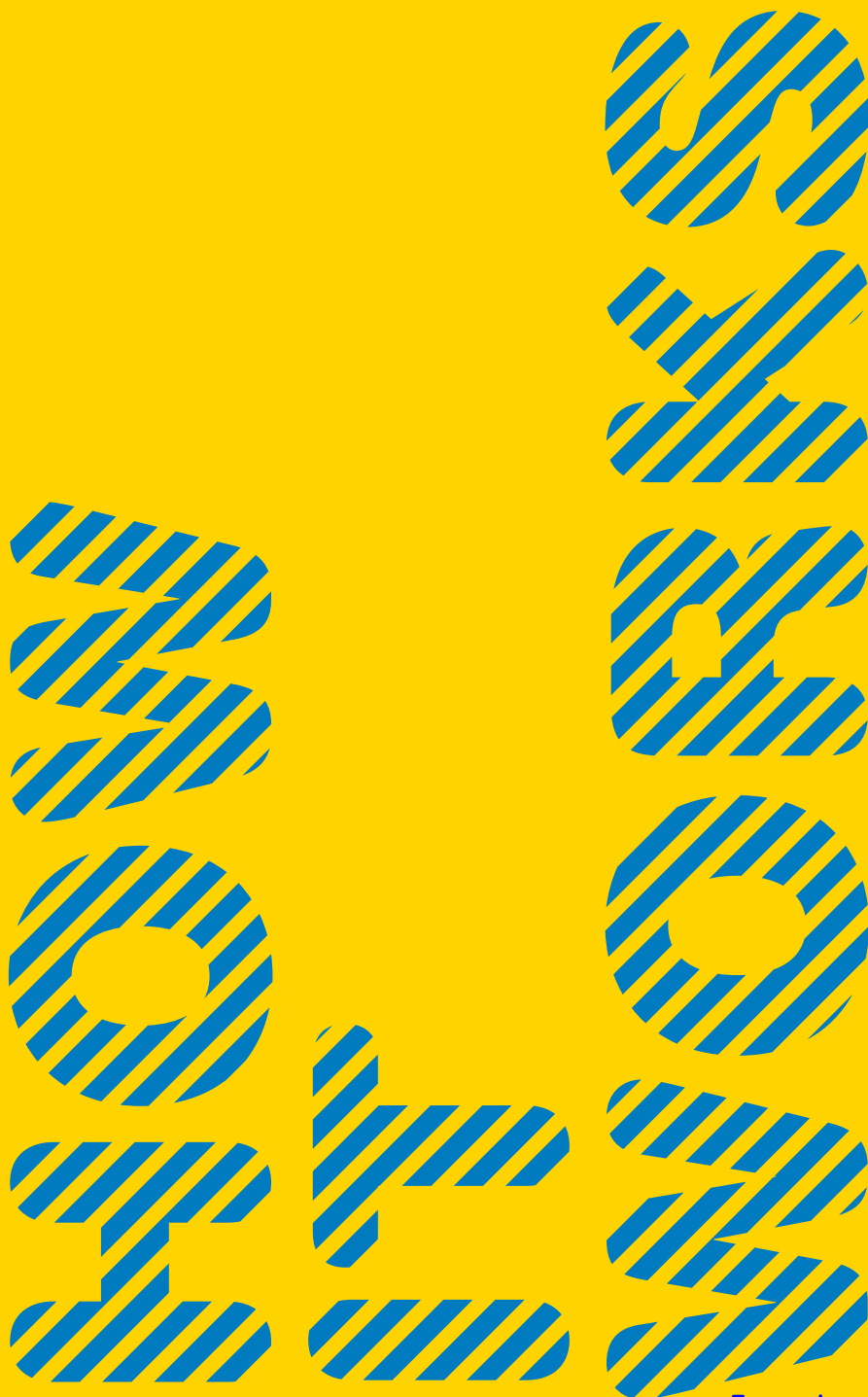




NATIONAL FORUM ON EUROPE
FÓRAM NAISIÚNTA UM AN EORAIP

The European Union:



[Forward >](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
TREATIES	3
HOW EUROPEAN UNION LAWS ARE MADE	5
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT	6
THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION	11
THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION	16
THE OTHER EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS	19
<i>To find out more</i>	<i>24</i>

NATIONAL FORUM ON EUROPE



FÓRAM NAISIÚNTA UM AN EORAIP

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Preface

Opinion polls frequently reveal that the European Union institutions and how they interact with one another are perplexing to many citizens. The European Union is indeed different. It is neither a federation of states governed along the lines of the United States of America or Germany nor an intergovernmental organisation such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organisation. It is a hybrid body, with federal and intergovernmental elements. It combines those elements in a unique way that is not replicated elsewhere.

This booklet is offered with a view to de-mystifying and clarifying key issues to help people understand the European institutions, their decisionmaking processes and the impact of Ireland on these institutions and processes.

Introduction

The European Union has a unique system of institutions which carry out its work. Understanding what each of these institutions does, and how they relate to each other, is the key to understanding how the EU works.

THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

The three main decisionmaking institutions are:

- the **European Parliament**, which represents the European Union's citizens and is directly elected by them;
- the **Council of the European Union**, which represents the individual Member States, and
- the **European Commission**, which seeks to promote the interests of the Union as a whole.

This 'institutional triangle' produces the policies and laws (ie legal instruments such as regulations and directives) that apply throughout the European Union. The rules and procedures that the institutions must follow are laid down in the treaties, which are agreed by the Member States unanimously and ratified via their parliaments or via referendum. In principle, it is the Commission that proposes new European Union laws and it is the Parliament and Council that adopt them.

The **Court of Justice** has the job of upholding and interpreting European Union law and the **Court of Auditors** checks the financing of the Union's activities.

Five other bodies complete the system:

- the **Economic and Social Committee** represents the social partners;
- the **Committee of the Regions** represents regional and local authorities;
- the **European Central Bank** is the Central Bank for Europe's single currency (the Euro);
- the **European Investment Bank** helps finance European Union investment projects, and
- the **European Ombudsman** guards European Union citizens and organisations against maladministration.

TREATIES

The European Union is founded on two main treaties:

- The *Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC)*, which was signed on 25 March 1957 in Rome and came into force on 1 January 1958;
- The *Treaty on European Union (EU)*, which was signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992, and came into force on 1 November 1993.

The *Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)*, was signed in Rome along with the EEC Treaty. The EEC and Euratom treaties are often referred to as the 'Treaties of Rome'. When the term 'Treaty of Rome' is used, only the EEC Treaty is meant. A fourth Treaty, the *Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)* which was the original source of the EU's institutional structure, came into force on 23 July 1952 and expired on 23 July 2002.

The treaties have been amended to develop the European Union and, especially to enable adjustments to the institutions to accommodate successive enlargements. Following unanimous agreement from all Member States, amendments to the Treaties have also provided for areas of competence to be transferred from the Member State to Union level. The Treaties which may be amended only with the unanimous consent of all Member States have been amended by the following agreements:

- The *Single European Act (SEA)* was signed in February 1986 and came into force on 1 July 1987. It amended the EEC Treaty and paved the way for completing the Single Market.
- The *Treaty of Amsterdam* was signed on 2 October 1997 and came into force on 1 May 1999. It provided for greater co-operation at Union level in justice and home affairs.
- The *Treaty of Nice*, signed on 26 February 2001, entered into force on 1 February 2003. It further amends the other treaties, streamlining the European Union's institutional system so it can continue to work effectively for a Union which was about to grow from fifteen to twenty-seven Member States.

The Union can act only within the limits of the powers given to it by the Member States in the treaties. In other words, the Union cannot act if the power to act has not been given, or 'conferred', on it by the Member States. Such conferral of powers is done only through treaty change by unanimous agreement.

In some areas the Member States have given the Union **exclusive competence** to act on their behalf. These areas are: customs, competition in the internal market, euro countries monetary policy, conservation of marine biological resources and international trade.

In other areas the Member States **share competence** with the Union. These areas are: the internal market, certain aspects of social policy, cohesion, agriculture, fisheries, environment, consumer protection, transport, trans-European networks, energy, security and justice and common safety concerns in public health.

In still other areas the Union can act only to **coordinate** or **supplement** action taken by the Member States. These areas include: public health, industry, culture, tourism, education, youth, sport, vocational training, civil protection and administrative cooperation between national authorities.

Legal Instruments

The primary source of European Union law is the treaties. The treaties provide that the Union institutions can adopt regulations, directives, decisions and recommendations. These are secondary sources of European law through which the Union pursues its objectives.

Regulations apply directly across the Union and are binding.

Directives are binding on the Members States for the objective to be achieved but national authorities decide how to incorporate the Directive into their law.

Decisions are binding on the individuals or institutions to whom they are addressed.

Recommendations are not binding.

HOW EUROPEAN UNION LAWS ARE MADE

There are three main procedures used to enact new European Union laws: **co-decision**, **consultation** and **assent**. The main difference between them is the way Parliament interacts with the Council. Under the co-decision procedure, Parliament shares power with the Council; under the consultation procedure, Parliament gives its opinion and under the assent procedure Parliament accepts or rejects a proposal in its entirety. The European Commission, when proposing a new law, must decide which procedure to follow. The choice will, in principle, depend on the 'legal basis' of the proposal – in other words which Treaty article it is based on:

- 1) **Co-decision** (Covers areas including the free movement of workers, the internal market, transport, culture, employment, environment, consumer protection and customs co-operation)

In the co-decision procedure, which is the most commonly used procedure, Parliament and the Council share legislative power. The Commission sends its proposal to both institutions where it is read and discussed twice in succession. If Parliament and the Council cannot agree on it, it is put before a **conciliation committee**, composed of equal numbers of Council and Parliament representatives. Commission representatives also attend the committee meetings and contribute to the discussion. Once the committee has reached an agreement, the agreed text is then sent to Parliament and the Council for a third reading, so that they can finally adopt it as law.

- 2) **Consultation** (Covers areas including police and judicial cooperation, revision of the Treaties, European Union citizenship, agriculture, immigration, competition rules, tax arrangements and economic policy)

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, whose opinions are an integral part of the European Union's decisionmaking process. In addition, using the consultation procedure, the Council can amend a Commission proposal only by unanimity.

When the Parliament receives the proposal it 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.

3) **Assent** (covers areas including specific tasks of the European Central Bank; the Structural Funds and Cohesion Funds; the uniform electoral procedure for the European Parliament; certain international agreements, and the accession of new Member States).

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

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Role	Directly elected legislative arm of the European Union
Next election	June 2009
President	Hans-Gert Pottering
Meetings	Monthly plenary sessions in Strasbourg, committee meetings and additional sessions in Brussels
Internet	www.europarl.eu.int

The Parliament's origins go back to the 1950s and the founding treaties. Since 1979, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been directly elected by the citizens they represent. Parliamentary elections are held every five years, and every European Union citizen who is registered as a voter is entitled to vote. The European Parliament represents their interests in discussions with the other European Union institutions.

The MEPs sit in Europe-wide political groups that bring together all the main political parties operating in the European Union Member States.

The number of seats per political group, as at March 2006, is as follows:

POLITICAL GROUP	ABBREVIATION	NO. OF SEATS
European People's Party & European Democrats	EPP-ED	289
Party of European Socialists	PES	215
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	ALDE	101
Union for Europe of the Nations	UEN	44
Greens/European Free Alliance	Greens-EFA	42
European United Left/Nordic Green Left	EUL-NGL	41
Independence/Democracy	Ind/Dem	24
Non-attached to any group	–	29
TOTAL		785

Parliament has three main roles:

1. It shares with the Council the **power to legislate**. The fact that it is a directly-elected body helps guarantee the democratic legitimacy of European law.
2. It exercises **democratic supervision** over all European Union institutions, and in particular the Commission. It has the power to approve or reject the nomination of Commissioners, and it has the right to censure the Commission as a whole.
3. It shares with the Council **authority over the European Union budget** and can therefore influence European Union spending. At the end of the procedure, it adopts or rejects the budget in its entirety.

In addition, through its **Committee on Petitions**, the European Parliament accepts petitions on the activity of the European Union from citizens.

Parliament’s work is divided into two main stages:

- **Preparing for the plenary session.** This is done by the MEPs in the various parliamentary committees that specialise in particular areas of European Union activity. The issues for debate are also discussed by the political groups.
- **The plenary session itself.** Plenary sessions, attended by all MEPs, are normally held in Strasbourg (one week per month) and sometimes in Brussels (for two days). 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 questions about what is going on in the European Union or the wider world.

The number of seats a country has is broadly proportional to the size of its population. However, the ratio between the number of seats and the population size is progressively more favourable the smaller the size of the country’s population. Ireland currently has thirteen MEPs, elected in four euroconstituencies (see below), but this will be reduced to twelve at the next election (June 2009).

CONSTITUENCY	MEP	POLITICAL PARTY	POLITICAL GROUPING IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
Dublin	Proinsias De Rossa	Labour	PSE
	Mary Lou McDonald	Sinn Féin	GUE/NGL
	Gay Mitchell	Fine Gael	EPP-ED
	Eoin Ryan	Fianna Fáil	UEN
East	Liam Aylward	Fianna Fáil	UEN
	Avril Doyle	Fine Gael	EPP-ED
	Mairead McGuinness	Fine Gael	EPP-ED
North-West	Marian Harkin	Independent	ALDE
	Jim Higgins	Fine Gael	EPP-ED
	Séan Ó Neachtain	Fianna Fáil	UEN
South	Colm Burke	Fine Gael	EPP-ED
	Brian Crowley	Fianna Fáil	UEN
	Kathy Sinnott	Independent	Ind/Dem



The highest position in the Parliament is the President who is elected by the members. From January 2002 to July 2004 **Pat Cox**, MEP for Ireland's South euroconstituency, held the office of President of the European Parliament.

THE THREE COUNCILS

It's easy to become confused about which European body is which – especially when very different bodies have very similar names, such as these three 'councils'.

The European Council

The European Council consists of the heads of state and government (i.e. presidents and/or prime ministers) of all the European Union countries, plus the President of the European Commission. The European Council meets, in principle, four times a year to agree overall European Union policy and to review progress. It is the highest-level policy-making body in the European Union, which is why its meetings are often called 'summits'. The Presidency, which rotates every six months among Member States, chairs the European Council. The then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, chaired the European Council in the first half of 2004 during Ireland's Presidency. Foreign Ministers normally, and Finance Ministers sometimes, attend European Council meetings.

The Council of the European Union

Formerly known as the Council of Ministers, this institution consists of government ministers from all the European Union countries. The Council meets regularly to take detailed decisions and to pass European laws (see across).

The Council of Europe

This is not a European Union institution at all. It is an intergovernmental organisation which aims to protect human rights, to promote Europe's cultural diversity and to combat social problems such as racial prejudice and intolerance. It was set up in 1949 and one of its early achievements was to draw up the European Convention on Human Rights. To enable citizens to exercise their rights under that Convention it set up the European Court of Human Rights. The Council of Europe now has forty-seven Member States, including all twenty-seven European Union members, and its headquarters is in Strasbourg.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Role	Legislative arm of the European Union, representing the Member States
Members	One minister from each European Union country
Presidency	Rotates every six months
Meetings	In Brussels, except in April, June and October when held in Luxembourg
Internet	www.europa.eu
Secretary General	Javier Solana

The Council is the European Union's main decisionmaking body. Like the European Parliament, the Council was set up by the founding treaties in the 1950s. It represents the Member States, and its meetings are attended by one minister from each of the European Union's national governments.

While the Council is one single institution, there are currently nine different Council formations depending on the issues which the Council is discussing. The Government's ministerial-level representatives are:

COUNCIL FORMATION	IRELAND'S REPRESENTATIVE
1) General Affairs and External Relations	Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin TD
2) Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN)	Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan TD
3) Justice and Home Affairs	Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dermot Ahern TD
4) Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs	Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Coughlan TD , Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin TD , Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney TD
5) Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry and Research)	Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Coughlan TD
6) Transport, Telecommunications and Energy	Minister for Transport, Noel Dempsey TD , Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Eamon Ryan TD
7) Agriculture and Fisheries	Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Brendan Smith TD
8) Environment	Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley TD
9) Education, Youth and Culture	Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe TD

The European Union’s relations with the rest of the world are dealt with by the ‘General Affairs and External Relations Council’. This Council formation also has wider responsibility for general policy issues and may be attended by different ministers from time to time.

The Council of the European Union has six key responsibilities:

1. to pass European laws: in many fields it legislates jointly with the European Parliament;
2. to co-ordinate the broad economic policies of the Member States;
3. to conclude international agreements between the European Union and one or more states or international organisations;
4. to approve the European Union’s budget, jointly with the European Parliament;
5. to develop the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy based on guidelines set by the European Council, and
6. to co-ordinate co-operation between the national courts and police forces in criminal matters.

Most of these responsibilities relate to the areas of action where the Member States have decided to pool their sovereignty and delegate decisionmaking powers to the European Union institutions. However, the last two responsibilities, Common Foreign and Security Policy and Police and Judicial Cooperation, relate largely to areas in which the Member States have not delegated their powers to European Union level but are simply working cooperatively together.

Permanent Representative Committee (COREPER)

The role of this committee is to prepare the work of the Council, with the exception of agricultural issues which are handled by the Special Committee on Agriculture. In Brussels, each European Union Member State has a permanent team (‘representation’) that represents it and promotes its national interest at European Union level. The head of each representation is, in effect, his or her country’s ambassador to the European Union. Currently, Ireland’s permanent representative is Ambassador Bobby McDonagh. These ambassadors (known as ‘permanent representatives’) meet weekly within

the Permanent Representatives Committee, known by the French acronym COREPER. Below COREPER, a whole range of Council Working Groups prepare the way for Council consideration. Each Working Group is attended by civil servants of the twenty-seven national governments who are experts in their areas.

Presidency of the Council rotates every six months. In other words, each European Union 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. Ireland has held the Council Presidency six times, the last occasion was during the first half of 2004 and the next is scheduled for the first half of 2013.

The Presidency rota for 2008-2010 is as follows:

2008	First half of the year:	Slovenia
	Second half of the year:	France
2009	First half of the year:	Czech Republic
	Second half of the year:	Sweden
2010	First half of the year:	Spain
	Second half of the year:	Belgium

Most decisions in the Council are taken without vote following discussion at the various levels up to COREPER and Council. Every effort is made to accommodate the interests of each Member State and take into account its concerns.

When a decision is taken by vote, the bigger the country’s population, the more votes it has. But the number is not strictly proportional: it is adjusted in favour of the less populous countries. The number of votes each country can cast is as follows:



	NUMBER OF VOTES
Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom	29
Spain and Poland	27
Romania	14
Netherlands	13
Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Portugal	12
Bulgaria, Austria and Sweden	10
Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland	7
Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Slovenia	4
Malta	3
TOTAL	345

Voting in Council: Qualified majority and unanimity

The most common voting procedure in Council is *qualified majority voting*. This means that, for a proposal to be adopted, it needs the support of a majority of Member States (with at least 62% of the total EU population) along with a minimum of 255 of the 345 votes. However, in some particularly sensitive areas such as Common Foreign and Security Policy, taxation, asylum and immigration policy, Council decisions have to be taken by *unanimity*. In other words, each Member State has the power of veto in these areas. Unanimity is also required in key areas of social, employment and anti-discrimination policy.

Role of the Irish Government

Ministers and their Departments have responsibility for representing Ireland’s interests in Council and in the working groups that lead to a Council decision. Many issues have cross-cutting implications that require inter-departmental coordination. Departments report to the *Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee on European Affairs* chaired by the *Minister for European Affairs Dick Roche TD*. The highest-level dedicated structures for national consideration are the *Cabinet Committee on European Affairs*, chaired by the *Taoiseach*, and ultimately *Government* itself.

When a proposal has been adopted in Council, there is usually an agreed time limit for its implementation: it may have direct effect in Ireland or it may require to be 'transposed' into Irish law by the Oireachtas, by secondary legislation, or by administrative procedure. Ministers and their Departments are responsible for ensuring that European Union law is transposed and implemented in Ireland.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Role	Executive arm of the European Union and initiator of legislative proposals
Members	One commissioner per Member State
President	José Manuel Barroso
Term of office	Five years (2004-2009)
Internet	www.ec.europa.eu
Commissioner nominated by Ireland	Mr Charlie McCreevy

Like the Parliament and Council, the European Commission was set up in the 1950s under the European Union's founding treaties. The European Commission is a unique institutional construct. Inspired by Jean Monnet, in response to two world wars and as a contribution to avoiding further war, the Commission represents no single Member State or sectoral interest but seeks to represent the interests of the community or Union as a whole. It is politically independent. It is the engine within the European Union's institutional system: it proposes legislation, policies and programmes of action and it is responsible for ensuring that the decisions taken by the Union are implemented. In ensuring that the treaties and Union decisions are correctly applied the Commission seeks to create a level playing field for all so that unfair advantages, for example in the competition area, cannot be created.

The Members of the Commission are known as commissioners. All twenty-seven have held public office in their countries of origin, and many have been government ministers, but as Members of the Commission they are committed to acting in the interests of the Union as a whole and must not take instructions from national governments.

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

- The Member State governments agree together on who to designate as the new Commission President. In the absence of consensus, this decision may be taken by qualified majority vote;
- The Commission President-designate, in discussion with each of the Member State governments, chooses the other twenty-six Members of the Commission;
- The new Parliament then interviews all twenty-seven members and gives its opinion on the entire 'college'. If approved, the new Commission can officially start work the following January.

Under the current Treaties, the next Commission, to be appointed in November 2009, would be reduced in size to a number less than the number of Member States. The Treaty of Lisbon proposes a one-third reduction which would not take effect until 2014.

The European Commission has four main roles:

1. to propose legislation to Parliament and the Council;
2. to manage and implement European Union policies and the budget;
3. to enforce European law (jointly with the Court of Justice), and
4. to represent the European Union on the international stage in those areas of foreign policy that are 'common', for example by negotiating trade agreements between the European Union and other countries.

It is up to the Commission President to decide which commissioner will be responsible for which policy area, and to reshuffle these responsibilities (if necessary) during the Commission's term of office. The President, with the Commission's approval, is also entitled to demand a commissioner's resignation.

The team of twenty-seven commissioners (known collectively as 'the college') meets once a week, usually on Wednesdays in Brussels. Each item on the agenda is presented by the commissioner responsible for that policy area, and the college takes a collective decision on it. **Charlie McCreevy** is the

current Commissioner nominated by Ireland. He holds the important Internal Market and Services portfolio.

The Commission's staff is organised into thirty-six departments, known as 'Directorates-General' (DGs) and 'services' (such as the Legal Service and Translation Service). Each DG is responsible for a particular policy area and is headed by a Director-General who is answerable to one of the commissioners. It is the DGs that draft the Commission's legislative proposals, but these proposals become official only when 'adopted' by the college at its weekly meeting. Catherine Day from Ireland currently occupies the position of Secretary General, the most senior official in the Commission. She is the first woman to hold the position and she succeeded Irishman David O'Sullivan in December 2005.

There are 17,000 Commission officials, less than half the number employed in the Irish civil service and one-twentieth of the number employed in the Irish public service.

Commission Proposals: The Procedure in Ireland

As soon as the Commission has made a proposal or published a policy paper Ministers are obliged under the Oireachtas Scrutiny Act 2002 to provide the Oireachtas with details of the proposal and the likely implications for Ireland. The *Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Scrutiny*, chaired by *John Perry TD*, decides if a proposal requires further scrutiny and, if so, allocates it to the appropriate Oireachtas Committee. The *Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs*, chaired by *Bernard Durkan TD* reviews EU policies and their implications for Ireland. The *Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs*, chaired by *Michael Woods TD*, examines issues in the Common Foreign and Security Policy areas. Ministers frequently appear before Oireachtas committees prior to Council Meetings to brief them and to hear their views.

Websites: www.oireachtas.ie
www.euaffairs.ie

THE OTHER EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS

The Court of Justice

Role	Established when the European Union was initiated, the Court of Justice ensures that European Union legislation is interpreted and applied in the same way in each Member State.
Court of Justice	This court includes one judge from each European Union country. At the moment the Irish judge at the European Court of Justice is <i>Justice Aindrias O Caoimh</i> . The court also has eight advocates-general.
Court of First Instance	Established in 1988 to hear and determine at first instance certain classes of action or proceedings. Decisions can be appealed to Court of Justice. Made up of one judge from each European Union country, the Irish judge, <i>Judge Kevin O'Higgins</i> , was appointed in 2008.
Term of office	Members of both courts are appointed for renewable terms of six years.
Based in	Luxembourg
Internet	www.curia.eu.int

The European Court of Auditors

Role	To check that European Union funds are used properly
Members	One from each European Union country. <i>Máire Geoghegan-Quinn</i> is currently the Irish member of the Court
Term of office	Members are appointed for a renewable term of six years.
Based in	Luxembourg
Internet	www.eca.eu

The European Economic and Social Committee

Role	Represents the Social Partners
Members	Currently 344, maximum 350, divided into the three interest groups they represent. Ireland has nine members of the Economic and Social Committee (see box)
Term of office	Four years
Meetings	Brussels, monthly
Internet	www.eesc.europa.eu
Irish Representatives	
<i>Employers Group</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Heidi Loughheed</i> – IBEC• <i>Brian Callanan</i> – Former Director of IBEC• <i>Thomas MacDonagh</i> – International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)
<i>Employees Group</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Sally Anne Kinahan</i> – Assistant General Secretary of ICTU• <i>William Attley</i> – Former Joint General President SIPTU• <i>Jim McCusker</i> – Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
<i>Special Interests Group (Agriculture, Women and Youth organisations)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Frank Allen</i> – Former President Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)• <i>John Dillon</i> – Former President Irish Farmers' Association• <i>Jillian van Turnhout</i> – Former President of National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)



The Committee of the Regions

Role	Represents regional and local authorities across Europe
Members	Currently 317, maximum 350
Ireland's Members	<p>Ireland has nine full members, all of them County Councillors, based on political, geographical and gender balance: Currently they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamus Murray – Meath, Fianna Fáil • Michael FitzGerald – South Tipperary, Fine Gael • Constance Hanniffy – Offaly, Fine Gael • Patrick McGowan – Donegal, Fianna Fáil • Denis Landy – South Tipperary, Labour • Declan McDonnell – Galway, Progressive Democrats • Cathal Crowe – Clare, Fianna Fáil • Paul O'Donoghue – Kerry, Fianna Fáil • John Lahart – South Dublin, Fianna Fáil
Term of office	Four years
Meetings	Brussels, five plenary meetings per year
Internet	www.cor.eu

The European Central Bank

Role	To manage the euro and European Union monetary policy
Governing Council	The six Members of the Bank's Executive Council and the governors of the National Central Banks from the euro area countries.
Ireland's Representative	John Hurley , Governor of the Central Bank
Based in	Frankfurt am Main
Internet	www.ecb.int

The European Investment Bank

Role	Provide finance for projects that promote the objectives of the European Union
Board of Governors	Ireland's representative is Minister Brian Lenihan
Board of Directors	One per Member State - Ireland's representative is Kevin Cardiff , Deputy Secretary General, Department of Finance
Based in	Luxembourg
Internet	www.eib.eu

The European Ombudsman

Role	To investigate allegations of maladministration in European Union institutions or bodies
Term of office	Five years, renewable once after the election of the European Parliament – currently P Nikiforos Diamandouros 2003-2008
Based in	Strasbourg
Internet	www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int

To find out more

- Europe Direct, a free telephone and email enquiry service has been in operation since 2000:
Freephone from any Member State: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11
Email via: www.ec.europa.eu/europedirect
- The official web portal of the European Union is www.europa.eu
- The website of the European Commission Representation in Ireland is www.ec.europa.eu/ireland
- The website of the European Parliament Office in Ireland is www.europarl.ie
- SOLVIT is an on-line problem-solving network in which European Union Member States work together to solve, without legal proceedings, problems caused by the misapplication of Internal Market law by public authorities. There is a SOLVIT centre in every European Union Member State each handling complaints from both *citizens* and *businesses*. www.ec.europa.eu/solvit

The Forum website www.forumoneurope.ie carries debates and information on the latest issues on the European agenda.

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