



# **Submission to the European Parliament Constituencies Committee on the Constituencies for the European Parliament Elections 2019**

European Movement Ireland  
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**European Movement Ireland**



# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1.0 Foreword</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2.0 Who We Are</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 Our Mission .....	5
2.2 Our Vision .....	5
<b>3.0 Comparisons with other EU Member States</b> .....	<b>6</b>
3.1 Voting .....	6
3.2 Constituencies .....	6
<b>4.0 History of European Parliamentary Constituencies in Ireland</b> .....	<b>7</b>
4.1 Turnout.....	7
4.2 Countries with similarities.....	8
<b>5.0 2014 Constituencies</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>6.0 Observations</b> .....	<b>10</b>

## 1.0 Foreword

The impending withdrawal of the UK from the EU means that there will be a change in the composition of the European Parliament. The UK's withdrawal from the EU necessitated a decision be made regarding the 73 seats currently held by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the UK. The European Parliament Committee for Constitutional Affairs' (AFCO) recommendation, which has been endorsed by the European Parliament and adopted by the European Council, proposes that should the UK leave the EU, the total number of MEPs should be reduced from 751 to 705. Ireland has been allocated two additional seats in the European Parliament for the 2019-2024 term. This increases Ireland's representation from 11 to 13 MEPs, requiring the establishment of an independent committee to report on European Parliament constituencies.

The UK electorate's vote to leave the EU has demonstrated the importance of actively engaging with the EU and, at the same time, has arguably acted to spur the vital and on-going discussions about what we, as Irish and EU citizens, want a reforming EU to look like. Discussions which European Movement (EM) Ireland has been pleased to help facilitate. The upcoming European Parliament elections in May 2019 represent an important opportunity to amplify such public dialogue and attach even greater significance to our voice in the European Parliament, a directly-elected Institution that defends the interests of citizens in the EU decision-making process.

In July 2018, the European Parliament Constituencies Committee invited written submissions on matters which should be considered in reporting on constituencies. European Movement Ireland is delighted to have the opportunity to put forward the following submission. The crux of EM Ireland's submission centres on our belief that it is of paramount importance that constituencies for the 2019 European Parliament elections are organised in such a way which means that they do not act to inhibit participatory democracy. MEPs represent a crucial bridge between citizens and the EU Institutions but the current constituencies perhaps cover too great a geographical area, creating challenges for candidates and MEPs to meaningfully engage with their constituents. This current constituency review can therefore be seen as a valuable opportunity to address this issue and create in the process a system which continues to represent and promote Irish citizens relationship with the EU.

**Noelle O Connell**  
**Executive Director**  
**24 August 2018**

## 2.0 Who We Are

European Movement (EM) Ireland is Ireland's longest-established non-governmental organisation promoting European Affairs. It is a membership-based, not-for-profit organisation.

EM Ireland was founded in 1954 by a group of Irish citizens, including Dr Garret FitzGerald, Eoin Ryan and Declan Costello, who believed that Ireland should play a role in a united Europe. Our founding principle was to "keep the Irish public informed about current European affairs and to encourage an informed and constructive contribution from Irish society towards the development of Europe and, through it, Europe's contribution to the solution of local problems", and the same is true today.

Though its initial aim was achieved when Ireland took its place at the European table in 1973, over the last 45 years, EM Ireland has continued to work to develop the connection between all sectors of Irish society and Europe by:

1. Increasing awareness of, involvement in, and commitment to Europe;
2. Disseminating non-partisan and factual information about the EU in language that is simple and understandable;
3. Providing an independent, reasoned, non-governmental voice on all issues relating to Europe in Ireland;
4. Inputting views on EU initiatives and proposals that reflect Irish opinion and influencing the final shape and content of such initiatives.

EM Ireland works to reach the broadest possible audience through holding citizens' dialogues, being active online in engagement and discussion, as well as running education programmes and campaigns.

## 2.1 Our Mission

To make the connection between Irish people and the EU, campaigning for every Irish person to get involved with the European Union and by doing so, help shape it.

## 2.2 Our Vision

For Europe to be discussed in Ireland in a fair, reasoned, and robust manner based on facts and informed debate.

### 3.0 Comparisons with other EU Member States

As part of EM Ireland’s submission to the Committee, we have conducted comparative analyses of Ireland’s electoral system for European Parliament elections with those of other Member States. MEPs across the EU are elected under national electoral systems. The number of MEPs in each country is determined by its population and assigned on the basis of the principle of degressive proportionality.

#### 3.1 Voting

Although elected under national electoral systems, there are a number of common principles established under EU law which determine how European Parliament elections are run. As per Article 1 of Council Decision 2002/772/EC, Euratom, MEPs must be elected by proportional representation, either by single transferable vote or by the list system. Ireland and Malta are the only Member States to use the proportional representation by single transferable vote (PR-STV) system. Northern Ireland also uses this system. The other 26 Member States, including the rest of the United Kingdom, use a list system.

The list system is where a political party lists its candidates according to the party’s determination of priorities. In eight Member States, including the UK, voters can only vote for a list, without the possibility to change the order of candidates on the list. This is known as a closed list. The other type of list system is known as preferential voting and this system allows voters to express a preference for one or more of the candidates. 19 Member States use a form of preferential voting<sup>1</sup>.

#### 3.2 Constituencies

Ireland is one of only five Member States who currently have multiple constituencies for European Parliament elections. All other Member States have a single national constituency. The UK, Italy, Belgium and France had multiple constituencies in the 2014 European Parliament election. The UK elected 73 MEPs across 12 constituencies, Italy elected 73 MEPs across five constituencies, and France elected 74 MEPs across eight constituencies. Belgium elected 21 MEPs across four constituencies by three electoral colleges which are based on the different groups in the country.

In January 2018, the French government approved a reform to create a single electoral constituency, which the Assemblée Nationale voted in favour of on 14 May 2018. However, this is being challenged in the Constitutional Court after 61 French Members of the Assemblée Nationale appealed the decision<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Data from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/623556/EPRS\\_ATA\(2018\)623556\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/623556/EPRS_ATA(2018)623556_EN.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/623556/EPRS\\_ATA\(2018\)623556\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/623556/EPRS_ATA(2018)623556_EN.pdf)

## 4.0 History of European Parliamentary Constituencies in Ireland<sup>3</sup>

The number of Irish MEPs has altered over our 45 years of EU membership due to the changing structure of the European Parliament and the accession of new Member States.

For the 1973-1979 European Parliament term, MEPs were nominated by the Dáil and Seanad. For the first direct election in 1979, Ireland had 22 MEPs.

Between 1984 and 2004, Ireland had 15 MEPs elected across four constituencies: Dublin, Leinster, Munster and Connacht-Ulster. In the 1984 and 1989 elections, Dublin elected four MEPs, Munster elected five and Leinster and Connacht-Ulster each elected three MEPs. The distribution was altered for the 1994 and 1999 elections with Dublin, Leinster and Munster each electing four MEPs, and Connacht-Ulster electing three.

For the 2004 and 2009 elections, Ireland had new constituencies: Dublin, East, South and North-West. For the 2004 election, Ireland had 13 seats. Dublin elected four MEPs while East, South, and North-West each elected three. With the 2007 accession of Romania and Bulgaria, Ireland's number of MEPs was reduced to 12. In the 2009 election, each constituency elected three MEPs.

Due to the 2013 accession of Croatia, for the 2014-2019 European Parliament term, Ireland's number of seats was reduced to 11. Ireland's Electoral Act 1997 specifies that constituencies must elect between three and five Members, therefore the number of constituencies was reduced to three with Dublin electing three MEPs, and Midlands-North-West and South each electing four MEPs.

### 4.1 Turnout

The average voter turnout across the EU was 43.31 per cent in the 2014 European Parliament election. This ranges from 89.64 per cent in Belgium, where voting is compulsory, to 13.05 per cent in Slovakia. Luxembourg, which also has compulsory voting, had the second highest turnout at 85.55 per cent and Malta took third place at 74.80 per cent. The Maltese figure is notable as they are the only other Member State to use PR-STV.

Ireland had a turnout of 52.44 per cent in the 2014 election, giving it the seventh highest turnout in the EU. Greece, Italy and Denmark all had higher, but similar, turnouts to Ireland. It appears that holding

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ireland/en/your-meps/irish-meps-1973-2014>

European Parliament elections on the same day as other elections contributes to an increase in voter turnout. Greece, Italy and Ireland all held local elections in conjunction with European elections, and the Danish electorate voted in a referendum on membership of the Unified Patent Court on the same day.

The average electoral turnout in Ireland for the past four European Parliament elections has been 54.96 per cent with turnouts of 50.21 per cent in 1999, 58.58 per cent in 2004, 58.64 per cent in 2009 and 52.44 per cent in 2014.

YEAR	TURNOUT	NUMBER OF CONSTITUENCIES	NUMBER OF MEPS
1994	44 per cent	4	15
1999	50.21 per cent	4	15
2004	58.58 per cent	4	13
2009	58.64 per cent	4	12
2014	52.44 per cent	3	11

## 4.2 Countries with similarities

Malta is the only other Member State which uses PR-STV. Malta currently has six seats in the European Parliament and elects them by a single national constituency. In the 2014 election, 32 Maltese candidates ran and the turnout was 74.8%.

The countries with the similar populations to Ireland are Denmark (14 MEPs), Finland (14 MEPs), Slovakia (14 MEPs) and Croatia (12 MEPs). Each of these Member States have a single national constituency and use preferential list systems. Denmark, Finland, and Croatia all use the d'Hondt formula (highest averages) to allocate seats. They are three of 15 Member States (including the UK) to use this method of apportioning votes. The Slovakian system is based on the 'Droop' method and the highest remainder<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/493047/IPOL-AFCO\\_ET\(2014\)493047\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/493047/IPOL-AFCO_ET(2014)493047_EN.pdf)

## 5.0 2014 Constituencies

Per Section 6(2)(b) and 6(3)(c) of the Electoral Act 1997 (Ireland), each constituency must return three, four or five Members in a European Parliament election. As a result, a decision was taken to reduce the number of constituencies in Ireland to three as follows:

CONSTITUENCY	AREAS	SEATS	POPULATION (APPROX.)
Dublin	Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, South Dublin, City of Dublin	3	1,347,359
Midlands-North-West	Co. Cavan, Co. Donegal, Co. Galway and City of Galway, Co. Kildare, Co. Laois, Co. Leitrim, Co. Longford, Co. Louth, Co. Mayo, Co. Meath, Co. Monaghan, Co. Offaly, Co. Roscommon, Co. Sligo, Co. Westmeath	4	1,686,175
South	Co. Carlow, Co. Clare, Co. Cork, Co. Kerry, Co. Kilkenny, Co. Limerick, North Tipperary, South Tipperary, Co. Waterford, Co. Wexford, Co. Wicklow and the Cities of Cork, Limerick and Waterford	4	1,728,331

\*Source: [Report of the Constituency Commission 2017](#)

## 6.0 Observations

1. Historically, Ireland has a high voter turnout in European Parliament elections relative to other Member States. Since becoming a Member State, there have only been two occasions when turnout in Ireland has been lower than the EU average, in the 1984 and 1994 European Parliament elections. It is the opinion of EM Ireland that any changes should seek to promote a continued high level of engagement and that these alterations should be predicated on helping to foster an understanding of the importance and value of democratic participation in the elections.
2. After an increase from 44% in 1994 to over 58% in 2009 (which was over 15% higher than the EU average), turnout dropped by almost 6% in the last election in 2014 when the number of constituencies was reduced to three.
3. In EM Ireland's experience of engaging directly with the public on EU affairs through a number of town hall style events and citizens' dialogues across the country, we believe that the current constituencies arguably cover too great a geographical area. These larger constituencies could be seen as less representative and create practical challenges for candidates and MEPs in meaningfully engaging with their constituents due to the wide area they have to cover in order to do so. For example, the current South constituency stretches from Bray in County Wicklow to Dingle in County Kerry, while the Midlands-North-West constituency spans three provinces; Leinster, Ulster and Connaught.
4. EM Ireland is of the opinion that it is worth exploring the merits of all options in the review and assessing the strength of different electoral systems and constituency boundaries in promoting the representation of Irish citizens in the EU. This includes assessing the value of replacing the electoral system of multiple constituencies for European Parliament elections with one single national constituency, as well as the option of increasing the number of constituencies to four.
5. EM Ireland has been and continues to be supportive of attempts by the Committee to invite citizens to engage in the consultation process regarding changes to the electoral system for the upcoming 2019 European Parliament elections.





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