

A Guide to the EU Institutions



Irish Regions Office

© Irish Regions Office
Rond-Point Schuman 6 • B 1040 Brussels
Tel +32 2 282 8477 • Fax +32 2 2828475

Table of Contents

The Irish Regions Office	2		
		THE DECISION MAKING	
		PROCESS	
INTRODUCTION		Decision Making Procedures	33
		Voting in the Council of the EU	36
The European Union	4		
		FUTURE CHALLENGES	
THE EU INSTITUTIONS		A Constitution for Europe	40
The European Commission	7		
The European Parliament	9		
The Council of the European Union	13		
The European Court of Justice	16		
The European Court of		APPENDIX	
Auditors	18	Glossary of Terms	43
		The Treaties	46
OTHER BODIES			
The European Council	21		
The Committee of the Regions	22		
The European Economic & Social Committee	25		
The European Central Bank	27		
The European Investment Bank	27		
The European Ombudsman	29		
EU Agencies	30		

The Irish Regions Office

The Irish Regions Office (IRO) was established in 2000, with the support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, as a Brussels based resource for the Irish members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and their regional authorities. The activities of the office have since been expanded through a collaboration of the Association of Irish Regions (AIR) and county and city managers to provide a wider range of services to Irish local and regional authorities. The key functions of the office include:

- Acting as a source of EU information for sub-national government in Ireland
- Representing the views of Irish sub-national government at EU level
- Providing general executive support to, and acting as a contact point for elected representatives and officials of sub-national authorities in Ireland in relation to EU matters
- Assisting local and regional authorities with the development of EU projects
- Providing support in Brussels to the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR)

In carrying out its responsibilities the office is routinely engaged in the production of reports, briefing documents and EU information bulletins, coordinating the production and promotion of policy and position papers on behalf of AIR and the CoR delegation, assisting with the development of EU projects and with the preparation of funding applications, and responding to general requests for information from and on the sub-national authorities in Ireland.

The IRO currently has two full-time staff and is located on Rond-Point Schuman, in the heart of Brussels' EU district and in close proximity to the main EU institutions.

This Guide

This guide is intended to provide those interested in EU affairs with an overview of the institutions and bodies involved in the formulation of EU policy and, where relevant, to highlight Ireland's representation on these bodies. The guide also explains the EU's decision-making process and its procedures.

This is the first up-date of this guide, which was originally published in May 2003. Further updates are envisaged in the future to take account of ongoing developments within the EU. Feedback and comments from users are therefore very welcome.

Further copies of the guide are available from the Irish Regions Office.

Contact: Robert Collins
Irish Regions Office
6 Rond-Point Schuman
B-1040 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2 282 8474
E-mail: robert.collins@iro.ie

Eamon O'Hara
Irish Regions Office
6 Rond-Point Schuman
B-1040 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2 282 8477
E-mail: eamon.ohara@iro.ie
Website: www.iro.ie

Introduction

The European Union

The European Union (EU) is a family of democratic European countries, committed to working together for peace and prosperity. Its Member States have set up common institutions to which they delegate some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level.

The historical roots of the EU lie in the Second World War. The original idea of European integration was to foster economic cooperation and interdependence between the countries of Europe in order to ensure that such a catastrophe would never reoccur. Since its foundation, however, the role of the EU has evolved and it now also deals with many other subjects of direct importance to the everyday lives of Europeans, such as: citizens' rights; ensuring freedom, security and justice; job creation; regional development; environmental protection; and representing the EU's position internationally.

In March 2000 EU leaders meeting in Lisbon agreed on a broad strategic programme to boost economic growth and competitiveness in the EU. Known as the Lisbon Agenda, this strategic programme currently guides the EU's main policy orientations. It is reviewed annually at the spring European Council.

The work of the EU is carried out by a number of key bodies. These include five 'institutions':

- The European Commission (the EU's executive body);
- The European Parliament (elected by the citizens of the Member States);
- The Council of the European Union (representing the governments of the Member States);
- The European Court of Justice (ensuring compliance with EU law);
- The European Court of Auditors (ensuring sound and lawful management of the EU budget).

The institutions are guided by the European Council (Heads of State and Government of EU Member States) and assisted by two 'advisory bodies':

- The Committee of the Regions (expresses the opinions of regional and local authorities);
- The European Economic and Social Committee (expresses the opinions of organised civil society on economic and social issues);

There are also a number of other important bodies, such as:

- The European Central Bank (responsible for monetary policy and managing the euro);
- The European Investment Bank (helps achieve EU objectives by financing investment projects);
- The European Ombudsman (deals with citizens' complaints about maladministration by any EU institution or body);

The rule of law is fundamental to the EU and all EU decisions and procedures are based on the Treaties, which are agreed by all EU countries. The EU (formerly the European Economic Community (EEC)) was originally established when the six founding members, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined in 1973, Greece in 1981, Spain and Portugal in 1986, and Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995.

Having successfully grown from 6 to 15 members by 1995, the EU underwent a further a more challenging enlargement in 2004, when 10 Central and Eastern Europe countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) became members. A further five countries are currently in various stages applying for membership of the EU. Bulgaria and Romania are currently

what's known as "accessing countries" (i.e. "accessing" to EU membership) and are due to become full members in 2007. Turkey, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are currently "candidate countries," which means their applications are currently under consideration. The EU has also identified the countries of the West Balkans region as potential "candidates" for EU membership. This includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and Kosova.

In order to join the EU, candidate countries need to fulfil the economic and political conditions known as the 'Copenhagen criteria'. According to these criteria a prospective member must:

- be a stable democracy, respecting human rights, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities;
- have a functioning market economy;
- adopt the common rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law.

The EU assists these countries in taking on EU laws, and provides a range of financial assistance to improve their infrastructure and economy. In "Agenda 2000" the Commission set aside an overall package of €45 billion for new members for the period 2000 to 2006. €7 billion of this was allocated to pre-accession aid.

The recent enlargement (10 new members) represents a considerable challenge for the EU, with the integration of 75 million inhabitants, representing a fifth of the Union's population, but only contributing a GNP equivalent to less than 5% of the Union of 15 members. Meeting this challenge will be the task of the institutions in the coming decade. But they will also have to improve their own decision-making procedures if they wish to avoid paralysis or dilution.

Contact: Further information on the EU, including links to the institutions and other important bodies can be found on Europa, the official EU website: <http://www.europa.eu.int>

The EU Institutions

The European Commission: the EU's civil service

Functions

The European Commission is effectively the EU executive and as such is responsible for most of the day-to-day activities of the Union. The Commission is the driving force in the Union's institutional system:

1. It has the right to initiate draft legislation and therefore presents legislative proposals to the Parliament and the Council;
2. As the Union's executive body, it is responsible for implementing European legislation (Directives, Regulations, Decisions), the EU budget and programmes adopted by Parliament and the Council;
3. It acts as guardian of the Treaties and, together with the Court of Justice, ensures that Community law is properly applied;
4. It represents the Union on the international stage and negotiates international agreements, chiefly in the field of trade and cooperation.

Structure

The European Commission currently consists of 25 members, known as "Commissioners". This team of 25 commissioners, also known as the "College", meets once a week in Brussels, usually on a Wednesday. At these meetings each item on the agenda is presented by the Commissioner responsible for that policy area and the College then takes a collective decision.

In carrying out their duties the Commissioners are assisted by about 24,000 civil servants. The Commission's staff is organised into 36 departments, known as "Directorates-General" (DGs) and "Services" (such as the Legal Service). Each DG is responsible for a particular policy area (e.g. DG Agriculture, DG Regional Policy, DG Environment, DG Competition, etc..) and is headed by a Director-General who is answerable to the Commissioner responsible for that policy area. It is the DGs that actually devise and draft the Commission's legislative proposals, but these proposals only become official Commission proposals when "adopted" by the College at its weekly meeting.

Appointment

A new Commission is appointed every five years, within six months of the European Parliament elections. The procedure is as follows:

1. The President of the Commission is chosen by the governments of the EU Member States and must be approved by the European Parliament
2. The other members are nominated by the Member State governments in consultation with the incoming president. At present each Member State is entitled to nominate one Commissioner.
3. The new Parliament then interviews all members and gives its opinion on the entire College. If approved, the new Commission can officially start work. However, the Parliament retains the right to dismiss the Commission.

The Commission President decides on the portfolios to be assigned to the Commissioners and can reshuffle these responsibilities during the Commission's term of office. The President, with the Commission's approval, is also entitled to demand a Commissioner's resignation. All members of the Commission are committed to acting in the interests of the Union as a whole and not taking instructions from national governments.

Post Enlargement

Once the EU enlarges to 27 Member States, the Treaty of Nice states that the Council - by a unanimous decision - will fix the maximum number of commissioners, but there must be fewer than 27 and their nationality will be determined by a system of rotation that is absolutely fair to all countries.

The proposed new EU Constitution, if ratified, would override the Nice Treaty. Under the new Constitution the Commission would have one member from each Member State until 2014. After that, the Commission would consist of a number of Members, including its President and the EU Minister for Foreign Affairs, corresponding to two thirds of the number of Member States, unless the European Council, acting unanimously, decides to alter this figure. Commissioners would be selected on the basis of a system of equal rotation between the Member States. Member States would be treated on an equal footing as regards determination of the sequence of, and the time spent by their nationals as members of the Commission. However, this system would only come into effect if the Constitution were ratified in its current format.

Ireland's Commissioner:

Mr Charlie McCreevy, Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services.

In September 2004, Ireland's nominee Mr Charlie McCreevy was appointed European Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services, with responsibility for the EU's policy on the functioning of the internal market of 450 million people across 25 Member States. A key priority for Commissioner McCreevy is to ensure that remaining barriers to trade within Europe are dismantled over time, and that fragmentation and administrative burdens are reduced. Prior to being European Commissioner, Mr McCreevy was Minister for Finance in the Irish Government from June 1997 to July 1999.

Mr McCreevy's contact details are:

European Commission
DG Internal Market & Services
B-1049 Brussels
E-mail: Charlie.Mc-Creevy@cec.eu.int
Tel.: +32 (2) 299.22.38

Mr McCreevy's Chef de Cabinet is:

Mr Martin Power
E-mail: martin.power@cec.eu.int
Tel.: +32 (2) 295 5436

Contact: European Commission
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32(0) 2 299 1111
Web: <http://europa.eu.int/>

Representation in Ireland:
European Commission
European Union House
18 Dawson Street
Dublin 2
Ireland
Tel: 01 634 1111
E-mail: eu-ie-info-request@cec.eu.int

The European Parliament: the voice of the people

Functions

The European Parliament (EP) is elected to promote the interests of the citizens of the Union and to defend their rights at EU level. The principal roles of the Parliament are as follows:

- To examine and adopt European legislation. Under the co-decision procedure, Parliament shares this power equally with the Council of Ministers in many policy areas.
- To approve the EU budget, jointly with the Council.
- To exercise democratic control over the other EU institutions, possibly by setting up committees of inquiry.
- To assent to important international agreements such as the accession of new EU Member States and trade or association agreements between the EU and other countries.

The work of the Parliament is divided into two main areas of activity:

- Preparing for the plenary session. This is done by the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the various parliamentary committees, which specialise in particular areas of EU activity. The issues for debate are also discussed by political groups.
- The plenary session. Plenary sessions, attended by all MEPs, are normally held in Strasbourg (one week per month) and sometimes in Brussels. At these sessions, Parliament examines proposed legislation and votes on amendments before coming to a decision on the text as a whole.

Other items on the agenda may include Council or Commission "communications" or wider EU or international issues.

Structure

Directly elected every five years, MEPs sit not in national blocs but in seven political groups. Each group reflects the political ideology of the national parties to which its members belong. Some MEPs (independents) are not attached to any political group. The total number of MEPs is 732, with the number per Member State based on population (*see table*).

Belgium	24	Luxembourg	6
Czech Republic	24	Hungary	24
Denmark	14	Netherlands	27
Germany	99	Austria	18
Estonia	6	Malta	5
France	78	Poland	54
Greece	24	Portugal	24
Ireland	13	Finland	14
Italy	78	Slovenia	7
Spain	54	Slovakia	14
Cyprus	6	Sweden	19
Latvia	9	United Kingdom	78
Lithuania	13		

If ratified, under the terms of the new EU Constitution the maximum size of the European Parliament would be set at 750 members from 2009. Representation of citizens would be "degressively proportional", with a minimum threshold of 6 members per Member State. No Member State would be allocated more than 96 seats.

Irish Representation in the European Parliament

Following the June 2004 European Parliament elections the number of Irish MEPs has dropped from 15 to 13 (see below). A Boundary Review Commission, which was set up to examine the need for changes to the Euro-constituencies in Ireland, recommended the reduction of a seat in each of the Leinster and Munster constituencies and the transfer of the population of County Clare from the Munster constituency to the Connacht-Ulster constituency.

The Commission also recommended that the constituencies be renamed as follows: Dublin (the city and county of Dublin) - 4 seats; East (all Leinster counties except Dublin) 3 seats; South (all Munster counties except Clare) 3 seats; North-West (Clare, all Connacht counties and the three Ulster counties in the Republic) 3 seats.

Contact: European Parliament
Rue Wiertz
B-1047 Brussels
Tel: +32 (0) 2 284 21 11
E-mail: epbrussels@europarl.eu.int
Web: <http://www.europarl.eu.int/>

European Parliament
(Office in Ireland)
43 Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 605 7900
E-mail: epdublin@europarl.eu.int
Web: <http://www.europarl.ie>

Irish MEPs (2004-2009)

DUBLIN

Proinsias De Rossa (Labour)
17 Ely Place, , Dublin 2
Tel: +353 (0)1 678 9740
Fax: +353 (0)1 678 9737
E-mail: pderossa@europarl.eu.int
Website: www.derossa.com

Mary Lou Mc Donald (Sinn Féin)
Sinn Féin Press Office
44 Parnell Square, Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 8722609
Email: marylou@sinnfein.ie

Gay Mitchell TD (Fine Gael)
Leinster House, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6183727
Fax: (01) 6184512
Email: gay.mitchell@finegaele.ie

Eoin Ryan TD (Fianna Fáil)
19 Vavasour Square
Sandymount, Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 667 3790
Fax: (01) 667 3790
Email: eoin.ryan@oireachtas.ie
Website: www.eoinryan.ie

EAST

Avril Doyle (Fine Gael)
43 Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
Tel: +353 (0)1 676 2279
Fax: +353 (0)1 676 2279
E-mail: office@avrildoyle.ie
E-mail: adoyle@europarl.eu.int
Website: www.avrildoyle.ie

Aylward, Liam TD (Fianna Fáil)
Aghaviller, Hugginstown
Co. Kilkenny
Tel: (056) 7768703, (01)6072291
Fax: (056) 7768229, (01)6622170

McGuinness, Mairead (Fine Gael)
Unit 15, Ardee Business Park
Hale Street, Ardee, Co Louth
Tel: (041) 6858737
Fax: (041) 6858736
Email: info@mcguinness4europe.ie
Website: www.mcguinness4europe.ie

NORTH WEST

Marian Harkin TD (Independent)
1 Dominic Street
Sligo
Tel: (071) 9145888
Email: marianharkin1@eircom.net
Website: www.marianharkin.ie

Senator Jim Higgins (Fine Gael)
Devlis
Ballyhaunis
Co. Mayo
Tel: (094) 9630224, (01) 618 3109
Fax: (094) 9630224, (01) 618 4582
Email: jim.higgins@oireachtas.ie

Sean Ó'Neachtain (Fianna Fáil)
42 Prospect Hill
Galway
Tel: +353 (0)91-560020
Fax: +353 (0)91-560023
E-mail: seanoneachtain@eircom.net
E-mail: soneachtain@europarl.eu.int

SOUTH

Simon Coveney TD (Fine Gael)
1 Abbottswood Downs
Rochestown
Co. Cork
Tel: (021) 4313100
Email: simon.coveney@oireachtas.irigov.ie
Website: www.simoncoveney.ie

Brian Crowley (Fianna Fáil)
Maryborough Lodge
Maryborough Hill
Douglas
Cork
Tel: (021) 4896433
Fax: (021) 4896401
Email bcrowley@europarl.eu.int
Website: www.briancrowleymep.ie

Kathy Sinnott (Independent)
St. Joseph
Ballinabearna
Ballinhassig
Co. Cork
Tel: (021) 4359582, (087) 2142121
Email: kathysinnott@iol.ie

The Council of the European Union: the voice of the Member States

Functions

The Council of the European Union, formerly known as the Council of Ministers, is the EU's main decision-making body. It represents the Member States and its meetings are attended by one minister from each of the EU's national governments. The Council has six key responsibilities:

1. To pass European laws. In many fields it legislates jointly with the European Parliament. As a rule, the Council only acts on a proposal from the Commission
2. To co-ordinate the broad economic policies of the Member States.
3. To conclude international agreements between the EU and one or more states or international organisations.
4. To approve the EU's budget, jointly with the European Parliament.
5. To develop the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), based on guidelines set by the European Council.
6. To coordinate cooperation between the national courts and police forces in criminal matters.

Most of these responsibilities relate to the "Community" domain - i.e. areas of action where the Member States have decided to pool their sovereignty and delegate decision-making powers to the EU institutions. This domain is referred to as the "first pillar" of the EU (the different policy areas of the EU are also referred to as "pillars" – see box). The last two responsibilities relate largely to areas in which the Member States have not delegated their powers but are simply working together. This is called "intergovernmental co-operation" and it covers the CFSP, the "second pillar", and police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, the "third pillar".

The Three Pillar structure of the EU

The European Union has been described as a temple based on three pillars. The three pillar structure was established by the Maastricht Treaty:

Pillar I	European Community pillar
Pillar II	Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pillar
Pillar III	Co-operation in Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) pillar

Whilst Pillar I uses procedures and instruments set out in the Treaties, Pillars II and III are largely inter-governmental and dominated by the European Council and the Council of the European Union.

The European Community Pillar covers the vast majority of EU responsibilities, including amongst others the internal market, competition, agriculture, structural policies, social policy, education and culture and immigration. The CFSP Pillar encourages the Member States to forge common positions and take joint action on foreign and security affairs. Decisions are kept within the Council, with relatively little direct influence from the European Parliament or Court of Justice. The JHA Pillar aims to increase co-operation in the areas of internal security. Decisions in this area require unanimity in nearly all cases.

The future of the pillar structure is in doubt, with the draft EU Constitution proposing it be abolished.

Structure

Which ministers attend which Council of Ministers meeting depends on what subjects are on the agenda. If, for example, the Council is to discuss environmental issues, the meeting will be attended by the Environment Minister from each EU country and it will be known as the "Environment Council". Altogether there are nine different Council configurations:

- General Affairs and External Relations
- Economic and Financial Affairs ("ECOFIN")
- Justice and Home Affairs
- Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs
- Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry and Research)
- Transport, Telecommunications and Energy
- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Environment
- Education, Youth and Culture

The EU's relations with the rest of the world are dealt with by the "General Affairs and External Relations Council". But this Council configuration also has wider responsibility for general policy issues, so its meetings are attended by whichever Minister or State Secretary each government chooses.

Each minister in the Council is empowered to commit his or her government. In other words, the minister's signature is the signature of the whole government. Moreover, each minister in the Council is answerable to his or her national parliament and to the citizens that parliament represents¹. This ensures the democratic legitimacy of the Council's decisions.

Member State Representation

In Brussels, each EU Member State has a 'permanent representation' that defends its national interests at EU level. The head of each representation is, in effect, his or her country's ambassador to the EU. These "permanent representatives" meet weekly within the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER).

COREPER is responsible for preparing the Council's work and for overseeing and coordinating the work of some 250 committees and working parties made up of civil servants from the Member States who prepare at the technical level the matters to be discussed by COREPER and the Council. COREPER is divided in two parts:

1. COREPER I: Made up of the Deputy Permanent Representatives, it prepares the meetings of the following Council formations: Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumers; Competitiveness; Transport, Telecommunications & Energy; Agriculture (Food Safety) & Fisheries; Environment; Education, Youth and Culture.
2. COREPER II: Made up of the Permanent Representatives, it prepares the meetings of the General Affairs & External Relations, Economic Affairs & Finance and Justice & Home Affairs Councils;

The COREPER I and II are, in turn, prepared respectively by the "Mertens Group" and the "Antici Group", composed of the Deputy Permanent Representatives and assistants to the Permanent Representatives.

¹ In Ireland, the European Union (Scrutiny) Act 2002 requires Ministers and the Joint Committee on European Affairs to respect certain reporting obligations to each House of the Oireachtas and to have regard to recommendations made by either or both Houses or by one of their committees.

Ireland's Permanent Representation (PermRep)

The Irish Permanent Representation represents Ireland's interests in the EU. While the Department of Foreign Affairs is the lead department, the Representation is staffed by civil servants drawn from a wide range of government departments who negotiate in the Council on behalf of Ireland. The Irish Representation works closely with the PermReps of the other Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament and maintains a watching brief on the EU's advisory bodies. It also maintains contact with other bodies that may be interested in, or affected by the EU, including Irish businesses, their employees, lobbyists, consultants, academics and the media.

Ireland's Permanent Representative (Ambassador to the EU) is Mr Bobby McDonagh. The Deputy Permanent Representative is Mr Kenneth Thompson.

The Council Presidency

Under current arrangement the Presidency of the Council rotates every six months. In other words, each EU country in turn takes charge of the Council agenda and chairs all the meetings for a six-month period, promoting legislative and political decisions and brokering compromises between the Member States.

In the first half of 2006, Austria holds the Presidency of the EU. Austria will be followed by Finland on 1 July 2006, then Germany and Portugal. Slovenia will take over the Presidency in the first half of 2008 as the first of the new Member States which joined the EU on 1 May 2004. Beyond this the following schedule will apply:

1 July - 31 December 2008	French Presidency of the EU
01 January - 30 June 2009	Czech Presidency of the EU
1 July - 31 December 2009	Swedish Presidency of the EU
01 January - 30 June 2010	Spanish Presidency of the EU
1 July - 31 December 2010	Belgian Presidency of the EU
01 January - 30 June 2011	Hungarian Presidency of the EU
1 July - 31 December 2011	Polish Presidency of the EU
01 January - 30 June 2012	Danish Presidency of the EU
1 July - 31 December 2012	Cypriot Presidency of the EU
01 January - 30 June 2013	Irish Presidency of the EU

The Presidency is assisted by the General Secretariat, which prepares and ensures the smooth functioning of the Council's work at all levels. In 1999, Mr Javier Solana was appointed Secretary-General of the Council. He is also High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and in this capacity he helps the Council to draft and implement political decisions. He also engages in political dialogue, on the Council's behalf, with non-EU countries.

Contact:	Council of the European Union Rue de la Loi, 175 B-1048 Brussels Tel: +32 (0)2 285 61 11 E-mail: public.info@consilium.eu.int Web: http://www.consilium.eu.int	Ireland's Permanent Rep. to the EU 89/93 Rue Froissart B-1040 Brussels Tel: + 32 2 230-8580 E-mail: irlprb@iveagh.irlgov.ie
----------	---	--

The European Court of Justice: upholding EU law

Functions

When common rules are decided in the EU, it is of course vital that they are also followed in practice, and that they are universally understood in the same way. This is the responsibility of the Court of Justice of the European Communities. If national courts are in doubt about how to apply EU rules they ask the Court of Justice. Individuals can also bring proceedings against EU institutions before the Court.

Structure

The Court, which is located in Luxembourg, is composed of one independent judge from each Member State, so that all the EU's national legal systems are represented. Since enlargement of the EU to 25 Member States, for the sake of efficiency the Court can now sit as a "Grand Chamber" of just 13 judges instead of always having to meet in a plenary session attended by all the judges.

Ireland's Current Member

Mr Aindrias Ó Caoimh is Ireland's member of the Court of Justice since 13 October 2004. Mr Ó Caoimh was a High Court judge from 1999 to 2004 and a Bencher of the Honourable Society of King's Inns since 1999. He is the son of Judge Andreas O'Keeffe (Aindrias Ó Caoimh), member of the Court of Justice 1974-85.

The Court is assisted by eight "advocates-general". Their role is to present reasoned opinions on the cases brought before the Court. They must do so publicly and impartially. The judges and advocates-general are either former members of the highest national courts or highly competent lawyers who can be relied on to show impartiality. They are appointed by joint agreement of the governments of the Member States. Each is appointed for a term of six years, after which they may be reappointed for one or two further periods of three years.

Working Method

A specific judge and advocate-general are assigned to each case that is brought before the Court. The procedure that follows is in two stages: first a written and then an oral phase. At the first stage, all the parties involved submit written statements and the judge assigned to the case draws up a report summarising these statements and the legal background to the case. From this report, the advocate-general assigned to the case draws his or her conclusions. In the light of these conclusions, the judge draws up a draft ruling which is submitted to the other members of the Court for examination.

The second stage is the public hearing. In principle, this takes place before the whole Court (in "plenary session"), but hearings can also take place before chambers of three or five judges, depending on the importance or complexity of the case. At the hearing, the parties' lawyers put their case before the judges and the advocate-general, who can question them. The advocate-general then gives his or her conclusions, after which the judges deliberate and deliver their judgment. Judgments of the Court are decided by a majority and pronounced at a public hearing. Dissenting opinions are not expressed.

The Court of First Instance

To help the Court of Justice cope with the thousands of cases brought before it, and to offer citizens better legal protection, a "Court of First Instance" was created in 1989. This Court (which is attached to the Court of Justice) is responsible for giving rulings on certain kinds of cases, particularly actions brought by private individuals and cases relating to unfair competition between businesses. The Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance each have a President, chosen by their fellow-judges to serve for a term of three years.

Contact:	European Court of Justice L-2925 Luxembourg Tel. +352 43031 E-mail: info@curia.eu.int Website: http://www.curia.eu.int
----------	---

European Court of Auditors: ensuring value for money

Functions

The funds available to the EU must be used legally, economically and for the intended purpose. The Court of Auditors, an independent EU institution located in Luxembourg, is the body responsible for ensuring that this is the case. The role of the European Court of Auditors is to audit independently the collection and spending of EU funds and, through this, assess the way that the European institutions discharge these functions.

The Court examines whether financial operations have been properly recorded, legally and regularly executed and managed so as to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In undertaking its work, the Court aims to contribute to improving the financial management of EU funds at all levels, so as to ensure maximum value for money for the citizens of the Union.

Structure

The Court has one member from each EU country, appointed by the Council for a renewable term of six years. After enlargement there will still be one member per EU country but, for the sake of efficiency, the Court will be able to set up "chambers" (with only a few members each) to adopt certain types of report or opinion. The members elect one of their number as President for a term of three years.

Ireland's Current Member

Ireland's current serving member of the European Court of Auditors is Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. Ms Quinn has been a member since March 2000 and is responsible for auditing the EU's animal and plant products, other EAGGF expenditure and agricultural measures. She is a member of the ADAR Group (Audit and training methodology, Quality assurance, Coordination of the procedure for drawing up reports, Other professional assistance services, Relations with OLAF²) of the court. Ms Geoghegan-Quinn is currently the Member responsible for the ADAR sector of the Court and is the most senior member of the CEAD (Coordination, Evaluation, Assurance and Development) Group. Ms Geoghegan-Quinn was a member of Dail Eireann from 1975 until 1997.

Working Method

The Court of Auditors works independently, and is free to decide how to schedule its auditing activities, how and when to present its observations, and what publicity to give to its reports and opinions. It has approximately 550 qualified staff, of which about 250 are auditors. The auditors are divided into "audit groups", which prepare draft reports on which the Court takes decisions. The auditors frequently go on tours of inspection to the other EU institutions, the Member States and any country that receives aid from the EU. Indeed, although the Court's work largely concerns money for which the Commission is responsible, in

² OLAF - the European Anti-Fraud Office was established to fight fraud, corruption and any other irregular activity, including misconduct within the European Institutions. (Internal cases make up around 10% of all the cases OLAF investigates). It has special status to ensure its independence and is prohibited from seeking or accepting instructions from any government or institution, including the Commission itself, and can bring an action in the European Court of Justice if this independence appears to be at risk. OLAF investigates several hundred cases each year where the EU is being cheated out of revenue or its funds have been misused. OLAF cannot bring cases to court in the member states, but when an investigation suggests that prosecution is justified, OLAF sends the file to the relevant national authority. For more information on OLAF: [www: http://europa.eu.int/comm/anti_fraud/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/anti_fraud/)

practice 90% of this income and expenditure is managed by the national authorities.

The Court of Auditors informs the citizens of Europe, the EU institutions and the Member States of its work, and the results produced through the publication of reports. These include:

1. An annual report concerning the implementation of the EU budget for each financial year;
2. A “statement of assurance” on the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions for each financial year;
3. Specific annual reports concerning certain Community bodies;
4. Special reports on subjects of particular interest (e.g. the financial impact of the reform of the CAP).

The Court of Auditors must also be consulted for its opinion prior to the adoption of certain Community regulations of a financial nature and the other Community institutions may also ask the Court for an opinion. The Court itself has no legal powers. If auditors discover fraud or irregularities they pass the information as quickly as possible to the EU bodies responsible, so they can take the appropriate action.

Contact: European Court of Auditors
External Relations Department
12, rue Alcide De Gasperi
L - 1615 Luxembourg
Tel. : +352/4398-45410
E-mail: euraud@eca.eu.int
Website: <http://www.eca.eu.int>

Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn
The European Court of Auditors
12, rue Alcide De Gasperi
L - 1615 Luxembourg
Tel. +352 43 98 45370
E-mail: maire.geogheganquinn@eca.eu.int

Other Bodies

The European Council: strategic direction

Functions

The European Council gathers together the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the EU and the President of the Commission. It came into being in 1974 and was given formal status by the Single European Act in 1986. Its members are assisted by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and by a Member of the Commission.

The European Council provides the impetus for the major political issues relating to European integration, amendments to the Treaties and changes to the institutions, and declarations on external relations in the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. It also serves as a forum for top-level political discussion in crisis situations and endeavors to resolve disagreements between Member States where they arise. Following negotiations between the Member States, the European Council, on a consensus basis, can issue:

- Guidelines: setting out the European Council's priorities relating to management of the Union and its common policies to the Council of Ministers and the European Commission. These sometimes take the form of general policy guidelines and determine the timescale and specific objectives;
- Declarations or Resolutions: which express the views of the Heads of State or Governments on a specific point.

The primary function of the European Council is to give the general impetus and political guidance in all areas of EU activities at both European and national levels. But its guidelines and declarations are not legally binding. To be put into effect, they must follow the routine procedure for Community legal instruments: proposals from the European Commission voted on by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, followed where necessary by implementation at national level.

Working Method

The European Council meets at least once every six months under the chairmanship of the Head of State or Government of the Member State which holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU. In practice however, the European Council meets at least four times a year, and special European Councils are also organised as circumstances demand. Since 2000, in accordance with the Lisbon strategy, the March or Spring Council addresses economic, social and environmental issues. Presidency conclusions are published after each meeting.

The role played by the European Council is crucial but differs from that of the Council of the EU, whose members are Ministers from the Member States. The Council of the EU exercises the powers conferred on it by the Treaty subject to review by the European Court of Justice, and it adopts Community legal instruments.

The Committee of the Regions: the local perspective

Functions

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) was established in 1994 as an advisory body to give local and regional authorities a voice at the heart of the EU. It is therefore one of the EU's youngest bodies.

The setting up of the CoR was a means of addressing two key issues. Firstly, about three quarters of EU legislation is implemented at local or regional level, so it makes sense for local and regional representatives to have a say in the development of new EU laws. Secondly, there were concerns that the public was being left behind as the EU went forward. Involving the elected levels of government closest to the citizens was seen as one way of closing the gap.

The Treaties oblige the Commission and Council to consult the CoR whenever new proposals are made in areas which have repercussions at regional or local level. The Maastricht Treaty set out 5 such areas - economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture. The Amsterdam Treaty added another five areas to the list - employment policy, social policy, the environment, vocational training and transport - which now covers much of the scope of the EU's activity.

Outside these areas, the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament have the option of consulting the CoR on issues which may have important regional or local implications. The CoR can also draw up an opinion on its own initiative, which enables it to put issues on the EU agenda.

Structure

As a consultative body a key aim of the CoR is to defend the principle of subsidiarity and one of its strengths is that its membership is composed of 317 representatives (limited to 350 under the Nice Treaty) from all levels of local and regional government and from all Member States. The 317 members of the CoR are officially appointed by the Council of the European Union for a four-year term. An equal number of alternate members are also appointed. Members and alternates of the CoR must hold an electoral mandate at regional or local level or be answerable to a local or regional assembly. The detailed work of the CoR is carried out by 6 sectoral committees (known as "commissions"), which report back to the CoR's plenary sessions.

The current president of the CoR is Mr Peter Straub, president of the Baden-Württemberg Parliament (Germany). Mr Straub was elected President of the CoR on 11 February 2004 for a period of two years.

Ireland's Representation in the CoR

Ireland currently has nine full members and nine alternate members on the CoR (see below). These members are nominated by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The composition of the Irish Delegation is generally on the basis of political, geographical and gender balance. All Irish members are directly elected local politicians and members of local authorities. In their role as CoR members, they represent their respective regions and are obliged to regularly brief their Regional Authority on developments within the CoR. All full members are automatically members of their Regional Authority.

Within the CoR each Irish member is a member of at least two commissions and must also attend the five plenary sessions that are held every year in Brussels. In the commissions, Irish members may undertake the drafting of CoR opinions, make contributions to various debates and submit amendments to documents. Alternate members replace full members when they are unable to attend meetings. While the range of

functions of local government in Ireland is relatively restricted in comparison to other Member States, EU legislation, policies and programmes continue to play an increasingly important role in the work of local and regional authorities. Irish members therefore represent the interests of Ireland and its local and regional authorities in the EU's decision-making process.

Contact: Irish Secretariat:
John Crowley
Irish CoR Delegation
11, Parnell Square
Dublin 1
Tel: 01-8782773
E-mail: jcrowley@cor.ie
Web: <http://www.dra.ie/cor>

or

Robert Collins
Irish Regions Office
Rond-Point Schuman, 6
B-1040 Brussels
Tel: +32 2 282 8474
E-mail: robert.collins@iro.ie
Web: <http://www.iro.ie>

Brussels:
Committee of the Regions
Rue Montoyer, 92 - 102
B - 1000 Brussels
Tel. +32 2 282 2211
Web: <http://www.cor.eu.int>

Irish Members of the CoR (2006-2010)

Cllr Cathal Crowe (Mid-West Regional Authority)
"Heathmount"
Knockroe
Meelick
Co Clare
Tel: +353 (0)87 136 8882
E-mail: cathalcrowe@yahoo.ie

Cllr Maria Corrigan (Dublin Regional Authority)
22 Orby Drive
The Gallops
Leopardstown
Dublin 18
Tel: +353 (0)86 6078139
E-mail: mcorrigan@cllr.drlrcoco.ie

Cllr Michael Fitzgerald (Sth East Regional Authority)
Rathclogheen House
Golden
Co Tipperary
Tel: +353 62 72136
E-mail: cllrmfitzgerald@southtippcoco.ie

Alternate Members

Cllr Terry Brennan (Louth County Council)
Ghan Road
Carlingford
Co Louth
Tel: +353 (0)42 9332211
Fax: +353 (0)42 9370769

Cllr Veronica Cawley (Sligo County Council)
St Martin
Rathbraughan
Line
Co Sligo
Tel: +353 87 6494723
E-mail: cawley.veronica@itsligo.ie

Cllr Peter Coyle (Fingal County Council)
8 Burrow Court
Portmarnock
Co Dublin
Tel: +353 (0)87 283 7160
E-mail: peter.coyle@fingalcoco.ie

Irish Members of the CoR (2006-2010) (contd.)

Cllr Constance Hanniffy (Midland Regional Authority)
Doon
Ballinahoun
Co Westmeath
Tel: +353 (0)90 6430106
E-mail: connieh@iol.ie

Cllr Denis Landy (South-East Regional Authority)
Mainstown
Carrick-on-Suir
Co Tipperary
Tel: +353 (0)51 641641
E-mail: Cllrdenis.landy@southtippcoco.ie

Cllr Declan McDonnell (West Regional Authority)
4 Tara Grove, Wellpark
Galway
Tel: +353 (0)91 753770
E-mail: declanpmcdonnell@eircom.net

Cllr Patrick McGowan (Border Regional Authority)
Mayfield
Killygordon
Co Donegal
Tel: +353 (0)87 6868438
E-mail: patrickmcgowan@eircom.net

Cllr Seamus Murray (Mid-East Regional Authority)
Cullentra
Longwood
Co Meath
Tel: +353 (0)46 9555189
E-mail: smurray@members.meathcoco.ie

Cllr Paul O'Donoghue (South-West Regional Authority)
Castlequin
Caherciveen
Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (0)66 9761186

Alternate Members (contd.)

Cllr Pat Doran (Wicklow County Council)
Tomacork
Carnew
Co Wicklow
Tel: +353 (0)55 26249

Cllr Michelle Mulherin (Mayo County Council)
47 Moy Heights
Ballina
Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (0)96 71935
E-mail: Cllr.michelle@oceanfree.net

Cllr John Pender (Carlow County Council)
Grangeview, Friarstown
Co Carlow
Tel: +353 (0)59 9163760
E-mail: johnpender@oceanfree.net

Cllr Noreen Ryan (Limerick County Council)
Lacka
Castleconnell
Co Limerick
Tel: +353 (0)61 377308
E-mail: noreenryan@limerickcoco.ie

Cllr Mary Shields (Cork City Council)
48 Halldene Avenue
Bishopstown
Cork
Tel: +353 (0)21 4544486
E-mail: mshields@corkcity.ie

Cllr Barney Steele (Longford County Council)
Moigh
Ballymahon
Co Longford
Tel: +353 (0)90 6432407
E-mail: bsteele@longfordcoco.ie

The European Economic and Social Committee: Involving the social partners

Function

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a non-political body that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups, and others, a formal platform to express their points of views on EU issues. Its opinions are forwarded to the larger institutions - the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process.

The EESC was set up under the 1957 Rome Treaty in order to involve economic and social interest groups in the establishment of the common market and to provide institutional machinery for briefing the European Commission and the Council of Ministers on relevant issues. The EESC's role has since been reinforced by the Single European Act (1986), the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and the Treaty of Nice (2000).

Structure

The 317 members of the EESC are drawn from economic and social interest groups in Europe. Members are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a renewable 4-year term of office. They belong to one of three groups: Employers, Employees, and Various Interests. Membership of the EESC mirrors that of the CoR: Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom have 24 members each, Spain and Poland have 21, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, Czech Republic and Hungary have 12, Denmark, Ireland, Finland Lithuania and Slovakia 9, Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia 7, Luxemburg and Cyprus 6, and Malta 5.

The EESC and the CoR have a cooperation agreement, which means that both committees share a number of administrative staff and services in what is known as the "Joint Services Structure". Since June 2004 both bodies also share the same building in Brussels.

Contact:	European Economic and Social Committee Rue Ravenstein 2 1000 Brussels Belgium Tel: +32 (0) 2 546 90 11 Website: http://www.esc.eu.int	President: Ms Anne-Marie Sigmund (A)
-----------------	--	--------------------------------------

Irish Members of the EESC

Frank Allen
Former President ICMSA Family Farm Organisation
Knocklong, Co Limerick
Tel: 353-87-2449420
E-mail: allenfrank@eircom.net

William A Attley
Joint General President S.I.P.T.U.
41 Beechwood Lawns
Rathcoole, Co Dublin
Tel: 353-1-4589773
E-mail: wattley@eircom.net

Harry Byrne
Chairman
Guinness Pension Scheme Trustees
17 Park Drive
Ranelagh, Dublin 6
Tel: 353-1-4971575
E-mail: hib@eircom.net

Joan Carmichael
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
31-32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
Tel: 353-1-8897777
E-mail: joan.carmichael@ictu.ie

Clare Carroll
Consultant on Employment Affairs
Avoca,
Co Wicklow
Tel: 353-402-35001
E-mail: cacarroll@eircom.net

John Donnelly
Former President of the Irish Farmers' Association
Loughrea, Co Galway
Tel: 353-90 9745226
E-mail: donnellyjohn@eircom.net

Jim McClusky
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
4, Taunton Avenue
Belfast BT15 4AD
Tel: 44-289-0371063
E-mail: jbmccusker@aol.com

Thomas McDonogh
Chairman
Irish branch of the International Chamber of Commerce
Thomas McDonogh & Sons Ltd
Dock Road, Galway
Tel: 353-91-560700
E-mail: thomasmcdonogh@mcdonogh.ie

Jillian Van Turnhout
Former President of National Youth Council of Ireland
Isiltir
Slatecabin Lane
Dublin 18
Tel: 353-1-2069981
E-mail: jillianvanturnhout@oegroup.com

The European Central Bank: price stability for Europe

Function

The European Central Bank (ECB) is responsible for managing the single currency, the euro, and for overseeing European monetary policy - deciding, for example, how high or low interest rates should be. Established in 1998, it is one of the world's youngest central banks. However, it has inherited the credibility and expertise of the 12 euro area national central banks, which together with the ECB implement the stability-oriented monetary policy for the euro area. The Bank's main objective is to ensure price stability, so that the European economy will not be damaged by inflation. However, the monetary policy also supports other political objectives decided by the EU.

Structure

The European Central Bank is based in Frankfurt, Germany. It is managed by a President and an Executive Board, who work in close cooperation with the national central banks of the EU. The highest decision-making body of the ECB is the Governing Council, which consists of the six members of the Executive Board and the 12 governors of the national central banks of the euro area. Ireland's representative on the Governing Council is Mr John Hurley, Governor of the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland. The President of the ECB chairs both the Governing Council and the Executive Board.

The key task of the Governing Council is to formulate monetary policy for the euro area. Specifically, it has the power to determine the interest rates at which commercial banks may obtain liquidity (money) from their central bank. Thus the Governing Council indirectly influences interest rates throughout the euro area economy, including the rates that commercial banks charge their customers for loans and those that savers earn on their deposits.

Contact:	European Central Bank Postfach 16 03 19 D-60066 Frankfurt am Main Germany Tel. +49 69 1344 0 E-mail: info@ecb.int Website: http://www.ecb.int	President: Jean-Claude Trichet (France)
----------	--	---

The European Investment Bank: the EU's financing institution

Function

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the financing institution of the European Union. The EIB's mission is to further the objectives of the European Union by providing long-term finance for specific capital projects in keeping with strict banking practice.

The EIB lends money for investment projects of European interest, in particular projects that benefit less well-off regions. It finances, for example, rail links, motorways, airports, environmental schemes, and (via partner banks) investment by small businesses (SMEs) that help to create jobs and growth. EIB loans also support the Union's enlargement process and its development aid policy.

The EIB is currently assisting in the implementation of the European Union's new "Growth Initiative". This involves supporting a list of priority projects in areas such as transport and telecommunications, which were prepared by the European Commission and the EIB, and which are aimed at accelerating the integration of the internal market and boosting economic growth in the enlarged Europe.

Structure

The members of the EIB are the Member States of the European Union, who have all subscribed to the Bank's capital. The EIB enjoys its own legal personality and financial autonomy within the EU. The Bank is based in Luxembourg and raises its funds on the capital markets. As a non-profit organisation it is able to lend on favourable terms.

Irish Representation

Mr Noel Thomas O'Gorman is the current Irish member of the board of directors of the European Investment Bank (EIB). Mr O'Gorman is Second Secretary General in the Banking, Finance & International Division of the Department of Finance.

Contact:	European Investment Bank 100 boulevard Konrad Adenauer L-2950 Luxembourg Fax: +352 43 79 31 22 E-mail: infopol@eib.org Website: http://www.eib.org	President: Philippe Maystadt (Belgium)
----------	---	--

The European Ombudsman

The European Ombudsman was established by the Maastricht Treaty to deal with complaints regarding maladministration by the institutions and bodies of the European Community. The Ombudsman operates completely independently and impartially. He does not request or accept instructions from any government or organisation and during his term of office, he may not exercise any other professional activity, either paid or unpaid.

Citizens of a Member State of the European Union or those living in a Member State, businesses, associations or other bodies with a registered office in the Union can make a complaint to the Ombudsman. It is not necessary to show that you are directly concerned by the alleged maladministration to lodge a complaint. The European Ombudsman examines complaints against the Community institutions and bodies. He cannot investigate complaints against national, regional or local authorities, even when the complaints are about Community law.

When the Ombudsman tells the relevant institution about a complaint he has received, it can take steps to resolve the problem. This is called "*settled by the institution*". If maladministration is found and the case is not settled during the inquiry, the Ombudsman tries to find a "*friendly solution*". If this fails, he can make a draft recommendation to the institution, calling on it to take the necessary steps to put the maladministration right. If the institution does not accept his recommendation, he can make a special report to the European Parliament. If a friendly solution is not possible and the maladministration cannot be put right, the Ombudsman can address a "*critical remark*" to the institution.

The Ombudsman aims to acknowledge the receipt of complaints within one week, decide whether to open an inquiry within one month, and to close inquiries within one year. Complainants can write to the Ombudsman in any of the 12 (11 working plus Irish) Treaty languages of the Union, setting out clearly who they are, which institution or body of the European Community they are complaining about and the grounds for the complaint. Complaints can be lodged by mail, fax or e-mail. Complaint forms can also be downloaded from the Ombudsman's website.

Contact:	P. Nikiforos Diamandouros The European Ombudsman 1, avenue du Président Robert Schuman BP 403 F-67001 Strasbourg Cedex France Tel. (33) 388 17 23 13 Fax (33) 388 17 90 62 E-mail: euro-ombudsman@europarl.eu.int Web: http://www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int
----------	---

EU Agencies

Community agencies are bodies governed by European public law. They are distinct from the Community Institutions (Council, Parliament, Commission, etc.) and have their own legal personality. They are set up by an act of secondary legislation in order to accomplish very specific technical, scientific or managerial tasks, which are specified in the relevant Community act.

The following bodies meet the definition of Community agency, even though differing terms are used to designate them (Centre, Foundation, Agency, Office, Observatory):

Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO)

PO Box 2141
F - 49021 Angers Cédex 02, France
(33) 2-41-25-64-00 Fax (33) 2-41-25-64-10
E-mail: cpvo@cpvo.eu.int
Website: <http://www.cpvo.eu.int>

EUROJUST

Maanweg 174
N - 2516 AB The Hague, Netherlands
(3170) 412-5000 (Fax) (3170) 412-5555
E-mail: info@eurojust.eu.int
Website: <http://eurojust.eu.int>

European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR)

Egnatia 4
Thessaloniki 54626, Greece
(30) 31 505 100 Fax (30) 31 505 172
E-mail: info@ear.eu.int
Website: <http://www.ear.eu.int>

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA)

Gran Via 33
E - 48009 Bilbao, Spain
(34) 94-479-43-60 Fax (34) 94-479-43-83
E-mail: information@osha.eu.int
Website: <http://www.osha.eu.int>

European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA)

7 Westferry Circus
Canary Wharf
London E14 4HB, United Kingdom
(44 20) 7418-8400 Fax (44 20) 7418-8416
E-mail: mail@emea.eu.int
Website: <http://www.emea.eu.int>

European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)

rue de Genève 12
B-1140 Brussels – Evere, Belgium
Postal address:
G-12 03/54
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium
Fax (322) 298-6649
E-mail: tren-aprights@cec.eu.int
Website: <http://www.easa.eu.int>

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

Europe 123
GR-57001 Thessaloniki (Pylea),
Postal address:
PO Box 22427 – Thessaloniki
GR-55102 Thessaloniki, Greece
E-mail: info@cedefop.eu.int
Website: <http://www.cedefop.eu.int>

European Environment Agency (EEA)

Kongens Nytorv 6
D-1050 Copenhagen, Denmark
(45 33) 367 100 Fax (45 33) 367 199
E-mail: eea@eea.eu.int
Website: <http://www.eea.eu.int/>

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

Largo N. Palli 5/A
I-43100 Parma
Italy
E-mail: info@efsa.eu.int
Website: <http://www.efsa.eu.int>

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (E.FOUND)

Wyattville Road
County Dublin, Ireland
(353 1) 2043100 Fax (353 1) 2826456; (353 1) 2824209
E-mail: postmaster@eurofound.eu.int
Website: <http://www.eurofound.eu.int>

European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA)

rue de Genève 12
B-1140 Brussels – Evere, Belgium
E-mail: tren-emsas-info@cec.eu.int
Website: <http://www.emsa.eu.int>

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)

Rua da Cruz de Santa Apolónia 23-25
PT-1149-045 Lisbon, Portugal
(351) 21-811-3000 Fax (351) 21-813-1711
E-mail: info@emcdda.org
Website: <http://www.emcdda.org>

European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)

Rahlgasse 3
A-1060 Vienna, Austria
(43-1) 580 30-0 Fax (43-1) 580 30-99
E-mail: office@eumc.eu.int
Website: <http://www.eumc.eu.int>

European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA)

Permanent location: Greece
Temporary contact information:
European Commission
Office: BU33 02/56
Information Society Directorate General/A
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium
(322) 296-8111 or (322) 296-3344 Fax (322) 296-8363
E-mail: ENISA-info@cec.eu.int
Website: <http://www.enisa.eu.int>

European Police Office (EUROPOL)

Raamweg 47
The Hague,
Postal address:
P. O. Box 90850
NL-2509 LW The Hague, Netherlands
(31 70) 302-5302 Fax (31 70) 345-5896
E-mail: info@europol.eu.int
Website: <http://www.europol.eu.int>

European Training Foundation (ETF)

Villa Gualino
viale Settimio Severo 65
I-10133 Turin, Italy
(39 11) 630-2222 Fax (39 11) 630-2200
E-mail: info@etf.eu.int
Website: <http://www.etf.eu.int>

Food and Veterinary Office (FVO)

Grange
Dunsany, County Meath, Ireland
(353-46) 617 00 Fax (353-46) 618 79
E-mail: Sanco-Fvo-Helpdesk@cec.eu.int
Website:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/index_en.html

Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market (OHIM)

Avenida de Europa, 4
Apartado de Correos 77
E-03080 Alicante, Spain
(34) 965-139-100 Fax (34) 965-139-173
E-mail: information@oami.eu.int
Website: <http://oami.eu.int>

Statistical Office (EUROSTAT)

Information/Public Relations
Bâtiment Jean Monnet
Rue Alcide De Gasperi
L-2920 Luxembourg
(352) 4301-32384 Fax (352) 4301-33509/32649/32594
E-mail: eurostat-infodesk@cec.eu.int
Website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/>

Translation Centre for Bodies in the European Union (CDT)

Bâtiment Nouvel Hémicycle
1 rue du Fort Thüngen
Kirchberg
L-1499 Luxembourg
(352) 42 -17-11-1 Fax (352) 42-17-11-220
E-mail: cdt@cdt.eu.int
Website: <http://www.cdt.eu.int>

The Decision Making Process

The Decision Making Process

What sets the EU apart from more traditional international organisations is its unique institutional structure. In accepting the European Treaties, Member States relinquish a measure of sovereignty to independent institutions representing national and shared interests. The institutions complement one another in what is known as the “Community Method”, with each having a specific role to play in the decision-making process.

There are different means of making decisions, which arise as a result of the competence conferred by the Treaties on different institutions of the EU. The key institutions in such decisions are the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. However, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions also have a role to play in making decisions, as do the Court of Auditors and European Central Bank.

In general, the Commission is responsible for initiating proposals, although this may be on the recommendation of one of the other institutions. Once a proposal is prepared by one of the Commission’s Directorates General, the Secretary-General will put it on the agenda for a forthcoming Commission meeting.

At the Commission meeting, the relevant Commissioner will explain to his or her colleagues why this legislation is being proposed, and it will then be discussed. If there is agreement, the College will “adopt” the proposal. If there is disagreement among the commissioners, the President will ask them to vote on it. If 13 or more (out of 25) are in favour, the proposal will be adopted. Thereafter it will have the unconditional support of all the Commission.

Once adopted the proposal is sent to the European Parliament and the Council for their views and for a decision on whether or not it should be enacted into legislation. Where appropriate, it will also be sent to the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee for their opinion. A proposal is not adopted in law until it has the approval of the Council and also, in most cases, the Parliament.

Decision Making Procedures

The main decision making procedures employed by the Council and Parliament are as follows:

1. Consultation

Under the consultation procedure, the Commission sends its proposal to both the Council and Parliament but it is the Council that officially consults Parliament and other bodies such as the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. In some cases, consultation is compulsory because the legal basis requires it and the proposal cannot become law unless Parliament has given its opinion. In other cases consultation is optional and the Commission will simply suggest that the Council consults Parliament.

In all cases, Parliament can:

- Approve the Commission proposal;
- Reject it;
- Or ask for amendments.

If Parliament asks for amendments, the Commission will consider all the changes Parliament suggests. If it accepts any of these suggestions it will send the Council an amended proposal. The Council examines the

amended proposal and either adopts it as it is or amends it further. In this procedure, as in all others, if the Council amends a Commission proposal it must do so unanimously. The areas covered by the consultation procedure are:

- Police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters
- Revision of the Treaties
- Discrimination on grounds of sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or political conviction, disability, age or sexual orientation
- EU citizenship
- Agriculture
- Visas, asylum, immigration and other policies associated with the free movement of persons
- Transport (where it is likely to have a significant impact on certain regions)
- Competition rules
- Tax arrangements
- Economic policy

2. Assent

The assent procedure means that the Council has to obtain the European Parliament's assent before certain very important decisions are taken. The procedure is the same as in the case of consultation, except that Parliament cannot amend a proposal: it must either accept or reject it. Acceptance ("assent") requires an absolute majority of the vote cast. The areas covered by the assent procedure are:

- specific tasks of the European Central Bank;
- amending the statutes of the European System of Central Banks/ European Central Bank;
- the Structural Funds and Cohesion Funds;
- the uniform electoral procedure for the European Parliament;
- certain international agreements;
- the accession of new member states.

3. Cooperation

The Single European Act introduced the cooperation procedure, which allows Parliament two readings of Commission proposals, thus giving it more influence over the passage of legislation. The introduction of the cooperation procedure was a major development in the power of the Parliament. However, in recent years, it has been overtaken by the use of the co-decision procedure.

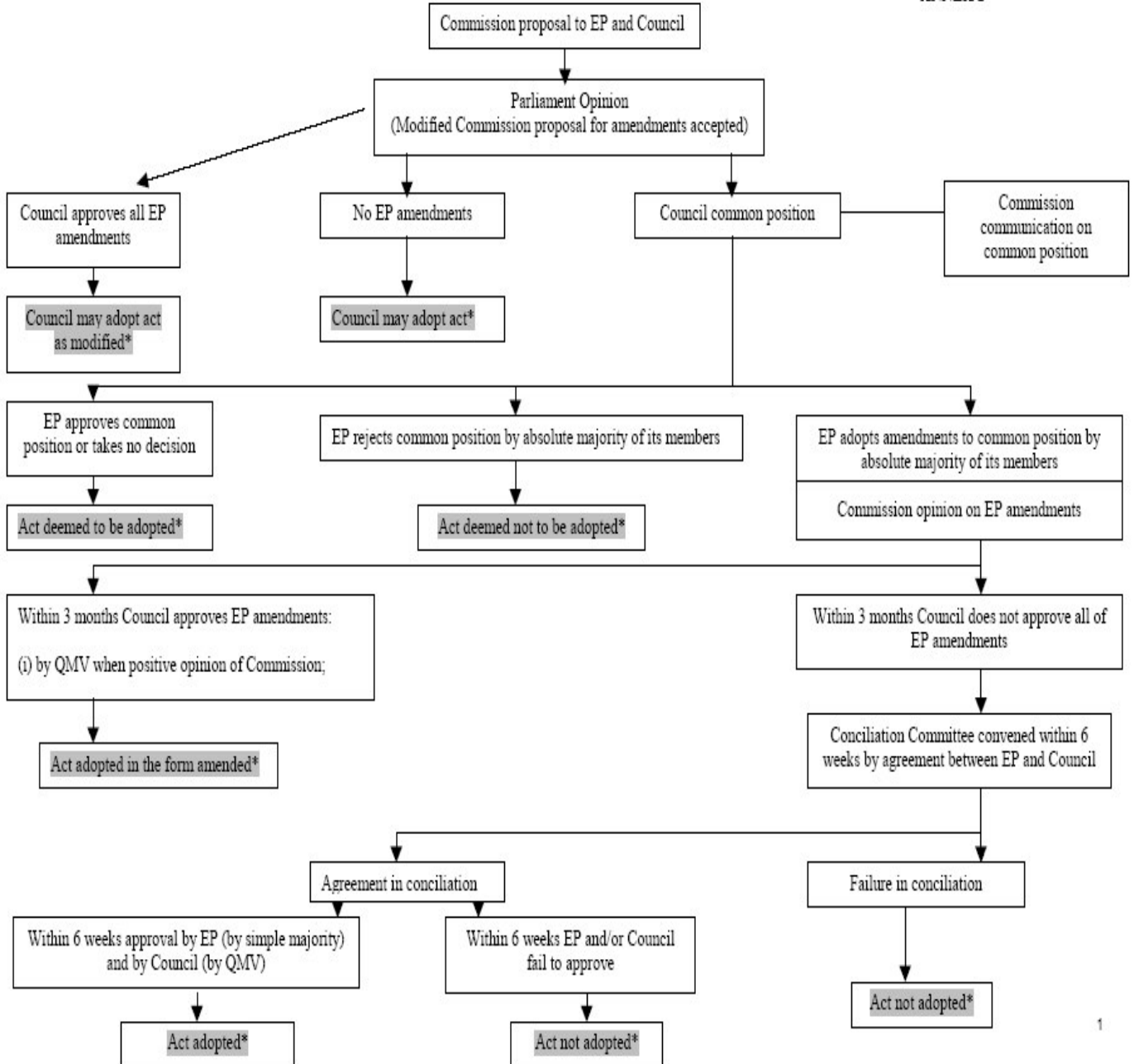
4. Co-Decision

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 introduced the concept of co-decision, which means that Parliament now has the power to adopt instruments jointly with the Council. Under the Treaty of Amsterdam, the co-decision procedure was extended to place the Council and the Parliament on an equal footing. The Nice Treaty extended the use of the co-decision procedure to the adoption of most legislation.

Where the co-decision rule applies, proposals are initially sent to the Parliament for a first reading (*see chart*). At this stage Parliament can approve, amend or reject the proposal. If Parliament rejects the proposal the procedure lapses at the first reading. If the proposal is approved, with or without amendments, it is then considered by the Council. If the Council does not agree with the legislative text as adopted by the Parliament at its first reading then it establishes a common position. The Parliament then has three months to approve, amend or reject the Council's common position at its second reading.

REVISED CO-DECISION PROCEDURE
* end of procedure

ANNEX 2



If approved, or if the Parliament fails to make a decision within the three months, the proposal is adopted. If the common position is rejected the procedure lapses. If the Parliament amends the common position, the Council has to decide whether or not to approve all the Parliament's amendments. If the Council approves all the amendments, the act is adopted.

In cases where the Council is unable to approve all Parliaments' amendments, the co-decision procedure provides for the convening of the Conciliation Committee. The Conciliation Committee, which draws its membership from both institutions, attempts to reconcile the differences between the two institutions.

If agreement is reached between the Parliament and Council delegations in the Conciliation Committee, the co-chairs submit the joint text to the full Parliament and Council. Both bodies must then vote on the text as it stands without any possibility of amending it. If on the other hand the Conciliation Committee does not reach an agreement or if the Parliament or the Council does not approve the 'joint text', the proposal is deemed not to have been adopted.

The areas covered by the co-decision procedure are:

- non-discrimination on the basis of nationality
- the right to move and reside
- the free movement of workers
- social security for migrant workers
- the right of establishment
- transport
- the internal market
- employment
- customs co-operation
- the fight against social exclusion
- equal opportunities and equal treatment
- implementing decisions regarding the ESF
- education
- vocational training
- culture
- health
- consumer protection
- trans-European networks
- implementing decisions regarding the ERDF
- research
- the environment
- transparency
- preventing and combating fraud
- statistics
- setting up a data protection advisory body

Voting in the Council of the European Union

Decisions made by the Council can be taken by simple majority, by qualified majority, or by unanimity.

1. Qualified Majority Voting

In the Council the most commonly used method of voting is Qualified Majority Voting (QMV). This is where each Member State is allocated a certain number of votes roughly depending on their population size. The number of votes per Member State is set out in the Treaties. A threshold is also set for the number of votes needed for agreement.

With effect from November 1, 2004, where the Council is required to act by a qualified majority, the votes of its members, as set out under the terms of the Nice Treaty, are weighted as follows:

QMV – Weighted Votes for each Member State (system from November 1, 2004)

Belgium	12	Luxembourg	4
Czech Republic	12	Hungary	12
Denmark	7	Netherlands	13
Germany	29	Austria	10
Estonia	4	Malta	3
France	29	Poland	27
Greece	12	Portugal	12
Ireland	7	Finland	7
Italy	29	Slovenia	4
Spain	27	Slovakia	7
Cyprus	4	Sweden	10
Latvia	4	United Kingdom	29
Lithuania	7		

The threshold for reaching agreement by QMV, under this system, is 232 votes out of a total of 321. In addition there is also a second threshold, which requires the votes cast in favour to cover at least 62% of the total population of the Union. However, this is only be enforced subject to a request from a member of the Council. This is known as the “*Double Majority*.”

Under the terms of the proposed new EU Constitution, if ratified, qualified majority would be redefined to mean: at least 55% of Member States, representing at least 65% of the population of the Union. The Constitution also provides for a blocking minority, which would have to include at least four Council members, failing which the qualified majority would be deemed attained. However, where the Council was not acting on a proposal from the Commission or from the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers, the qualified majority would be 72% of the members of the Council, representing Member States comprising at least 65% of the population of the Union.

2. Unanimity

In some particularly sensitive areas such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), taxation, asylum and immigration policy, Council decisions have to be unanimous. In other words, each Member State has the power of veto in these areas.

Unanimous agreement is difficult to achieve in a Union of 25 Member States and will be even more so in a Union of 27. The Treaty of Nice has therefore changed the rules, allowing the Council to take decisions by qualified majority voting in quite a number of areas that previously required unanimity.

Future Challenges

Future Challenges

The integration process set in motion when the founding six countries set up the Community, which grew into a Community of nine in 1973, ten in 1981, twelve in 1986, fifteen in 1995, twenty-five in 2004, and which could rise to twenty-seven or more over the next decade, is still a vital force. The challenges of the post-war period were such that an attempt had to be made to reconcile nations and rebuild the economies of Western Europe. Half a century later the challenges facing Europe are no less significant. The new democracies emerging from the former Communist bloc expect support from their neighbours and a willingness to work with them to create a common destiny.

However, the expansion of the EU raises two questions that will have to be tackled by existing and prospective members:

1. How is the Union, whose institutions were designed for a handful of Member States, to expand without undermining its decision-making mechanisms or its political identity?
2. How are people from so many different backgrounds and cultures to develop the will to live together, so that they will be prepared to pool a part of their sovereignty?

This vision of Europe at the beginning of the 21st Century is speculative and incomplete. It assumes that the existing Member States will be prepared to allow the Union to act as a driving force for the entire continent and that prospective members will commit themselves unreservedly to the political objectives set in the Treaty.

A Constitution for Europe

The development of an EU Constitution is important to the future of the European Union, designed to ensure that a Europe of 25 Member States and more is efficient, democratic and transparent.

The text of the Constitution has its origins in the Laeken Declaration of December 15, 2001 when the European Council decided to convene a 'European Convention' composed of the main stakeholders and charged with the task of drawing-up a document which would address the vital questions raised by the future development of the EU. These vital questions were outlined as:

- How to organise the division of responsibilities between the Union and the Member States?
- How to better define the respective tasks of the European Institutions?
- How to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the Union's external action?
- How to strengthen the Union's legitimacy?

The European Convention

The European Convention, chaired by former French President Mr. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, began its work on February 28, 2002. It was composed of representatives of: the Heads of State and Government of the Member States and Candidate Countries; the national parliaments of these states; and the European Parliament and the European Commission. It also had observers from other bodies, such as the CoR, EESC and the European Ombudsman.

The Convention was the first opportunity for all European and national viewpoints to be expressed in a broad, open and transparent debate. After 16 months of deliberations the European Convention reached a consensus on a draft European Constitution. This draft was submitted to an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), composed of the Heads of State and Government of the Member States and Accession Countries, for consideration.

The draft European Constitution is divided into four parts:

- Part I Provisions that define the Union – its objectives, its powers, its decision-making procedures and its institutions.
- Part II The Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Part III Provision of the current Treaties are incorporated – focus on the Union’s policies and actions
- Part IV Final clauses – including the procedures for adopting and reviewing the Constitution

The Intergovernmental Conference (IGC)

On July 18th, 2003 Mr Giscard d'Estaing officially handed over a full draft Treaty establishing a new Constitution for Europe to the Italian Presidency of the European Council in Rome. This provided the basis for the Intergovernmental Conference on the future EU Constitution, which began in Rome on 4 October, 2003. The conference was expected to be concluded before the end of the Italian Presidency on 31 December 2003, however, agreement on some key issues was not achieved and negotiations were carried over to the Irish Presidency, in the first half of 2004.

Following the much applauded efforts of the Irish presidency, the European Council agreed on the EU's first-ever Constitutional Treaty on 18 June 2004. However, once adopted by the IGC, the text of the Constitution, still had to be independently ratified by each Member State, either by the national parliament or through referenda. The Constitution cannot enter into force until one year after the last national ratification is complete.

Constitutional Crisis!

While most countries planned to ratify the Treaty through a parliamentary process, a number of countries indicated that they would hold a referendum on the Constitution. In two of these countries, France and the Netherlands, voters rejected the EU Constitution and this effectively brought the ratification process to a standstill. Following this setback the European Commission called for a “period of reflection” to consider the implications of the “no” votes in France and the Netherlands and to decide on the best way forward.

Indications are that the existing Constitutional Treaty text will be retained but will now probably be accompanied by new proposals to take account of the concerns expressed by France, the Netherlands and others. The results of the “period of reflection” and a decision on the way ahead should be taken in the latter half of 2007. The goal would then be to have the Constitution in force by 2009.

APPENDIX

Glossary of Terms

Acquis communautaire: This is a French term meaning, essentially, "the EU as it is" - in other words, the rights and obligations that EU countries share. The "acquis" includes all the EU's treaties and laws, declarations and resolutions, international agreements on EU affairs and the judgments given by the Court of Justice. It also includes action that EU governments take together in the area of "justice and home affairs" and on the Common Foreign and Security Policy. "Accepting the acquis" therefore means taking the EU as you find it. Candidate countries have to accept the "acquis" before they can join the EU, and make EU law part of their own national legislation.

Comitology: This is more correctly known as "committee procedure". It describes a process in which the Commission, when implementing EU law, has to consult special advisory committees made up of experts from the EU countries.

Community Legislation: Community law, adopted by the Council, or by the Parliament and the Council in the framework of the co-decision procedure, may take the following forms:

- **Regulations:** directly applied, without the need for national measure to implement them;
- **Directives:** bind Member States to the objectives to be achieved, while leaving the national authorities the power to choose the form and the means to be used;
- **Decisions:** these are binding in all their aspects upon those to whom they are addressed. A decision may be addressed to any or all member States, to undertakings or to individuals;
- **Recommendations and Opinions:** these are non-binding.

Democratic deficit: It is often said that the EU's decision-making system is too remote from ordinary people, who cannot understand its complexities and its difficult legal texts. The EU is trying to overcome this "democratic deficit" through simpler legislation and better public information, and by giving citizens' organisations a greater say in European policymaking. Citizens are already represented in EU decision-making via the European Parliament.

Enhanced co-operation: This is an arrangement whereby a group of EU countries (there must be at least eight of them) can work together in a particular field even if the other EU countries are unable or unwilling to join in at this stage. The outsiders must, however, be free to join in later if they wish.

Eurocrat: The term "Eurocrats" (a pun on the word "bureaucrats") refers to the many thousands of EU citizens who work for the European institutions (Parliament, the Council, the Commission, etc.).

Euroland: This is a nickname for the EU Member States that have adopted the euro as their currency. So far the countries involved are Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland. Taken together they are known as "the euro area" or (less correctly) "the euro zone".

Four freedoms: one of the great achievements of the EU has been to create a frontier-free area within which (1) people, (2) goods, (3) services and (4) money can all move around freely. This four-fold freedom of movement is sometimes called "the four freedoms".

Gothenburg Agenda: In June 2001, the European Council at Gothenburg agreed on a European strategy for Sustainable Development ("A sustainable Europe for a better world: A European strategy for Sustainable Development"). This strategy proposed measures to deal with important threats to the environment and

quality of life, such as climate change, poverty, and emerging health risks, which had been identified in a consultation paper in March 2001.

Harmonisation: This means coordinating national policies and technical standards so that products and services can be traded freely throughout the EU. Contrary to popular myth, harmonisation does not mean pointlessly standardising everything from the curvature of cucumbers to the colour of carrots. Often it simply means that EU countries recognise one another's product safety standards.

Intergovernmental Conference (IGC): This means a conference at which the Member States' governments come together to amend the EU treaties. The next IGC is scheduled for 2004, when the plan is to merge all the present treaties into a single, simplified treaty (or "constitution") setting out the EU's aims and policies and saying who is responsible for doing what.

Lisbon Strategy: The Lisbon Strategy is a commitment to bring about economic, social and environmental renewal in the EU. It was agreed in March 2000, at a meeting of the European Council in Lisbon and it sets out a ten-year strategy to make the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy. Under the strategy, a stronger economy will drive job creation alongside social and environmental policies that ensure sustainable development and social inclusion.

Open method of coordination

The Open Method of Coordination was introduced at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 as a means of facilitating the spread of best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the Lisbon objectives. This method, which is designed to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies, involves:

- fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;
- establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;
- translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;
- periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

Schengen countries

In 1985, five EU countries (France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) agreed to abolish all checks on people travelling between them. This created a territory without internal borders which became known as the Schengen area. (Schengen is the town in Luxembourg where the agreement was signed). The Schengen countries introduced a common visa policy for the whole area and agreed to establish effective controls at its external borders. Checks at the internal borders may be carried out for a limited period if public order or national security make this necessary. Little by little, the Schengen area has been extended to include every EU country plus Iceland and Norway, and the agreement has become an integral part of the EU treaties. However, Ireland and the United Kingdom do not take part in the arrangements relating to border controls and visas. You do not need a visa for travelling within the Schengen area if you are a citizen of one of the Schengen countries. If you have a visa for entering any Schengen country it automatically allows you to travel freely throughout the Schengen area, except Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Subsidiarity: The "subsidiarity principle" means that EU decisions must be taken as closely as possible to the citizen. In other words, the Union does not take action (except on matters for which it alone is responsible) unless EU action is more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level.

Troika: The Troika is a team that represents the EU in external affairs. Before the Treaty of Amsterdam, the troika consisted of the current presidency of the Council of Ministers, together with its immediate successor and predecessor, the point being to provide continuity to EU foreign policy. The Treaty of Amsterdam reconstituted the troika to consist now of the Council presidency, the Commission president and the 'High Representative' of the Council - a step towards weakening the prerogatives of the member states in foreign and security affairs.

Two-speed Europe: This refers to the theoretical possibility that, in future, a particular "core" group of EU Member States may decide to move faster than others along the road of European integration (see above). It is already possible for a group of EU countries to work together more closely than others under an arrangement known as "enhanced co-operation" (see above).

The Treaties

Treaty	In force	Summary
European Coal and Steel Community(ECSC) Treaty (Treaty of Paris, 1951)	1952	Concluded for 50 years amongst the Six on the basis of the Schuman Plan
European Economic Community (EEC) Treaty (Treaty of Rome, 1957)	1958	Concluded on the model of the ECSC Treaty but with a much broader range of objectives; the most important of the Treaties, which also established the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee
European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) Treaty (also signed in Rome, 1957)	1958	A sector-specific Treaty of limited application
Treaty establishing a Single Council and a Single Commission of the European Communities (Merger Treaty, 1965)	July 1967	Amended the ECSC, EEC and Euratom Treaties to create a Council and a Commission serving all three Communities
Treaty amending certain Budgetary Provision of the Treaties establishing the European Communities (and of the Merger Treaty) (Treaty of Luxembourg, 1970)	1971	Laid down a new procedure for settling the Budget and introduced the system of 'own resources'
Treaty amending certain Financial Provisions of the Treaties establishing the European Communities (and of the Merger Treaty) (1975)	1978	Refined the budgetary procedure to give the European Parliament more power and set up the Court of Auditors
Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (European Elections Act, 1976)elections	1978	The basis for the first (1979) and subsequent European elections
Single European Act (1986)	July 1987	Amended and expanded the EEC Treaty (most importantly by extending the scope of qualified majority voting) and laid down new procedures for foreign policy co-operation
Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty, 1992)	November 1993	Established the European Union; amended and expanded the EEC Treaty; created the co-

		decision procedure; created 'pillars' of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Co-operation in the Fields of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA); Established the Committee of the Regions and the EU Ombudsman
Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)	May 1999	Amended the Maastricht Treaty and the EEC Treaty; extended co-decision; added new provisions on social policy; incorporated the Schengen <i>acquis</i> into EEC Treaty; created 'constructive abstention'; strengthened transparency
Treaty of Nice (2001)	February 2003	The Treaty makes adaptations to the European institutions which are necessary for enlargement. The Treaty also aims to facilitate decision-making in the Council by shifting the decision rule from unanimity to qualified majority. The Treaty foresees a major reform of the Union's judicial system, and it improves the procedure to detect and address a serious breach of fundamental rights by a Member State.