



The European Union:  
History and Institutions

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# European Union (EU) -- Member states and candidates for accession



# History of the EU

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- European integration: Initiated in Western Europe in aftermath of World War II; context marked by political and economic reconstruction, beginning of Cold War
- Three Communities created in 1950s: European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and European Economic Community (EEC), with six member states
- Two trajectories of development: (1) Accession of more member states (“widening”), and (2) transfer of further powers to European institutions, coupled with shift to supranational decision making (“deepening”)

# “Widening” integration

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Original members:  
Germany, France,  
Italy, Benelux



1973:  
UK, Denmark,  
Ireland



1981:  
Greece



1986:  
Portugal,  
Spain



1990:  
East Germany



1995:  
Austria, Sweden,  
Finland



2004:  
CEECs, Cyprus,  
Malta



2007:  
Bulgaria,  
Romania

# “Deepening” integration

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- 1963/64: Court of Justice strengthens Community law against member states
- 1985: Single European Act abolishes member-state veto in many policy areas, strengthens European Parliament
- 1991: Maastricht Treaty lays groundwork for Euro; European Union established in addition to Communities
- 1997 /2000: Amsterdam and Nice Treaties reform EU institutions prior to enlargement
- 2007: Lisbon Treaty simplifies institutional structure, gives EU unified legal personality → in force since 2009

# Core EU institutions -- An overview

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Institution	Governance role	Character
European Council (Brussels)	Defines legislative and executive objectives	Intergovernmental, but supranational presidency
European Commission (Brussels)	Mainly administrative, but also legislative and executive functions	Supranational
Council of Ministers (Brussels)	Legislative, some executive functions	Intergovernmental
European Parliament (Strasbourg, Brussels)	Legislative	Supranational
Court of Justice (Luxembourg)	Judiciary	Supranational

# European Council

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- Summits of heads of state or government from all member states, permanent president (H. Van Rompuy)
- Discusses pressing issues; defines policy objectives; decides on institutional reform and key personnel
- Decisions usually consensual



# European Commission

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- One Commissioner per member state, responsible for specific portfolio, headed by president (J.M. Barroso)
- Initiates EU legislation; manages EU programs and finances; monitors implementation of EU law; represents EU abroad
- Most decisions consensual



# Council of Ministers

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- One minister per member state; composition varies by policy field; presidency rotates between member states every six months
- Must pass all binding EU laws; monitors Commission; some executive powers in foreign/defence policy
- Decides unanimously or per qualified majority (QMV)

# European Parliament

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- 736 directly elected members, organized in transnational party groups, chaired by president (J. Buzek)
- Co-legislator with Council in most policy areas; scrutiny functions vis-à-vis Commission
- Usually decides by simple majority

# Court of Justice

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- 27 judges, appointed by member states, chaired by president (V. Skouris)
- Makes decisions on interpretation of EU law; cases often brought by national courts
- Most decisions made in chambers of 3 or 5 judges