

Quick guide

European Parliament Elections

May 2009

What is the role of the European Parliament?

The **European Parliament** is the European Community institution that represents the 492 million citizens of the 27 Member States of the European Union (EU).

The European Parliament makes decisions on new European laws, jointly with the **Council of the European Union** (also known as the Council of Ministers).¹ The Parliament is the only directly elected body of the European Union. The Parliament and the Council also share authority over the annual budget of the EU.

Current Membership of the European Parliament

There are currently 785 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), representing the 27 countries currently in the EU. The proportion of women in the European Parliament has risen steadily. At present **about one third of MEPs are women.**²

Currently the UK has 78 elected MEPs, representing 12 regions, **Wales represents one of these regions and has 4 MEPs.** Each MEP in a region represents everyone in the region, so for people living in any part of Wales, all four Wales region MEPs represent them and people can contact any or all of the MEPs.

Results of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections in Wales

Party/description	Number of votes	Percentage of votes (%)	Seats won	Elected members
British National Party	27,135	3.0		
Christian Democratic Party	6,821	0.7		
Conservative Party	177,771	19.4	1	Jonathan Evans
Forward Wales	17,280	1.9		
Green Party	32,761	3.6		
Labour Party	297,810	32.5	2	Glenys Kinnock, Mair Morgan
Liberal Democrats	96,116	10.5		
Plaid Cymru	159,888	17.4	1	Jill Evans
Respect - The Unity Coalition	5,427	0.6		
UK Independence Party	96,677	10.5		
Total valid votes cast¹	917,686			
Turnout²	41.4%			

Source: Electoral Commission, *The 2004 European Parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom*

¹ Total valid votes cast excludes ballot papers that are rejected for any reason.

² Turnout only includes valid votes cast.

¹ The Council is the main decision-making body of the European Union. The ministers of the Member States meet within the Council of the European Union. Depending on the issue on the agenda, each country will be represented by the minister responsible for that subject (foreign affairs, finance, social affairs, transport, agriculture, etc.). The presidency of the Council is held for six months by each Member State on a rotational basis.

Voter Turnout

Since the first European election in 1979, overall voter turnout has been in steady decline. The overall turnout figure in **1979 was 63.0%; in 2004 it was 45.7%**. These figures mask very different participation rates between different member countries: turnout in Slovakia was 17% in 2004, compared with 91% in Belgium. The turnout in Wales increased considerably from 28.1% to 41.4% from 1999 to 2004.³

2009 Elections

The next European Parliament elections will take place across the EU from 4 to 7 June 2009. In the United Kingdom voting will be held on **Thursday 4 June 2009**. There will be a slight reduction in the number of MEPs as a whole, to compensate for the extra MEPs representing Romania and Bulgaria, who joined the EU on 1 January 2007, after the 2004 elections.

MEPs are elected on a regional basis through a form of **proportional representation**, although differences exist between Member States in the methods used for this. The UK is divided into 12 electoral regions, with between 3 and 10 MEPs representing each region. There are nine English regions. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each represent one region. In the 2009 elections, the English regions will elect 59 MEPs, Scotland will elect 6 MEPs, **Wales 4 MEPs**, and Northern Ireland 3 MEPs.

The **election count** in Wales will take place the evening of **7 June 2009** in line with the rest of Europe. Following release of the results, the Members' Research Service will produce a research paper summarising the results from the elections.

Parties and candidates standing

A list of the registered parties and **individual candidates nominated to stand for election in Wales** can be found by clicking [here](#).

² [European Parliament - Members](#) [as at 15 May 2009]

³ Electoral Commission, [The 2004 European Parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom](#) [as at 15 May 2009]

Further information

For further information on aspects of the European Parliament Elections, please contact Martin Jennings (Martin.Jennings@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK), or Rachel Dolman (Rachel.Dolman@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK), Members' Research Service.

For further information on the topics below, double click on the links.

- [European Parliament](#)
- [Council of the European Union](#)
- House of Commons Library, [2009 European Parliament Elections](#)
- Electoral Commission, [The 2004 European Parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom](#)
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