EU MATTER

NEWSLETTER — #3

Who does what in the EU?

Understanding the structure and roles of the European Union institutions

EU-MATTER

European Understanding – Mobilising Awareness through Training, Trust, Engagement, and Representation

Connecting young people with Europe, democracy and civic participation

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IN FOCUS

The EU institutional system: different roles, one Union

The European Union has seven official institutions, each with responsibilities established by the EU Treaties. At the heart of EU decision-making are four institutions: the European Parliament, European Council, Council of the European Union and European Commission.

4
KEY DECISION-MAKING INSTITUTIONS

27
EU MEMBER STATES

720
MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The institutional system is designed to balance different interests.

The European Parliament represents EU citizens. The Council of the European Union represents the governments of the Member States. The European Commission promotes the general interests of the EU. Meanwhile, the European Council, composed mainly of EU heads of state or government, establishes the Union's overall political direction and priorities.

This means that no single institution normally decides EU legislation alone. In the ordinary legislative procedure, the Commission generally proposes legislation, while Parliament and the Council negotiate, amend and jointly adopt it.

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One Union, different voices: citizens, national governments and the common European interest all have a place in EU decision-making.

Understanding these roles makes it easier to see where EU decisions come from, who takes them and how citizens and national governments are represented in the process.

Who represents whom?

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01 — CITIZENS

European Parliament

The European Parliament is the only EU institution directly elected by EU citizens. Its 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) debate and adopt EU legislation together with the Council, decide on the EU budget and exercise democratic scrutiny over other EU institutions.

REPRESENTS EU citizens

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02 — MEMBER STATES

Council of the European Union

The Council brings together national ministers from each EU Member State. Which ministers attend depends on the policy area being discussed: environment ministers discuss environmental policy, finance ministers economic matters, and so on.

Together with Parliament, the Council negotiates and adopts EU legislation and the EU budget.

REPRESENTS national governments

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03 — EU COMMON INTEREST

European Commission

The European Commission is the EU's main executive body. It proposes new legislation, implements EU policies, manages EU programmes and the budget, monitors the application of EU law and represents the Union internationally in certain areas.

REPRESENTS the general interests of the EU

IN BRIEF

European Council ≠ Council of the European Union

They are two different institutions.

The European Council brings together EU leaders and defines the Union's broad political direction.

The Council of the EU brings together national ministers and participates directly in making EU laws.

HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER

From an idea to an EU law

Most EU legislation is adopted through the ordinary legislative procedure. It is based on cooperation between the Commission, Parliament and Council.

1

POLITICAL DIRECTION

European Council

EU leaders identify major priorities and challenges and establish the Union's general political direction. The European Council does not normally negotiate or adopt EU legislation.

Think *Where should the EU go?*

2

PROPOSAL

European Commission

The Commission prepares and submits legislative proposals. Before presenting a proposal, it may assess its economic, social and environmental impacts and consult citizens, experts and stakeholders.

Think *What should the EU do?*

3

NEGOTIATION & ADOPTION

Parliament + Council

The proposal goes to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Both institutions examine the text, can propose amendments and must agree on the final legislation for it to be adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure.

Think *Can citizens' representatives and national governments agree?*

4

IMPLEMENTATION

Commission + Member States

Once legislation is adopted, Member States implement EU rules according to the type of legal act involved, while the Commission oversees their application and can take action when EU law is not correctly applied.

Think *Is the agreed law being put into practice?*

Understanding the EU starts with knowing who does what

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EU decision-making may appear complex, but the basic logic is simple: different institutions represent different interests and must cooperate.

Citizens are represented by the **European Parliament**.

National governments are represented in the **Council of the EU**.

The **European Commission** promotes the common European interest and initiates most legislation.

EU leaders in the **European Council** establish the Union's broad political priorities.

Together, these institutions transform shared priorities into European action.

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