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European Parliament (Brussels) by Xaf on Flickr.

Cambridge academics seek "fairer" EU seats allocation

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A "fairer" way of allocating seats in the European Parliament has been devised by an international panel of mathematicians.

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A European Parliament commissioned report, led by Cambridge academics, recommends a formula that guarantees every member state a minimum of six seats, with proportional allocation up to the maximum of 96 seats.

Previously political bartering would be involved in the distribution of seats, rather than their numbers being allocated by population numbers within each member state.

The new formula would result in France, UK, Italy, Spain, Poland and Estonia increasing their allocation, and 15 countries reducing their allocation by up to four seats each.

The recommendations follow an invitation by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament to a panel of experts in mathematics and public policy from seven different European universities, led by Professor Geoffrey Grimmett from Cambridge's Statistical Laboratory, to determine a new mathematical formula.

The panel met in January 2011 at the Centre for Mathematical Sciences, University of Cambridge. Its members were from the University of Augsburg in Germany, École Polytechnique in France, University of Granada in Spain, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, University of Copenhagen in Denmark and the universities of Cambridge and Aberdeen.

"The formula has to be durable, transparent and impartial to politics," explained Professor Grimmett. "It also needs to observe degressive proportionality, whereby the greater the population of a state, the more citizens per member are represented."