

Who is who in the EU?

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

This group of 28 commissioners (one from each member state) thinks of solutions to problems in the European Union.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

This group of 751 people is responsible for approving the solutions proposed by the European Commission, otherwise the solutions will not be implemented. The members of the European Parliament are elected by the citizens of the member states. The European Parliament can propose amendments, but may not submit its own solutions. Proposals are approved in the European Parliament if half of the total number of parliamentarians +1 are in favour.

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (COUNCIL OF MINISTERS)

This council has one member per member state, who is always a minister from that state's government. The minister sent to the Council by each country varies depending on the subject being discussed. In this case, each country sent its Minister of Economic Affairs. Just like in the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union must approve the proposed solution. Approval is granted in the Council of the European Union by a 'qualified majority'. Each member state has a certain number of votes it can use in the Council, depending on the member state's population:

- 29 votes: Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom
- 27 votes: Spain and Poland
- 14 votes: Romania
- 13 votes: The Netherlands
- 12 votes: Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Hungary and the Czech Republic
- 10 votes: Bulgaria, Sweden and Austria
- 7 votes: Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania and Slovakia
- 4 votes: Cyprus, Luxembourg, Latvia, Slovenia and Estonia
- 3 votes: Malta

A qualified majority in the Council of Ministers is reached if a majority of the member states agrees (sometimes a two-thirds majority) AND at least 260 of the 352 votes are in favour of the proposal. A minimum of 260 votes ensures a majority of the total European population.

Note: A member state may demand that the qualified majority be set at 65% of the total EU population. If this is not reached, the proposal will not be adopted.

ORDINARY LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE

Under the ordinary legislative procedure, a proposal by the European Commission must be approved by both the European Parliament AND the Council of the European Union. Policy-making in most areas follows the ordinary

legislative procedure. Both bodies may request amendments to the proposal.

HOW A DECISION IS MADE

1. The European Commission prepares the draft proposal. It has the 'right of initiative', which means that the Commission may submit legislative proposals. The draft proposal is then presented to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.
2. The proposal is presented. The various political groups in the European Parliament meet to discuss and establish their views on the proposal, after which it is debated in Parliament. The European Parliament may modify parts of the proposal, by submitting 'amendments' (changes to the proposal). Then a vote is taken. Some amendments are accepted, others are not. The amendments accepted in the Parliament are incorporated into the proposal, which is then sent to the Council.
3. If the Council agrees to the EP's amendments, it will be adopted with the amendments. If the Council disagrees, it will present its own version of the proposal, and either accept or reject the EP's amendments. The Council must adopt a 'joint position'. The new version of the proposal then goes back to the European Parliament.
4. The Parliament discusses the Council's modifications. If the EP approves the Council's changes, the proposal will be adopted and returned (including the changes) to the Commission. If the Commission does not agree, the proposal will not go ahead. The Commission can also propose new amendments.
5. The Commission states which amendments it does/does not find acceptable, and the proposal returns to the Council.
6. It is now the Council's turn again. If they agree, the proposal is adopted (minus the amendments that the Commission did not agree with). If the Council disagrees, a Conciliation Committee will be formed to negotiate among the various bodies. Under this decision-making process, all three bodies must ultimately reach agreement.

SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE

There are various procedures referred to as 'special', all of which deviate to some extent from the ordinary procedure described above. For example: the European Parliament may not have the ability to amend a proposal, a unanimous decision may be required by the Council, or the European Parliament may be excluded from the process entirely. Special legislative procedures often apply in the following areas: security, foreign policy, institutional reforms (e.g. changes to treaties), tax policy, social policy (or parts thereof), some topics within political and judicial cooperation, and the conclusion of international agreements.

REGULATION

An EU regulation is a decision that requires no further work by member states, and can be implemented immediately. All EU member states must implement regulations in the same way, and they are obligated to do so. The immediacy of regulations is what makes collaboration in the EU unique. If regulations go against national legislation, it is the national legislation that must

change. Note: Regulations are only one type of decision made by the European Union, which can also issue a *directive* or a *decision*. A *directive* establishes an objective to be achieved by EU member states, who are then free to incorporate it into their national legislation however they like. A *decision* affects a specific party to which it is directed – several years ago, for example, a decision was issued to chip manufacturer Intel, forcing it to pay a penalty for abusing a position of power.