

The House of Representatives

Institutions

The European Union has a large number of institutions to guarantee its functioning and efficiency. The Commission, the Council of the European Union (Council of ministers), European Parliament and the European Council are clearly the most important and the best known.

The European Commission

The European Commission handles a great deal of the daily activities of the Union. For its functioning, the Commission does not depend on the governments of the member states. It defends Europe's interests.

The European Council (2009) decided that each country would keep a Commissioner, although the intention was to reduce the number of Commissioners to 18 from 2014 onward.

The President of the European Commission is proposed by the European Council. In this respect, the result of the European elections must be taken into account. The President of the European Council must consult the European Parliament to this end. The candidate of the Heads of State and Government must be supported by an absolute majority at the European Parliament. The governments of the member states then appoint the commissioners in deliberation with the future president. They must appear individually before hearings at the European Parliament. The Commission can only act after EP has approved the whole of the Commission. One of the Commissioners is also the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy.

The Commission is appointed for a five-year period but EP controls the Commission and can force the whole commission to step down, even intermediately.

The Commission meets weekly in Brussels. The meetings are not public.

» Tasks

- The Commission drafts new European “laws” that will be presented to EP, the Council of the European Union and the national parliaments.
- It ensures that the regulations and directives of the EU are being put into effect.
- The Commission makes sure that the member states comply with the European treaties and the European “laws”. It has the right to “punish”.

- The Commission carries out the decisions taken by the Council of the European Union.
- It represents the EU in international organisations and negotiates about trade, association and affiliation.
- The Commission controls the financial means of the Union.

The Council of the European Union

The Council consists of **ministers of the member states**. They defend the interests of their member states. The composition of the sessions of the Council depends on which topic is on the agenda.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs meet every month to discuss foreign affairs. The Foreign Affairs Council is chaired by the **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**. She conducts the common foreign and security policy of the EU. She is also a member of the European Commission. In that capacity, she ensures the implementation of the decisions of the European Council and the Council of the European Union.

In general, the foreign ministers, the economics, finance and agriculture ministers meet once a month. The other Council configurations meet between one and three times every six months. If the topic on the agenda is, in Belgium, a competency of the communities (e.g. education) or the regions (e.g. agriculture), the competent minister of Belgium's community or regional governments who speaks and votes on behalf of our country is determined by a rotation system.

Every six months, a different member state presides the Council. That country sets the European agenda. The competent minister of the presiding country presides over the Council.

The meetings are held in Brussels and Luxembourg.

» Tasks

- The Council is the legislative body of the EU, together with EP (ordinary legislative procedure or co-decision).
- Together with EP, the Council sets the budget. The Commission executes it.
- The Council coordinates economic policies by setting general guidelines and making recommendations to member states.
- The Council enters into international agreements with non-member states and international organisations.

- The Council takes decisions to set and execute common foreign and safety policies.
- The Council coordinates the actions of the member states and organises cooperation where police and justice are concerned.

European Parliament

The European Parliament represents the citizens of the European Union. Members of European Parliament are elected every five years. Each citizen of the EU who is registered to vote may vote, depending on the Community electoral law of the EU and the respective electoral laws of the member states. The most recent European elections were held from 6 till 9 June 2024. The EP has 720 members, 22 of which are Belgians.

European Members of Parliament are not grouped per country but based on their political conviction, they are subdivided into 8 political groups.

Political groups in the European Parliament	Number of seats	Belgian parties whom are part thereof	Belgian MEPs
Group of the European People's Party (Christian democrats)	188	CD&V, CSP	3
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	136	Vooruit, PS	4
Patriots for Europe	84	Vlaams Belang	3
European Conservatives and Reformists	78	N-VA	3
Renew Europe	77	Les Engagés, Open Vld, MR	5
Group of the Greens/ Free European Alliance	53	Groen, Ecolo	2
The Left - GUE/NGL	46	PTB	2
Non-attached members	33		
Europe of Sovereign Nations	25		
Total	720		22

» Main tasks

- Discuss and approve European legislation, jointly with the Council of the European Union (ordinary legislative procedure or co-decision procedure).
- Set the annual budget of the EU together with the Council.
- Democratic control of the other institutions of the EU, mainly the Commission. EP approves or rejects the members of the Commission. The Parliament can even force the Commission to resign.
- Approve important international agreements, such as the access of new EU member states, trade agreements or association treaties between the EU and other countries.

The European Council

Since the Lisbon Treaty (December 2009), the European Council has become a real institution.

The European Council's task is to set the broad lines of policy, and deliberate on the future of the Union.

The European Council consists of the **heads of state and government** of the member states and the president of the European Commission. For Belgium, not the head of state but the prime minister has a seat in the European Council.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy takes part in the work of the European Council.

Since 1 December 2009, the European Council has a **President**. The President's term of office is two and a half years (which is renewable once). The current President of the European Council is the Belgian Charles Michel, who took office on 1 December 2019.

The President prepares the meetings of the European Council. He ensures the external representation of the Union on issues concerning its common foreign and security policy. He represents the EU at world level.

The members of the European Council may decide each to be assisted by a minister and, in the case of the President of the Commission, by a member of the Commission.

The Council meets, in principle, four times a year in Brussels. Such meetings are also called European summits.

Other institutions

In addition to these four important institutions, the EU has several other institutions or bodies such as the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.