

Teacher's notes

It is important for students to understand how culturally different Europe is but also how all European countries within the European Union work together. Students may at some point need to know about different currencies within Europe, for example

- Britain's Pounds and Pence
- Euros and Cents
- Polish Zloty's
- Swedish Krona and öre
- Latvia's Lats and Santimi

Students may want to investigate what laws have been created by the EU for example on issues such as

- Trading
- Education
- Immigration
- Human Rights

How does Europe, more specifically, the European Union work. Aspects to consider might be,

- MPs (Members of Parliament) and MEPs (Members of European Parliament)
- How often does the Parliament meet?
- Where do the EU workers meet? Where is the EU base?

Are these to make Europe a stronger and fairer place to live and work? You may want to find out who your MEP is and invite them to talk to the students. Or make a list of questions that the students would like answered about Europe that your MEP could answer for you.

The notes below are from www.askcedric.org.uk. They give a brief summary of the EU for Key Stage 3.

How is the EU governed?

Background Information

By signing the Treaty of Rome each of the member countries agreed that they would work together to make a common set of trading laws. Instead of having separate national rules or standards they agreed to harmonise to create a common united market. In some instances this has meant changing some of our own national laws.

In order to share in the benefits of belonging to the Community we have had to be prepared to compromise as some decisions that affect our lives are made within other EU countries.

To bring out a new law, or to change an existing one, always takes time. The problem with an EU law is magnified twentyfive times. Often each country will want to keep the standards it already has. The law-making process is very complicated and can sometimes take years.

In order to understand how EU laws are made, it is necessary to start by looking at the organisations involved in the EU.

GOVERNING THE EU

There are five institutions involved in running the European Union:

- the **European Parliament** (elected by the peoples of the Member States).
- the **Council** (representing the governments of the Member States).
- the **Commission** (the executive and the body having the right to initiate legislation).
- the **Court of Justice** (ensuring compliance with the law).
- the **Court of Auditors** (responsible for auditing the accounts).

These institutions are supported by other bodies:

- the **Economic and Social Committee**,
- the **Committees of the Regions** (advisory bodies which help to ensure that the positions of the EU's various economic and social categories and regions respectively are taken into account),
- the **European Ombudsman** (dealing with complaints from citizens concerning maladministration at European level),
- the **European Investment Bank** (EU financial institution)

INSTITUTIONS

1) The European Parliament

The most important powers of the European Parliament fall into 3 categories:

- legislative power

- power over the budget
- supervision of the executive

It is often described as the "watchdog" of the EU because it keeps an eye on how those other two bodies are working. It also watches how the money is being spent. The budget for the EU is quite large and has to be shared out as fairly as possible between all the countries.

Now more than ever before, it is in a much better position to do both because its responsibilities have been gradually widened and its powers strengthened first by the Single Act of 1987 and then by the Treaty of European Union of 1993.

Meetings of the Parliament are held about once a month in Strasbourg or Luxembourg. The people who sit in Parliament are called Euro-MP's, they are appointed by elections which are held every five years. They are directly elected by the 370 million citizens of the Union that it represents.

2) The Council of the European Union

More commonly known as the Council of Ministers, this institution has no equivalent anywhere in the world. This is the decision-making body and it decides on whether or not the proposals put to it by the European Commission become law.

Each country will send one of its own government ministers to attend the Council. Most of the time it will be the Foreign Minister but if, for example, the Council are discussing something which would affect agriculture, then the Minister of Agriculture would attend.

Meetings of the Council are held in Brussels or Luxembourg. The Presidency of the Council rotates between member states every six months: January until June, July until December.

3) The European Commission

The Commission is made up of representatives from each member country and sits in Brussels. They are not elected by the European people, but are chosen by each country's own government.

The Commission's job is to plan policies and to put together written proposals on what it feels the Union ought to be doing. It also acts as a mediator and will try to sort out arguments between governments if they can't agree between themselves.

Whenever they are looking at any proposals or problems, members of the Commission must put the European interest first. They should think about the

situation in Europe as a whole rather than about their own country's individual needs.

The role and responsibilities of the European Commission place it firmly at the heart of the European Union's policy-making process. In some respects, it acts as the heart of Europe, from which the other institutions derive much of their energy and purpose.

4) The European Court of Justice

The European Court of justice sits in Luxembourg and is made up of one judge from each Member State. It is there to make sure that once an EU law is made, all the countries within the Community follow it fairly. If there is a disagreement, then the Court of Justice can decide who is right.

The Court may be called upon by the Commission, the Council of Ministers, a member country or an individual citizen. But once it has made a decision, it has the full force of law. This means that everyone in the EU has to obey the Court's ruling or decision.

The Court of Justice provides the judicial safeguards necessary to ensure that the law is observed in the interpretation and application of the Treaties and, generally in all of the activities of the Union.

Community law has successfully become part of the law in each Member States, due to it having been interpreted and applied by the citizens, the administrative authorities and the courts of all of the Member States. It is now a uniform body of rules that individuals may rely upon in their national courts.

The decisions of the Court have made Community law a reality for the citizens of Europe and often have important constitutional and economic consequences.

Example

Retirement Age

In 1986, the European Court of Justice ruled that it is illegal to force British women workers to retire from their jobs earlier than men. The case had been brought by Mrs Helen Marshall who was asked to retire from her job as Senior Dietician in a Southampton hospital when she reached 60 years of age. She felt that this was unfair because her male colleagues were allowed to stay until 65.

The Court of Justice decided that the British Government was acting unlawfully and had broken the EU's 1976 Sex Equality Rules.

5) Court of Auditors

This is the taxpayers' representative, responsible for checking that the European Union spends its money according to its budgetary rules and regulations and for the purposes for which it is intended.

It guarantees that certain moral, administrative and accounting principles are respected. The Court's reports are a rich source of information on the management of the Union's finances, and a source of pressure on the institutions and others with administrative responsibility to manage them soundly.