

# EU INSTITUTIONS: TRIANGLE AS A BASE



## Institutional triangle

Three institutions are responsible for making policy and taking decisions:

- EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
- COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The powers of the EU institutions have been laid down by founding treaties negotiated and ratified by member countries. In policy areas not covered by the treaties, national governments are free to exercise their own sovereignty.

The European Union is a unique political entity, whose sovereign member countries pool authority in key areas of government in order to reach shared goals. Every national of a member country is also an EU citizen and has the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Although has characteristics of both a state and an international organisation, the EU cannot be labeled as neither of those and is considered a "sui generis" political project. What is unique for the EU is its supranational character reflected in the mandate and work of some of its institutions – European Commission, European parliament and European Court of Justice, where Member States relinquished some of their authorities and transferred them to the EU.

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

[www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

The European Parliament was set up to represent EU citizens directly. It was directly elected by EU citizens for the first time in 1979. The current Parliament was elected for five years in June 2009 and has 766 members (MEP) from all 28 countries. The MEPs sit in political groups – they are not organised by nationality, but by political affiliation; currently, there are 7 political groups in the EP. *Every new EU treaty has increased the European Parliament's legislative power. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) has increased the mandate of the Parliament, in line with the efforts to deal with "democratic deficit" and to ensure that EU citizens' voices reflected in the Parliament are fully respected.*



European Parliament seat, Strasbourg

- The Lisbon Treaty makes the Parliament a **stronger lawmaker** by bringing over 40 new fields within the "co-decision" procedure, under which Parliament has equal rights with the Council. These areas include agriculture, energy security, immigration, justice and home affairs, public health and structural funds.

- From now on, the Parliament will decide on the entire **EU budget** together with the Council of Ministers. Until now, it did not have the final word on "compulsory expenditure" (around 45% of the EU budget) such as spending relating to agriculture or international agreements.

- The Parliament will also have a **greater say on who runs the EU**: it will elect the President of the European Commission, on the basis of the EU heads of state and government's pre-selection, which must take into account the results of European elections. The whole Commission needs Parliament's approval to take office.

***New power means more responsibility.** As the only directly-elected EU institution, the Parliament will have new tools to give a stronger voice to the 507 million citizens it represents and to hold the EU accountable to them. The Parliament will be the guardian of EU citizens' new catalogue of civil, political, economic and social rights - the Charter of Fundamental Rights - embedded in the Lisbon Treaty, as well as their new right of citizens' initiative, which will allow people to call for new policy proposals if supported by 1 million signatures.*

## COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

[www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu)

It is the voice of EU national governments, where **ministers from each Member State** meet several times a month in Brussels, to adopt laws and coordinate policies. It has both a legislative function, which it shares with Parliament, and an executive function, which it shares with the Commission. It meets in ten different configurations depending on the subjects under discussion: the "Foreign Affairs" configuration is made up of foreign affairs ministers, the "Justice and Home Affairs" configuration of justice and home affairs ministers, etc. It is commonly called the Council of Ministers, or just the Council. The foreign ministers' Council has a permanent chairperson – the EU's **High Representative for foreign and security policy**. All other Council meetings are chaired by the relevant minister of the country holding the rotating EU presidency. Most decisions are reached by qualified majority vote (Member States have different



Justus Lipsius building, Council of the EU seat, Brussels

number of votes, determined by the size of their population). In votes concerning sensitive topics - like security and external affairs and taxation - decisions by the Council have to be unanimous.

**Passing EU laws:** The Council and Parliament share the final say on new EU laws proposed by the Commission.

**Coordinating economic policies:** EU member countries have decided they want an overall economic policy for Europe, coordinated by the economics and finance ministers of each country. A further objective is to create more jobs and improve education, healthcare and welfare systems.

**Signing international agreements:** The Council signs agreements on behalf of the EU, on subjects as diverse as the environment, trade, development, textiles, fisheries, science, technology and transport.

**Approving the EU budget:** The money the EU can spend every year is decided jointly by the Council and the European Parliament.

**Foreign and defence policy:** National governments have independent control in these areas, but are working together to develop a **joint foreign and defence** policy (known as the Common Foreign and Security Policy). The Council is the main forum for this cooperation.

**Justice:** EU citizens should have equal access to justice anywhere in the EU. In the Council, justice ministers strive to ensure that court judgments in one EU country are recognised in all other EU countries. Justice and interior ministers coordinate the policing of the EU's external borders, and the fight against terrorism and international organised crime.

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

[www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)

The Commission is the EU's executive body; it is independent of national governments and represents the interests of the EU as a whole. The Commission is based in Brussels and Luxembourg and has offices (**representations**) in every EU country and **delegations** in capital cities around the world.



Berlaymont, European Commission building, Brussels

A new Commission is appointed every five years, following the elections to the European Parliament. Commissioners – currently one from each country, including the Commission President and Vice Presidents – are vetted by Parliament before taking office.

It has four essential functions:

**Proposing new laws:** The Commission has the 'right of initiative' – it can propose new laws to protect the interests of the EU and its citizens. It does this only on issues that cannot be dealt with effectively at national, regional or local level (subsidiarity principle). When the Commission proposes a law, it tries to satisfy the widest possible range of interests and therefore it consults expert groups and holds **public consultations**.

**Managing the EU's budget and allocating funding:** With the Council and Parliament, the Commission sets broad long-term spending priorities for the EU in the EU 'financial framework'. It also draws up an annual budget for approval by Parliament and the Council, and supervises how EU funds are spent. The Commission manages funding for EU policies (e.g. agriculture and rural development) and programmes such as Erasmus (student exchanges).

**Enforcing European law:** As a 'guardian of the Treaties', the Commission checks that each member country is applying EU law properly. If it thinks a national government is failing to apply EU law, the Commission first sends an official letter asking it to correct the problem. As a last resort, the Commission refers the issue to the Court of Justice that can impose penalties, and its decisions are binding on EU countries and institutions.

**Representing the EU internationally:** The European External Action Service (EEAS – [www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu)) is the European Union's diplomatic corps. It supports the EU foreign affairs chief (High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) in conducting the common foreign and security policy. The High Representative is also a Vice-President of the European Commission. EEAS has delegations around the world working on behalf of the people of Europe and representing the EU as a whole. The Commission speaks on behalf of all EU countries in international bodies like the World Trade Organisation.

## EU DELEGATION TO SERBIA

In 1981, the Delegation of the EC established its premises in the then Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. However, since 2009, after the entry of the Lisbon Treaty into force, the EU presence in Serbia is conducted by the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, within a new framework of functioning, European External Action Service (EEAS). The Delegation is one of the largest in the world out of over 130 similar political and diplomatic representations. The EU Delegation in Serbia has several roles: to politically and financially represent the EU and to bring its values and EU perspective closer to Serbian citizens. The EU is Serbia's biggest financial contributor with €2,4 billion of EU donation since 2000.

In order to implement EU policies, the European institutions adopt legal acts in accordance with the rules and procedures set out in the Treaties. In general, the European Commission proposes the legal acts, which are then adopted by the Council and the European Parliament. The three main procedures are consultation, assent and co-decision.

## EUROPEAN COUNCIL

**Heads of state or government** from EU member countries meet at least four times a year within the European Council. The Council President can convene additional meetings as and when required. The Council provides the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and defines political directions and priorities. Decisions are usually taken by consensus.

## COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The **Court of Justice of the European Union** makes sure that EU legislation is interpreted and applied in the same way in all member countries. The Court can also rule in legal disputes involving EU countries, EU institutions, businesses or individuals.

**Other institutions and bodies.** The EU has 6 other main bodies with specific tasks: **Court of Auditors, European Central Bank, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions, European Investment Bank and European Ombudsman.**

In Serbia the EU Information Centre is there to answer your questions related to this issue or anything else of your interest.

**Mon - Fri: 10:00 - 19:00**  
**Sat: 10:00 - 15:00**



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