

6 European Parliament constituencies

6.1 The Commission's terms of reference and role

This chapter contains the Commission's recommendations for the constituencies for the election of members to the European Parliament. As regards this part of its work, the Commission's terms of reference, set out in section 6 of the 1997 Act, require it to have regard to the following:

- the total number of members of the European Parliament to be elected in the State shall be 12 or such other number as may be specified for the time being pursuant to the treaties governing the European Communities;
- there shall be reasonable equality of representation as between constituencies;
- each constituency shall return 3, 4 or 5 members;
- the breaching of county boundaries shall be avoided as far as practicable; this is deemed not to include a reference to the boundary of a city or any boundary between any two of the counties of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin;
- each constituency shall be composed of contiguous areas;
- there shall be regard to geographic considerations including significant physical features and the extent of and the density of population in each constituency; and
- subject to the above provisions, the Commission shall endeavour to maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies.

As with the Dáil constituencies, the Commission's role is advisory. The final determination of the constituencies for the European Parliament is a matter for the Oireachtas to prescribe in legislation.

6.2 Irish legislation

Elections in Ireland to the European Parliament are governed by the European Parliament Elections Acts 1992 to 2006 which provide for elections on the single transferable vote system in multi-member constituencies. Section 15(2) of the European Parliament Elections Act 1997 provides for the revision of constituencies as follows:—

“(2) The Minister shall, having considered any report presented on statutory authority to each House of the Oireachtas recommending any alteration in the constituencies for which candidates shall be elected under this Act to be representatives in the Parliament, and not later than the first day of December, 2003 and at least once in every ten years thereafter, submit to the Oireachtas proposals for a review of the said constituencies.”.

The existing European constituencies are specified in the Third Schedule to the European Parliament Elections Act 1997 as set out in the table below and in Map 18. The cities and counties are as specified in Schedule 5 to the Local Government Act 2001.

Constituency	Area	Number of Members
Dublin	The counties of: Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin; and the city of Dublin.	3
East	The counties of: Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Wexford and Wicklow.	3
North-West	The counties of: Cavan, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo and Westmeath; and the city of Galway.	3
South	The counties of: Cork, Kerry, Limerick, North Tipperary, South Tipperary and Waterford; and the cities of Cork, Limerick and Waterford.	3

6.3 Submissions

Eight of the submissions received by the Commission in response to its public notice inviting submissions, related to European Parliament constituencies. The organisations and persons who made submissions are listed in Appendix 6.

One submission suggested either two 6-seat constituencies or a single 12-seat constituency. These arrangements could not be considered having regard to the requirement that each constituency shall return 3, 4 or 5 members. Five submissions proposed three 4-seat constituencies. The other two submissions made recommendations in relation to particular constituencies.

6.4 Equality of representation

The Commission's terms of reference require that there should be reasonable equality of representation as between constituencies. The degree of equality that can reasonably be achieved is limited by practical considerations, notably the small number of seats available for distribution (12) and the comparatively large blocks (primarily the counties) which are used for adjustment purposes. This is consistent with the criterion in the terms of reference to the effect that breaches of county boundaries shall be avoided as far as practicable.

This Commission noted that in the recommendations of previous commissions European Parliament constituencies have involved variances from the national average population per member ranging from -11.16% to +8.44% in 1977; from -11.12% to +9.05% in 1993; from

–10.39% to +9.44% in 1998; from –9.92% to +10.33% in 2003/4; and from –6.20% to +12.00% in 2007.

6.5 Recommendations for constituencies

Based on numerical equality of representation between constituencies, each of the 12 MEPs to be next elected should represent an average population of 382,354 based on the 2011 Census. Applying this national average to the existing constituencies the range of variance (from –5.87% to +10.99%) in the 4 existing constituencies, as detailed in the table below, is less than the ranges previously recommended by Commissions.

Constituency	Number of MEPs	2011 Population	Population per MEP	% Variance from National Average Population per MEP
Dublin	3	1,273,069	424,356	+10.99
East	3	1,106,581	368,860	–3.53
North-West	3	1,079,710	359,903	–5.87
South	3	1,128,892	376,297	–1.58
Total	12	4,588,252	382,354	

Having regard to these figures the Commission considered options for constituencies. These included making adjustments to the existing 4 constituencies to take account of population change since 2006; the other possible combinations of three 4-seat constituencies or one 3-seat, one 4-seat and one 5-seat constituency; and making no change.

Having considered all the relevant circumstances and the submissions made to it, the Commission recommends that the arrangement most in keeping with its terms of reference would be that of maintenance of the existing arrangement of constituencies for the election of members to the European Parliament.

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