

HOW TO BECOME A 'NEAR-PERFECT' POLITICIAN

Tool Related to the Role-Play Game
For Students 15–18

POLITICIAN FOR A DAY - THE SKILLS IT TAKES

Congratulations! You have successfully participated in a role-play game at the Parliamentarium, where you had the experience of being a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and deliberating with your party on two proposed directives.

The negotiations on the 'water solidarity' and 'personal identification' directives come pretty close to the real work of an MEP.

They too

- collect information under time pressure;
- assess the value of the information they receive;
- define a position within their own political party and defend it with the other groups;
- negotiate and reach a compromise to achieve an outcome;
- must communicate their position across - not only to each other, but also to the press and the public.

The work of MEPs even more complicated because they tackle all these tasks in various different languages and locations.

What did you like best about being a MEP? Which part of the game did you find particularly interesting? Where there parts that were too difficult or stressful?

HOW IT WORKS

Definitions

It takes many skills to be an effective politician. The first skill is to understand all the technical terms that are used in lawmaking at a European level.



EUROPEAN UNION: The European Union (EU) currently has 28 Member States. Although they are all sovereign states (that is, they are free to decide on their own laws and organisation), they have agreed to apply joint laws in a number of areas. They do this in particular in cases where many different national laws would make exchanges (for example of goods) very difficult, or in cases where the measures needed to tackle a problem go beyond a single country's borders (for example environmental protection).



THE (LISBON) TREATY: The document sets out the area in which Member States will adopt joint laws, it specifies the process of lawmaking among Member States and it defines what is required to be an EU citizen.



EU CITIZENSHIP: Any person who holds the nationality of an EU country is automatically an EU citizen. EU citizenship does not replace national citizenship. If you are a citizen of Europe, look at your passport – it is proof of both your nationality and your EU citizenship.



DIRECTIVE: This is what (most) laws at EU level are called. They are called 'directives' because they define a broad goal to be achieved by all EU countries while leaving the details to the individual Member States (thus giving a direction for national lawmakers). Sometimes the Member States adopt additional relate laws that are more detailed and must be applied nationally.

Note! *The Council of Ministers should not be confused with the EUROPEAN COUNCIL or the COUNCIL OF EUROPE. The EUROPEAN COUNCIL brings together the Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States, and typically decides, or issues recommendations, on top priorities and initiatives that should be developed by the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The COUNCIL OF EUROPE is composed of 47 member states and deals with issues such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights - it is Europe's major human rights organisation. It cannot issue laws. The COUNCIL OF EUROPE has its headquarters, like the European Parliament, in Strasbourg.*

In order to be effective at the European Parliament, you need to also understand who the main players are.

The Players:



THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION (THE EC):

The European Commission is the EU's 'executive body'. It is composed of 28 'Commissioners' (one from each Member State), who are independent and represent the interests of the EU as a whole. The European Commission proposes European laws and also makes sure that they are correctly applied. However, the EC does not adopt the laws itself. This is the job of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers.



THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT is

composed of 751 Members of Parliament, who are directly elected by the citizens of all 28 Member States and organised in a number of political groups. As such, the European Parliament represents EU citizens. Parliament negotiates and adopts European laws together with the Council of Ministers.



THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS is

composed of one minister per Member State. As the European Union deals with many different subjects, such as agriculture, foreign affairs, the environment and transport, in reality there is not just one Council of Ministers, but many different ones. The Council of Ministers represents the governments of the Member States and has to agree with the European Parliament on new laws.

The Players within the European Parliament:



MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Members of the European Parliament are directly elected for a five year period. MEPs who share the same political beliefs, regardless of their country of origin, form a POLITICAL GROUP. The political groups in the European Parliament are thus organised by political affiliation and not by nationality. A new political group can be created in the European Parliament only if it has a minimum of 25 MEPs representing at least 7 Member States.



COMMITTEES: A committee is a place where MEPs from different political groups meet to discuss topics within a specific policy area (such as the environment, foreign policy or economic affairs). There are more than 20 such committees, and it is here that much of the preparatory work on new laws is done. *Remember, you attended committee meetings during the role-play game.*



PLENARY SESSION: This is where the European Parliament as a whole takes its decisions. Whereas in a committee only *some* MEPs meet and discuss *certain* proposed laws, the plenary sessions are the meetings where *all* MEPs get together to examine *all* the proposed laws that have passed through the committees. *Did you speak in the plenary during the role-play game?*



AMENDMENTS: A proposal for a change to a draft law.



READING: When the Parliament or the Council sit together and decide on a proposal for a law.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Parliament and the Council work in parallel, but as a rule the European Parliament is the first to formally 'adopt' (decide on) its position. When the Council adopts its own position, it must also decide whether it can accept the changes requested by Parliament.

Reaching Agreements:

In order for a European law to be approved, the European Parliament and the Council must agree on a joint text. How do they reach agreement? There is a procedure involving a maximum of 3 phases (these are called 'readings'), leading to a compromise.

Here is a detailed description of this process:

Phase 1: The Council and the European Parliament both study the Commission's proposal. A lot of information is collected mainly through consultations with accredited lobbyists, stakeholders, citizens, and others. Remember how you collected information in the role-play game?

The group that works on the proposal is called a **PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE** in Parliament and a **WORKING GROUP** in the Council.

1st READING: Parliament and the Council vote separately on the proposal for the first time.

Phase 2: If they do not fully agree (which is often the case), they move on to a second phase. Here they examine possible compromises. The working group and the committee meet once again, and at the end of this phase the Council and Parliament vote on the proposed text for a second time. This is the second reading.

Phase 3: If, after the second reading, the two parties still cannot agree on a joint text, they have one last chance: a conciliation committee is set up to find a possible solution. In the conciliation meeting, representatives of the European Parliament and the Council sit down together to find a compromise. These meetings often take place under great time pressure, and a deal is often struck in the early morning after many hours of negotiation.

If no agreement is reached here, the proposed law is definitively rejected. You may be wondering why there are so many steps. You might be asking yourself if this is really necessary.

But consider this: only through this process can you make sure that different perspectives and points of view are heard!

MEMO ON WRITING A MANIFESTO

- Have a vision.
- Set out your goals and develop your strategy to make it achievable.
- Find five arguments to persuade people to vote for your directive.
- Be passionate, concise and relevant, and use clear language.
- Be creative and inspiring when putting across your ideas.

Now that you understand more about the process of the European Parliament, it is your turn to form a political group and propose a law on a cause you strongly believe in.

Follow these 6 steps and let's see if you can convince your classmates to vote in your favour.

- 1. Compose your political group of members who have the same beliefs as you.**
- 2. Together with your members, choose a name for your political group.**
- 3. Write your group manifesto.**
- 4. Pick the cause you would like to defend.**
- 5. Make a policy proposal that you would like Parliament to adopt.**
- 6. Make a speech in front of other political groups (your classmates) supporting your group's position on the proposal.**

At the end of each speech, you and your classmates will vote to decide which political group was the most persuasive in defending its cause.

Take up the challenge to be the winning group!

