Uniform electoral procedure

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The Committee has adopted by a large majority the draft report by Georgios ANASTASSOPOULOS (EPP, Gr) on an electoral procedure using common EU-wide principles for the election of MEPs. The committee is calling for the introduction in all Member States of an electoral system based on proportional representation, territorial constituencies and the optional use, when distributing seats, of a threshold of no more than 5% of the votes cast nationally. In addition, the committee advocates the use of preferential voting, although each Member State would decide the precise arrangements for itself. The report argues that being an MEP should be incompatible with being a member of a national parliament, that each Member State should be able to set a limit on candidates' expenditure (which must be linked to the conduct of the election campaign) and that special arrangements should be allowed to take account of specific regional characteristics, although these must not violate the principle of proportional representation. The committee also wants 10% of the total number of seats in the European Parliament to be filled by means of a transnational list-based system relating to a single constituency comprising the entire territory of the EU. Some of these principles, such as the introduction of a threshold, the incompatibilities applicable to being an MEP and the proportional voting system could, the committee believes, be introduced in time for the next European elections in June 1999. As to the other points, progress would have to be gradual. For example, the provision on territorial constituencies would apply only from 2004 and the use of transnational lists from 2009. However, the first step will be for the Council to examine the proposals and adopt them as soon as possible once they have been debated and endorsed by Parliament at the next part-session.