

The first half of the current EP term

What the legislative amendments tell us

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In this article we analyse the amendments in the first six months of the 2019–24 EP term. We use data publicly available on the website of the European Parliament (EP).

The ranking of the involvement of individual MEPs in amendments is topped by the Belgian MEP Olivier Chastel, who was by far the most active MEP, involved in 724 amendments. He is followed by Ramona Strugariu of Romania (577 amendments), Lina Galvez Muñoz of Spain (545 amendments) and Gilles Boyer of France (504 amendments).

Overall, the top 10 most involved MEPs) make up 7.4% of the total involvement in amendments of all 751 MEPs (pre-Brexit). This exhibits a hugely disproportionate level of involvement, with the data also indicating that 15 MEPs were only involved in 1 amendment, and 57 MEPs were not involved in any amendments at all. Each member of the top 10 contributed to at least 0.58% of total involvement, with Olivier Chastel alone contributing to 1.11% of total involvement and 14.95% of the top 10's involvement. This information shows that not all MEPs are equal in the range of their activity regarding legislative amendments. The sheer size of this disparity is important to note, despite the fact that different pieces of legislation differ in size and subject matter.

THE MOST ACTIVE MEMBER STATES

The ranking of the involvement of the collective MEPs of different Member States does not stray from this theme of disproportionality. France tops the ranking with 7608 amendments, followed by Spain with 6920 amendments, Germany with 6067 amendments and Italy with 5601 amendments. Estonia, Luxembourg and Cyprus sit at the bottom with 619, 617 and 586 amendments, respectively.

However, this data is better understood when taking into account the number of MEPs in each Member State, as states with smaller populations have fewer MEPs and therefore fewer opportunities to be involved in amendments. The ranking of the involvement of the collective MEPs of different Member States per the number of MEPs in these states is topped by Slovakia, with 163 amendments per number of MEPs. In this regard, Slovakia accounts for 6.04% of all amendments per number of MEPs. Slovenia comes second with 146 amendments per number of MEPs, making up 5.43%. They are followed by Malta (131 amendments, 4.85%), Belgium (125 amendments, 4.64%) and Lithuania (124 amendments, 4.62%).

THE MOST ACTIVE EP GROUPS

The Socialists and Democrats Group (S&D) leads the EP Groups for involvement in amendments, with 19,967 amendments tabled. This accounts for 31% of the total involvement, an impressively large share despite the fact that it can partly be attributed to S&D's size as the second largest EP Group with 146 MEPs. The S&D Group has made 136 amendments per MEP. S&D is followed by the Renew Europe Group (RE), which was involved in 16,927 amendments (26% of the total). As the third largest EP Group with 98 MEPs, RE is clearly the most active for its size with 173 amendments per MEP.

S&D and RE appear even more active, however, when our attention turns to the other EP Groups. The third most involved EP Group, the European People's Party (EPP), accounts for 10,954 amendments and 17% of involvement (considerably less than both S&D and RE) but is by far the largest EP Group with 187

MEPs. EPP only tabled 59 amendments per MEP, which is especially striking when compared to the much higher numbers of S&D and RE.

The four remaining EP Groups (Greens/EFA, ECR, ID, and GUE/NGL) each account for either 6% or 7% of the total involvement, and less than 100 amendments per MEP (with ID's 54 amendments per MEP being the least). None of these EP Groups seem to be especially active, then, even when their relative sizes are taken into account. Furthermore, the Non-Instructs (NI) Although this might suggest that S&D and RE are overperformers (as opposed to saying that these smaller groups are underachieving), it does not at all detract from the lacklustre performance of EPP. Out of all EP Groups, only ID was involved in less amendments per MEP than EPP was. The size and prominence of EPP in the European Parliament prompts one to question why their involvement in amendments per MEP is so little.

THE MOST AMENDED LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

The ranking of the top 10 most amendmended legislative procedures is topped by The European Forest Strategy – The Way Forward, which was subject to 2,786 amendments. This large amount is closely followed by the 2,758 amendments made to the EU disability strategy post 2020, and then by the 2,571 amendments made to the Digital Services Act: Improving the functioning of the Single Market.

Various inferences can be drawn from analysing which individual legislative procedures were subject to the most amendments. The number of amendments made to a certain piece of legislation might illustrate its complexity or importance as something which warrants fine-tuning and deliberation, possibly over long periods of time and many different people. It could also demonstrate how much some legislation has been contested, for example because it contains a controversial issue. Finally, considering this might simply show the significance of the implications of particular legislation to different MEPs or EP Groups. They might want to get involved in a policy area because it is on their political agenda, because of lobby pressure, or purely because they feel its application particularly affects their constituents.

Following this, we can infer different reasons for the individual rankings of the legislative procedures within the top 10. It is understandable, for example, that procedures relating to economic and security issues are heavily amended due to their inherent complexity and importance to Europe, but also possibly because of their controversy and prominence on the political agendas of many individual MEPs.

The high ranking of procedures relating to the environment or international cooperation could also be explained by this reasoning, but one might suggest that they are not viewed as equally important by many MEPs. We might be able to instead explain their prominence on the ranking (especially as the 1st place is occupied by The European Forest Strategy) with reference to the importance of these issues to smaller, more focused, and more active groups of MEPs. It is unsurprising to note, in the context of COVID-19, that the none of the top 10 procedures are specifically dedicated to issues of healthcare, as most would likely want such procedures to be implemented with great urgency.

THE MOST FREQUENTLY AMENDED TYPES OF LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

If, on the other hand, we consider the ranking of the most frequently amended types of legislative procedures, we are presented with a disproportionate picture of the use of amendments. Out of all amendments to legislative procedures, own-initiative procedures (INI) are by far the most frequently amended, with 31,109 amendments. This accounts for 48% of all amendments made, which seems more logical if one notes that 6 of the aforementioned top 10 most amended procedures fall under the INI dossier type.

The 2nd place in the ranking is held by resolutions on topical subjects (RSP), with 9,053 amendments/14% of the total; and the 3rd place by co-decisions (COD), with 8,654 amendments/13% of the total. These are substantially smaller figures than those claimed by the top spot, but in the context of the other procedure types (consultation procedures (CNS) were only amended 88 times) they appear considerably sized. The position of budgetary procedures (BUD) at 6th place in the ranking seems illogical (especially considering that 2 of the top 10 most amended procedures fall under this dossier type), but this might possibly be explained by noting that there are fewer budgetary procedures than many other types and therefore less amendments that can be made in total.

Analysing the different types of legislative procedures amended provides us with an additional level of analysis that helps us understand what forms of legislation are met with the most activity (in the form of amendments made). A large number of amendments for a certain procedure type might suggest that these types of legislation are naturally going to be met with more scrutiny than others, for ideological reasons or simply for administrative reasons (routine). This might provide us with evidence of which types of legislation are easier to pass than others.

In addition to this, the aforementioned themes of complexity, controversy, and importance (to both individuals, groups and Europe as a whole) also apply here, as we can see which types of procedures are met with more obstruction in the form of amendments because of their origin (i.e. own-initiative reports versus co-decisions).

THE MOST AMENDED OWN-INITIATIVE REPORTS

The most amended INI in the first six months of the current EP term was The European Forest Strategy – The Way Forward, with 2,786 amendments. This INI also happens to be the most amended out of all legislative procedures, as identified in our previous article on the Top 10 most amended legislative procedures and types of procedures. In fact, no less than 6 of the top 10 most amended INIs can be found on our previous list of the top 10 most amended legislative procedures. This figure is unsurprising, as we also previously identified that 48% of all amendments made to legislative procedures are made to INIs.

The second position is held by the Situation of Fundamental Rights in the European Union – Annual Report for the years 2018–2019, with 1,947 amendments; the third position is held by the Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests, with 1,775 amendments. It is interesting to note the common themes evident in the top 10: 2 INIs concern the environment, 2 concern human rights, 2

concern economic policy, and 4 concern security/foreign policy (albeit through different lenses). This illustrates a reasonable balance of focus regarding what issues the EP is calling attention to in INIs.

One could perhaps say that the most noticeable INI on the top 10 is the Recommendations on the negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which stands out as the only Brexit-related INI with 1,378 amendments. Whether or not this large amount of amendments is a positive or negative sign for the future depends not only on one's political views but also on their understanding of what it means for a legislative procedure to be subject to many amendments.

From seeing that a certain procedure has had many amendments, that a procedure is controversial, or that it is complex, or simply that it has garnered the attention of many MEPs. As mentioned before, INIs are important as the indicators of the EPs political intentions to the EC, which then has to publicly decide whether or not it will put forward a legislative proposal. Because of this, then, the EP can use INIs to put political pressure on the EC to address certain concerns.

From this we can see that regardless of the various other reasons for an INI having many amendments, the political importance of the issue addressed by the INI is practically guaranteed. This might be the most important reason for many amendments, which would explain why almost half of all amendments made are made to INIs.

THE MOST ACTIVE MEPS IN OWN-INITIATIVE REPORTS

When we shift our attention to the involvement of MEPs in INIs, we see that first place in the ranking of the top 10 MEPs by number of amendments made to INIs is held by the Lithuanian MEP Petras Auštrevičius of the Renew Europe Group (RE), with 320 amendments made. First place is closely followed by the Belgian Hilde Vautmans (of RE, with 309 amendments) in second, the Italian Pierfrancesco Majorino (of the Socialists and Democrats Group (S&D), with 306 amendments) in third, and the French Nathalie Loiseau (again of RE, with 303 amendments) in fourth.

After these, the top 10 consists of a further 2 RE MEPs and 4 S&D MEPs, meaning the two Groups have an equal share of 5 MEPs each in the top 10. When we look at the breakdown of the percentage of amendments made to INIs within just the top 10 MEPs, we see that 1278 amendments (44%) were made by S&D MEPs, and 1614 amendments (56%) were made by RE MEPs.

Outside of the top 10, the first time an MEP from a different EP Group appears in the ranking is at the 19th position (an ID MEP with 180 amendments), and then at the 21st position (an EPP MEP with 172 amendments). This clearly illustrates how active RE and S&D are in tabling amendments to INIs, which suggests that they view INIs as particularly effective means to achieve their political agendas. Although the rest of the rankings do include MEPs from the other EP Groups, their numbers do not match the prominence of RE and S&D.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you are interested in our work or need access to more detailed analysis or insights. We are happy to provide tailored EU-related analysis and training, or partake in joint academic research.

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