

## The Main Institutions of the European Union (EU)

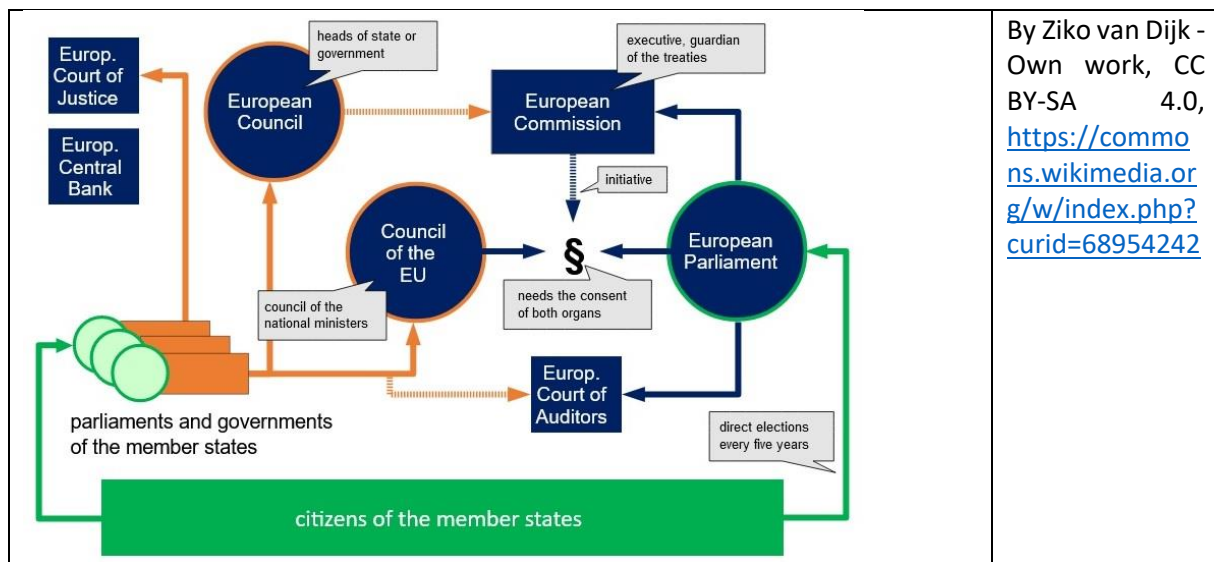
There are 4 main decision-making institutions in the EU, which together formulate and apply EU policy.

1/ The **European Parliament, EP** (with assemblies in Brussels and Strasbourg). It represents the EU's citizens, with elections every five years. The Parliament shares voting power with the Council of the European Union. It does not have power of initiative, but adopts and amends legislation and decides on the annual EU budget, on an equal footing with the Council. The EP also auditions members of the Commission before their final appointment.

2/ The **European Council** brings together the heads of state or government, usually in quarterly summits. It defines the general political direction and priorities of the EU, and is chaired by a president who is elected for a 2.5-year term, renewable once. It does not adopt laws except for possible EU Treaty amendments.

3/ The **Council of the European Union** (informally known as the Council of Ministers or just as the Council) represents the governments of EU countries. It is where the relevant national ministers from each government meet to adopt laws and coordinate policies. In 2020, these included 10 areas with 10 formations, or committees: General Affairs (GAC), Foreign Affairs (FAC), Economic and Financial Affairs (Ecofin), Agriculture and fisheries (Agrifish), Justice & Home Affairs (JHA), Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO), Competitiveness (COMPET), Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE), Environment (ENV), and Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYC).

4/ The **European Commission** is the executive of the EU. It has official power of initiative to propose legislation, and also acts as "Guardian of the Treaties". The Commission President is in practice nominated by the European Council and approved by the Parliament. Each Member State nominates a Commissioner, and portfolios are allocated by the President, who proposes a College of Commissioners which is then auditioned by the European Parliament.



Their work is complemented by other institutions and bodies, which include:

5/ The **Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)** interprets EU law, thus also creating jurisprudence. Situated in Luxembourg, the CJEU is the judicial branch of the EU, and actually consists of two courts: the Court of Justice and the General Court. The former hears applications from national courts for preliminary rulings, annulment and appeals. There is one judge from each country, plus 11 advocates general. The General Court hears applications for annulment from individuals, companies and less commonly national governments.

6/ The **European Court of Auditors (ECA)**, situated in Luxembourg) was established in 1975 to improve EU financial management. It has no jurisdictional functions, but acts more as an external, audit agency, primarily of the EU budget. The Court provides general and specific annual reports, as well as special reports on its audits.

7/ The **European Central Bank (ECB, Frankfurt)** is the main component of the Eurosystem and the European System of Central Banks (ESCB). The Eurosystem is the monetary authority of the Eurozone, and consists of the ECB plus the national central banks (NCBs) of the Eurozone. The ECB has the exclusive right to authorise the issuance of euro banknotes. Member States of the eurozone can issue coins, but the amount must be agreed beforehand by the ECB. The ESCB includes all NCBs in the EU, including those not in the Eurozone.

The Governing Council of the ECB is the main decision-making body of the Eurosystem. It includes the members of the ECB's Executive Board (six persons appointed by the European Council) and the governors of the NCBs.

The ECB is accountable to the European Parliament.