

Serving the people of Europe

How the European Commission works



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Introduction

The early 21st century presents the European Union (EU) with some very special challenges. For example, enlargement to the east, modernising Europe's economy, reforming the welfare state, and the whole debate about the future of Europe. These are issues that will affect generations to come.

The European Commission plays a vital role in ensuring that the EU meets these challenges. But the Commission faces challenges of its own. It, too, is changing and developing, becoming more open and accountable, and striving to bring itself closer to the people of Europe.

The European Commission was created by and works in tandem with the elected leaders of Europe and, through them, the citizens. It is the people of Europe that make up the staff and who, by the process of consultation, are involved in every stage of policy-making. While the Commission is often described as the 'driving force of Europe', its momentum comes from the citizens.

The aim of this booklet is to provide a clear picture of what the European Commission is like and who works there. Each chapter gives you the chance to meet a member of staff, to find out who they are and what they do.



Role

The purpose of the European Union is to ensure that its citizens can live in peace, freedom and prosperity. This was envisaged by its founders in the early 1950s and is still of fundamental importance today. The European Commission is at the heart of this endeavour. The powers and responsibilities of the Commission are set out in the Treaty of Rome and have, with universal approval from the Member States, been confirmed and increased as the process of European cooperation has developed from a European Economic Community of six Member States to a European Union of some 380 million citizens in 15 countries.

The Commission has three distinct functions. The first is to initiate proposals for legislation: the Commission drafts proposals which are submitted to the European Parliament and to the Council of Ministers. Sustainable development and the safety and security of Europe's citizens are among the key priorities of the present Commission.

Its second role is to manage the huge range of EU activities: from improving the quality of drinking water to training teachers; from social protection to fisheries; from e-commerce to agriculture. The Commission is also responsible for conducting international trade negotiations on behalf of the Member States, for example within the World Trade Organisation.

The Commission's third principal area of responsibility is to ensure that EU law is applied properly and universally by the Member States, making sure that they fulfil their legal obligations. If they do not, the Commission has the right to take them to the EU Court of Justice.



A greener future

Running day-to-day projects on a huge variety of subjects, the European Commission has a significant effect on the daily life of every citizen of Europe and on many more people in the wider world. The environment is one of the most important subjects for us all, and it is an area where the Commission continues to make an important positive impact.

Marco studied political sciences in his home-town university of Pisa. He then took a Master's degree in international relations at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (based in Washington and Bologna). He has always had a strong interest in science and the environment and began his working life at an environmental consultancy in London. He is also a keen jazz musician ('even though I am not that good!') and plays regularly at an improvised jazz workshop called 'Inaudible'.

'I had some involvement with the environmental work of the Commission before I actually started here. It seemed to me a dynamic organisation and I liked that.

When I first began here, it was in the department that gave companies the right to put a special label on their products if they were deemed to be environmentally friendly. Currently, I am working on Europe's implementation of the Kyoto Protocol (an international agreement on climate change). We are working with governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations and other groups to see what can be done to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for global warming.

I am proud to work here, as the European Commission has been extremely progressive in its work on climate change and I feel that my everyday work can make a difference. I am also interested in making a difference in the developing world and I will soon be moving to another job in the Commission to work with development aid.'

Marco Loprieno

BORN:

1957 in Pisa, Italy

POSITION:

Coordinates the European Climate Change Programme.



THE DIRECTORATES-GENERAL

Policies

- Agriculture
- Competition
- Economic and Financial Affairs
- Education and Culture
- Employment and Social Affairs
- Energy and Transport
- Enterprise
- Environment
- Fisheries
- Health and Consumer Protection
- Information Society
- Internal Market
- Joint Research Centre
- Justice and Home Affairs
- Regional Policy
- Research
- Taxation and Customs Union

External relations

- Development
- Enlargement
- EuropeAid-Cooperation Office
- External Relations
- Humanitarian Aid Office
- Trade

General and internal services

- Budget
- European Anti-Fraud Office
- Eurostat
- Financial Control
- Group of Policy Advisers
- Internal Audit Service
- Joint Interpreting and Conference Service
- Legal Service
- Personnel and Administration
- Press and Communication
- Publications Office
- Secretariat-General
- Translation Service

Structure of the Commission

The term 'European Commission' refers, in the first instance, to the 20 commissioners appointed by the EU Member States in conjunction with the European Parliament. However, 'the Commission' also refers to the institution and its approximately 24 000 staff. This may sound a lot, but it is, in fact, fewer than the number of staff employed by most medium-sized city councils in Europe.

The Commission is headed by the President, Romano Prodi. He and the 19 other commissioners are appointed for a five-year term, which started in 2000.

Although most people working at the Commission are based in Brussels, around 2 000 are in Luxembourg and there are Commission representative offices in every EU country. There are also over 100 Commission delegations around the globe, from Peru to Papua New Guinea, dealing with such matters as trade, development and humanitarian aid.

The 20 commissioners meet once a week to take policy decisions together. Each commissioner is also responsible for one or more of the Commission's 36 departments called directorates-general (DGs). Each DG manages a specific policy area, such as trade, research or consumer protection.

With up to 10 to 13 countries expected to join the EU, structural alterations will be needed, including an increase in the number of commissioners.



Value for your money

The Commission's Internal Audit Service (IAS) was created in 2000, as part of President Prodi's administrative reform programme, to help ensure the Commission's resources are rigorously and effectively managed. The main role of the IAS is to assess the performance of all departments and to audit their internal control systems.

Vijay came to the United Kingdom with his father, a teacher, when he was 10 years old. He went to school in London and, before qualifying as a chartered accountant, he earned a B.Sc. in economics at the London School of Economics. He joined the Commission in 1988 after working at the European Court of Auditors for four years, having initially trained as an auditor and lecturing in management accountancy at Sheffield Polytechnic.

'I am now an audit supervisor, but I have held several different positions since I started in this unit in September 2000. Mobility is one of the

upsides of working at the Commission. Previously, I was in the department which dealt with the international development programmes for Asia and Latin America. I particularly enjoyed the experiences there and my time in the environment department. I feel my present unit, the IAS, has a genuinely positive effect.

The IAS is very much part of the reform process at the Commission, and auditing is a necessary driver for change. We are helping to create a more dynamic management culture and, by giving independent and objective advice, we can help departments to refocus when need be. Knowing it as I do, I hold the institution in high esteem and our work to improve it is not only challenging but also satisfying.'

Vijay Bhardwaj

BORN:

1954 in Nairobi,
Kenya

POSITION:

Head of Unit,
Internal Audit Service



People

The European Commission employs 24 000 staff in a wide variety of roles, and the diversity of people is enormous. It reflects the diversity of the European Union as a whole. With civil servants hailing from 15 countries, the Commission is a melting pot of European languages and cultures.

It is difficult to sketch a picture of an average Commission official, as they come from such a wide range of cultural, linguistic, social and ethnic backgrounds. Walking down a single corridor at the Commission, you are likely to encounter several different nationalities and languages.

There is no set career path which leads you to work at the Commission and, although the Commission strives to create a broad balance among nationalities, there is no quota system. What is essential is adaptability, so one of the attributes that the people do have in common is their ability to thrive in a multilingual and multicultural environment. It is a minimum requirement to speak two EU languages.



From teaching to helping regions

The cornerstone of the Commission is its heterogeneity.

'I was a secondary school teacher for 16 years before I started at the European Commission. The schools I worked in were situated in the very north of Sweden, close to the Arctic circle. Even if teaching was very rewarding, I eventually started to feel like changing careers and doing something completely different.

One day, I just happened to see an advert in the newspaper for jobs at the Commission, and said to myself, "I'll jump on this train and see where it takes me". I took part in the competitions and to my surprise I was one of the first Swedes to begin work here in 1996.

Ironically, my husband, who was a customs officer at the border between Finland and Sweden, lost his job in 1995 when Sweden joined the EU. Now he is supporting my career by working as a "house husband", thereby facilitating life for the whole family, which includes two children.

I was born and used to live in one of the kinds of area that are eligible for support from the Structural Funds, i.e. sparsely populated with a harsh climate, and I believe this helps me to better understand the challenges in these areas.

My job sometimes allows me to visit the Swedish regions to see how programmes are being implemented on the ground. One of the most rewarding aspects of my work is the contact with the people at the "sharp" end.'

Ann-Kerstin Myleus

BORN:

1960 in Övertornea, Norrbotten, Sweden

POSITION:

Administrator of the Structural Funds for Sweden

REMUNERATION

In August 1999, an independent comparative study of the remuneration of EU staff was carried out. The aim was to compare the salary levels of the EU institutions, national civil services, the United Nations, the European Investment Bank, NATO and five multinational companies. The main conclusions were that the EU institutions' net remuneration level is:

- lower than that of comparable grades in multinational companies;
- lower than comparable grades of five Member States' diplomatic services;
- close to comparable grades of other international organisations;
- higher than that of national civil servants.

Examples:

A graduate with three years' experience beginning his/her career would earn 3 999 euro/month gross (level 'A 8' in the EU staff classification).

A trained and experienced secretary beginning at level 'C 5' would earn 2 276 euro/month gross.

Recruitment

The most usual way to become a Commission civil servant is to sit an 'open competition'. These examinations, in all EU languages, consist of multiple-choice pre-selection tests and a written examination. Successful candidates are then invited to an oral examination, usually held in Brussels. Although the competitions are open to all who meet a basic set of conditions, they are extremely selective, so applicants need to prepare thoroughly. The competitions are widely advertised in the press and on the EU web site.

Success in the examinations opens the way to a mobile and highly rewarding career, and staff can expect to focus on a range of policy areas in the course of their working life.

Most of the Commission staff is made up of civil servants. This system is meant to guarantee their independence from national and special interests. Salaries and working conditions are decided by the Member States' governments in a special law called the 'Staff Regulations'. The European civil servants pay income tax to the EU, not to the country where they work or come from.

Openings may arise for specialised temporary staff in some areas of the Commission's work, and national civil servants are regularly seconded to work in these areas.

The Commission is at present carrying out a thorough reform of its internal administration. The reform is focusing particularly on human resources policy, the planning and programming of activities, and financial management. Its overall purpose is to ensure the Commission is thoroughly committed to serving the European public – with great emphasis on responsibility, accountability, efficiency and transparency.

In future, officials will have greater opportunities for career development based on proven merit, with greater emphasis on training and mobility. To this end, the Commission favours a fundamental overhaul of the career structure (currently based on a series of categories and grades) and many other aspects of the terms and conditions of employment. Reform begins at the top, and major changes have been made in the selection and appointment of the Commission's top managers.



New experiences

Twice a year, for a period of five months, around 500 trainees (chosen from among more than 7 000 applicants) come to Brussels from all over Europe and beyond to get a taste of life in the European Commission. Some of them may eventually join the Commission after taking the open competitions.

'With Poland being one of the countries involved in negotiations to join the European Union, doing a traineeship here was a great opportunity for me to gain experience and take a real step forward in my career. This is a historic time for the Polish and I am really pleased to be one of the first trainees from the enlargement countries to be at the Commission, which is the centre of it all.

I studied economics at the University of Gdansk and then European law at the College of Europe at Natolin. But, in fact, I would like to be a journalist. That's why it is important for me to learn about the functioning of the Commission. Before working, I did the usual student jobs, from teaching English as a foreign language in Poland to public relations. My time here has been extremely valuable and, hopefully, what I have learned should serve me well for the future.'

Agnieszka Raczynska

BORN:
1976 in Gdynia,
Poland
POSITION:
Trainee in the
Directorate-General
for Press and
Communication



Budget

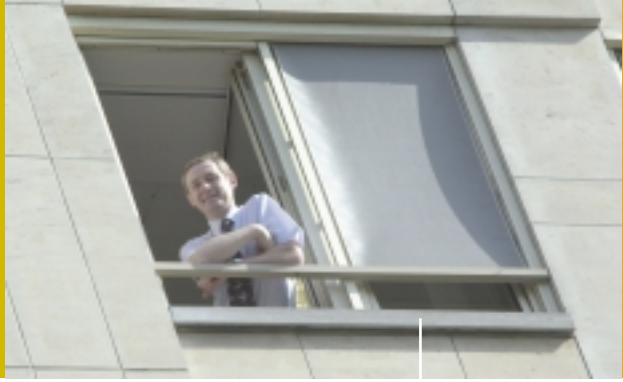
The total budget for the EU in 2002 is 98.6 billion euro. In real terms, this is equivalent to around only 1.1 % of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the EU countries. Only a small part of this money is used to run the EU institutions themselves: that accounts for 4.9 billion euro, or just 5.1 % of the total budget.

The budget is used for implementing the full range of EU policies, from environmental protection to fisheries. Over 35 % is invested in the European regions through the Structural Funds. This money goes to finance, for example, major infrastructure projects, such as building new roads or bridges, and a variety of cross-border projects. Around 45 % of the EU budget is spent on agriculture.

The Commission does not have free rein to spend money as it wishes: accountability and transparency are required at every stage by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, which jointly take all the major decisions on the EU budget.

Annual budgets are drawn up by the Commission within an overall annual ceiling. These ceilings were decided for the period 2000–06 at the Berlin summit meeting in 1999 and agreed by the European Parliament.

The Commission's finances and systems are audited internally (within each department and by the new Internal Audit Service) and externally (by the European Court of Auditors). At the end of each financial year, the Commission is required to submit its accounts to the Parliament for approval.



Helping the regions

More than a third of the EU budget is used for investing money in the areas of Europe that are in need, for example by building infrastructure or training workers. The programmes are managed by local authorities, assisted by European Commission officials.

Having studied commerce at the University of Liverpool, Philip went on to work for the accountancy firm KPMG. After living in the Isle of Man, Manchester and Luxembourg, he passed an accounting–audit open competition for the European Commission and came to Brussels in 1990. He began working in the Directorate-General for Regional Policy in November 1999.

'The unit I work for helps people in the regions in Britain. One of the most important aspects of our work is to spread best practice. For example, if something happens in France that is effective and efficient, we try and spread the approach to Britain. It is a partnership; we work very closely with the social, voluntary and private sectors as well as with the British Government, and, for the most part, what we offer is facilitation and advice.

We spend a lot of our time going to the regions and listening to what people have to say, especially those working in small and medium-sized businesses, in order to learn what they need. From this, we work out a spending framework for our 2 billion euro budget.

Outside the office, I spend as much time as I can with my wife and daughter and enjoy swimming. And even though it is perhaps a little unusual for a Brit, I like to cook as well.'

Philip Owen

BORN:

1958 in St Asaph,
North Wales

POSITION:

Deputy Head of Unit
for Regional Policy
for the United Kingdom



Consultation

With such a broad policy mandate, the Commission sees consultation as vital: it consults as widely and as systematically as possible when drafting policy or legislative proposals.

It receives invaluable information, expertise and advice from many sources, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society (voluntary and other groups) and EU governments.

EU decision-making is assisted by two consultative bodies: the Committee of the Regions, made up of 222 representatives of local and regional bodies, and the Economic and Social Committee, which also has 222 members drawn particularly from trade unions and employers' associations.

In its dialogue with civil society and interest groups, the Commission consults formally through committees or groups of experts, but it also seeks advice in a less formal manner on individual issues. Interactive policy-making via the Internet also gives a further opportunity for groups to play an active role in developing legislation.

Through the interactive Commission web site, 'Your voice in Europe' (europa.eu.int/yourvoice), every citizen has the opportunity to play an active role in policy-making. The site allows everyone to comment, to share their experience and to take part in policy forums.



Everybody can have a voice

Harnessing the power of the Internet is one of the principal objectives of the European Commission. The online system known as 'Consultation, the European Commission and civil society' (Coneccs) is part of the Commission's commitment to provide better information about its consultation process. Coneccs is just one of the information tools available.

After graduating from the University of Helsinki with a Master's degree in political science, Lea started her career in the Finnish government information department. In 1994 she began work with the European Free Trade Association which brought her to Brussels.

'When I first arrived in Brussels, Finland was not a member of the European Union; we were just part of the free trade area. I was involved with a lot of projects around and about the institutions and for a long time it had been my dream to work at the Commission. When Finland joined the European Union in 1995, it was a

great opportunity for me, since the institutions were looking to employ Finnish civil servants, and I passed my entry exam for the Commission. It was an interesting and historic time to join, and I really liked the idea of the togetherness of the EU.

Outside working hours, I find time, when I can, to go kayaking. Brussels isn't the ideal city for water sports and, although the canals are not as clean as rivers, it feels good to go out and get some exercise at least once in a while!

Lea Vatanen

BORN:
1962 in Helsinki,
Finland
POSITION:
Administrator for the
Coneccs information tool
in the Secretariat-General



Citizens' rights

The decisions taken at the Commission touch upon many of the issues affecting the everyday lives of people in Europe. So the Commission strives to be as open and accountable as possible, enabling citizens to keep informed on areas that interest or concern them. Over 1.5 million documents are available on the EU Internet site (europa.eu.int). The constantly updated web site covers all Commission policies and has a range of interactive features. If anyone needs further information, they can get it in a number of ways:

- **Access to documents**

Openness is one of the key priorities of the European Commission. So the public has access not only to all official publications but also to internal documents. Anyone can request a document regardless of his or her professional status and without giving any justification for the request. Only information that is, for example, personal or which would endanger legitimate business interests may be refused.

- **Enquiries**

Members of the public are welcome to contact the Commission by letter, telephone, fax or electronic mail in any of the 11 languages of the EU. The Commission is obliged to send a reply in the same language within 15 days of receiving the enquiry.

The simplest way of getting information from the Commission is to call or e-mail 'Europe Direct' (europa.eu.int/europedirect).

This is a tailor-made service providing practical answers to a wide range of questions about the Commission. It can also help you obtain legal advice.



Informing the media

Another important way in which information is transmitted to the public is through the media. Ensuring that journalists have the information they require, and dealing with their enquiries on a daily basis, is the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Press and Communication.

After completing a bilingual secretarial course in Dublin, Dervla began working with the European Commission in 1986, but stayed in Brussels for only six months before taking up a position in the Middle East.

'An opportunity arose for me to work for the European Commission delegation in Syria. It was an unforgettable experience and I stayed there for a year.

It wasn't until 1995 that I decided to try the external open competition for the Commission. I succeeded, and my first post was in Employment and Social Affairs. After a few years, I moved to my present position in the Press and Communication DG. This is

the official voice of the Commission and the first port of call for journalists reporting on Commission affairs. I enjoy it as it is varied. I need to follow the Commission's activities, and I have to keep right up to date with the news.

One of the benefits of being here is the flexibility. I have had the opportunity to be involved in several interesting areas where I have learned a lot. As a secretary, my role is perhaps more challenging than it would be in the private sector.

What do I do outside the Commission? Well, I enjoy swimming and cooking for friends. And one of the consequences of having lived abroad is that I have caught a serious case of the travel bug!

Dervla O'Shea

BORN:
1968 in Dublin,
Ireland
POSITION:
Secretary
to the Spokesman,
Directorate-General for
Press and Communication



Checks and balances

The European Commission is subject to a number of checks and balances. First and foremost, the Commission is accountable to the people that it serves, the citizens of Europe, through the European Parliament. It is also accountable to the governments of the Member States through the Council of Ministers.

Effective cooperation between the EU institutions is a daily reality of life in the Commission. The process of adopting European legislation is itself a good example of this. The Court of Justice and the European Court of Auditors both have a vital role in ensuring that EU law is respected and taxpayers' money is spent effectively, while the European Ombudsman has the job of ensuring that the rights of individual citizens are upheld and of seeking remedies for cases of maladministration.

The Commission is also subject to strict independent financial controls, both internal and external. The external role is played by the Court of Auditors. Within the Commission, the Directorate-General for Financial Control and the recently created Internal Audit Service strive to develop a culture of effective and efficient management as well as to rooting out bad practice.



The workings of democracy

Working in partnership with the European Commission, the directly elected European Parliament plays a key role in developing EU policy and in making laws. Effective coordination is essential, so civil servants such as Xabier Atutxa closely monitor the development of draft EU laws in order to facilitate their passage through the Parliament.

'I have always been interested in the construction of the European Union, so it is fascinating to have the opportunity to work closely with both the European Parliament and the Commission. It is my job to follow what is happening in the Parliament, such as how the members of Parliament are reacting to certain things, what they like and what they want changed, and report it back to the relevant directorate-general. Once I have done this, the Commission then amends the legislation and tries to reach a compromise.'

Xabier began working at the European Commission in September 1995, having studied law at the University of East Anglia in the UK and gained a Master's degree in European integration at the University of the Basque Country. Despite moving to Brussels, his regional identity is very important to him, and something which is enhanced by being a 'European'.

'I see Europe as a way to live in peace whilst respecting nationalities and identities. Bearing in mind the wars which took place not so long ago, what has happened is remarkable. For me, it is its strength in diversity that make Europe unique.'

Xabier Atutxa Sarria

BORN:

1964 in Bilbao, Basque Country, Spain

POSITION:

Administrator for European Commission relations with the European Parliament

Languages

The language that you speak is one of the most obvious expressions of your nationality and culture, and is part of the rich history of each nation. The EU values variety: respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is enshrined in Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU also encourages language learning as a gateway to other cultures. For this purpose, the Commission runs a series of programmes across Europe, helping and encouraging people of all ages to improve their ability to speak other European languages.

For the functioning of the Commission, Europe-wide communication is a top priority. Official documents and general information on the European Union are produced in the 11 official EU languages, so that all citizens have access in their own tongue to the information which directly concerns them. Each citizen has the right to correspond with the Commission in his or her native language. The official EU languages are Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish.

As a microcosm of the Union as a whole, the Commission, of course, comprises native speakers of all official languages (and others besides). Given that it is unreasonable to expect each civil servant to speak every language, there has to be a degree of compromise. Within the Commission, for practical purposes, internal documentation is typically reproduced in three languages: English, French and German. It is usual for each civil servant to speak at least one of these, and they are the languages normally used at internal meetings.



New horizons for teachers

The European Commission's emphasis on promoting a diversity of languages and cultures is clear from the variety of programmes it manages, ranging from the Ariane programme (supporting translation and literacy projects) to the well-known Erasmus programme of university exchanges.

'I was involved in teacher training before I took a chance at the exam to get into the Commission. Having been an assistant professor at the University of Nuremberg, even though it is in a similar field, it is a considerable change to be in such a large institution. But I feel that the work that I am doing here is worthwhile.

Among other things, our directorate deals specifically with aspects of education such as training teachers across Europe, access for schools to information and communication technology (ICT) and developing lifelong learning. It is remarkable how many people we reach. Between 1995 and

1999, 2 million school pupils in one way or another were involved with Comenius. So far, we have around 10 000 schools participating and we hope to triple that figure by 2006.

What is being done is very valuable, and these programmes can certainly make a difference to individual schools, teachers and pupils.

In my free time, I play a bit of handball and try to keep up with my interest in European history.'

Detlev Clemens

BORN:
1962 in Nuremberg,
Germany

POSITION:
Organises the Comenius
school exchange
programme
and the training
of school staff

Conclusion

The Commission is an independent but far from unaccountable body. It has been developed to serve the citizens of Europe, and to manage efficiently an unprecedented Union of sovereign States. It is staffed not by an army of faceless bureaucrats but by ordinary European citizens who share a common goal of building a strong and diverse Union.

As the EU increases in size, and as the single currency becomes a reality for many Member States, the role of the European Commission will certainly evolve. Exactly how it evolves will very much depend on the people it serves. Your view of Europe's future, whatever it may be, is important to the Commission.

Through the online forums or by writing to the Commission, you have the opportunity to make your voice heard. It is up to each person to help create the Europe in which they want to live.

Further reading

You can read more about questions related to management and organisation of the European Commission: europa.eu.int/comm/reform/index_en.htm

Practical information on how to get a job in the European Commission: europa.eu.int/comm/recruitment

For information about the European Union policies and activities in general, please see the page 'Other information on the European Union at the end of this booklet.

European Commission

Serving the people of Europe

How the European Commission works

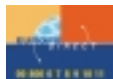
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Other information on the European Union

Information in all the official languages of the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).



EUROPE *DIRECT* is a freephone service to help you find answers to your questions about the European Union and to provide information about your rights and opportunities as an EU citizen: **00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

Information and publications in English on the European Union can be obtained from:

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European Commission and Parliament representations and offices exist in all the countries of the European Union. The EC also has delegations in other parts of the world.

The European Union

Member States and candidate countries



EU Member States
 Candidate countries

At the heart of the European Union is the European Commission: a body with a unique combination of legislative and executive powers. It is responsible for a wide range of policy areas ranging from culture to agriculture. Employing 24 000 people from the length and breadth of the EU, the Commission works closely with the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, civil society and national governments. It strives to bring Europe together through mutual understanding and a desire for peace, freedom and prosperity. What is it like and who works there? This booklet gives you the chance to find out.

