

UNDERSTANDING THE EUROPEAN UNION

THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- The UK has 73 MEPs and 29 votes in the Council of the EU.
- Find your local MEP: http://www.europarl.org.uk/en/your_meps/list-meps-by-region.html

History

- In the 1960s the UK applied to join the European Communities. The European Communities were three international organisations governed by the same set of institutions. These included the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. These organisations formed the European Union. The UK's application and a further one were vetoed by France. In 1973, after a referendum, the UK joined the European Economic Community.
- While the UK is part of the EU it does not belong to the Eurozone, which refers to EU currency, and accepts only part of the Schengen Agreement. This agreement refers to the gradual removal of internal borders between agreed member states.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is government by seven institutions:

1. European Parliament
2. European Council
3. Council of the European Union (Council)
4. The European Commission
5. Court of Justice of the European Union
6. European Central Bank
7. Court of Auditors



ABC of the EU institutions



European Parliament

The only directly-elected EU body. Represents the EU's 500 million inhabitants.
Plays a key role in electing the President of the European Commission.
Shares power over EU budget and legislation with Council of the European Union.

751 MEPs

Following the accession of Croatia, the EP temporarily has 766 MEPs. In line with the Lisbon Treaty, the number of MEPs elected in May 2014 will be 751.

Seats per country from 2014

21	17	21	13	96	6	11	21	54	74	11	73	6	8	11	6	21	6	26	18	51	21	32	8	13	13	20	73
BELGIUM	BULGARIA	CZECH REPUBLIC	DENMARK	GERMANY	ESTONIA	IRELAND	GREECE	SPAIN	FRANCE	CROATIA	ITALY	CYPRUS	LATVIA	LITHUANIA	LUXEMBOURG	HUNGARY	MALTA	NETHERLANDS	AUSTRIA	POLAND	PORTUGAL	ROMANIA	SLOVENIA	SLOVAKIA	FINLAND	SWEDEN	UNITED KINGDOM



European Commission

The EU's executive body, responsible for proposing and implementing EU laws, monitoring the treaties and the day-to-day running of the EU.



Council of the European Union

Government ministers who share budgetary and legislative power with European Parliament.

European Council

Heads of state or government of EU Member States.
Strategic body that decides the EU's political direction.

European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) frames laws, oversees other EU institutions and sets the annual EU budget with the Council of Ministers which is made up of the 28 EU national governments.

An overview of responsibilities and powers:

- Appoint the president of the European Commission
- Legislative Co-decision: Accept, reject or amend draft legislation in around 80 policy areas including the single market, transport, consumer protection, civil liberties, environment and agriculture.
- Consult: On other types of legislation such as tax and new Eurozone members the EP can only act as an advisor.
- Consent: Parliament must give consent for members to join or leave the EU but they cannot amend details of individual cases.
- Right of initiative: Parliament can ask the Commission to propose new legislation.
- EU Budget: Parliament is responsible for the approval and management of long-term spending.
- Inquiries: Parliament can set up temporary committees to investigate an issue of public interest or look into alleged breaches of Community law.
- Parliamentary questions: As with the UK's parliament, MEPs can ask oral and written questions which aim to hold the Commission and Council to account.
- Foreign policy: The EP must give consent for the EU to grow and for the conclusion of trade and other international agreements with non-EU states.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)

- There are currently 766 MEPs since Croatia joined the EU in July 2013.
- The number of MEPs will be reduced to 751 at these elections.
- Over 500 million citizens in 28 countries are represented by these MEPs. The seats are allocated on the basis of 'digressive proportionality'. Which means countries with larger populations have more seats than smaller ones but the latter have more seats than under strict proportionality.

Work of MEPs

- MEPs sit on parliamentary committees where they scrutinise legislation. There are currently 20 committees which focus on specific areas of policy.
- MEPs can be members of interparliamentary delegation which aim to develop relationship with non-EU parliaments.

Office Holders of Parliament

- **President of Parliament:** elected from among the 751 MEPs for two and a half years. The President represents the EU internationally, chairs plenary session and oversees the work of Parliament. There are fourteen Vice-Presidents who share this workload.
- **Committee or delegation chair:** guides the proceedings of Parliament.
- **Coordinator:** the leading representative of his or her political group in a committee.
- **Rapporteur:** an MEP chosen to steer a specific resolution or piece of legislation through Parliament.

Political Parties

- MEPs work through transnational political groups or parties. These groups are made up of MEPs from different countries but with similar political convictions.
- There are currently seven political parties in the European Parliament, representing 160 national political parties.
- Under Parliament's rules, members of a party must share a 'political affinity' and have a minimum of 25 Members from at least one quarter of member states (i.e. currently at least seven).
- Independent MEPs who are not part of a party either because they choose not to or because they are unable to, sit separately.

Current EU Political Parties

- Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats): <http://www.eppgroup.eu/home>
- Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament: http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/?request_locale=EN
- Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe: <http://www.alde.eu/>
- Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance: <http://www.greens-efa.eu/>
- European Conservatives and Reformists Group: <http://ecrgroup.eu/>
- Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left: <http://www.guengl.eu/>
- Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group: <http://www.efdgroupp.eu/>

European Council

- Along with the European Council President and the President of the European Commission, the European Council is made up of heads of state or government from EU member states.
- It does not have any legislative power but holds a strategic role. The Treaty of Lisbon outlines that the European Council is responsible for determining “the general political directions and priorities” of the EU.

Council of the European Union (Council)

- Represent the executive of EU member states along with the Parliament.
- There are 28 national ministers, one for each member state. The Presidency rotates every six months between these ministers.
- Decisions are made by qualified majority vote and in some cases by unanimity.
- In most areas the Council and Parliament share legislative and budgetary powers equally. This means they both have to agree for a proposal to pass.
- Council may initiative new EU law.

The European Commission

- The executive arm of the European Union and made up of 28 appointees representing the 28 member states.
- Drafts all EU legislation and proposes almost all new bills.
- Led by a President who is nominated by the European Council and approved by Parliament. The remaining 27 appointees are selected by member-states in consultation with the President.

Note: Nomination of the President of the European Commission

Of the 13 European political parties, five have nominated a candidate to succeed the current Commission President.

- The Christian Democrats candidate is Jean-Claude Juncker, former Luxembourg prime minister and former EuropGroup president.
- The Socialists candidate is Martin Schulz, current president of the European Parliament
- The Liberals and Democrats candidate is Guy Verhofstadt, former Belgian prime minister and current Liberal group leader in the EP
- The Greens candidates are current MEPs, French José Bové and German Ska Keller
- The European Left candidate is Alexis Tsipras, leader of the Greek SYRIZA party

Court of Justice of the European Union

- Made up of the Court of Justice, The General Court and the Civil Service Tribunal and interprets EU law and treaties.

European Central Bank

- Controls monetary policy relevant to the Eurozone and is at the centre of the European System of Central banks which includes all EU national banks.

Court of Auditors

- Ensures the EU budget is correctly spent and provides an annual audit report to the Council and Parliament.

Note: This information was largely taken from the European Parliament - <http://www.elections2014.eu/en/press-kit>