



VOTE: A EUROPEAN STORY

Ten elections that
shaped our world

EXHIBITION

EN



European Parliament

VOTE: A EUROPEAN STORY

Ten elections that
shaped our world

EXHIBITION

VOTE: A European Story
Ten elections that shaped our world
Exhibition

Team:

Martí Grau Segú, Curator
Inês Nauwelaers, Assistant curator
Debora Righetti, Project management

With thanks to:

Vladimir Čajkovac, Rocío del Casar Ximénez, Hans De Waegeneer, Christine Dupont, Óscar Fontao Regueira, Vasileios Galanakos, Yann Guillard, Clodagh Hourigan, Albrecht John, Philippe Le Guen, Nathalie Minten, Audrey Mottier, Elisabete Petim, Philippe Peyredieu du Charlat, Maria Teresa Pollastro, Véronique Recher, Frédéric Tadino, Jean-Baptiste Teresa, Josette Torres, Tatiana Tumashik and Lycée Viollet-le-Duc (Villiers-Saint-Frédéric, France).

A European Parliament project, jointly carried out by the House of European History (Jean Monnet House service) and the Parliamentarium.

Cover photograph: 1984 European election in France.
© European Union

Table of Contents

Purpose	7
Introduction	8
<i>The unfolding of democracy in European history</i>	8
<i>The architects of European unity and the quest for a directly-elected European Parliament</i>	10
Ten elections that shaped our world	13
1979	
Two founding mothers on day one of a directly-elected European Parliament	14
1984	
New elections for a European Parliament with more robust powers	16
1989	
After the Cold War, shaping a new union: elections in a momentous year	18
1994	
The new Europe of the Treaty of Maastricht is under way	20
1999	
Welcome to the euro	22
2004	
After a big bang enlargement, a reunited Europe votes	24
2009	
In the shadow of the financial crisis	26
2014	
The President of the Commission is appointed under the new provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon	28
2019	
The people are back	30
2024	
The upcoming election: A game changer?	33

Purpose

In June 2024, citizens from all European Union Member States will be called to elect their representatives to the European Parliament.

It will be the 10th time such elections have been held since the first direct election to the European Parliament in 1979. It is therefore a fitting occasion to reflect on how Europe's supranational democracy has unfolded, from the origins of democratic participation on the continent to the step-by-step building of a true European polity.

This time travel is not just an opportunity to get acquainted with things past, but also a way of helping you make an informed choice at the polling station! Democracy is vital; your say is crucial.

Introduction

The unfolding of democracy in European history

Europe has come a long way in terms of how democracy has developed. For some, the roots of that democracy go back to Classical Athens. For others, the freedoms of the contemporary era are fundamentally different from those of the ancient world because they apply to a whole society, rather than just a segment of it. While in antiquity, democracy was deemed compatible with keeping large groups of people disenfranchised, the Enlightenment's most advanced ideas stress that democracy must be inclusive.

This beautiful notion, though, has often been applied more in theory than in practice. Since the late 18th century, the progress of democracy has been associated with other important causes on the road to greater equality, from the abolition of slavery to the extension of civic rights to both men and women. In the 19th century, nascent democratic legitimacy had to coexist with autocratic regimes. Although multilateralism between autocratic regimes made lasting peace among nations possible on several occasions (Münster/Osnabrück in 1648, Utrecht in 1713, and Vienna in 1815), it would ultimately be at the expense of the people's fight for greater civic freedoms, such as in the repression that marked the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna in 1815). As the 19th century progressed, the codification of international law and the creation of broader stable international organisations created the conditions for the international spread of the democratic standards that some countries were already testing in the domestic arena. The world was ready for a paradigm shift, where democratic values would take the lead in international systems. Unfortunately, Europe would have to wait for the aftermath of yet another war – World War I – to see most of its countries become democracies.

If one thing is clear today, it is that no election is fully democratic without universal suffrage. In Europe, elections by universal suffrage were first held in the early 20th century, mostly in Scandinavian and other northern European countries. In the rest of Europe, there was sometimes a very long quest for women's suffrage: in Switzerland it did not become a reality until the 1970s, whereas in Spain and Türkiye it was introduced in the 1930s. The heyday of liberal democracy was also the moment its most serious challenges were unleashed: Nazism and



Finnish woman voting at the 1907 Parliamentary Election.

© Public domain

Stalinism thrived on their criticism of the spread of individual freedoms. Thus, the long evolution of democratic elections is also the story of how they incorporate some of societies' most important causes: women's rights, the rights of the disenfranchised and, especially after World War II and thanks to the architects of European unity, the promotion of international peace.

The architects of European unity and the quest for a directly-elected European Parliament

After World War II, there was a strong sense that the failure to bring about European unity during the interwar period had been one of the main causes of the breakdown in peace and democracy. In drafting the Schuman declaration in 1950, Jean Monnet found a way to link the destinies of peace, democracy and European unity. Furthermore, Monnet did not simply lay the foundations for a technocratic Europe but worked relentlessly for the democratisation of the European institutions over the following decades, by advocating for direct elections to the European Parliament.

This work primarily took place through the Committee of Action for the United States of Europe. Therefore, the cause of peace prompted the most ambitious democratic project worldwide: supranational elections in Europe. Since 1979, direct democratic elections to the European Parliament have steered the destinies of our continent through people's participation and the increase in its institutional powers.

From the outset, as in many other areas, the European founding fathers had worked hand in hand for the parliamentarisation of the European unity project: former Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, in close association with Monnet, became the first president of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, succeeded by former Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi in 1954. The three men relied on the Assembly to advance the supranational character of the nascent European institutional architecture.

Two more European Communities were created in 1958: the European Economic Community and EURATOM. The very man who had publicly endorsed and announced Monnet's blueprint for a united Europe to the world, former French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, became president of the new legislature uniting representatives of all three Communities: the European Parliamentary Assembly.



Robert Schuman at the European Parliamentary Assembly, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. 10 May 1960.

© European Union



1984 European elections in Italy.
© European Union

Ten elections that shaped our world

1979

Two founding mothers on day one of a directly-elected European Parliament

The very first direct European election came about after a long struggle. The mid-1970s were a time of progress for European unity, with the first enlargement of the European Community, the beginnings of European monetary cooperation, and the creation of the European Council. For a founding father like Jean Monnet, the occasion of the first direct European elections was the moment to cease his relentless activity and retire, confident that a new generation of democratically elected leaders would pick up the work where he left off.

In June 1979, citizens from the nine Member States made their way to polling stations to cast their vote. The election campaign had given rise to a new iconography — posters, TV commercials and merchandising — that stressed joint decision-making. The turnout was around 62 %.

On day one of the new chamber, two women were at the helm. It was initially presided by the oldest member, Louise Weiss, a fervent advocate of European unity and campaigner for women's rights since the twenties, who was now crowning her career on both accounts. Weiss passed the baton to the first democratically elected president of the European legislature, Simone Veil, a former French minister and Holocaust survivor who championed women's reproductive rights. After the founding fathers of the fifties, Europe was rallying its founding mothers!

In the second part of the parliamentary term, starting in 1982, the president was Piet Dankert of the Netherlands.



Louise Weiss greeting Simone Veil elected as European Parliament president. 17 July 1979.
© European Union

1984

New elections for a European Parliament with more robust powers

After its first elections, despite its newly gained democratic legitimacy, the European Parliament still had only limited powers. Many people were dissatisfied with this situation, and several outspoken members sought to push for change immediately, if not through legislation, then in practice. For example, broadening the budgetary powers of the chamber became a means of influencing a growing number of policy areas. Key among these political brokers was Altiero Spinelli, who had been a proponent of European unity since the 1940s.

In 1941, while imprisoned on the tiny island of Ventotene, Spinelli and a number of other opponents of Fascism had drafted a manifesto for a federal Europe. As the war raged around them, it was clear that the international system could not go back to the status quo ante once World War II was over. Later, Spinelli went on to become a European Commissioner, and ran as a candidate to the European Parliament in 1979. At the head of the Crocodile Club, named after the Strasbourg restaurant where its members gathered, Spinelli put forward a Draft Treaty Establishing a European Union, a Federalist-minded text adopted by the European Parliament in February 1984. The political stakes of the impending election became very high.

It was also the first time that European elections were held with Greece as a full member state. With a turnout of 59 %, Pierre Pflimlin from France was elected president of the institution, becoming the first former Prime Minister of a Member State to lead the European Parliament. Charles Henry Plumb, from the UK, was then president from 1987. Since Spain and Portugal joined the European Community halfway through the parliamentary term, a partial election was envisaged for them in 1987. Although the Member States ultimately did not endorse the Draft Treaty Establishing a European Union, the text paved the way for groundbreaking developments to come, such as the approval of the European Single Act and, ultimately, the creation of the European Union.



Altiero Spinelli.

© Historical Archives of the European Union

1989

After the Cold War, shaping a new union: elections in a momentous year

The 1989 election took place in one of the most momentous years in recent history. After four decades of Cold War, marked by the East-West confrontation on the world stage, the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union was disintegrating and central and eastern European countries were swiftly moving towards pluralistic democracy. Within the European Community, Jacques Delors, a former French minister who had become president of the European Commission in 1985, was leading an unprecedented, transformative action.

Drawing in part on Spinelli's Draft Treaty Establishing a European Union, Delors had successfully seen his European Single Act approved by the Member States, a decisive step towards a European Union, the powers of which would extend over a vast array of policy areas. The third European election therefore took place in a climate of anticipation about this new political entity, which would have the attributes of a fully fledged international actor in external relations and an unprecedented level of internal integration. With the treaty negotiation still ahead, election turnout was around 58 %.

The new parliament elected the Spaniard Enrique Barón as its president. The German Egon Klepsch was then elected president in 1992 for the second half of the term. The new legislature witnessed deep historical changes, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification and the robust financial aid to the democratic transitions in central and eastern European countries. It exerted a decisive influence in favour of more integration in the drafting and ratification of the Treaty on European Union, also known as the Treaty of Maastricht. A new Europe was born!

ELEZIONI EUROPEE 18 GIUGNO 1989



IL PARLAMENTO EUROPEO LA NOSTRA VOCE IN EUROPA



PARLAMENTO EUROPEO Ufficio d'informazione per l'Italia - Via IV Novembre, 149 - 00187 ROMA - Tel. 6790507-6790502

STAMPATO IN ITALIA

1994

The new Europe of the Treaty of Maastricht is under way

Roughly one year after the Maastricht Treaty came into force, thereby creating the European Union, European citizens were again summoned to vote. Under the new distribution of powers, the European Parliament had greatly increased its standing, now acting as co-legislator on a par with the Council of Ministers. Ambitious new projects that would act as driving forces for the entire European architecture — the projected eastward and southward enlargement, the blueprint for a united currency — were now subject to democratic decision-making and public scrutiny through the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

The new elections were held in a mood commensurate with the important choices to be made (European enlargement: how far?) and with the need to dispel citizens' qualms (will a single currency be wholly beneficial or not?). New policies needed to be activated or boosted, such as those concerning the infrastructures funded through regional policies, epitome of the continent's new interconnectedness.

The turnout was around 57 %. The German Klaus Hänsch was elected president of the European Parliament in 1994. The Spaniard José María Gil-Robles then became president for the second half of the term in 1997. Because on 1 January 1995 the EU had grown from 12 to 15 Member States, Austria, Sweden, and Finland elected their representatives in partial elections throughout 1995 and 1996. These brand-new Members brought with them a strong tradition of non-alignment and high social and environmental standards. The world was also looking at Europe through new lenses: a new narrative filled with optimism had blossomed in the Old World, and the European model seemed destined to outperform that of the former Cold War blocs.



European elections in Brussels on 12 June 1994.
© European Union

1999

Welcome to the euro

The progress of the single currency was about to bring about something tangible: euro notes and coins. A big bang enlargement had just gained speed with the opening of accession negotiations with 12 candidate countries in 1998. The last European election of the 20th century took place at a major political crossroads, and its outcome was bound to have far-reaching effects.

If peace seemed secured, after almost half a century of European integration and also a decade since the end of the Cold War, the Kosovo conflict was a cruel reminder of its fragility, as the Yugoslavian wars had been before. A more muscular European external policy appeared to be the way to give stability to the continent. During the following parliamentary term, the signing of the Treaty of Nice (2001), amending both the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the Treaty of Rome (1957), was in part meant to prepare the union for enlarged membership.

The turnout was 58 %. The French politician Nicole Fontaine was elected president of the European Parliament for the first half of the term in 1999 and the Irish politician Pat Cox took over for the second half of the term in 2002. This Parliament saw the euro come into circulation on 1 January 2002, and the setting up of a Convention for the drafting of the European Constitution, but it also witnessed major challenges to the European Union's role as a world player. The 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington put the fight against terrorism on the table as never before..

The US invasion of Iraq split the union into two groups of countries, those which sided with the United States and those which remained critical: that even prompted a dismissive distinction between an 'Old Europe' and a 'New Europe'!



666Tini

Information stands for the upcoming European election of June 1999.

© European Union

2004

After a big bang enlargement, a reunited Europe votes

The rift between European countries caused by the war in Iraq needed to be healed, and the EU's biggest enlargement to date certainly provided a grand narrative to do so. After more than half a century of deep, entrenched division, in 2004 the continent was ready for a reencounter. Ten new Member States were joining the club, eight from central and eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and two from southern Europe (Cyprus and Malta). Their citizens could also vote in the elections that same year. Two more countries (Bulgaria and Romania) became members in 2007.

The turnout for this election was about 46 %. The Spaniard Josep Borrell became president of the European Parliament in 2004 for the first half of the term, and then the German Hans-Gert Pöttering served as president for the second half. However, in spite of the pro-European climate, the euphoria was short-lived, as clouds were gathering on the horizon. In 2005, both Dutch and French citizens said 'no' in a referendum on the Draft Treaty for a European Constitution, which would have brought the Union one step closer to a Federal Europe. Some countries were showing the first signs of enlargement fatigue: after all the effort of adaptation, was Europe worthwhile?

Nevertheless, not all the progress made in giving shape to a new Europe would go to waste: a period of reflection ensued after the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. What to do next? The Berlin Declaration, co-signed in March 2007 by President Pöttering, salvaged many of the provisions of the Constitutional Treaty in time for the next election, in the form of what would become the Lisbon Treaty (initially known as the Reform Treaty).



Enlargement day: arrival of the new flags. Brussels, 1 May 2004.

© European Union

2009

In the shadow of the financial crisis

By the time the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009, not only had there been new elections but also a severe crisis had hit the global economy, with serious financial, social and political repercussions. The electorate's choices were now more likely to be driven by fear, and managing those fears became one of the political representatives' main tasks.

Certainly, some silver linings were to be found: the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America in 2008 heralded a new era in transatlantic relations; the *greening* of industrial production had become a ubiquitous motto. But would that be enough?

The turnout was 43 %. Jerzy Buzek, a former Polish Prime Minister, was elected president in 2009, becoming the first president from central and eastern Europe to hold the office. The German Martin Schulz then took over as president in 2012.

In 2010, the threat of Greece defaulting on its debts triggered the European sovereign debt crisis, and Ireland's financial crisis was followed by lasting financial straits in many Member States, as being in the red went global. This Parliament also saw turmoil close to the Union's borders: the Arab Spring, beginning in 2010, flared up in 2011, the same year that the war in Syria started. In 2013, the Euromaidan protests began in Kyiv, followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbas in 2014.



JCDecaux



Quelle agriculture pour notre alimentation ?

Votre vote, utilisez-le lors des élections
du Parlement européen le **7 juin**.

www.elections2009.eu

2014

The President of the Commission is appointed under the new provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon

The 2014 election introduced the *Spitzenkandidat* or lead candidate process: in this system, European political parties nominate their lead candidate ahead of the European elections, allowing for citizens to directly influence the choice of the head of the European executive with their vote in the European elections. The largest party after the election is entitled to propose the name of the future President of the European Commission, to be later elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its members. This has widely been seen as a way to 'Europeanise' elections to the European Parliament.

The Treaty of Lisbon provides the basis for this enhanced role of the European Parliament in the appointment of the president of the European Commission. Thus, Jean-Claude Juncker became the new president of the European Commission through this system. Participation in the election was around 43 %. Martin Schulz, already president of the European Parliament since 2012, was re-elected in 2014 for the first half of the term. He was the first president of the European Parliament to be re-elected. Antonio Tajani then became president in 2017.

During the following parliamentary term, MEPs were confronted with a rapidly changing environment, both at home and abroad. In mid-2016, in an unprecedented move, a majority of British citizens decided that their country should leave the European Union. Warnings had to be issued to some Member State governments that were sliding towards 'illiberal democracy'. The election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016 put EU-US relations under strain.

**EUROVISION
DEBATE**

#TellEUROPE



*Eurovision debate in 2014 between candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission.
© European Union*

2019

The people are back

In the election of 2019, the turnout was 51 %. This marked the first increase in election participation since the very first EU elections of 1979 and represented the largest-ever transnational election. David Sassoli became president of the European Parliament, followed in January 2022 by Roberta Metsola, Parliament's youngest ever president.

Most European political parties again appointed lead candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission ahead of the 2019 European elections. The European Council later proposed Ursula von der Leyen, who had not been a lead candidate, to the European Parliament as candidate for President of the European Commission. She was then elected by the European Parliament, as part of its scrutiny powers.

Climate protection issues featured prominently in the 2019 election, as globally the environment continues to give alarming signs of rapid deterioration. During the following term, MEPs had to face the actual departure of the United Kingdom. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. The European institutions decided to summon a Convention on the Future of Europe to look ahead, starting in 2021. In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine.



2019 European Elections: election night backstage.
© European Union

2024

The upcoming election: A game changer?



As is apparent from this sequence of all European elections since 1979, the debates and political issues of their time have characterised each European election.

Their story is one of the landmarks in the shaping of a truly European polity, a reflection of the main concerns and struggles in the political arena of each moment.

In this respect, what does the European election of 2024 have in store?
You have a say!



An aerial, high-angle photograph of a massive, diverse crowd of people walking on a light-colored paved surface. The crowd is dense and fills most of the frame, with individuals of various ages, ethnicities, and clothing styles. The perspective is from directly above, looking down on the group. The lighting is bright, casting soft shadows on the ground.

together.eu

**TOGETHER FOR
DEMOCRACY**