

Introduction

The European Commission is the EU's executive body. The Commission is the only institution that can propose EU laws and it ensures that these laws are properly applied in all member states. When members do not implement EU law the Commission can take legal action. The Commission has the financial power to draft the EU budget and distribute EU money to member states. It also represents all member states in treaty negotiations, the enlargement of the EU, and it surveys all decisions made about foreign, justice and home affairs policy.

The European Commission is not directly elected by the electorate and, due to its far reaching power, many critics have accused it of being undemocratic. Instead, each member state government sends one person to be in the Commission.

How does the European Commission work?

The European Commission consists of 28 commissioners (including the president), one from each member state. A new team of commissioners is appointed every five years and each one manages EU policy in a particular area, such as trade, education or transport. The Treaty of Rome states that each commissioner must show no allegiance to their home country.

The Commission President is elected by the European Parliament. Following this election, the president selects the commissioners based on suggestions made by member states. The final list of commissioners is agreed by the president and the European Council. After this agreement the Commission requires the European Parliament's consent.

The UK's commissioner is Lord Hill of Oareford, who is responsible for overseeing the EU's financial services sector. Such a prized position was unexpected after Prime Minister David Cameron opposed Jean-Claude Juncker's presidency. It was seen as an olive branch, with the intention of keeping Britain inside the EU.

History

The Commission was created by the Treaty of Rome (1957). Its influence has changed over the years, largely depending upon the president. Walter Hallstein, president from 1958 to 67, is credited with establishing this part of the EU. Jacques Delors (1985-94) moved the integration process forward. In 1999, due to allegations of corruption, the entire Commission resigned following pressure from the European Parliament.

Over 2,000 permanent EU civil servants based in Brussels carry out the work of the Commission. They are based in 33 Directorates-General which deal with all areas of economic and social policy, external affairs, the management of the EU, legal advice and translation. Each commissioner is supported by their own cabinet of advisors.

Commission presidents used to be nominated by heads of state and government, and then approved by the European Parliament. As of 2014, in an attempt to make the process more democratic, the major political groups nominate a lead candidate for the post, who is then approved by the European Parliament.

The current Commission will be in power until 31 October 2019. Its president is Jean-Claude Juncker. He was nominated as lead candidate of the European People's Party, the largest party in the European Parliament.