

Parliament

Thirteen member states will lose EP seats in 2014

By Ophélie Spanneut | Friday 25 January 2013

Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Romania and Sweden will each lose one seat in the European Parliament with the next elections in 2014, according to a proposal by the rapporteurs on the composition of Parliament with a view to the elections.

With Croatia joining the EU, room needs to be made for the new members in Parliament. Twelve Croats are currently sitting in the EP as observers. At the time of accession, in July 2013, they will become fully-fledged members. Parliament will then have 766 members, but the transitional provisions on the assembly's composition expire in 2014. For the next elections, Treaty Article 14 will therefore apply. It sets a limit of 751 seats distributed according to the principle of degressive proportionality with a minimum of six and a maximum of 96 seats per member state.

This implies that Germany will lose three seats, dropping from 99 to 96. The rest of the distribution is based on the principle that “nobody gains, nobody loses more than one,” propose rapporteurs Roberto Gualtieri (S&D, Italy) and Rafal Trzaskowski (EPP, Poland), who presented their draft report on 22 January to the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO). The loss of two or even three seats (as in the case of Hungary or Lithuania) would also lead to a truer representation of populations, they acknowledge, but is politically difficult to get governments to accept. They find their solution more pragmatic and think it stands the best chance of winning enough votes, ie unanimity of the member states and the majority of Parliament.

VERHOFSTADT: “UNFAIR”

Not everyone shares that view. Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, Belgium) finds their proposal unfair, mentioning the example of Hungary, which has 9.9 million inhabitants and would have 21 seats, while Sweden, with 9.5 million inhabitants, would have two fewer, only 19, although the population difference is very small. Trzaskowski pointed out that any recalibration will create new problems through a domino effect. The proposal is the result of months of reflection and careful calculation to come up with “the least bad solutions possible,” added Gualtieri.

The idea behind their report is to make only the adjustment needed to comply with the Lisbon Treaty as the result of Croatia's accession. It is not about conducting a “radical reform” of Parliament. On the other hand, the rapporteurs find that, for the 2019 elections, a system should be established so that, prior to each election, the distribution of seats is revised in terms of member states' demographic developments. The aim is for the distribution of seats to be based on a mathematical formula based on objective population parameters rather than intergovernmental bargaining.