

A Rúnaí, a chara,

The European Council has provided for 13 members of the European Parliament to be elected from Ireland. Two problems with the current constituencies are the large geographical area of Midlands-North-West, which spans more than half the area of the state, and the need for a constituency including Dublin to have equal representation with the rest of the country. These problems can be solved while fulfilling the terms of reference of the Committee, including equality of representation, respecting county boundaries and continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies.

First, Midlands-North-West is very large in land area, but is sparsely populated in parts, and has an unusually broad diversity of interests ranging from the rural north and west to the suburbs of Dublin, with no common local identity. The decision to move to 13 MEPs allows the committee to restore the three-seat North-West constituency that existed in the 2009-14 Parliament. With small changes to Midlands-North-West, it would have a more consistent rural- and town-based settlement pattern. Its large regional centres include Galway, Letterkenny, Athlone and Ennis.

Second, county Dublin cannot be maintained as a 3-seat constituency (+23% variance from the national average ratio of population to MEPs), while the inequality of representation with 4 seats would exceed all recent practice of the committee (-8% variance). To best promote both equality of representation and continuity of arrangement of constituencies, both the current Dublin constituency and South should expand. Dublin, Kildare, Louth and Meath would comprise a 5-seat constituency in the East of the country. Laois and Offaly would join the South constituency, while Clare would move from South to North-West. South would also elect 5 MEPs.

The three recommended constituencies have variances below 3.5% and are substantially continuous with the current areas being represented. Alternative arrangements of four districts may also exist, though they would necessarily be less continuous with the current arrangement of constituencies, and may deliver less equality of representation.

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Éamon Ó Gamhna