

## Media interest in EU elections doubles due to 'unprecedented' campaign

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News

The European Parliament says its "unprecedented" election campaign has resulted in a doubling of media interest in the EU-wide poll from 23-26 May.



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The elections to elect 751 new members will officially kick off with the first votes being cast on 23 May in the UK and the Netherlands.

Speaking on Friday, Parliament's chief spokesman Jaume Duch said, "Our campaign has been very different from before. It has been an unprecedented effort to raise awareness in the election among the media and public and to urge people to vote."

“Polls show a majority of citizens think the EU is a good thing, but the challenge now is to persuade them to cast their vote, especially the young. People need to know that their votes do matter.”

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Parliament’s promotional film on the elections, he said, has now been seen by 130m people and he described the multi-million-euro campaign as “unprecedented for any institution in Europe.”

He added, “We have not done this alone and there has been a huge mobilisation among the young where we have mobilised no less than 300,000 supporters, including about 25,000 who have become active volunteers in helping people realise the importance of the vote.”

“This figure may not seem huge, but I can tell you that having 25,000 people helping with this work has been crucial.”

Such aid includes a team in Antarctica who made a “this time I am voting” promotional film.

“Our campaign has been very different from before. It has been an unprecedented effort to raise awareness in the election among the media and public and to urge people to vote” **Jaume Duch, Parliament chief spokesman**

“This is quite touching and has been done on a voluntary basis. It has all helped generate a lot of interest in the elections,” he told the election news conference in Parliament.

Celebrities have also helped promote the elections while Duch said the Parliament had signed 340 partnerships with pan-European groups while private companies, “particularly interestingly,” have also been engaged in trying to raise interest.

A scooter company, for instance, will provide free rides to polling stations on 26 May in 12 countries.

Duch said, “The impact in the media has doubled compared with 2014, political campaigning is intensifying and we now enter the last week of this important event.”

He said Parliament had hosted a “lively and useful debate” of candidates seeking the European Commission presidency on Wednesday.

This too, he said, had created “a lot of media interest”, including from 50 television stations which had broadcast the debate live.

Some 2.4m citizens followed the event via Parliament’s twitter account.

A Parliament source also laid out the timetable for events around the election itself, saying that the first main event will be a meeting of the conference of presidents - group leaders - on 28 May, the same day as an EU summit and less than 48 hours after the elections.

So far, 1,000 journalists have been accredited for the election coverage in the Brussels Parliament itself.

These will be offered "stories with a human angle" including one about ballot papers being shipped to far-flung places of Europe and a march next week by Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish climate activist.

On Sunday, Parliament will publish the first estimates of results and exit polls from 6pm onwards for those countries where voting has finished and the first projection of seats for the assembly will be at around 8.15pm.

The first 12 national estimates (from 6pm until 8pm) include results from France and Spain. Italy is expected to release the last results at around 11pm.

The source said, "This timetable is tentative and is subject to change and delay."

New parties, such as the Brexit Party in the UK, who are not yet represented in Parliament, will initially be put in an "artificial" category called "others."

The source said 11.15pm is the "2nd key time" on Sunday, with a results projection expected to come in from another 18 Member States.

Another update will be given at 12.15am in the early hours of 27 May for a total of 21 Member States, including Belgium, together with "partial results" from the UK.

Counting in the UK does not start until 11pm so its final results are likely to be among the last to come in.

The source said, "We will continue updating results from 27 May and throughout the weeks up to 1 July when we expect all results to be in full."

"This final data will reflect the decisions made by MEPs and groups as to which groups they join or form."

"On election night we will provide results in real time as and when they are available. The aim is to inform the public and media more fully and on a broader scale than in 2014 and Parliament will be the only place to provide such reliable information on the results."

"National Member State turnout will be published alongside the results of that Member State. The UK will not publish its turnout figures until about 11pm on Sunday and this may be when we can also publish the EU-wide turnout data though there is no concrete timing for this," the source added.

Figures for gender balance of the new Parliament will also be given.

A total of 180 media organisations will take in Parliament's live media streaming of the event while three leading data experts have been lined up to help provide advice throughout election night.

The group leaders will make the first post-election statements in the hemicycle, said Duch.

"All group leaders were here 5 years ago and this will probably be the case this time. All the European

Commission President candidates will also be here to give their reactions to the results in the hemicycle from between 11.15pm to 11.30pm. Further reactions will also come in on the 27 May, of course.”

Directly outside Parliament, concerts will take place in Place Luxembourg until 11pm, tents will host debates by civil society groups and a screen will display votes as they come in.

The Parliament source accepted that the process for media registration for the election had created “some problems.”

A complaint was made about this by one leading organisation representing Brussels-based media.

So far, 1,200 reporters have registered, double the number of journalists who covered the 2014 elections.

The Parliament source said, “It is important we do not exceed capacity limits for fire and safety reasons and we have now agreed to extend the deadline so there is still time to register. So far, we have sent out 750 replies to accreditation requests.”

### **About the author**

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