

V4 in the European Parliament: Punching above its weight?

V4 MEPs in the current European Parliament (2014-2019)

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Main points

- The 14.1 % of European Parliament deputies (106 out of 751) who come from the Visegrád Group countries are – at least on paper - punching above their weight: they hold 5 out of 22 committee chairs (22,7%) and 22 out of 87 committee vice chairs (25,3%). The European Parliament has never played such an important role in the EU's decision-making; the four Visegrád countries (V4) could benefit from the aggregated strength of their MEPs.
- Having enough firepower, an effectively working V4 caucus in the EP could translate some specific joint interests into various pieces of EU legislation.
- MEPs' consultations could supplement already existing relations between V4 governments on EU issues. The forthcoming Czech V4 presidency could facilitate the institutionalization of a V4 MEP caucus, which could be beneficial for exchanges of views or practices. Such efforts could benefit from, and further develop, an informal group of V4 MEPs led by Polish MEP Danuta Hübner, which was initiated by two Visegrád think tanks (CEPI and demosEUROPA) and has been holding regular meetings since December 2014.
- The distribution of V4 MEPs between European political groups is strikingly uneven. Of the two largest political groups in the EP, the V4 has a particularly strong position in the largest group, the EPP (48 out of 218 MEPs), and a much weaker relative position in the S&D group (17 out of 190).
- Even though the V4 has its MEPs in the presidia of all but four committees, these include the crucial committees on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), and Budget (BUDG) that shape law-making relevant for the Visegrád region, such as the Juncker investment package.
- A number of V4 MEPs have been re-elected, and some of them are already serving their third mandate. Since the established profile among MEPs is strongly correlated with seniority, one would expect their political portfolio to be easily recognizable. However, often that is not the case. Notable exceptions are mainly to be found among the Polish MEPs.

- In order to raise their individual as well as group profile within the European Parliament, the V4 MEPs need to look for more experienced political advisors and staff. The role of the teams around MEPs in navigating the stormy waters of the EP's deal-making and networking is crucial. If more V4 MEPs are to make a difference in the super-crowded agenda of Brussels and Strasbourg, their work has to be more focused, and supported by practical coalition building, including through the V4 format (which so far has not been utilized in the European Parliament).

Introduction

The power of the European Parliament has risen since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty. It plays a far more important role in the EU's decision making, and its leader, Martin Schulz, is ready to use every opportunity to swing the pendulum of power even more to the only directly elected body in Brussels.

Juncker's Commission has introduced a number of innovations, including the Berlaymont plan to decisively decrease the number of legislative proposals introduced. Furthermore, the EC College will put forward packages which would together signal major change in selected EU policy areas. It means that a more thematic focus will be expected from MEPs, and a large amount of broking will take place.

Consultations among the V4 MEPs might help put some regional priorities high on the EU's agenda. This is not to say that their party affiliations should not be respected. On the contrary, political groups are crucial for any coordination and can serve as the necessary foundations for promoting initiatives of regional importance.

The era of adaptation and learning is gone, as MEPs from the V4 countries have started their third legislative period. Let's have a look at how they managed to entrench themselves in the EP's structures by examining the following criteria: 1) proportional representation in political groups; 2) number of committee chairs and vice-chairs; 3) posts in the presidia of individual committees; and 4) number of coordinators and deputy coordinators in EP committees.

V4 MEPs in political groups

Voters from the V4 send more centre-right than left leaning representatives to Brussels and Strasbourg. Interestingly, V4 representation in the European People's Party (EPP) is much larger than German representation (48 Visegrad to 34 German representatives). However, the proportion of V4 MEPs in the Socialists & Democrats (S&D), the second most important political group, is very low. The V4 constitutes almost a third of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), mainly thanks to the Polish Law and Justice party.

Table 1: V4 delegations share in individual political groups

Political group	Number of CZ MEPs	Czech parties	Number of HU MEPs	Hungarian parties	Number of PL MEPs	Polish parties	Number of SK MEPs	Slovak parties	Total V4
EPP	7	TOP09 + KDU-ČSL	12	FIDESZ - KDNP	23	PO + PSL	6	KDH + SDKÚ-DS + SMK-MPK + MOST-HID	48
S&D	4	ČSSD	4	MSZ+DK	5	SLD	4	SMER-SD	17
ECR	2	ODS	0		19	PiS	3	OL'aNO + NOVA + SaS	24
ALDE	4	ANO	0		0		0		4
GUE/NGL	3	KSČM	0		0		0		3
Greens/EFA	0		2	Együtt-PM + LMP	0		0		2
EFDD	1	SSO	0		1	KNP	0		2
NI	0		3	JOBBIK	3	KNP	0		6

Committee chairs and vice-chairs

The chairman of each committee is endowed with relatively substantial procedural powers in the legislative process. He is also part of the Conference of Committee Chairs, which provides the Conference of Presidents of the political groups with recommendations regarding the items on the agenda and the schedule of committees. The committee chairs significantly influence legislation and the legislative process. Chairs and vice-chairs are therefore the most important in the hierarchy of positions in the EP.

MEPs from the V4 punch above their weight when it comes to holding the EP committees' chairmanships and vice-chairmanships. With their share of chairs and vice-chairs, a combined delegation of MEPs from the V4 countries would be ranked 6th relative to the overall size of national delegations, leaving behind both Italy and the United Kingdom. Yet, in the case of committee

chairs, this is mainly due to the contribution of Poland (4 posts). Vice-chairs are more diversified among the V4 delegates. All V4 countries ranked above average, with the Czechs achieving the best score: 7 out of their 21 MEPs are vice-chairs in EP committees.

Table 2: Number of chairs and vice-chairs of committees.

Member state	Overall number of MEPs	Chair(s)	Share of chairs (%)	Rank according to share	Vice-chair(s)	Share of vice-chairs (%)	Rank according to share
Germany	96	5	5,21	3.	13	13,54	13.
France	74	2	2,70	9.	9	12,16	14.
Italy	73	3	4,11	6.-7.	6	8,22	17.
United Kingdom	73	3	4,11	6.-7.	4	5,48	20.
Spain	54	2	3,70	8.	4	7,41	18.
Poland	51	4	7,84	1.	8	15,69	7.
Romania	32	0	0,00	10.-28.	8	25,00	3.-4.
Nederland	26	0	0,00	10.-28.	1	3,85	23.
Czech Republic	21	1	4,76	5.	7	33,33	1.-2.
Hungary	21	0	0,00	10.-28.	5	23,81	5.
Portugal	21	0	0,00	10.-28.	3	14,29	12.
Greece	21	0	0,00	10.-28.	1	4,76	21.-22.
Belgium	21	0	0,00	10.-28.	1	4,76	21.-22.
Sweden	20	1	5,00	4.	3	15,00	11.
Austria	18	0	0,00	10.-28.	0	0,00	24.-28.
Bulgaria	17	1	5,88	2.	1	5,88	19.
Denmark	13	0	0,00	10.-28.	2	15,38	8.-10.
Slovakia	13	0	0,00	10.-28.	2	15,38	8.-10.
Finland	13	0	0,00	10.-28.	2	15,38	8.-10.
Croatia	11	0	0,00	10.-28.	1	9,09	15.-16.
Lithuania	11	0	0,00	10.-28.	1	9,09	15.-16.
Ireland	11	0	0,00	10.-28.	0	0,00	24.-28.
Slovenia	8	0	0,00	10.-28.	2	25,00	3.-4.
Latvia	8	0	0,00	10.-28.	0	0,00	24.-28.
Malta	6	0	0,00	10.-28.	2	33,33	1.-2.
Luxemburg	6	0	0,00	10.-28.	1	16,67	6.
Estonia	6	0	0,00	10.-28.	0	0,00	24.-28.
Cyprus	6	0	0,00	10.-28.	0	0,00	24.-28.
Total V4	106	5	4,72	Theoretical rank 6.	22	20,75	Theoretical rank 6.

Table 3: Representation of V4 MEPs in individual committees' presidia

Committee	Number of members	Nationality of chair	Number of CZ vice-chairs	Number of HU vice-chairs	Number of PL vice-chairs	Number of SK vice-chairs	Committee without V4 representative
Foreign Affairs (AFET)	71	Germany			1		
Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)	68	Italy	1	1			
Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)	67	Poland	1				
Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON)	61	Italy					XXX
Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)	59	United Kingdom		1	1		
Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)	55	Germany			1		
Transport and Tourism (TRAN)	49	Germany		1	1		
Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)	45	Poland				1	
Regional Development (REGI)	43	Bulgaria	1				
International Trade (INTA)	41	Germany	1				
Budgets (BUDG)	41	France					XXX
Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO)	40	United Kingdom					XXX
Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)	35	Spain				1	
Petitions (PETI)	34	Sweden				1	
Culture and Education (CULT)	31	Italy	1	1			
Human rights (DROI)	30	Spain		1			
Security and Defence (SEDE)	30	Poland	1				
Budgetary Control (CONT)	30	Germany	1				
Development (DEVE)	28	United Kingdom					XXX
Legal Affairs (JURI)	25	Czech Republic				1	
Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)	25	Poland				1	
Fisheries (PECH)	24	France				1	

It is impossible to judge whether one committee is more important than another, since it depends on number of variables. Such classification cannot be objective. However, the prestige of the committee relates to its overall size. Herewith, we can see that the Polish delegation succeeded in getting the chair of one of the bigger committees, ITRE, and one of the medium-sized ones, AGRI. AFCO, JURI and SEDE, which are also chaired by V4 MEPs, fit, on the other hand, into the category of smaller committees.

The V4 is only absent from the presidia of four EP committees: on Economic and Monetary Union (ECON), Budgets (BUDG), Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) and Development (DEVE). It is perhaps easy to understand why the V4 delegations were unable to get the chair or vice-chair post in ECON, since only Slovakia is a member of the Eurozone, and DEVE, as development aid is an often-omitted policy in Central Europe. On the other hand, lack of representation in the presidium of BUDG is striking, as is the absence of chair or vice-chair posts in IMCO.

Coordinators and deputy coordinators

Coordinators are responsible for specific policy areas within their political groups. They may be convened by the chairman to prepare decisions for the committee, such as the appointment of a rapporteur.

The weight of V4 delegations in individual political groups is reflected in the number of coordinators and deputy coordinators. V4 is again particularly strong in EPP and ECR. On the other hand, V4 lacks a coordinator from S&D. Nevertheless, it should also be taken into account that the S&D group does not use the position of deputy coordinator.

Table 4: Coordinators and deputy coordinators from V4 and individual political groups

Political group	Czech republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
EPP	x	REGI - Deputy Coordinator Tamás Deutsch AFCO - Coordinator György Schöpflin	DROI - Coordinator Andrzej Grzyb DEVE - Deputy Coordinator Bogdan Brunon Wenta BUDG - Deputy Coordinator Jan Olbrycht IMCO - Deputy Coordinator Róża Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein JURI - Coordinator Tadeusz Zwiefka PETI - Deputy Coordinator Jarosław Wałęsa	x
S&D	There is no V4 coordinator			
ECR	ITRE - Deputy Coordinator Evžen Tošenovský	x	SEDE - deputy coordinator Marek Jurek CONT - Coordinator Ryszard Czarnecki DEVE - Deputy Coordinator Karol Karski ITRE - Coordinator Marek Józef Gróbarczyk JURI - Coordinator Andrzej Duda AGRI – Deputy Coordinator Janusz Wojciechowski FEMM – Deputy Coordinator Jadwiga Wiśniewska	x
ALDE	EMPL - Deputy Coordinator Martina Dlabajová IMCO - Coordinator Dita Charanzová	x	x	x
GUE/NGL	ENVI - Coordinator Kateřina Konečná	x	x	x
Greens/EFA		AFET – Coordinator Tamas Meszerics		
EFDD	AFCO - Coordinator Petr Mach	x	x	x

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