

Voice of the People

Manuscript
The Parliament
TVSYD, Brussels

Participants:

No names on questioners

Politician: Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca, Member of the Parliament for Spain

Crew:

Reporter: Lene Krüger

Camera: Mohsen Safarkhanlou

Editor: Kurt Nielsen Banke

Music: Song of Joy from Council of Europe's CD "The European Anthem" 15sec

Duration: 7:22

Translation

The parliament

TVSYD, Denmark

Speak:

0:11

The European Parliament, among the world's largest political assemblies with 731 members from 25 different European countries. The Commission, the Council and the Parliament are the three EU institutions which govern the European Union.

Sync:

0:29

How can I strengthen the power of the Parliament? As it is now, it is subordinate to the Commission and the Council.

Sync:

0:36

What the Commission does is to implement policies and to manage the budget. But Parliament is not executive but legislative. And we discuss and approve or reject the proposals of the Commission. So, we make laws, and they implement the policies.

1'02

But there is one specific characteristic of the European institutions. The only institution that can propose a project, a law, a proposal, is the Commission.

1'18

However, adopting laws isn't just a walk in the park for the European Parliament. Prior to that, there is a rather complicated decision-making procedure which can take a very long time.

Graphics:

1'31

First the Parliament debates the proposal made by the Commission. The proposal is then sent to the Council with possible amendments. If the Council accepts the proposal with or without amendments, the proposal is adopted.

Graphics:

1'42

If the proposal isn't adopted in the first reading, it is returned to the Commission, which comments on the Council's and Parliament's opinion on the proposal and forwards it on to Parliament for a second reading.

Graphics:

1:55

Now, Parliament may choose to adopt, reject or further amend the proposal.

These amendments must be commented on again by the Commission and be approved by the Council.

Graphics:

2'06

If agreement still can't be reached, a conciliation committee is called in, which either ensures that the proposal is finally adopted by Parliament by a simple majority or by the Council by a qualified majority, or rejects the proposal all together due to lack of agreement.

2:13

What in point of fact could be solved in the Parliament?

2:29

The forerunner of the Parliament was called the Common Assembly and was formed in 1952, when the Coal and Steel Community was established by France, the Netherlands, the Benelux-countries, Belgium, Western Germany and Italy.

2:40

At that time, the members were also members of the national parliaments which is not permitted today. And then the Assembly only had advisory functions. Today, it is very different.

2:52

The Commission brings to this house proposals of laws, of rulings on most different subjects: Environment, public health, industry, anything you can imagine.

Sync:

3:15

I think it's not good as it is. They are down to small things. They should think big. Not how we should hunt our birds up here. Who cares in Portugal or Spain?

3:32

Apart from being part of the legislative, the Parliament has other functions, too. It must approve the composition of the Commission. And furthermore, it takes influence on the EU budget and has democratic control.

Sync:

3:44

It is not true that we only deal with small issues. This is not true. For instance, now we are preparing a big legislation on chemicals. And this is something which is related to an industry that has millions of jobs, that moves thousands and thousands of million euros. And that is one of the key elements of European economy and competitiveness. So, I cannot imagine anything bigger than that.

4:24

The 731 members of Parliament are not divided according to nationality, but according to parties. Across nationalities they have grouped according to political interests. In total there are 8 parties, and they are divided as follows:

Graphics:

4'40

There is the group of the European People's Party and European Democrats.

4'45

The group of the Party of European Socialists.

4'48

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

4'51

The European Federation of Green Parties also called the European Free Alliance.

4'55

The European United Left, also called the Nordic Green Left.

4'59

And the group of Independence and Democracy.

5'03

There is the Union for a Europe of Nations.

5'06

And furthermore about 30 politicians have chosen not to belong to any political group, to become Non-Inscrits.

Speak:

5:11

How many members a country has depends on the size of the country's population. Malta with five representatives, has the fewest members, while the largest country of the EU, Germany, has 99 representatives in the Parliament.

5:29

A member of the European Parliament receives tax-free paid clerks plus a subsistence allowance and travel costs. Furthermore, they are paid by their national state and receive the same salary as their colleagues in their home country.

Sync:

5:41

And there are big differences. For instance, if you compare the salary of an Italian member and an Austrian member compared to a member from Spain or still worse from Prague, Warszawa or Vilnius. Then differences can be a factor of 10 or 15 for the salary.

6:03

Abstentions? I think we better check that it did not get the 314 votes.

6:09

The official home of the Parliament is not Brussels, as many might believe, but Strasbourg. Here, members gather in plenary sittings for one week every month. Furthermore the members also meet in Brussels, while a part of the administration of the Parliament is situated in Luxembourg. A change of treaty would be necessary to change the decision to move around with the Parliament.

Sync:

6:30

It is a symbol of the reconciliation between France and Germany which was the cradle of the union. The original reason why the union was born, was to end wars in Europe, and of course, France and Germany were the two main elements of these wars in the past century. So we keep Strasbourg as a symbol. It is expensive, we know. It costs; let's say some hundred million euros per year. But most of us, not all of us, think this symbol should be kept alive.