

## Reading 1

**Read the text for useful vocabulary. Don't forget useful connectors, collocations and derived forms of useful words (e.g. legislative *adj* → legislature *n*)**

The *European Parliament* is the directly elected parliamentary institution of the European Union (EU). Together with the Council of the European Union (the Council) and the European Commission, it exercises the legislative function of the EU. The Parliament is composed of 751 members, who represent the second-largest democratic electorate in the world (after the Parliament of India).

It has been directly elected every five years by universal suffrage since 1979. However, voter turnout at European Parliament elections has fallen consecutively at each election since that date, and has been under 50% since 1999.

Although the European Parliament has legislative power that the Council and Commission do not possess, it does not formally possess legislative initiative, as most national parliaments of European Union member states do. The Parliament is the "first institution" of the EU (mentioned first in the treaties, having ceremonial precedence over all authority at European level), and shares equal legislative and budgetary powers with the Council (except in a few areas where the special legislative procedures apply). It likewise has equal control over the EU budget. Finally, the European Commission, the executive body of the EU, is accountable to Parliament. In particular, Parliament elects the President of the Commission, and approves (or rejects) the appointment of the Commission as a whole. It can subsequently force the Commission as a body to resign by adopting a motion of censure.

The President of the European Parliament (Parliament's speaker) is Antonio Tajani (EPP), elected in January 2017. He presides over a multi-party chamber, the two largest groups being the Group of the European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). The last union-wide elections were the 2014 elections.

The European Parliament has three places of work – Brussels (Belgium), the city of Luxembourg (Luxembourg) and Strasbourg (France). Luxembourg is home to the administrative offices (the "General Secretariat"). Meetings of the whole Parliament ("plenary sessions") take place in Strasbourg and in Brussels. Committee meetings are held in Brussels. The Parliament and Council have been compared to the two chambers of a bicameral legislature. However, there are some differences from national legislatures; for example, neither the Parliament nor the Council have the power of legislative initiative (except for the fact that the Council has the power in some intergovernmental matters). In Community matters, this is a power uniquely reserved for the European Commission (the executive). Therefore, while Parliament can amend and reject legislation, to make a proposal for legislation, it needs the Commission to draft a bill before anything can become law. The value of such a power has been questioned by noting that in the national legislatures of the member states 85% of initiatives introduced without executive support fail to become law. Yet it has been argued by former Parliament president Hans-Gert Pöttering that as the Parliament does have the right to ask the Commission to draft such legislation, and as the Commission is following Parliament's proposals more and more Parliament does have a *de facto* right of legislative initiative.

The Parliament also has a great deal of indirect influence, through non-binding resolutions and committee hearings, as a "pan-European soapbox" with the ear of thousands of Brussels-

based journalists. There is also an indirect effect on foreign policy; the Parliament must approve all development grants, including those overseas. For example, the support for post-war Iraq reconstruction, or incentives for the cessation of Iranian nuclear development, must be supported by the Parliament. Parliamentary support was also required for the transatlantic passenger data-sharing deal with the United States. Finally, Parliament holds a non-binding vote on new EU treaties but cannot veto it. However, when Parliament threatened to vote down the Nice Treaty, the Belgian and Italian Parliaments said they would veto the treaty on the European Parliament's behalf.

The parliamentarians are known in English as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). They are elected every five years by universal adult suffrage and sit according to political allegiance; about a third are women. Before 1979 they were appointed by their national parliaments.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, seats are allocated to each state according to population and the maximum number of members is set at 751 (however, as the President cannot vote while in the chair there will only be 750 voting members at any one time).

The seats are distributed according to "degressive proportionality", i.e., the larger the state, the more citizens are represented per MEP. As a result, Maltese and Luxembourgish voters have roughly 10x more influence per voter than citizens of the six large countries. As of 2014, Germany (80.9 million inhabitants) has 96 seats (previously 99 seats), i.e. one seat for 843,000 inhabitants. Malta (0.4 million inhabitants) has 6 seats, i.e. one seat for 70,000 inhabitants.

The new system implemented under the Lisbon Treaty, including revising the seating well before elections, was intended to avoid political horse trading when the allocations have to be revised to reflect demographic changes.

Pursuant to this apportionment, the constituencies are formed. In six EU member states (Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and the United Kingdom), the national territory is divided into a number of constituencies. In the remaining member states, the whole country forms a single constituency. All member states hold elections to the European Parliament using various forms of proportional representation.

The *European Council* is the group of heads of state or government of the EU member states. It meets four times a year to define the Union's policy agenda and give impetus to integration. The President of the European Council is the person responsible for chairing and driving forward the work of the institution, which has been described as the highest political body of the European Union.

The *Council of the European Union* (informally known as the Council of Ministers or just the Council) is a body holding legislative and some limited executive powers and is thus the main decision making body of the Union. Its Presidency rotates between the states every six months, but every three Presidencies now cooperate on a common programme. This body is separate from the European Council, which is a similar body, but is composed of national leaders.

The Council is composed of twenty-eight national ministers (one per state). However the Council meets in various forms depending upon the topic. For example, if agriculture is being

discussed, the Council will be composed of each national minister for agriculture. They represent their governments and are accountable to their national political systems. Votes are taken either by majority or unanimity with votes allocated according to population. In these various forms they share the legislative and budgetary power of the Parliament, and also lead the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The *European Commission* is the executive arm of the Union. It is a body composed of one appointee from each state, currently twenty-eight, but is designed to be independent of national interests. The body is responsible for drafting all law of the European Union and has the ability to propose new laws (bills). It also deals with the day-to-day running of the Union and has the duty of upholding the law and treaties (in this role it is known as the "Guardian of the Treaties").

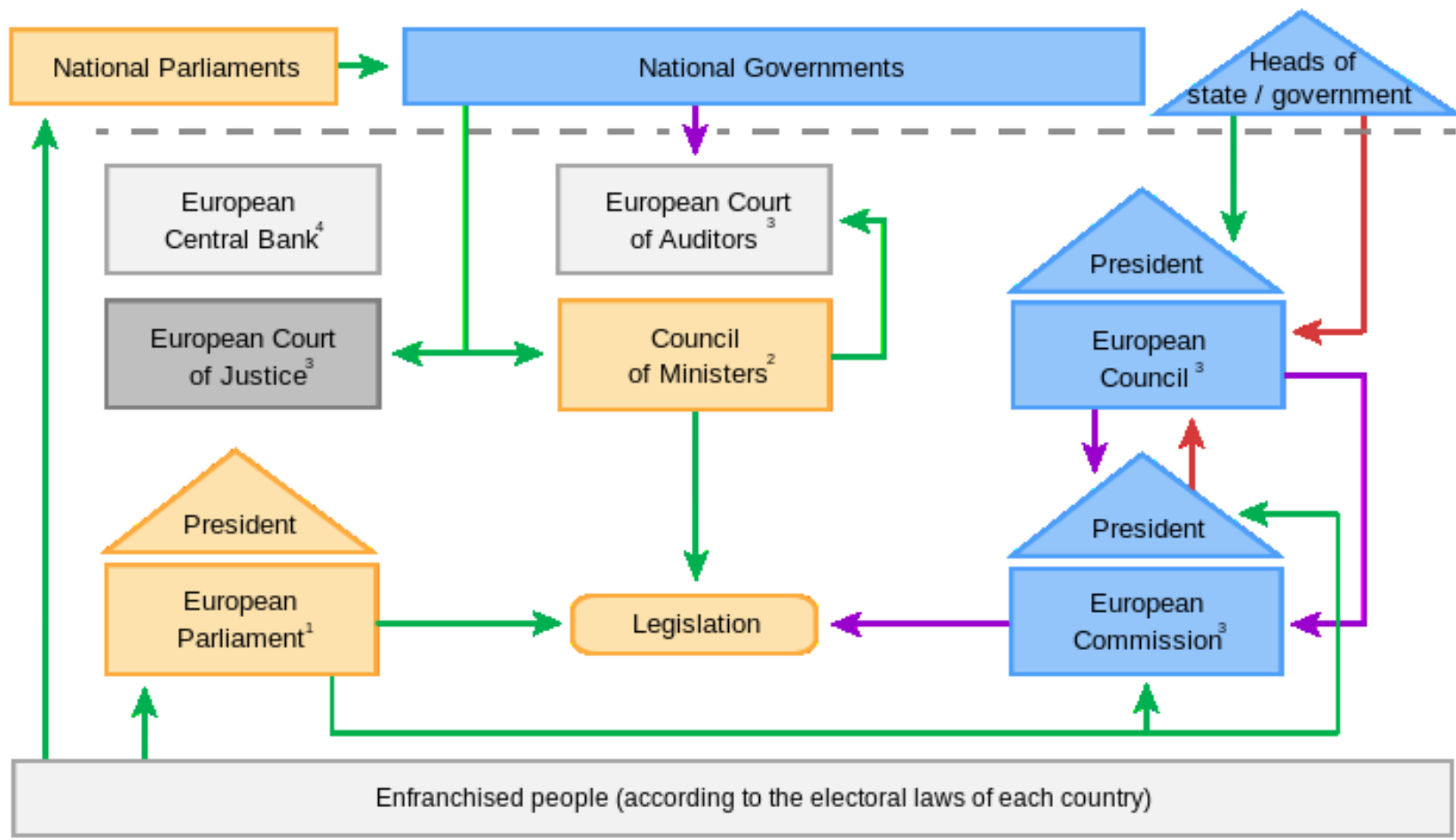
The Commission is led by a President who is nominated by the Council (in practice the European Council) and approved by Parliament. The remaining 27 Commissioners are nominated by member-states, in consultation with the President, and have their portfolios assigned by the President. The Council then adopts this list of nominee-Commissioners. The Council's adoption of the Commission is not an area which requires the decision to be unanimous, their acceptance is arrived at according to the rules for qualified majority voting. The European Parliament then interviews and casts its vote upon the Commissioners. The interviews of individual nominees are conducted separately, in contrast to Parliament's vote of approval which must be cast on the Commission as a whole without the ability to accept or reject individual Commissioners. Once approval has been obtained from the Parliament the Commissioners can take office.

The *Court of Justice of the European Union* is the EU's judicial branch. It is responsible for interpreting EU law and treaties. It comprises the main chamber: Court of Justice, the General Court and the Civil Service Tribunal.

The *European Central Bank* is the central bank for the eurozone (the states which have adopted the euro) and thus controls monetary policy in that area with an agenda to maintain price stability.

It is at the centre of the European System of Central Banks which comprises all EU national banks. The bank is governed by a board of national bank governors and a President.

The *European Court of Auditors*, despite its name, has no judicial powers. It ensures that taxpayer funds from the budget of the European Union have been correctly spent. The court provides an audit report for each financial year to the Council and Parliament. The Parliament uses this to decide whether to approve the Commission's handling of the budget. The Court also gives opinions and proposals on financial legislation and anti-fraud actions. The Court of Auditors was set up in 1975. It was created as an independent institution due to the sensitivity of the issue of fraud in the Union (the anti-fraud agency, OLAF, is also built on its independence). It is composed of one member from each state appointed by the Council every six years. Every three years one of them is elected as the president of the court.



- Legislative branch
- Executive branch
- Judicial branch
- elects / appoints / decides on
- membership
- proposes

- 1: Elections are every 5 years. The right to vote may be different depending on the country
- 2: State chamber. Composes in varying composition depending on the policy area. Each country is represented by one member per department
- 3: Each country is represented by one member
- 4: The European Central Bank is composed of representatives of the national central banks. Its Board is elected by the European Council on the proposal of the Council of Ministers