4.2011, PE440.210v04-00.

⁴ Consolidated version of the Act concerning the election of the representatives of the Assembly by direct universal suffrage annexed to the Council decision of 20 September 1976, and of the subsequent amendments. Pages 9–14 in: *Report on a Proposal for a Modification*. See note 3.

⁵ F. Pukelsheim: *Die Zusammensetzung des Europäischen Parlaments 2024-2029 (in English)*. IEP Berlin – Institut für Europäische Politik, EU Wahlmonitor, 28.01.2025, [Online](#).

⁶ F. Pukelsheim: *Proportional Representation. Apportionment Methods and Their Applications. With a Foreword by Andrew Duff MEP. Second Edition.* Cham CH, 2017.

Vote patterns

Voters may express their political persuasion in different ways. As for “the list system” of the European Electoral Act, emphasis typically is on a list of candidates, not on a particular party. A candidate list may be registered with the electoral authorities by a single political party, a group of parties, or an ad-hoc political movement. In most cases, parties and candidate-lists are in a one-to-one correspondence, whence the terms “party” and “list” become exchangeable. In other cases, it may be a coalition, or alliance, who presents a joint list of candidates. Rarely, a party with an abundant pool of candidates submits two or more lists; this did not occur at the 2024 elections.

Lists of candidates may be rank-ordered in descending order, from the lead candidate in first place down to the last place. Generally, this is classified as a list vote (LV). Specifically, the vote pattern is designated LV0 when the electorate is granted no (zero) option to adjoin preferences for individual nominees. In the same vein vote patterns LV1, LV2, LVm indicate that, besides endorsing the list, voters additionally can support up to 1, 2, or multiple candidates by way of further preference votes.

In contrast, lists of candidates may be meant simply to offer an ensemble of names, with no intention to signify any particular order. The idea is to communicate the set of nominees as a set of equals. Voters pick the names of 1, 2, or more candidates whom they prefer to represent them. Such candidate votes (CV) are coded 1CV, 2CV etc. Evaluation in favour of parties is by implication, in that personal votes are counted towards the tally of that party to whom marked candidates are affiliated.

Of the 27 Member States, 19 implement vote patterns wherein “the list system” embraces supplementary options towards the election of persons (LV1, LV2, LVm, 1CV, etc.). The Single Transferable Vote (STV) schemes in Ireland and Malta build on personalization anyway. In just six Member States (DE, ES, FR, HU, PT, RO) voters are limited to rigid lists of candidates dictated by party headquarters (LV0). Vote pattern LV0 sometimes is labelled the closed list system, vote patterns LV1, LV2 etc. semi-open list systems, and vote patterns 1CV, 2CV etc. open list systems.

Electoral thresholds

A proportional representation system may, or may not, stipulate an electoral threshold that the vote tally of a party must overcome in order for the party to participate in the apportionment of available seats. A widespread threshold amounts to five per cent of valid votes. Article 3 of the European Electoral Act allows a slightly higher maximum level: five per cent of votes cast (rather than valid votes). In Bulgaria, the threshold reaches 5.5 per cent of votes cast. However, Bulgarian provisions do not explicitly use the word “threshold”, the hurdle emerges implicitly in the depth of arithmetical calculations.

In the presence of a threshold, the set of valid votes decomposes into two subsets. The first subset comprises the votes for parties who fail the threshold. These votes are discarded without further ado, being swept under the carpet and archived as ineffective. Solely the second subset, the collection of votes for parties who do pass the threshold, turns effective and becomes relevant for the seat apportionment process. Accordingly, any “vote” columns in apportionment tables are confined to exhibit effective votes only; these columns are silent about valid votes that are ineffective. On the other hand, in the absence of a threshold, the two notions of valid votes and effective votes no longer differ but coincide.

Apportionment of seats to parties

Due to history and tradition, Member States practice various methods for the apportionment of seats to parties proportionally to effective votes. Since vote tallies are large figures and seat numbers small integers, any such apportionment procedure involves two steps: a division, to pass from large quantities to small quotients, and a rounding rule, to convert interim quotients to neighbouring whole numbers. There are two

prominent classes of procedures to execute these steps. A divisor method uses a flexible divisor for the division step and a fixed rounding rule for the passage to whole numbers. A quota method uses a fixed divisor for the division step and a flexible rounding rule for the passage to whole numbers.

At the 2024 elections, Member States made use of three divisor methods and five quota methods.

Divisor method with downward rounding (DivDwn, also known as D'Hondt method). For every party, its vote tally is divided by a select divisor. The resulting interim quotient is rounded downwards to the whole number below, which yields the party's seat number. The select divisor, being a flexible electoral key, is determined so that the sum of all seat numbers exhausts the total of available seats.

Divisor method with standard rounding (DivStd, also known as Sainte-Laguë method). For every party, its vote tally is divided by a select divisor. To obtain the party's seat number, its interim quotient is rounded downwards or upwards according to the quotient's fractional part being smaller or larger than one-half. The select divisor secures that the sum of all seat numbers equals the total of available seats.

Swedish modification of the divisor method with standard rounding (Div0.6). The modification solely concerns interim quotients smaller than one. They are rounded downwards to zero or upwards to one according to being smaller or larger than 0.6. Otherwise, quotients are subject to standard rounding.

Hare-quota method with fit by greatest remainders (HaQgrR, also known as Hare/Niemeyer method). The Hare-quota HaQ is the (unrounded) ratio of effective votes relative to available seats.

Hare-quota variant-1 method with fit by greatest remainders (HQ1grR). The Hare-quota variant-1 HQ1 is the Hare-quota rounded downwards to the whole number below.

Hare-quota variant-2 method with fit by greatest remainders (HQ2grR). The Hare-quota variant-2 HQ2 is the Hare-quota rounded upwards to the whole number above.

Hare-quota variant-3 method with fit by greatest remainders (HQ3grR). The Hare-quota variant-3 HQ3 is the ratio of valid (effective plus ineffective) votes relative to available seats rounded downwards.

Droop-quota variant-3 method with fit by greatest remainders (DQ3grR). The Droop-quota variant-3 DQ3 is the standard rounding of the ratio of effective votes relative to available seats plus one.

The term "quota" generally signifies the size of a group of voters who justify representation by a seat in parliament. All quota methods proceed similarly. Firstly, the main apportionment metes out one seat for each fulfilment of the quota. With current quotas, there always remain groups of voters failing to reach a full quota as well as some residual seats. Secondly, the fit by greatest remainders (grR) deals out residual seats one by one to parties whose interim quotients – vote tally divided by quota – exhibit the greatest fractional part. An interim quotient is rounded upwards or downwards according to its fractional part being large or small. In our detailed breakdown (note 5), the apportionment tables for quota methods display a select split value that separates large remainders for upward rounding from small remainders for downward rounding.

Assignment of party-seats to candidates

The assignment of the seats of a party to its candidates is immediate in Member States admitting rank-order list votes while barring preference votes (vote pattern LV0). The ex-ante rank-order of the list is decisive. It is also straightforward in systems who allow personal votes only (vote pattern 1CV, 2CV, etc.). Then the ex-post rank-order of the candidates by personal vote tallies becomes pivotal.

When list votes and preference votes are superimposed (vote pattern LV1, LV2, etc.), it is first examined whether candidates garner enough personal votes to bypass the list's rank-order, before reverting to the list's rank-order. Sufficiency of a candidate's success is measured by means of a bypass rule.

A widespread type of bypass rules requires a candidate's personal vote tally to meet or exceed a certain percentage of the affiliated party's vote count. Common hurdles are five per cent (AT, BG, CZ, SE), ten per cent (HR), or three per cent (SK). Three Member States practice other bypass quorums (BE, NL, SI).

The table below provides an overview of the Member States' system characteristics at the 2024 elections. Member States are ordered by two-letter country codes, as this ordering is language-independent.

European elections 2024: Characteristics of electoral systems

Code	Member State	Seats	Vote Pattern/ Bypass Rule	Electoral Threshold	Apportionment Method
AT	Austria	20	LV1/5 %	4 % of valid votes	DivDwn
BE	Belgium*3	22	LVm/quorum	none	DivDwn
BG	Bulgaria	17	LV1/5 %	5.5 % of votes cast	HaQgrR
CY	Cyprus	6	2CV	1.8 % of valid votes	HQ3grR
CZ	Czechia	21	LV2/5 %	5 % of valid votes	DivDwn
DE	Germany/16	96	LVO	none	DivStd
DK	Denmark	15	1CV	none	DivDwn
EE	Estonia	7	1CV	none	DivDwn
EL	Greece	21	4CV	3 % of valid votes	HQ1grR
ES	Spain	61	LVO	none	DivDwn
FI	Finland	15	1CV	none	DivDwn
FR	France	81	LVO	5 % of valid votes	DivDwn
HR	Croatia	12	LV1/10 %	5 % of valid votes	DivDwn
HU	Hungary	21	LVO	5 % of valid votes	DivDwn
IE	Ireland*3	14	STV	none	STVran
IT	Italy/5	76	3CV	4 % of valid votes	HQ1grR
LT	Lithuania	11	5CV	5 % of votes cast	HQ2grR
LU	Luxembourg	6	6CV	none	DivDwn
LV	Latvia	9	mCV	5 % of votes cast	DivStd
MT	Malta	6	STV	none	STVran
NL	Netherlands	31	LV1/quorum	3.2 % of votes cast	DivDwn
PL	Poland/13	53	1CV	5 % of valid votes	DivDwn/HaQgrR
PT	Portugal	21	LVO	none	DivDwn
RO	Romania	33	LVO	5 % of valid votes	DivDwn
SE	Sweden	21	LV1/5 %	4 % of valid votes	Div0.6
SI	Slovenia	9	LV1/quorum	4 % of valid votes	DivDwn
SK	Slovakia	15	LV2/3 %	5 % of valid votes	DQ3grR

Note: Belgium establishes 3 separate constituencies, indicated by Belgium*3; similarly: Ireland*3. Germany is divided into 16 districts, indicated by Germany/16; similarly: Italy/5, Poland/13.

Five recommendations

With a retrospective view on the 2024 European elections, we would like to put forward a handful of recommendations aiming to enhance commonality of the principles that are governing the event.

Misdirection – inhibit

The 2024 elections featured ten list alliances, in eight Member States, whose candidates, after having been mandated, joined distinct political groups in the EP:

Bulgaria	PP–DB 2	Renew Europe, 1 EPP
Czechia	KDU+ODS+TOP 09	3 EPP, 3 ECR
Spain	Ahora Repúblicas	2 Greens/EFA, 1 The Left
Spain	SUMAR	2 Greens/EFA, 1 The Left
France	Reconquête !	4 ECR, 1 ESN
Italy	Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra	4 Greens/EFA, 2 The Left
Netherlands	Groenlinks / PvdA	4 Greens/EFA, 4 S&D
Poland	Wolność i Niepodległość	3 ESN, 2 PFW, 1 NI
Poland	Trzecia Droga	2 EPP, 1 Renew Europe
Romania	Alianța Electorală PSD PNL	11 S&D, 8 EPP

These lists constitute an abstruse misdirection of domestic electorates.

I recommend that list alliances are inhibited when comprising candidates of two or more domestic parties or political movements who are affiliated with distinct European political parties.

Mismatch – exhibit

In its resolution of 26 November 2020 on stocktaking of the 2019 European elections,⁷ Parliament

proposes that the visibility of European political parties and movements be enhanced by placing their names and logos on the ballot papers, and recommends that the same should also appear on all materials used in European election campaigns.

Implementation of the proposal is overdue. To quote yet another source from the 2011 literature:⁸

There is a ‘mismatch’ between the institutional role the European Parliament is asked to play in the European Union’s separation of powers – the voice of European citizens about European Union politics – and the level of party competition at which Parliament elections are contested.

I recommend that domestic parties be obliged to exhibit their affiliation with a European political party clearly and visibly, on campaign material as well as on ballot papers.

Expenses – reward

Coordination and cooperation between European political parties and their domestic affiliates, whether supervised by a prospective European Electoral Authority or by the existing Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations, requires labour and effort of all concerned.

⁷ OJ C 425, 20.10.2021, 98–106 [105].

⁸ D. Schleicher: *What If Europe Held an Election and No One Cared?* Harvard International Law Journal 52 (2011) 109–161 [110].

I recommend that such expenses or parts thereof be rewarded by way of a vote-based funding scheme.

Composition – finalize

Regardless of the dynamics in legislating the European Electoral Act, a central role is played by Parliament's composition, i.e. the allocation of its seats between the Member States.⁹ In the past, the composition was decided confidentially behind closed doors. Following the AFCO workshop on a "Permanent system for the allocation of seats in the European Parliament" on 14 February 2024,¹⁰ the opportunity has never been more favourable than now to disclose the decision-making process to the public.

I recommend that Parliament adopt an objective, fair, durable and transparent procedure for the determination of its composition, such as the Power Compromise¹¹ or the FPS Technique.¹²

Commonality – realign

In a legislative resolution of 3 May 2022,¹³ Parliament proposes a new European Electoral Act. The intent is to inject into the present conglomerate of 27 domestic elections a truly Union-wide element by means of transnational lists. These are to stand in parallel with the extant elections in the Member States.

Alternatively, transnational lists could function as a proportional completion of the extant elections in the Member States.¹⁴ The tandem system could also be employed, which safeguards degressive representation between the Member States, while achieving proportionality between European political parties.¹⁵

I recommend continuing to be bold and daring to realign the current electoral patchwork using transnational lists or similar, in order to create a Union-wide component that is on par with Parliament's Union-wide function.

⁹ A. Duff / K.-F. Oelbermann / F. Pukelsheim: *The Electoral Reform of the European Parliament: Composition, Procedure and Legitimacy*. In-depth Analysis for the AFCO-Committee. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, PE 510.002, February 2015.

¹⁰ F. Pukelsheim: *Composition of the European Parliament and degressive representation: Three proposals under discussion*. Blog post. Der (europäische) Föderalist, 05.04.2024, [Online](#).

¹¹ F. Pukelsheim / G. Grimmett: *Power Compromise – An objective, fair, durable and transparent fix for the EP composition*. Briefing. European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, PE 759.357, February 2024.

¹² V. Ramírez Gonzáles: *A mathematical formula for determining the EP composition*. Briefing. European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, PE 759.358, February 2024.

¹³ OJ C 465, 6.12.2022, 171–198.

¹⁴ M. Müller: *A permanent system for seat allocation in the EP – Reconciling degressive proportionality and electoral equality through proportional completion*. Briefing. European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, PE 759.467 February 2024.

¹⁵ J. Leinen / F. Pukelsheim: Double proportionality for the European Parliament: The tandem system. Pages 289–300 in: *Advances in Collective Decision Making – Interdisciplinary Perspectives for the 21st Century*. Cham CH, 2023.

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