



EUROPEAN UNION AT A GLANCE



What is the European Union?

The European Union (EU) is a unique grouping of 28 independent countries with around 507.4 million citizens living within its boundaries.

Its origin can be traced back to the end of the Second World War when its founding members decided the best way to prevent further conflict was to jointly manage coal and steel production, two of the most important materials needed to wage a war.

The 28 EU Member States:

- 1958 Founding countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands
- 1973 Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom
- 1981 Greece
- 1986 Spain, Portugal
- 1995 Austria, Finland, Sweden
- 2004 Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia
- 2007 Bulgaria, Romania
- 2013 Croatia

The Member States are bound to the EU by a series of treaties that they have signed up to over the years. All of these treaties must be agreed by each Member State and then ratified either by the national parliament or through a referendum.

The forerunner to the EU was made up of six founding states. Since then the EU has grown to become 28 members with a series of enlargements.

In order to become a member of the EU, a country must have a stable democracy that guarantees the rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities. It must also have a functioning market economy as well as a public administration that is able to apply and manage EU laws.

Albania, Iceland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are candidate countries.

Who runs the European Union?

The EU is neither a federal state nor an international organisation in the traditional sense but rather an autonomous entity somewhere in between the two. In legal circles, the term 'supranational organisation' is now used.

The EU is unique as its Member States remain independent sovereign nations, but they pool their sovereignty — and thus gain much greater collective strength and influence. Pooling sovereignty means, in practice, that the Member States delegate some of their decision-making powers to shared institutions they have created, so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level.

There are three main EU institutions:

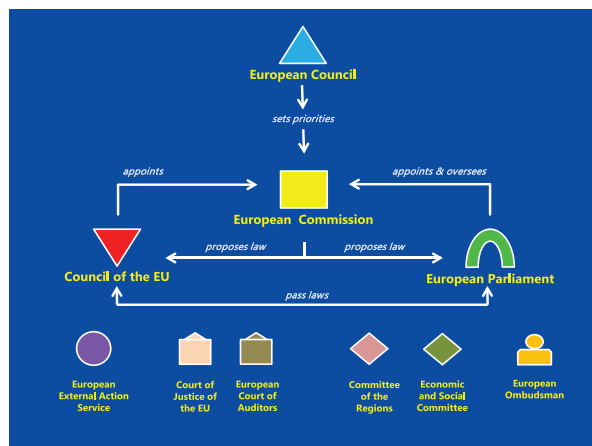
- the **European Parliament**, which represents the EU's citizens and is directly elected by them
- the **Council of the EU**, which represents the individual Member States
- the **European Commission**, which seeks to uphold the interests of the EU as a whole.

This 'institutional triangle' produces the policies and laws that apply throughout the EU.

Two other institutions play vital roles:

- the **European Court of Auditors**, which oversees how the EU budget is spent
- the **Court of Justice of the EU**, which helps to ensure that Member States are abiding by the EU laws to which they have signed up.

In addition, the EU has a number of other institutions and interinstitutional bodies that play specialised roles.



More info: <http://europa.eu>

European Parliament

President: Martin Schulz (Germany)

What is it? The European Parliament is elected every five years by the people of Europe to represent their interests. The present European Parliament has 751 members from all 28 EU Member States. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) do not sit in national blocks, but in Europe-wide political groups. Between them, MEPs represent all views on European integration, from the strongly pro-federalist to the openly Eurosceptic.



Where is it? The administrative base of the European Parliament (the 'General Secretariat') is in Luxembourg. Meetings of the whole European Parliament, known as 'plenary sessions', take place in Strasbourg (France) and sometimes in Brussels (Belgium). Committee meetings are also held in Brussels.

What does it do? The main job of the European Parliament is to pass European laws. It shares this responsibility with the Council of the EU, and the proposals for new laws come from the European Commission. The European Parliament and the Council of the EU also share joint responsibility for approving the EU's annual budget (€ 145.321 billion for 2015). The European Parliament has the power to dismiss the European Commission. The European Parliament also elects the European Ombudsman, who investigates citizens' complaints about maladministration by the EU institutions.

More info: <http://europarl.europa.eu>

European Council

President: Donald Tusk (Poland)

What is it? The European Council is the highest political authority of the EU and is made up of the Heads of State or Government of the 28 EU Member States, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy also takes part in the European Council's discussions.



What does it do? The European Council defines the general political direction and priorities of the EU. It meets at least twice every six months. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, it became an institution.

More info: <http://european-council.europa.eu>

Council of the European Union

What is it? The Council of the EU consists of ministers from the national governments of all the EU Member States. Meetings are attended by whichever ministers are responsible for the items to be discussed.

There are ten Council configurations, covering the whole range of EU policies. Decisions in the Council are taken by vote. In most cases a decision requires a qualified majority. In some cases the treaties require a different procedure, for example a unanimous vote in the field of taxation.

The Council of the EU is supported by the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) and more than 150 highly specialised working parties and committees (known as the 'Council preparatory bodies').

The Council of the EU should not be confused with the European Council (another EU institution, where EU leaders meet around four times a year) and the Council of Europe (not an EU institution).

Where is it? The Council's headquarters is in Brussels, but in April, June and October its meetings are held in Luxembourg.

What does it do? The Council of the EU shares with European Parliament the responsibility for passing laws and taking policy decisions. It also bears the main responsibility for what the EU does in the field of the common foreign and security policy, on the basis of strategic guidelines set by the European Council.

More info: <http://consilium.europa.eu>

Presidency of the Council of the EU:

The EU's 28 Member States take in turn to chair the Council of the EU for a period of six months each.

During this six-month period, the Presidency chairs meetings of the different Council configurations (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council) and is responsible for driving forward the Council's work on EU legislation, ensuring the continuity of the EU agenda.

Order of six-monthly presidencies:

Jan-Jun 2014	Greece
Jul-Dec 2014	Italy
Jan-Jun 2015	Latvia
Jul-Dec 2015	Luxembourg
Jan-Jun 2016	Netherlands
Jul-Dec 2016	Slovakia

European Commission

President: Jean-Claude Juncker (Luxembourg)

What is it? The European Commission – the executive arm of the EU – represents and upholds the interests of Europe as a whole. It is independent of national governments. The college of Commissioners, appointed every five years, currently consists of 28 women and men — one from each EU Member State.



The President of the European Commission is nominated by the European Council. The other 27 European Commissioners are also nominated by their national governments in consultation with the incoming President of the European Commission. The appointment of all Commissioners, including the President, is subject to the approval of the European Parliament.

European External Action Service



High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:
Federica Mogherini (Italy)

What is it? The European External Action Service (EEAS), created in 2011, is the EU's diplomatic service. The EEAS manages the EU's diplomatic relations with other countries outside the EU.

Where is it? The EEAS has its headquarters in Brussels and operates 140 EU Delegations and/or Offices around the world. The EEAS has approximately 3900 staff members, 45% of whom work in Brussels.

What does it do? The EEAS supports the EU's foreign affairs chief – the High Representative – in coordinating and carrying out the EU's foreign and security policy. The High Representative is also a Vice President of the European Commission and chairs the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) of the Council of the EU. This makes EU foreign policy more consistent and coherent.

More info: <http://eeas.europa.eu>

Each Commissioner is assigned responsibility for specific EU policy areas. The day-to-day running of the European Commission is managed by about 33,000 civil servants, most of whom work in Brussels.

Where is it? The 'seat' of the European Commission is in Brussels, but it also has offices in Luxembourg, plus representations in all EU Member States.

What does it do? It drafts proposals for new European laws, which it presents to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. It manages the day-to-day business of implementing EU policies and spending EU funds. The European Commission also keeps an eye out to see that everyone abides by the European treaties and laws. It can act against rule-breakers, taking them to the Court of Justice if necessary.

More info: <http://ec.europa.eu>



DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

<http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/indonesia>