



The European Union



The European Union: 500 million people – 28 countries



Member States of the European Union



Candidate countries and potential candidates

28 European Union Member Countries



Austria



Belgium



Bulgaria



Croatia



Cyprus



Czech Republic



Denmark



Estonia



Finland



France



Germany



Greece



Hungary



Ireland



Italy



Latvia



Lithuania



Luxembourg



Malta



Netherlands



Poland



Portugal



Romania



Slovakia



Slovenia



Spain



Sweden



United Kingdom

The historical roots of the European Union lie in the Second World War. Europeans are determined to prevent such killing and destruction ever happening again



EU symbols

- Flag: A circle with twelve yellow stars against a blue background as a symbol of unity, solidarity and harmony among the peoples of Europe
- Anthem: “Ode to Joy” by Ludwig van Beethoven
- Europe Day: 9 May – day of the Schuman Declaration of 1950, which laid the foundation of the European Union
- Motto: “United in diversity” – the EU countries are committed to peace and prosperity while respecting Europe's different cultures and languages



Political system and functioning

- The EU is a supranational alliance of sovereign states.
- By virtue of the legal personality it acquired after the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU can be a signatory to international agreements.
- The member states cede some of their decision-making powers and competences to community institutions.
- EU institutions can act in only those areas that have been defined in the treaties. In such areas the legal instruments adopted by the Commission, Council of Ministers and Parliament are legally binding on the member states and take precedence over national law.
- The member states remain responsible for areas where they have not transferred powers to the EU, unless they are unable to achieve the proposed objectives (principle of subsidiarity).



Composition and election

- 28 Commissioners: one per EU member state, among them the Commission President and the Vice-Presidents
- The Commission President is nominated by the European Council and elected by the Parliament. Commissioners are appointed by national governments. Parliament approves the election.

WHO IS THE PRESIDENT??

President of the European Union (or President of Europe) does not exist.

Nevertheless, the term is often misused to mean any of:

[President of the European Council](#) (since 1 December 2014, [Donald Tusk](#))

[President of the European Commission](#) (since 1 November 2014, [Jean-Claude Juncker](#))

[President of the European Parliament](#) (since 1 July 2014, [Martin Schulz](#))

[Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#)

The European Union has seven institutions:

The European Parliament

The Council of the European Union

The European Commission,

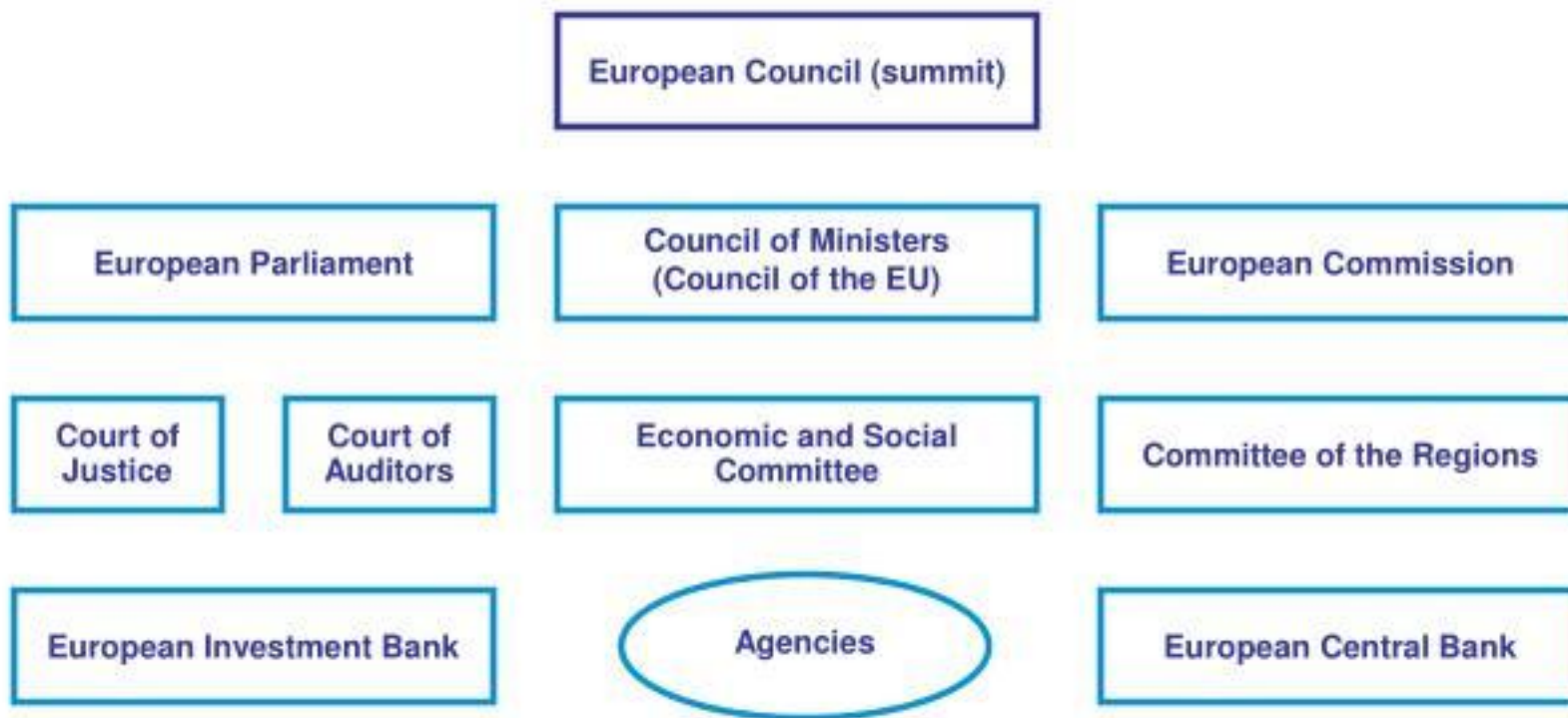
The European Council

The European Central Bank,

The Court of Justice of the European Union

The European Court of Auditors.

The EU institutions



Competencies in amending legislation are divided between the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union while executive tasks are carried out by the European Commission and in a limited capacity by the European Council (not to be confused with the aforementioned Council of the European Union). The monetary policy of the eurozone is governed by the European Central Bank. The interpretation and the application of EU law and the treaties are ensured by the Court of Justice of the European Union. The EU budget is scrutinised by the European Court of Auditors. There are also a number of ancillary bodies which advise the EU or operate in a specific area.

European Parliament



acts together with the Council as a legislature

shares with the Council the budgetary power and decides in the last instance on the general budget of the EU

exerts the democratic control over EU institutions including the European Commission and appoints the Commission members

based and plenary sessions in Strasbourg, General Secretariat in Luxembourg, primarily meets in Brussels

European Council



summit of the Heads of Government, chaired by the President of the European Council)

gives the necessary impetus for the development and sets out general objectives and priorities

will not legislate

based in [Brussels](#)

**Council of the
European Union**
- Legislative (similar
to upper house)



acts together with the Parliament as a legislature

exerts together with the Parliament the budgetary power

ensures coordination of the broad economic and social policy and

sets out guidelines for the Common Foreign and Security Policy
(CFSP)

conclude international agreements

European Commission

- Executive -

is the "government"

submits proposals for new legislation to the Parliament and to the Council

implements EU policy and administers the budget

ensures compliance with EU law

negotiates international treaties





Court of Justice of the European Union

It consists of two major courts and one specialised court:

the **Court of Justice**, informally known as **European Court of Justice (ECJ)** which hears applications from national courts for preliminary rulings, annulment and appeals;

the **General Court**, which hears applications for annulment from individuals, companies and, less commonly, national governments (focusing on **competition law**, **State aid**, trade, agriculture and **trade marks**); and

the **Civil Service Tribunal**, a specialised court which hears disputes between the EU and its staff

Functions

CJEU's specific mission is to ensure that "the law is observed" "in the interpretation and application" of the Treaties of the European Union. To achieve this, it:

reviews the legality of actions taken by the EU's institutions;

enforces compliance by member states with their obligations under the Treaties

interprets European Union law



The EU Court of Auditors

The Court is composed of one member from each EU state who are, after a hearing in the [Budgetary Control Committee](#) and a non-binding majority-vote in the committee as well as in the plenary of the [European Parliament](#), appointed unanimously by the [Council of the European Union](#) for a renewable term of six years.

The members then elect one of their members as the President of the Court for a renewable three-year term.

At present the **President** is *Vítor Manuel da Silva Caldeira* , elected in 2007

Despite its name, the Court has no judicial functions. It is rather a professional external investigatory audit agency.^[2] The primary role of the court is to externally check if the [budget of the European Union](#) has been implemented correctly, in that EU funds have been spent legally and with sound management. In doing so, the court checks the paperwork of all persons handling any income or expenditure of the Union and carries out spot checks. The court is bound to report any problems in the Court's reports for the attention of other states and institutions, these reports include its general annual report as well as specific and special reports on certain bodies and issues.^{[3][4]} The Court's decision is the basis for the [European Commission](#) decisions, for example: when the Court found problems in the management of EU funds in the [regions of England](#), the Commission suspended funds to those regions and prepared to fine those who did not come back up to acceptable standards.



Acts

The main legal acts of the EU come in three forms: regulations, directives, and decisions. Regulations become law in all member states the moment they come into force, without the requirement for any implementing measures, and automatically override conflicting domestic provisions. Directives require member states to achieve a certain result while leaving them discretion as to how to achieve the result. The details of how they are to be implemented are left to member states. When the time limit for implementing directives passes, they may, under certain conditions, have direct effect in national law against member states.

Decisions offer an alternative to the two above modes of legislation. They are legal acts which only apply to specified individuals, companies or a particular member state. They are most often used in competition law, or on rulings on State Aid, but are also frequently used for procedural or administrative matters within the institutions. Regulations, directives, and decisions are of equal legal value and apply without any formal hierarchy.

EU in a nutshell

The creation of a European single currency became an official objective of the European Economic Community in 1969.

The euro is designed to help build a single market by, for example: easing travel of citizens and goods, eliminating exchange rate problems, providing price transparency, creating a single financial market, price stability and low interest rates, and providing a currency used internationally and protected against shocks by the large amount of internal trade within the eurozone.

Among the many languages and dialects used in the EU, it has 23 official and working languages: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, [Dutch](#), [English](#), Estonian, Finnish, [French](#), [German](#), [Greek](#), Hungarian, [Italian](#), Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, [Portuguese](#), Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, [Spanish](#), and Swedish

Besides the 23 official languages, there are about 150 regional and minority languages, spoken by up to 50 million people

The EU is a secular body with no formal connection to any religion.