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"Plenary speech on the composition of the European Parliament"

Plenary debate

7th of February 2018, European Parliament, Strasbourg, France

*****Start of the debate*****

Today we will vote on a new composition of the European Parliament for the European elections of 2019. In times when democracy as a system is called into question, elections are the most important expression of citizens' democratic will. The European Parliament directly represents its citizens in the European Union, so we, as Members of the European Parliament, form the direct link between citizens and the Union. And it is the prerogative of the European Parliament to propose its composition to the European Council, and to have a final say on the European Council Decision for each legislative period.

A distribution of the European Parliament's seats that is fair, that follows objective principles, and that respects the EU's Treaty has been the objective that we, as Co-Rapporteurs, set ourselves when we were entrusted with this task. We listened to the concerns of the colleagues in the House and the Member States and proposed a composition that fully respects the principle of degressive proportionality, as required by the Treaty. This principle ensures a fair and balanced representation of citizens by the Member States.

The respect of this principle, in combination with a distribution of some of the UK's vacated seats, allows us to address the underrepresentation of some Member States in the House.

Brexit has undoubtedly created a new situation for the Union that affects the composition of our House. One of the most populous Member States is leaving the Union and we believe that this should be reflected in the future distribution of seats. It allows us not only to address the problem of underrepresentation of some Member States, but it would also leave a number of seats available for future enlargements and, depending on the creation of the proper legal basis, for the creation of transnational lists for European elections. By reducing the size of Parliament from 751 to 705 Members of Parliament we would also allow for savings, thereby freeing up resources that can be used for other purposes. I think that these are the right signals to our citizens.

Brexit has also made our task more challenging due to the legal uncertainties on the precise date and terms of when the EU acquis ceases to apply to the UK. That is why we have also envisaged a fall-back option in case the UK has not yet formally withdrawn from the Union in time for the next elections.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that this report garnered 80% support in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. I hope that we will manage to achieve a large majority at today's vote in Plenary as well, in order to ensure fair representation of our citizens. I call in this regard on the European Council to take heed of the European Parliament's position with regard to its composition.

****End of the debate*****

I would just like to raise a few issues. As we heard during the debate, there are very different opinions on some issues, such as transnational lists, but I would say that very few colleagues questioned the core of this report, which is the composition of our House as of 2019.

I believe that the proposal which we put forward is the middle ground between all points of view on the matter, and in the light of all the special – I would say extraordinary – circumstances we are facing this time around, this is the best solution available with regard to the composition of Parliament for the forthcoming term.

I would also like to reiterate my request to the European Council to heed Parliament's wishes in relation to its own composition, and I hope that the report will be approved by the European Council in the version that will, hopefully, pass through Parliament today. I would also like to make it clear to colleagues that the bigger the majority with which we adopt the composition proposal, the more likely it is that the Council will not change it. I am confident that, with this report, Parliament is sending a strong signal to citizens that it will remain efficient, while managing to reduce its size by 46 seats owing to the withdrawal of the UK from the Union.

I hope that the European Council will support us in this proposal because it is fair, equitable and in full compliance with Treaty principles. It is, above all, also in the interests of European citizens.