

LEARNING GUIDELINES

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

ROLE PLAY GAME

This role play game puts your learners in the shoes of a Member of the European Parliament. For one to two hours, your classroom becomes the European Parliament itself, and your learners discuss how they would tackle current EU topics.

This role play game will help your learners to develop their democratic skills. These skills include developing a critical opinion, debating skills and learning to make compromises.

First, **learners work in smaller groups** – parliamentary committees – on a legislative proposal from the European Commission. They use a game board with thematic cards. While amending the legislative proposal, they must take into account the different points of view of the Council of the European Union and other stakeholders. There are four topics to choose from, of different difficulty levels.

Second, there is a **plenary debate**, where the smaller groups present their adapted laws. This is followed by a plenary vote.

Finally, there is a thorough debriefing and evaluation of the role play game, pointing out the similarities and differences between the role play game exercise and reality.

Methodology	Duration	Materials
Role play game: work in parliamentary committees	25 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <u>Game board</u> for each group- <u>Worksheet</u> for each group- <u>Set of theme cards for each group</u>. The cards need to be printed on one side and cut out.- <u>Thematic legislative proposal of the European Commission</u> for each group.
Role play game: plenary debate and vote	10 mins per theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Blackboard/flipchart + chalk/marker- <u>Filled-in worksheet for each group</u>
Debriefing and evaluation	15 mins to 1 hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Computer + projector- <u>Presentation</u>

Disclaimer

Neither form nor content of this exercise offer a complete representation of reality, nor do they represent the actual points of view of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union or interest groups. The goal of this simulation exercise is purely educational, which is the only basis for the choices made.

OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

Attitude

- The learners develop an overall critical attitude: they form an opinion on current EU topics.

Knowledge

- The learners are familiar with and understand (a simplified version of) the EU decision-making process.
- The learners understand the European Parliament's role within this process.
- The learners know that the European Parliament deals with concrete topics that have an impact on their daily lives.
- The learners know more about the themes that are discussed.

Skills

- Throughout the exercise the learners develop their democratic skills: they learn how to take the opinion of others into account, how to form their own opinion, how to consult others and how to compromise.
- The learners learn how to present their proposal and how to speak in front of a group.

STEP BY STEP

1. ROLE PLAY GAME: WORK IN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Setting

Participants are divided into groups of four to five learners. Each group is assigned a theme to work with. Each group sits around a table with all the materials. Ideally, the tables will have already been prepared by the educator.

Each group has a thematic legislative proposal of the European Commission. On their table there is also a worksheet (identical for all themes), a game board (identical for all themes) and the cards that belong to the theme. The thematic cards are placed on the game board with the blank side up and with the corners featuring the numbers or symbols folded up.

A set-up theme looks like this:



Process

The educator explains briefly to the learners that from now on, they are all Members of the European Parliament and that, within that capacity, they will draft their own laws. The educator also explains that they will have to present their law to the rest of the group and that the entire group will vote on it. The educator chooses the topics that the learners will work on before explaining the game.

After that, the educator briefly explains the game board, which shows a simplified version of the EU decision-making process: the European Commission is the institution that initiates law, by making legislative proposals. These legislative proposals then go to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, who share the legislative power.

Each group of learners works independently following the instructions and timing on the worksheet and cards: the group starts with card number 1. One learner in the group turns over the card and reads what it says out loud. The group then performs the assignments on the card. Afterwards they move on to card 2, then to cards 3 and 4. They take notes on the worksheet.

The cards either contain an assignment or extra information presented as the point of view of the Council of the European Union, lobby groups or other stakeholders. Step by step, the learners will form their own 'EU law'. The learners' final assignment is to prepare a presentation of their law for the other learners in the entire group.

Content

All legislative proposals and thematic cards can be found in the document with the game material for this activity. There are four themes/topics for this role play. The legislative proposals from the European Commission, the adaptations requested by the Council of the European Union and the information given by the stakeholders, are all chosen to prompt as much discussion between the learners as possible. They are fictional and solely serve an educational goal. It is important that the educator explains the reality of the topics after the exercise.

The four topics are ranked according to difficulty, from easy to more complex:

1. An EU army?
2. European Democracy
3. Sustainable fashion
4. AI Act

Disclaimer

Please emphasise to learners that, in reality, the European Commission does not have the authority to propose certain initiatives featured in this simulation, such as the creation of a European Army or changes to the rules for European Elections, at least not through ordinary EU legal acts. Such matters would require Treaty change, in line with [Article 48 of the Treaty on European Union](#) (TEU), a process that involves national governments and the unanimous agreement of the European Council.

Some proposals in the role game are inspired by the European Parliament's recommendations for Treaty reform, which are part of an ongoing institutional discussion. For more context, see: [European Parliament Press Release](#), 22 November 2023.

Some tips

- Walk around the groups and help them if they are stuck.
- Preferably, each group works on a different theme. This way each group can present a different law to the plenary. However, you can also choose to have all groups work on the same theme, or to assign the same theme to two groups, etc.

2. ROLE PLAY GAME: PLENARY DEBATE AND VOTE

Setting

The learners remain seated in their own thematic committee. At the front of the room, a blackboard or flipchart shows the following grid:

Theme	Votes in Favour	Votes against	Abstained from Vote
e.g. sustainable fashion			
e.g. AI Act			

Write down the themes that are discussed in the first column.

Process

Each thematic group gets up to five minutes to present its proposal. The group uses the filled-in worksheet to do so. Afterwards, the other learners have some time to ask questions. Then the educator immediately moves on to the vote. Everyone votes by **raising their hand**. The learners in the thematic committee presenting the proposal are allowed to vote as well. The educator makes the following statements:

- 'Those who agree with this proposal, raise your hand.' Jot down the number in the 'Votes in favour' column of the theme in question.
- 'Those who do not agree with this proposal, raise your hand.' Jot down the number in the 'Votes against' column of the theme in question.
- 'Those who abstain, raise your hand.' Jot down the number in the 'Abstained from vote' column of the theme in question.

After the vote, conclude whether the majority has voted for the law to be accepted or rejected.

There is a majority when half + one of the learners vote in favour of or against a proposal. Those who abstained are not counted. In case of a tie, suggest that the vote be suspended. That way the proposal remains undecided upon.

Some tips

- The number of thematic groups determines the time needed for the exercise.
- The smaller the groups, the higher the involvement of each individual learner. Take both timing and the personal involvement of learners into account when deciding how many groups the class should be divided into.

3. DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION

Setting





Discuss the similarities and differences between the exercise and reality with the help of the presentation for this activity. The learners can remain in the smaller groups for this part of the game or change seats.

Process

First, ask about your learners' **experiences**: 'What was it like to walk in the shoes of an MEP?' Possible answers are that they found it hard to make decisions when there are so many interests at stake or that they liked having the power to make decisions. Ask the learners who had similar or opposite experiences: e.g. 'Who also felt like this? Who thought the opposite?'

After this introduction, move on to the **evaluation** of the exercise. Explain that the role play game is different from what happens in reality. There are differences both in format and content. At the same time, of course, there are a number of things that are similar. These differences and similarities are shown in the presentation by means of a roster (see picture).

EVALUATION OF THE ROLE PLAY

	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
FORM		
CONTENT		<div style="border: 1px solid green; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; margin-bottom: 10px;">The themes are both similar and different</div> 

The first question for the learners is: 'What aspects of the exercise do you think were **similar** in format or content?' Then the educator shows and explains the similarities using the presentation, with the input of the learners.

The second question is: 'What do you think works **differently** in reality?' Then the educator discusses the most important differences, again with the input of the learners and using the presentation.

Thirdly, the educator discusses the reality of the themes that were discussed in class. This is very important as it ensures that the learners leave the activity with an accurate image of reality.

Content

1. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH REALITY

welfare state like free education, cheap medical care, unemployment allowance, etc., for which others pay.

	Similarities	Differences
Form	<p>Thematic committees in the European Parliament. The European Parliament deals with very diverse themes. That is why MEPs specialise in only one or two themes. The European Parliament has about 20 fixed and some ad hoc thematic committees. Within these committees, MEPs first familiarise themselves with and discuss the theme before presenting it to the rest of the European Parliament in the plenary where the final vote is taken.</p> <p>Interest groups. MEPs are often approached by interest groups.</p> <p>Voting by show of hands. In the European Parliament, voting on proposals is often done by a show of hands because, generally speaking, this is quicker. Sometimes MEPs vote electronically (= individual vote), for example when Parliament is heavily divided on a subject and the result of the votes is not clear at a glance. A political group can also ask for an electronic vote (beforehand), and the final vote on a report is also mostly done by electronic vote. This helps members of the general public to keep track of which MEPs voted in favour/ against or abstained from voting.</p> <p>Voting by majority. In the European Parliament, the rule for a majority is also half + one of the votes cast.</p>	<p>Several political groups. During this exercise, the learners did not belong to a political party. In reality, there are eight political groups in the European Parliament. In plenary sessions, the MEPs sit together in their respective political groups, from left to right. Each group is chaired by a president.</p> <p>Shared legislative power. This exercise could give the impression that only the European Parliament has legislative power in the EU and therefore makes all the decisions. In reality, however, it shares its power with the Council of the European Union.</p> <p>More complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The exercise was done with only a few people. In the European Parliament, debate and voting involves 720 MEPs. - The exercise was conducted in one language. In the European Parliament, everyone is allowed to speak any of the 24 official languages. Everything is then interpreted into the other 23 official EU languages.
Content	<p>Arguments. The arguments mentioned during the exercise are similar to the ones expressed in European debates.</p>	<p>More complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The themes are often more technical. For example, the topic at hand could be the size of the holes in fishing nets. This would require scientific research on the type of fish that can be caught with each type of net, etc. - The legislative proposals that the European Parliament votes on are much more detailed. Every detail is discussed and, if necessary, modified.
	<p>Finally, there is one item that belongs to both the similarities and the differences: the themes themselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The themes can be considered similar because they are all topics the European Parliament is currently dealing with or has dealt with in the past. - The themes are also different because in reality the proposals and positions of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU are different (see disclaimer before chapter 2). 	

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ROLE PLAY GAME – TOPICS

1. AN EU ARMY?

Despite plans for a European Defence Community being made in 1952, the European Union does not have an army. Each EU country decides autonomously whether to have and deploy its own army. Since the Treaty of Maastricht, EU countries have continuously increased the scope of their cooperation in defence matters. Against the backdrop of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the debate on an EU army has gained new momentum.

Since the [Treaty of Lisbon](#), the EU Treaties include a mutual defence clause. In 2022, the EU published the Strategic Compass, the first joint strategic assessment of the security and defence challenges the EU is facing.

The EU has adopted several measures in response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, including far-reaching sanctions and the first-ever activation of the European Peace Facility, through which Ukraine is supported militarily. Discussions on the role of the EU in defence are ongoing.

Useful links

- More information on defence cooperation in the EU can be found on <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20190612STO54310/defence-how-the-eu-is-boosting-its-security>
- More information on the Strategic Compass can be found on <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/strategic-compass/>
- More information on the measures taken by the EU in response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine can be found on <https://ukraine.europarl.europa.eu/en/home>

2. EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Since 1979, European citizens directly elect a new European Parliament every five years. Citizens vote to elect MEPs who represent them at EU level. According to the common rules of the EU, these elections are to be held by secret ballot and direct universal suffrage (one vote for every adult citizen), and MEPs are elected based on proportional representation. Very importantly, every European citizen can vote or stand for election in the member state where they live.

At the June 2024 European Elections, Europeans voted for their representatives to fill Parliament's 720 seats. The distribution of these seats among the EU member states is based on the principle of degressive proportionality, meaning that while the number of seats is related to the population of each country, smaller countries have more MEPs per capita than larger countries. Furthermore, citizens can only vote for candidates running in their EU country (or regional constituency) of residence or their own country – but can only vote once.

However, other than these common rules, each country applies its own electoral arrangements based on its constitution – and these can vary a great deal. The democratic legitimacy of elected representatives depends on voter turnout, which has increased significantly since 2019, largely due to youth partici-

pation. Lowering the voting age is therefore one way to increase youth participation. For the 2024 European elections, four EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Malta) lowered their voting age to 16, while Greece lowered it to 17.

Each EU country determines whether citizens have a right to vote or are obliged to vote.

Useful links

- You can find more information on the European election system on www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/21/the-european-parliament-electoral-procedures.
- Find more information on voting age in European elections here: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/749767/EPRS_ATA\(2023\)749767_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/749767/EPRS_ATA(2023)749767_EN.pdf) (only available in English)
- There are several initiatives to get citizens more involved in European policy and to make the EU more democratic:
 - The European Citizens' Initiative (since 2012): if at least one million Europeans from a minimum of seven EU countries sign an initiative, they can call upon the European Commission to draw up a legislative proposal.
 - Many more participatory instruments exist, such as the EU Youth Dialogue, [public consultations](#) (experts in a particular field), the right to [petition](#) and [citizens' panels](#).

3. SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Global textile production more than doubled between 2000 and 2020. At the same time, the useful life of clothing has been drastically reduced. Textiles generate around 5 million tonnes of waste every year in the EU – about 12 kilograms per person – with synthetic fibres like polyester contributing to plastic pollution.¹

Today, fast fashion is not banned in the EU. The EU plans to introduce minimum sustainability standards for textiles through the new Ecodesign Regulation². Some Member States, like France, are already taking additional measures to limit ultra-fast fashion through eco-score systems and penalties.

The European Parliament is committed to making the EU textile industry more sustainable, circular and competitive by 2030. In June 2023, it adopted a resolution supporting the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, which aims to transform the sector. By 2030, all textiles in the EU should be durable, repairable, recyclable, made from recycled fibres, free from harmful chemicals and produced under fair social and environmental standards. Fast fashion will be phased out, while reuse and repair services will be promoted. Producers will be held accountable for the entire life cycle of their products, including waste management.

The European Parliament has called on the European Commission, EU countries and international partners to set specific targets and take concrete steps to implement them, balancing sustainability with the competitiveness of the textile industry.

(For this simulation, learners should first agree on how fast fashion should be defined for the purpose of the law.)

¹ see https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/textiles-strategy_en

² see https://commission.europa.eu/energy-climate-change-environment/standards-tools-and-labels/products-labelling-rules-and-requirements/ecodesign-sustainable-products-regulation_en

Useful links

- More information on the EU's textile strategy can be found on:
https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/textiles-strategy_en?
- More information on "How is the EU making fashion sustainable?"
https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/reset-trend/how-eu-making-fashion-sustainable_en
- More information on the EU campaign "ReSet theTrend"
https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/reset-trend_en

4. AI ACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is woven into our everyday lives, from voice assistants and recommendation algorithms to sophisticated tools in medicine and transport. By analysing vast amounts of data at high speed, AI can detect diseases earlier, optimise traffic flows, personalise learning and even help predict electricity demand, making services smarter, safer and more efficient.

The promise of AI is huge: doctors can use AI to detect early signs of cancer in medical images, farmers can monitor crop health with drone-based sensors, and manufacturers can use predictive maintenance to avoid costly breakdowns. On a global scale, AI-driven innovation has the potential to boost economic growth, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve access to education and healthcare in underserved regions.

But AI also poses serious challenges. Algorithms trained on biased data can reinforce discrimination in hiring, lending or law enforcement. Automated decision-making can be opaque, leaving individuals unable to understand or challenge the results. There are concerns about mass surveillance, the erosion of personal privacy, and the impact of automation on jobs and social cohesion. Because AI touches on so many aspects of life – ethical, legal, economic and social – it is essential to find a balanced approach that harnesses its benefits while safeguarding against its risks. Therefore, the European Union introduced the world's first comprehensive law on AI in 2024.

Useful links

- AI affects the life both positively and negatively. To read more about threats and opportunities of AI see here: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20200918STO87404/artificial-intelligence-threats-and-opportunities>
- Find out more about the EU's AI Act and what it regulates <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20230601STO93804/eu-ai-act-first-regulation-on-artificial-intelligence>
- An overview of the [EU's strategy](#) to build an ecosystem of excellence and trust in AI, balancing innovation with security and fundamental rights.