

THE INSTITUTION-PUZZLE

What is it about?

The Institution-Puzzle is an **interactive** non-formal **education tool**, which aims to make participants better understand how the most prominent *EU institutions work and what their roles are*.


What is the aim of the activity?

The Institution-Puzzle is an **interactive** non-formal **education tool**, which aims to make participants better understand how the most prominent *EU institutions work and what their roles are*.

How does it work?

The participants first get time to **read briefings** about the institutions before they start **picking the parts of the “puzzle”** and put them in the *right order*. If you have a bigger room available, this activity can also become a little competition between smaller groups. They might get the following task assigned: “Which team is the first in putting the institutions’ tasks and composition in the right order?”.

How many participants can join?

 20-25

How much time should I allocate?

Depending on the group, the reading can take about **15 minutes**, the “puzzling” can run for about 20 minutes. At the end of the activity, make sure there is enough time for further questions and an eventual discussion.

What do you need?

You will need the **following table**, cut it into pieces and glue or stick the names of the institutions and the different categories on a **flipchart** or a board (four columns, six lines). You spread the pieces of the puzzle on the floor or on a big table. You distribute the following briefings to every participant.

**EU: Who's who? – The central EU institutions, their tasks and competences**

Name:	European Council
Seat:	Brussels
Composition + Role of its members?	28 Members Heads of states and governments of the EU Member states (+ President of the Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and President of the European Council)
Appointment procedure:	democratically elected on the level of the EU Member states
Tasks assigned:	defines the general political direction and priorities of the European Union
Representing interests of ...?	Representation of national interests

Name:	Council of the EU
Seat:	Brussels
Composition + Role of its members?	28 Members (changing composition) Ministers of the Member states
Appointment procedure:	democratically elected on the level of the EU-Member states
Tasks:	Negotiates and adopts EU laws Co- law maker
Representing interests of ...?	Representation of national interests



Name:	European Parliament
Seat:	Strasbourg
Composition+role of its members	750 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) + the EP President
Appointment procedure:	directly elected by EU citizens in every EU member state for a 5 year mandate
Tasks:	Co- law maker political control of the Commission establishing and controlling the budget
Representing interests of ...?	Representation of the EU citizens' interests

Name:	European Commission
Seat:	Brussels
Composition+role of its members	28 Members (Commissioners)
Appointment procedure:	on the basis of a proposal by the Member states, to be approved by the European Parliament and appointed by the European Council for 5 years
Tasks:	Proposes new laws (monopoly of initiative) "Guardian of the Treaties" (Controls) Executive (implements EU policy) External representation of the EU
Representing interests of ...?	Representation of the EU's interests



Council of the EU
(Council of Ministers)

European Council
(Council of Heads of State/Gvt.)

**European
Parliament (EP)**



European Commission

Headquarters: **Brussels**

Headquarters: **Brussels**

Headquarters: **Strasbourg**

Headquarters: **Brussels**



28 members

28 members

(its composition changes
depending on the topic)

**750 members
+ president**

28 members



Heads of State or Government of the Member States

(+ President of the Commission,
High Representative of the Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
and President of the European Council)

EU Member States' specialised ministers

Deputies

Commissioners



**Democratically elected
at EU Member State level**

**Democratically elected
at EU Member State level**

**Elected directly by the
EU citizens, for 5 years**

**On the proposal of the EU
Member States, appointed
by the European Council
after approval by the EP,
for a period of 5 years.**



Determines general political objectives, guidelines and priorities of the EU

**Central decision-making body
(co-)legislator**

**Co-legislator
Political control
Budgetary control**

**Proposes laws (monopoly of initiative)
Guardian of the Treaties (Control)
Executive (implements EU policy)
External representation of the EU**



**Representation of the national
governments of the EU**

**Representation of the national
governments of the EU**

**Representation of the
citizens of the EU**

**Representation of the interests
of the European Union**



Briefings for the Institutions Puzzle

The European Parliament

We, citizens of the EU vote the members of the European Parliament in the European elections. The Parliament has the task to represent the interests of the EU citizens. The elections take place every five years; every 18-year old citizens (in Austria 16 year olds have the right to vote) has the right to participate in the elections. All of the citizens with a right to vote together count 380 Million people. The current European Parliament counts 750 delegates from all the 28 member states of the EU and its president. The members of Parliament are shortly called “MEPs”.

The official seat of the EP is Strasbourg; it is working at three different places though: Strasbourg, Brussels (Belgium) and Luxembourg. The most important sittings of the EP are the ones, where MEPs come together to vote the laws. These sittings are called “plenary sessions”. They take place 12 times a year in Strasbourg, more plenary sessions and the meetings of the different committees take place in Brussels.

Composition of the European Parliament

The number of [MEPs](#) for each country is roughly **proportionate to its population**, but this is by degressive proportionality: no country can have fewer than 6 or more than 96 MEPs and the total number cannot exceed 751 (750 plus the President). MEPs are grouped by [political affiliation](#), not by nationality.

The [President](#) **represents Parliament** to other EU institutions and the outside world and gives the final go-ahead to the EU budget.

How does the Parliament work?

Parliament's work comprises two main stages:

- [Committees](#) - to prepare legislation.
The Parliament numbers **20** committees and two subcommittees, each handling a particular policy area. The committees examine proposals for legislation, and MEPs and political groups can put forward amendments or propose to reject a bill. These issues are also debated within the political groups.
- [Plenary sessions](#) – to pass legislation.
This is when all the MEPs gather in the chamber to give a final vote on the proposed legislation and the proposed amendments. Normally held in Strasbourg for four days a month, but sometimes there are additional sessions in Brussels.



The composition of the European Parliament, legislature 2014-2019 (to be updated after elections in May 2019)

Member state	Number of MEPs
Belgium	21
Bulgaria	17
Denmark	13
Germany	96
Estonia	6
Finland	13
France	74
Greece	21
Ireland	11
Italy	73
Croatia	11
Lettonia	8
Lithuania	11
Luxembourg	6
Malta	6
Netherlands	26
Austria	18
Poland	51
Portugal	21
Rumania	32
Sweden	20
Slovakia	13
Slovenia	8
Spain	54
Tzech Republic	21
Hungary	21
United Kingdom	73
Cyprus	6
TOTAL	751



Briefings for the Institutions Puzzle

The European Commission

What does the Commission do?

Proposes new laws

The Commission is the sole EU institution tabling laws for adoption by the Parliament and the Council that:

- protect the interests of the EU and its citizens on issues that can't be dealt with effectively at national level;
- get technical details right by consulting experts and the public.

Manages EU policies & allocates EU funding

- Sets EU spending priorities, together with the Council and Parliament.
- Draws up annual budgets for approval by the Parliament and Council.
- Supervises how the money is spent, under scrutiny by the [Court of Auditors](#).

Enforces EU law

- Together with the Court of Justice, ensures that EU law is properly applied in all the member countries.

Represents the EU internationally

Political leadership is provided by a team of [28 Commissioners](#) (one from each EU country) – led by the [Commission President](#), who decides who is responsible for which policy area.

The College of Commissioners is composed of the President of the Commission, its six Vice-Presidents, including the First Vice-President, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and 21 Commissioners, each responsible for a portfolio.

The **day-to-day running** of Commission business is performed by its staff (lawyers, economists, etc.), organised into departments known as [Directorates-General \(DGs\)](#), each responsible for a **specific policy area**.



In the Council, **government ministers from each EU country** meet to discuss, amend and adopt laws, and coordinate policies. The ministers have the authority to **commit their governments** to the actions agreed on in the meetings.

Together with the [European Parliament](#), the Council is the **main decision-making body** of the EU.

Not to be confused with:

- [European Council](#) - quarterly summits, where EU leaders meet to set the broad direction of EU policy making
- [Council of Europe](#) - not an EU body at all.

Composition

There are **no fixed members** of the EU Council. Instead, the Council meets in [10 different configurations](#), each corresponding to the policy area being discussed. Depending on the configuration, each country sends their minister responsible for that policy area.

For example, when the Council meeting on economic and financial affairs (the "Ecofin Council") is held, it is attended by each country's finance minister.

Briefings for the Institutions Puzzle

The Council of the EU

What does the Council do?

- **Negotiates and adopts EU laws**, together with the [European Parliament](#), based on proposals from the [European Commission](#)
- **Coordinates** EU countries' policies
- Develops the EU's **foreign & security policy**, based on [European Council](#) guidelines
- Concludes **agreements** between the EU and other countries or international organisations
- Adopts the annual [EU budget](#) - jointly with the European Parliament.

Composition

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Briefings for the Institutions Puzzle

The European Council

The European Council brings together **EU leaders** to set the EU's **political agenda**. It represents the **highest level** of political cooperation between EU countries.

One of the EU's 7 official institutions, the Council takes the form of (usually quarterly) **summit meetings** between EU leaders in Brussels, chaired by a permanent president.

What does the European Council do?

- Decides on the EU's overall **direction** and political **priorities** – but *does not pass laws*.
- Deals with **complex or sensitive issues that cannot be resolved** at lower levels of intergovernmental cooperation
- Sets the EU's [common foreign & security policy](#), taking into account EU strategic interests and defence implications
- Nominates and appoints candidates to certain high profile EU level roles, such as the ECB and the Commission

On each issue, the European Council can:

- ask the [European Commission](#) to make a **proposal** to address it.
- pass it on to the [Council of the EU](#) to deal with

Composition

The European Council is made up of the [heads of state or government of all EU countries](#), the [European Commission President](#) and the [High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy](#).

It is convened and chaired by its [President](#), who is elected by the European Council itself for a once-renewable **two-and-a-half-year term**. The President represents the EU to the **outside world**.

How does the European Council work?

It usually meets **4 times a year** – but the President can convene additional meetings to address urgent issues.