

# EU Days

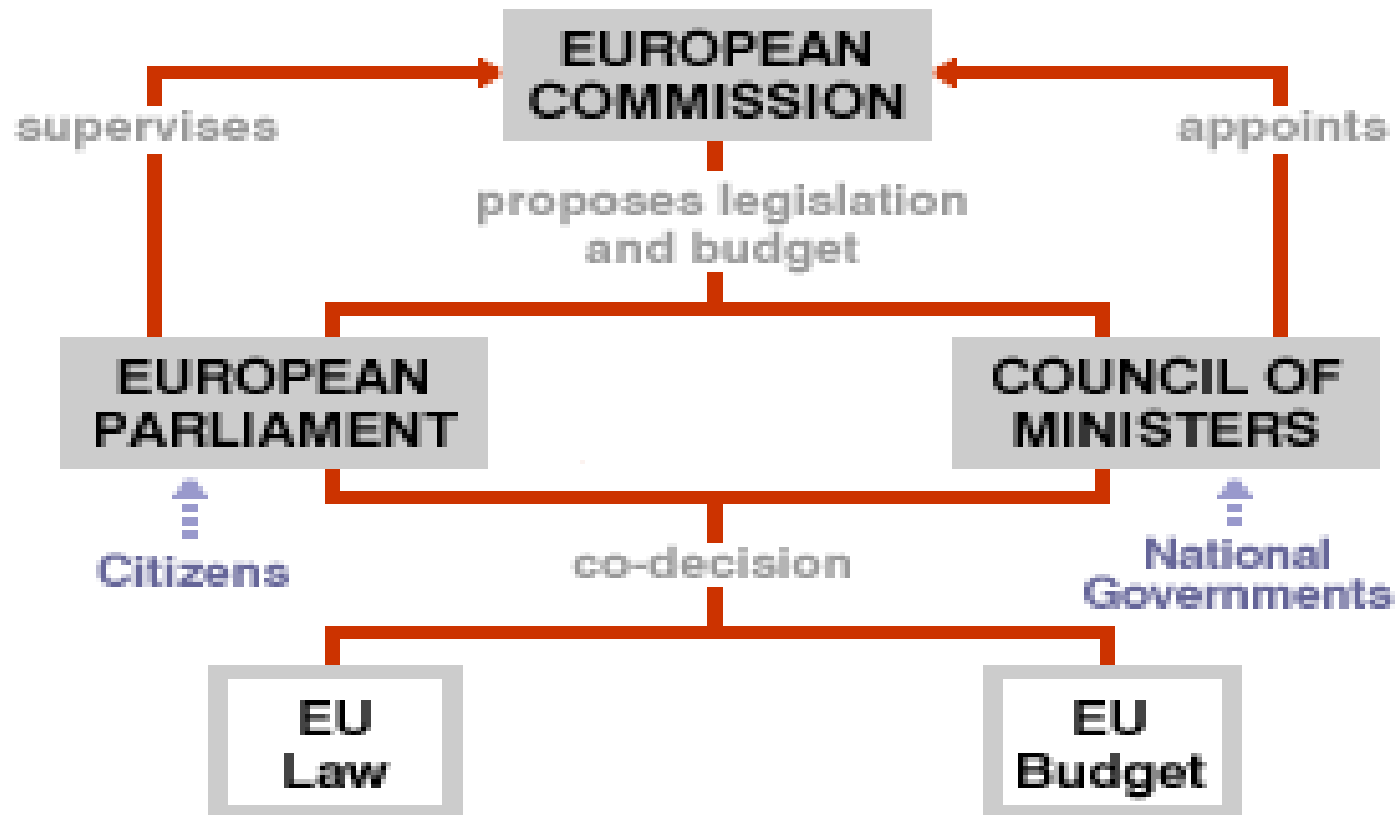
The workings of the European  
Parliament and the democratic  
deficit

# The European Parliament

- **Parliament's powers**
- The parliament amends, approves or rejects EU laws, together with the Council of Ministers.
- **The process of "co-decision"** - by which a law is only passed when approved by both bodies - applies in areas including consumer protection, the single market, workers' rights, asylum and immigration, the environment and animal welfare, but not foreign policy or agriculture.
- The parliament **also shares authority over the EU budget with the Council of Ministers and supervises other EU institutions, including the Commission. It vets new commissioners, and can sack the commission en masse.**

# Decision-making in EU

## HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER



# Where is the European Parliament?

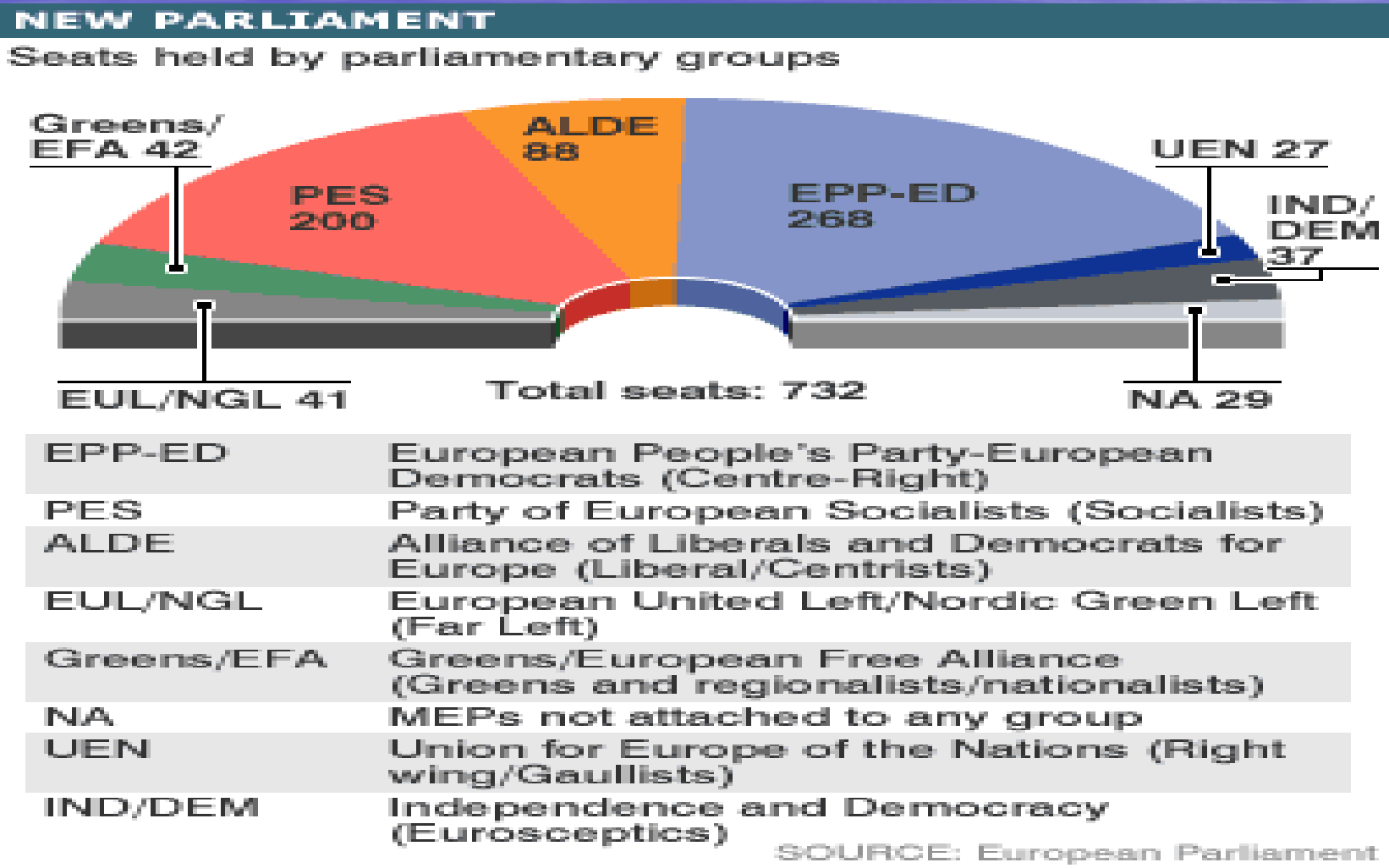
- **Locations**

- The parliament has two chambers - one in Brussels, the other in Strasbourg - and a secretariat in Luxembourg.
- **For three weeks of the month the parliament operates in Brussels**, where most committee and political group meetings take place, then for **one week it decamps to Strasbourg**.
- This perpetual movement adds to the cost of running the parliament, and is unpopular with members of the European Parliament (MEPs), because of the extra travel involved.
- However, the Strasbourg parliament is a matter of national prestige for France. Situated on the border between Germany and France, which fought two world wars in the last century, it is also a symbol of Europe's peaceful new order.

# Party Politics in EP

- **Party groups**
- Most MEPs belong to one of the parliament's political groups. None has an overall majority, so amendments need the support of more than one group to get through. On most issues the parliament divides along classic left-right lines.
- **A group must have at least 19 members, from at least five member states.** The larger the group, the more funding it receives the more key committee posts it gets and the longer it can speak in debates.
- Some groups are broad churches: the EPP-ED includes euro-enthusiast Christian Democrats and euro sceptic British Conservatives while the UEN includes the moderate Irish Fianna Fail party and Italy's post-fascist National Alliance.

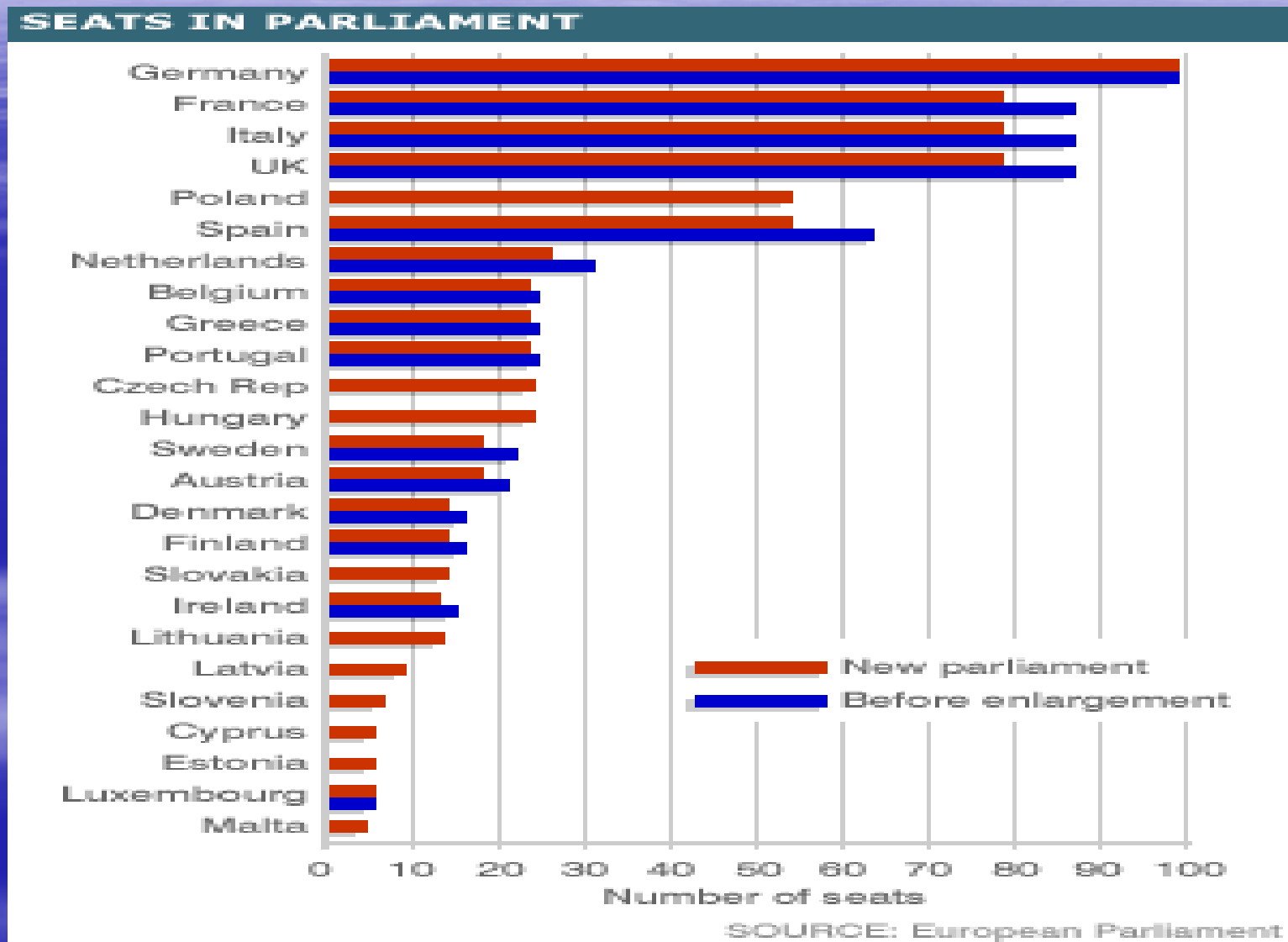
# Party Groups in EP



# Enlargement

- 
- **Before enlargement on 1 May 2004 the parliament had 626 seats. The new parliament elected in June 2004 has 732, and it will grow again when Bulgaria and Romania joined.**
- As 162 new MEPs from new member states have taken their seats, most of the older member states have lost a few members of parliament - Germany avoided this fate because it had the fewest seats per head of population.
- Enlargement puts huge new burdens on the parliament's translation service, which **must now provide simultaneous translation of all debates into 20 languages.**
- This amounts to **190 different language** combinations - Finnish-Czech, German-Portuguese, and English-Maltese and so on.
- From now on, more translations will take place through a third language, such as **English or French.**

# Seats in EP



# How democratic is the EU?

- **Democratic deficit:**
- It is often said that the EU's decision-making system is **too remote** from ordinary people, who cannot understand its complexities and its difficult legal texts. The proposed new constitution of the EU was to have addressed many of the issues raised under this heading.
- **Proposed changes under the new constitutional treaty – this was rejected by the voters of France and The Netherlands and is currently ‘in limbo’ awaiting a re-visit at some time in the future.**

# What the new constitution wanted to do

- It would have extended the power of **co-decision** to virtually all policy areas. This means that Parliament would become an equal legislative partner with the Council for virtually all EU-level decision-making.
- It would have required **the Council to meet in public** when legislating.
- It would have ensured that national parliaments receive information about new EU legislative proposals in **enough time to mandate ministers** on how to vote in the Council.

# The new proposed constitution

- It would also have given national parliaments a **new power to send any proposal back to the Commission for reconsideration if they believe the proposal lies outside the EU's competence** (i.e. if they believe it covers a policy area for which the treaties do not allow EU-level decision-making).
- It would have confirmed the principle of subsidiarity as a fundamental principle of the Union.
- It would have created a **new citizens' right of initiative**, obliging the Commission to consider any proposal for legislation that has the support of 1 million EU citizens.

# How the EU will make its laws

- *The action must be necessary because actions of individuals or member-state governments alone will not achieve the objectives of the action (the sufficiency criterion)*
- *The action must bring added value over and above what could be achieved by individual or member-state government action alone (the benefit criterion).*
- *Decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen (the close to the citizen criterion)*
- *The action should secure greater freedoms for the individual (the autonomy criterion).*
- *The European Union, however, has as part of its phraseology a call for "an ever-closer union." What restraints upon the progress of centralised decision making would be brought about by strict reference to the principle of subsidiarity have yet to be proven by major constitutional clashes.*