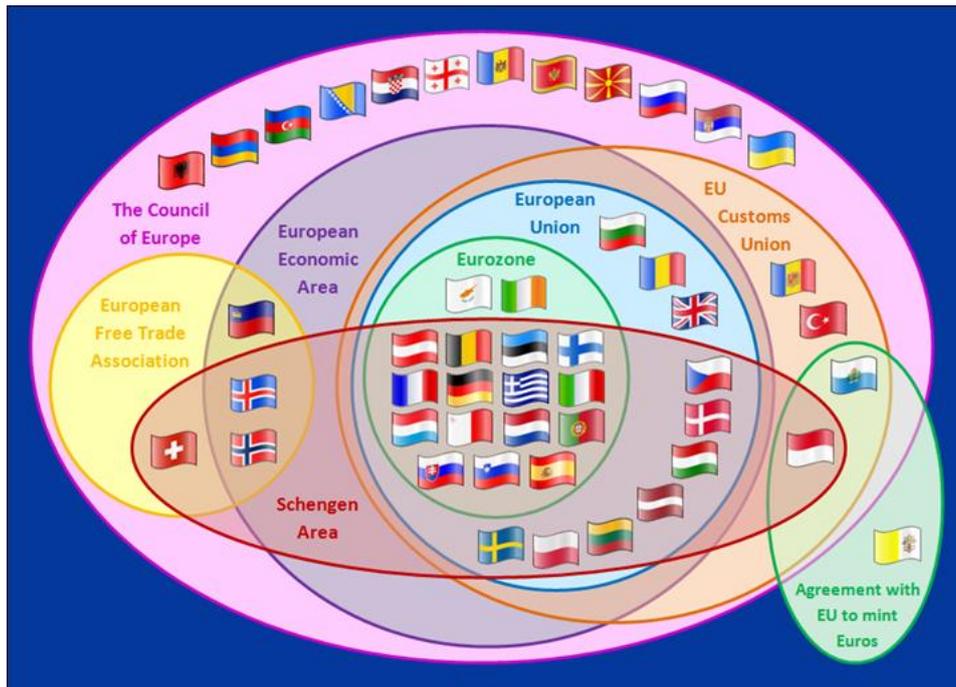


# The European Union



This diagram shows the various institutions and agreements that govern Europe; the UK is a part of all the major ones except the Eurozone and the Schengen area.

Within the **European Union**, there are three main institutions and politics is at the heart of each of them.

1. **The Commission** is the EU 'Civil Service'. It proposes legislation, implements and enforces European law and policies and represents the Union as a whole to other countries. It is currently lead by Jean Claude Juncker, the former Prime Minister of Luxembourg and he is assisted by a Commissioner from every other member state, who are given different policy responsibilities.

The President of the Commission is appointed by the Member States and will reflect the political makeup of those states. Each Member State then nominates a Commissioner candidate, typically senior politicians of that country, who are then approved by the European Parliament.

2. **'The European Council'** is the meeting of government *ministers* of each member state, who negotiate and agree EU laws with the European Parliament. The makeup of the Council differs depending on the policy under discussion, with relevant ministers from government departments being sent for specific policy areas

**'The Council of the European Union'** is a different body to the European Council, the most senior in the EU. It is the meeting of *Heads of State* and Government of each Member State. It decides the broad political & strategic direction of the EU. This is where the UK Prime Minister goes for the regular "EU summits."

3. **The European Parliament** which is the elected body of representatives of everyone around Europe. It has the power to approve, amend or reject legislation proposed by the Commission. It can also call for the Commission to propose a particular law.

The European Parliament is made up of 751 Members elected in the 28 Member States of the enlarged European Union. Since 1979 MEPs have been elected by direct universal suffrage for a five-year period.

Each country decides on the form its election will take, but must guarantee equality of the sexes and a secret ballot. EU elections are by proportional representation. Voting age is 18, aside from Austria, where it is 16.

Seats are allocated on the basis of population of each Member State. Slightly more than a third of MEPs are women. Labour MEPs are over 50% women. MEPs are grouped by political affinity, not nationality.

There are 9 different political groupings in the parliament, which consists of representatives from national parties, such as Labour and the Conservatives, who join up with similar parties from other countries.

Parliament is, in theory, a grand coalition of the big parties:

- Centre-Left (the Socialists & Democrats - Labour's group)
- Centre (ALDE, the LibDem group)
- Centre-Right Parties (the EPP)

The Tories sit in the hard right European Conservatives and Reformists party. There isn't, however, a government or governing party, with decisions being taken through a more consensus driven style.

Unlike in Westminster, the committees in the European Parliament have much more power.

There are 20 committees, one for each area of legislation

They reflect the political make-up of the assembly and are responsible for creating amendments to policy and in negotiating with the Council to agree on a law.

Policy is built via consensus between the different groups via the committees, leading to the legislative process being less acrimonious than in the UK parliament.

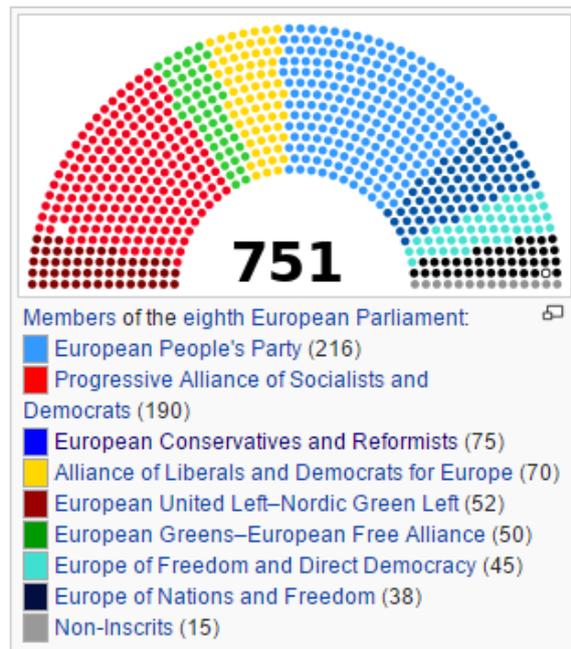


Figure 1 - Repartition of seats in the European Parliament after the creation of the ENL group.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:European\\_Parliament\\_as\\_of\\_June\\_2015.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:European_Parliament_as_of_June_2015.svg)