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The European Commission

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Presenting the EU's Executive Body and Working

The European Commission is the European Union's executive body and fulfils its day-to-day tasks. Its official seat is in Brussels (Belgium), although it also has offices in Luxembourg, representations in all EU countries and delegations in many capital cities around the world. The Commission comprises the President, currently Mr. José Manuel Barroso, 25 Commissioners, one for each country and approximately 24,000 members of staff. The Commission must be able to act with complete independence from the governments of Member States: its members represent the EU as a whole, and not their respective native countries.

Staff

The administrative staff manages the daily work of the Commission, and is organised into departments, known as 'Directorate-Generals' (DGs) and 'services', such as the Legal 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.

Designing a Legislative Proposal

Under the Treaty, the Commission has the 'right of initiative': in other words, it is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation. The Commission proposes action at EU level only if it believes that a problem cannot be solved more efficiently by national, regional or local action. This principle is called the 'subsidiary principle'. For example, if the Commission recognises a need for EU legislation to protect the health of workers, the Directorate- General for Employment draws up a proposal, based on extensive consultations with employment ministries in the Member States and international employment organisations.

The proposed legislation is then discussed with all relevant Commission DGs and amended, if necessary. It will then be checked by the Legal Service and approved by the Commissioners' 'cabinets', which comprise the Commissioners' personal political staff.

Once the proposal is completed, the Secretary-General places it on the agenda for a forthcoming Commission meeting. The 'college' of 25 Commissioners meets once a week, usually on Wednesdays in Brussels.

At this meeting, the appropriate Director-General explains the reasons for the proposal to colleagues. If agreed, either unanimously or by a majority vote initiated by the President, the college of Commissioners adopt the proposal and send it to the Council and the European Parliament for consideration.

Proposing Legislation to the Commission?

Individuals or national or European organisations can raise an issue directly at European level by correspondence with the European Commission, either on a service level, i.e. by mail to the unit heads in a relevant DG, or on political level through correspondence to the responsible Commissioner. For more information on the DGs, please see 'Your relevant Directorate-Generals and Commissioners' on page 15). The appropriate Commissioner is often easiest to identify, and forwards all correspondence to the responsible persons within the Commission. Through such correspondence, an idea can be presented or a meeting requested etc.

Alternatively, if individuals or organisations establish a relationship with a Member of the European Parliament, this channel can be used to address a question to the Commission, i.e. via the European Parliament. In this case the Parliament requires a formal institutional answer from

the Commission.

Other Roles

As the European Union's executive body, the Commission is also responsible for managing and implementing the EU budget and for the policies and programmes adopted by Parliament and the Council. Most of the actual work and budget expenditure is managed by national and local authorities, but the Commission is responsible for its supervision.

The Commission moreover acts as 'guardian of the Treaties'. This means that the European Commission, together with the Court of Justice, is responsible for ensuring that EU law is properly applied in all the Member States.

Finally the European Commission represents the European Union on the international stage, for example negotiating international agreements on its behalf.

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