**Institutions of the European Union**

**Symbols of the EU:**

* **The flag** - 12 golden stars in a circle on a blue background; the stars symbolize the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony among the people in Europe;
* **The anthem** – Symphony No. 9 composed by Ludwig van Beethoven in 1823 on Friedrich Schiller's poem „An die Freude“  or *Ode to Joy* in 1785;
* **Motto**: „In varietate concordia“ or *United in diversity* is being used since 2000;
* **Europe Day** – 9 May – in commemoration of the Schuman Declaration.

**Values of the EU:**

Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that:

*„The EU is founded on the values of* ***respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities****". The member states share a "society in which* ***pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail****".*

European traditions and the fundamentals of the EU emphasize these values as the main principles of living together and organizing the society, public life and politics.

**Goals of the EU:**

* Preserving peace, values, and the welfare of the citizens,
* Securing the freedom, security and justice without internal borders,
* Sustainable development based on balanced economic growth and price stability, highly competitive market economy characterized by full employment and social progress, and the environmental protection,
* Fight against social exclusion and discrimination,
* Support of the scientific and technological progress,
* Improvement of economic, social and territorial cohesiveness and solidarity between the member states,
* Protection of the rich cultural and language diversity,
* Creation of economic and monetary union with euro as common currency.

**Institutions of the EU:**

Their authorities are determined by treaties.

1. ***European Parliament*** – is the representative body of the citizens from the member states.

The European Parliament has 705 members.

Since 1979 they have been directly elected every 5 years.

The number of members in the EP for a particular state depends approximately on the number of citizens each of the states has, where minimum is 6 and maximum 96 MP´s in the European Parliament per member state.

The President of the European Parliament is elected for the term of two and a half years which makes half of the term of a regular MP and can be re-elected.

The current President is *David Sassoli*.

Tasks of the EP:

* The EP is a legislative body of the EU that draws up the budget of the EU and monitors all institutions of the EU.
* Common legislative authority: EP together with the European Council accepts the legal regulations that are presented as a proposal of the European Commission.
* Budget authority: EP decides upon the overall annual budget of the EU together with the European Council. The EP has the final say.
* Authority to control the executive: The parliament has the authority to control the activities of the Commission and other EU institutions. It elects the President of the European Commission and has the authority to approve/reject the Commission on the whole.

Running of the European Parliament:

MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) aren´t seated according to their countries but according to their political group.

In the EP there are currently eight political groups: European People's Party (EPP); Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D); Renew Europe Group (Renew); Identity and Democracy (ID); Greens / European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA); European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR); The Left in the European Parliament – European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL); Non-inscrits.

The work is prepared in smaller thematic parliamentary committees, for instance the Committee of Agriculture or the Committee of the Transportation.

The EP decides based on the majority of votes.

The official seat of the EP is in ***Strasbourg***. Every month the MEPs meet for a week at a plenary or general session. In all the other weeks the MEPs attend the parliamentary committee’s sessions, meetings of the political groups and current plenary sessions in ***Brussels***.

The Secretariat of the EP is seated in ***Luxembourg***.

1. ***European Council*** – the meetings take place 4 times a year in Brussels.

It is chaired by its president or the Prime minister of the country that chairs the EU summit at that particular time. The chairman is seen as a full member of the summit.

The chairman of the European Council is *Charles Michel* since 1 December 2019.

Tasks of the European Council:

* Provides the union with general political directions and priorities;
* It is a strategic crisis-solving body in cases where the Council of the EU has failed to find a compromise;
* Here the main political decisions are made;
* It is dealing with current international issues through common foreign and security policy whose aim is that the EU will act in diplomatic relations as a whole.

 Running of the European Council:

It usually assembles **4 times a year**; in urgent issues the chairman can call an extraordinary meeting.

The decisions made by the European Council are usually accepted via a **consensus**, in some cases though also unanimously or by competent majority. Only the heads of states or Prime Ministers can vote.

1. ***Council of the European Union*** (Council of Ministers) – based in Brussels.

Together with the European Parliament it is the main decision-making institution of the EU.

In the chairmanship the countries of the EU take turns every six months.

At each summit one minister for each member state is present. It depends on the topic discussed at the summit what competence the ministers have: the issues can be general; foreign; economic and financial; issues regarding justice and domestic affairs; employment; social policy; health and consumer issues; competitiveness (inner market, industry, research, space travel); transport, telecommunications and energetic; agriculture and fishing; environment; education, youth, culture and sport.

Tasks of the Council of the EU:

* Common legislative power: Council of the EU together with European Parliament hold the negotiations about legal regulations of the EU and accept these regulations on the basis of the European Commission proposals.
* Budget legislative power: Council of the EU together with the European Parliament approve the annual EU budget.
* Coordination of the member states politics: The council is responsible for the coordination of the member states politics in specific fields, such as education, culture, economic and fiscal policy and the employment policy.
* The development of the common foreign and security policy of the EU: The Council defines and performs foreign and security policy of the EU on the basis of the European Council regulations.
* The Council also ratifies the international treaties that were discussed by the European Commission.

Running of the Council of European Union:

The ministers of the Council of the EU represent their own countries and defend their countries´ interests.

The Council usually votes based on the qualified majority which is also called the „rule of the double majority“.

The qualified majority is reached under these two conditions:

* 55 % of member states vote aye
* These member states represent at least 65 % of the total EU inhabitants.

This means that the proposals can be clocked by a minimum of 4 states that represent 35% of the total EU inhabitants. In some cases the Council votes unanimously and in such cases the legislative proposal has to be accepted by all states.

1. ***European Commission*** – based in Brussels (Belgium).

It is made up of 27 members of the Commission (informally „commissioners“), each state having one member.

Each commissioner is responsible for their own specific political area.

New College of Commissioners is appointed every five years.

The present Commission has the valid mandate from 2019 till 2024.

The current Commission President is *Ursula von der Leyen* from Germany.

Tasks of the European Commission:

* EC is the „government“ of the EU – it has the executive power.
* Legislative initiative: it has the power to draft legislative proposals.
* Executive power: the Commission executes the rules and legal regulations of the EU. It means that the Commission is responsible for the everyday running of the EU.
* Enforcement: The Commission monitors the implementation of the legislation passed by the member states.
* The Commission substitutes the EU abroad and in international organisations for example the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Running of the European Commission:

The European Commission advances the general interests of the EU.

The commissioners try to reach the majority of decisions based on a consensus.

In other cases they use the majority of the votes (each commissioner having one vote).

1. ***Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)*** – based in Luxembourg.

It is formed by judges, each representing one of the EU countries, and 11 advocates general that help the judges.

They are appointed through common agreement of the governments of the member states for the period of six years that can be prolonged.

They are absolutely independent.

Tasks of the CJEU:

* The Court of Justice Works as an independent arbiter that passes sentences upon the issues that have arisen between the member states, institutions and citizens of the EU.
* The Court of Justice also interprets the law of the EU and so ensures its assertion in all member states equally and also cares that the EU legislation be abided by EU member states and institutions.
1. ***European Central Bank*** – based in Frankfurt (Germany).

The European Central Bank (ECB) was established in 1998 and is responsible for the European economic and monetary policy as well as the administration of the euro.

The highest decision-making authority of the ECB is the Executive Board.

It consists of 6 members and the Governors of 19 Central Banks of the Euro zone countries.

The President of the ECB is *Christine Lagarde* from France since November 2019.

Tasks of the ECB:

* One of the main roles of the ECB is to ensure price stability in the Eurozone, preventing inflation having any influence on the purchasing power of the euro. It is done by administration of the amount of money in circulation
* ECB determines the interest rate and monitors the trend in prices in the whole Eurozone as well as emitting the euro banknotes.
* Since 2014 the ECB has a new role that is separate from the two previous ones; bank supervision. An agreement was made that all banks within the Euro zone are subject to direct supervision of the ECB.

Running of the ECB:

ECB cooperates with the European System of Central Banks (ECB + the national banks of the EU member states) and is independent.

The policy of the ECB mainly focuses on the general interests of the Eurozone.

1. ***European Court of Auditors (ECA)*** – based in Luxembourg.

It has one member of each of the EU member states and they are appointed by the Council of the EU after consulting it with the European Parliament for the term of 6 years.

The European Court of Auditors, as the independent external EU auditor, cares about the European taxpayers. It doesn't have the legal authority but its goal is to improve the administration of the EU budget from the side of the European Commission and present the reports about the condition of the EU financial means.

Tasks of the ECA:

* It carries out the audit of incomes and expenses of the EU to see if the financial means are gained and spent in the right way.
* It monitors individuals or organizations that handle the EU financial resources.
* The findings are being written in reports and recommendations for the European Commission and national authorities.
* It informs the [European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF) about fraud suspicion, corruption or other illegal activities.](http://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/home_sk)
1. ***Economic and Social Committee (EESC)*** – based in Brussels.

It is a consultative body of the EU composed of „social partners“, namely: employer´s organizations (employers), trade unions (employees) and representatives of various other interests that are nominated by their national governments and are appointed by the Council of the EU for a 5 year renewable term.

It expresses opinions towards the European Commission, Council of the EU, and the European Parliament on matters concerning the EU. The meetings take place 9 times a year. Any proposals are accepted by the majority of the votes.

1. ***European committee of the Regions* (COR)** – based in Brussels.

It is a consultative body of the EU composed of 27 member states elected on local and regional levels.

The members of the COR are elected representatives working for local or regional organs. Each country nominates its members according to its own choice who are then appointed by the Council of the EU for a 5 year term that can be prolonged.

Via the COR the regions and towns can also officially participate in the creation of legislative regulations of the EU.

The European Commission, Council of the EU and the European Parliament has to consult the COR when proposing legal regulations concerning the local or regional administrations. Otherwise the COR can take legal actions to the CJEU.

After the COR receives the legislative proposal, it prepares and accepts the standpoint which is then sent to relevant EU institutions.

1. ***European Investment Bank (EIB)*** – based in Luxembourg.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the common ownership of the EU states.

Its goal is to:

* Support the Europe´s potential in the fields of employment and growth,
* Support he measures taken to moderate the climate-related changes,
* Assert the EU policy outside the EU.

 Tasks of the EIB:

* It borrows money on the stock market and at favourable conditions it grants credit for investments that support the goals of the EU.
1. ***European Ombudsman*** – based in Strasbourg.

The European Ombudsman is elected by the European Parliament for the term of 5 years.

It is an impartial body that isn't subject to any government or other organisation.

Tasks of the European Ombudsman:

* Investigating EU institutions or organs on the grounds of maladministration: administrative irregularities, unfairness, discrimination, abuse of power, failure to reply, refusal of information or unnecessary delay. The complaints of such manners can be made by individual citizens, persons with stays in the countries of the EU or associations or companies residing in the EU.
* He or she prepares an [annual report about their activities of the European Parliament.](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/sk/activities/annualreports.faces)
1. ***European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)*** – based in Brussels.

It is an independent supervisory authority that consists of one chairman and two vice-chairmen who are appointed for a 5 year term that can be prolonged.

Primary objective of the EDPS:

* Monitor and ensure that the legal regulations of the EU, foremost the general order about data protection and the personal data and privacy directive is respected in all countries related; he supports the cooperation among the domestic authorities for data protection.
* Provides general guidance (instructions, suggestions and the best procedures).
* The EDPS advises the European Commission on data protection and it also relates to proposals for new legislation that may affect personal data protection in the EU.
* Encourages the domestic authorities in data protection, mutual cooperation and exchanging information for the best procedures.
1. ***European External Action Service (EEAS)*** - based in Brussels.

It is the diplomatic service of the EU, led by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR), who is also the President of the Foreign Affairs Council and Vice-President of the European Commission.

Its goal is to strengthen the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the EU foreign policy and so to increase the influence of Europe and worldwide.

Tasks of the EEAS:

* Helps the High Representative of the EU execute the foreign policy of the EU.
* Manages the diplomatic relations and strategic partnerships with the third countries.
* Cooperate with domestic diplomatic services of the EU countries, UN and other important world powers.