

BRUSSELS



LIFE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MONDAY

Morning / planning work with staff based in the home region and meetings with local or national political colleagues over issues at home.

Afternoon / travel to Brussels

15.30 Office / A good deal of an MEPs work is carried out in the office: planning the week's activities, reading reports, dealing with correspondence, contacting other MEPs, the European Commission and national government representatives, keeping in touch with key contacts at home over issues as they develop.



TUESDAY

08.50 Place du Luxembourg / Parliament in Brussels is situated in the heart of the European quarter. For many MEPs it is just a short walk from their hotel or apartment, and to the other institutions, notably the European Commission and Council of Ministers Building. A huge amount of discussion and negotiation necessarily takes place between these institutions.



09.30 Parliamentary Committees / This is where the 'nuts and bolts' of parliamentary work takes place. Some committees have more legislative responsibility than others. The socialist members of the committee, led by an elected coordinator, meet in advance to agree on issues such as votes and allocation of reports which are the basis of new laws or policies.



15.00 Visitor Groups / Parliament is host to a constant stream of visitors from all over Europe and beyond. For MEPs, who are the main sponsors of such groups, it is a great opportunity to demonstrate, first-hand what they do. Visitors groups can see the workings of Parliament at committee, political group and plenary levels, hear from experts and have their questions answered.



WEDNESDAY

09.00 Bureau / The Bureau of the Socialist Group consists of the President, the eight Vice-Presidents and the Treasurer. It generally meets in Brussels and Strasbourg and its role is to give general guidance to the full Group, which is the final decision-making body. Political and administrative issues are discussed. A multi-lingual and multi-national staff provides the secretariat for the Bureau and full Group meetings.



10.00 Group / The Group's members also meet on a regular basis notably during the week prior to the plenary session in Strasbourg. The next plenary agenda is discussed and, if necessary, votes are taken to decide Group policy. Sometimes guest speakers are invited. All but two of the 27 member states (Cyprus and Latvia) are represented in the Group. As with the Bureau, the Group is chaired by the Leader.



THURSDAY

09.00 Plenary Session / continues until votes take place at 11.00.

Members generally leave Brussels on Thursdays and return to their home regions or capitals for meetings with colleagues or interest groups wishing to discuss proposals coming up for votes in committees and in the Parliament which can have an impact on daily life across the EU.

15.00 Plenary Session / The plenary session is parliament's showcase. This is where final decisions are made, where Heads of State and others come to debate. As in committees, members sit as a block, rather than by nationality. Socialist MEPs have showed considerable cohesion in voting, compared with some of the other groups, and have scored significant victories in their fight for a social Europe, a sustainable environment and a peaceful world.



FRIDAY

More meetings in the home region on European issues of different kinds.



MONDAY

MEPs arrive in Strasbourg for the plenary week. Some have a short train or car journey. Others may spend much of the day travelling by plane on two or more flights if they are coming from places as far afield as Finland, Malta or the Azores.

15.00 Office / Apart from the usual office work that the MEP does in Brussels, in Strasbourg there are often last-minute decisions to be made about speeches and voting in plenary. Secretarial support for MEPs on both administrative and political levels is essential.

16.00 Group / In Strasbourg the Group meets on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to discuss, in large part, votes to be taken the following day. Last minute amendments are debated and final positions adopted. On Mondays, the plenary begins at 17.00, right after the Group meeting.



TUESDAY

09.00 The Chamber / this is the main focus of attention with the plenary running all week. During voting time the chamber fills up and can be quite an impressive sight for visitors and distinguished guests looking down from the gallery. The plenary can be followed on TV monitors throughout the very large complex of buildings and in MEPs offices and the press centre, and for anyone outside Parliament, the plenary is covered live on the EP website.

11.00 Press Conference / Press conferences are the formal way in which Parliament and individual MEPs communicate their messages to the outside world. Group leaders hold theirs early in the week to outline their priorities for the plenary and address any other topical issues. Journalists then have an opportunity to ask questions. Rapporteurs (authors of reports) often hold their own press conferences particularly after important votes. Visiting government ministers of the country holding the 6-month EU presidency, representing the Council, are also regular speakers here.



12.30 Interview / Outside the chamber, there are often large numbers of journalists waiting to interview MEPs. Getting the message across is sometimes challenging as a lot of what is voted through can be quite technical in nature. On the other hand, issues such as the quality of air and water, road safety and working conditions are of obvious interest to people who will be directly affected, and who need to be informed about what precisely the parliament has decided. Members may also take part in studio discussions.



Once again, MEPs leave Strasbourg on Thursday after votes and have more engagements in their home countries or regions on Fridays, telling people about new developments either directly in meetings or through the media outlets there. Organisations or interest groups with specific views on legislation coming up for parliamentary votes will also want put their opinions across.

During weeks when Parliament is not meeting, delegations of MEPs from particular committees may go on

fact-finding visits to regions particularly affected by one or other policy. Within the EU, these can range from fisheries policy, to agricultural policy, to transport, to regional development or industrial restructuring. MEPs also take part in interparliamentary activities in partnership with national parliamentarians from all over the world. Discussions in these meetings often cover trade matters, human rights, or development issues. For up to date information about our activities, please visit our website:



17.30 Bureau / The cycle of meetings carries on! The Bureau will have urgent matters relating to the plenary session to deal with. Other issues will include relations with other political groups and relations with the world outside including decisions to visit trouble spots such as the Middle East. And of course there will be the usual but essential administrative matters to attend to.

All week! Press Room / The number of journalists attending a plenary session depends on what is on the agenda. As in Brussels, journalists are well served by the facilities. There is a constant 'coming and going' of journalists, staff and sometimes individual members. Media deadlines are of course uppermost in the minds of the journalists as they interview members and write their stories.

WEDNESDAY is the day when the biggest voting session takes place.

Anytime! Informal discussions in the corridors / Parliament does not only operate within the official meetings! Often important decisions or just a friendly chat can take place in the corridor or over a coffee in more informal settings. Official meetings, with full interpretation are of course essential, but informal direct contact also plays its part in the smooth functioning of this unique institution. Plenary also gives additional opportunities for discussions with the presence of European Commissioners and officials, and representatives of many different interest groups.

