



2009 European Parliament Elections

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Voting in the 2009 European Parliament elections will take place across the EU from 4 to 7 June. In the United Kingdom voting will be on Thursday 4 June 2009.

The number of UK MEPs is to be reduced at these elections from 78 currently, to 72. On the basis of the 2004 results, the UK's six fewer MEPs would have meant reductions of three MEPs for the Conservatives, two for the Liberal Democrats and one for Labour. For Great Britain, seats in the European Parliament are allocated to Parties according to a "d'Hondt" quota system which operates for each region. For Northern Ireland a different system of Single Transferable Vote is used.

This note sets out the changes to the number of seats by region and what this would have meant if the 2004 elections had been fought on this basis.

The Results of the 2004 Elections are analysed in Research Paper 04/50 *European Parliament Elections 2004* [<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2004/rp04-050.pdf>]

Contents

1	Number of UK MEPs	2
	Table 1 - Seats by Region 2004 and 2009	2
	1.1 Effect of the Treaty of Lisbon	2
2	2004 Election results	2
	Table 2 - European Parliament UK MEPs by party and region in 2004	3
3	Electoral system	3
	Table 3 - 2004 Election results – votes required to win a seat by region	4
	3.1 The prospects for the BNP	4

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1 Number of UK MEPs

The number of UK MEPs will be 72 after the 2009 elections, six fewer than prior to the 2009 elections.

Table 1 - Seats by Region 2004 and 2009

	2004	2009	Change
East Midlands	6	5	-1
Eastern	7	7	
London	9	8	-1
North East	3	3	
North West	9	8	-1
South East	10	10	
South West	7	6	-1
West Midlands	7	6	-1
Yorkshire & the Humber	6	6	
Scotland	7	6	-1
Wales	4	4	
Northern Ireland	3	3	
UK	78	72	-6

SI 2008/1954 http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi_20081954_en_1

1.1 Effect of the Treaty of Lisbon

Under the Treaty of Lisbon, the number of UK MEPs would rise from 72 to 73. It was agreed at the European Council meeting of 11 and 12 December 2009 that in the event of the Treaty of Lisbon coming into force after the June 2009 elections the number of UK MEPS would be increased to 73 on a temporary basis, if possible during the year 2010, until the next European elections in 2014.¹

The *European Parliament (Representation) Act 2003* provides for the number of MEPs to be varied in response to changes in Community law. Changes must ensure that:

- (a) each electoral region is allocated at least three MEPs; and
- (b) the ratio of electors to MEPs is as nearly as possible the same in each electoral region.

On the basis of the latest published electorate figures, this would mean that any additional MEP would probably be allocated to the London region.

2 2004 Election results

Had the 2004 elections been fought on the reduced number of UK MEPs the distribution of seats for Great Britain would have been a reduction of 3 Conservative MEPs, 2 Liberal Democrat and 1 Labour. UKIP and the Greens keep the seats they won in 2004.

¹ European Parliament Press Notice 16 Dec 2008

Table 2 - European Parliament UK MEPs by party and region in 2004

Results if 2004 votes cast had been used to elect 69 MEPs in GB

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP/ PC	UKIP	Green	Total	Change by party on actual 2004 results
East Midlands	2	1	-	-	2	-	5	-1 LD
Eastern	3	1	1	-	2	-	7	
London	3	2	1	-	1	1	8	-1 Lab
North East	1	1	1	-	-	-	3	
North West	3	3	1	-	1	-	8	-1 LD
South East	4	1	2	-	2	1	10	
South West	2	1	1	-	2	-	6	-1 Con
West Midlands	2	2	1	-	1	-	6	-1 Con
Yorkshire & the Humber	2	2	1	-	1	-	6	
Scotland	1	2	1	2	-	-	6	-1 Con
Wales	1	2		1	-	-	4	
GB	24	18	10	3	12	2	69	-3 Con -2 LD -1 Lab

3 Electoral system

The system used for allocating European Parliament seats in Great Britain is the d'Hondt quota system, as in 2004. Seats are allocated in successive rounds. In each round votes cast for each party are divided by the number of seats the party has already been allocated in the region plus one. The party with the highest remaining total in the round wins the seat.

Northern Ireland uses a different system to the rest of the UK for electing its three MEPs. There a system of single transferable vote reallocates the surplus votes of those elected and the votes of those eliminated to the remaining candidates. In 2004 one seat each went to the DUP, Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists.

The percentage for votes needed to win a European Parliament seat in Great Britain varies between regions, depending on the distribution of votes for different parties and the number of seats allocated to each region. Table 3 shows the lowest d'Hondt percentage share of votes in each region which would have given a party at least one MEP on the basis of the votes cast in 2004 applied to the 69 seats in Great Britain (the number which will apply in 2009). This shows the minimum vote share required for a party to win a European Parliament seat, given the distribution of votes in 2004.

Table 3 - 2004 Election results – votes required to win a seat by region

Lowest d'Hondt share required in 2004 to win a seat by region

Based on 69 GB seats (ie. seats to be used for 2009 elections)

	%
East Midlands	12.9
Eastern	8.4
London	7.7
North East	12.2
North West	6.8
South East	7.0
South West	9.2
West Midlands	8.8
Yorkshire & the Humber	8.8
Scotland	8.8
Wales	10.5

Note: the percentage figures in the table are the proportion of votes that would have given a party at least one MEP in 2009, using the votes cast in 2004.

3.1 The prospects for the BNP

There has been some speculation that the BNP might win a seat in the 2009 EP elections. Harriet Harman recently said that Labour was gearing up to stop Nick Griffin, the BNP chairman, from becoming an MEP in the North-West. According to Ms Harman the BNP need 8% of the vote to break through into the European Parliament.²

The electoral system makes it difficult to be precise about the lowest percentage of votes needed for a party to gain an MEP. This depends on the number of MEPs in a particular region and the distribution of votes between all the parties contesting the election. Experience in 2004 suggests that around 8% (and possibly lower in some circumstances) of the vote could indeed be sufficient to win a seat. In 2004 in London and the South East the Greens took a seat in each with around 8% of the votes. But this was at least in part due to the distribution of votes between four other parties (Con, Lab, Lib Dem and UKIP) all with higher vote shares. The minimum vote share required to gain representation is likely to be lowest in regions with the largest number of MEPs – South East (10), London (8), North West (8). In 2004 in the North West 12.2% of the vote gave UKIP an MEP (on the 6th round of allocation), but they actually required only 6.8% or more to gain a seat. The BNP had 6.4% of the votes in the North West and would have won a seat if this had been than 0.4% points higher. In London and the South East individual seats were allocated on around 7-8% of the votes. In 2004 the BNP vote was 4.0% in London and 2.9% in the South East.

In the 2008 London Assembly elections, the BNP polled 5.4% of votes for London-wide “top-up” members, giving it one seat on the Assembly.

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/jan/24/harriet-harman-bnp-european-election>