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## STUDENTS FORUM

### The European Commission

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The European Commission represents the interests of Europe in the institutional structure of the EU. It is the only body in the EU that has the right to make proposals for legislation and as such helps greatly to determine the speed and direction of the European Union's development. As "custodian of the Treaties" it also ensures that European law is obeyed. The origins of the European Commission can be traced back to the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which was the precursor of the Commission we know today. Since the treaty to merge the executives came into force in 1967, a single Commission has served all three European Communities (ECSC, Euratom and EC).

The Commission is the driving force in the Union's institutional system:

- 1) It has the right to propose legislation to Parliament and the Council;
- 2) As the European Union's executive body it is responsible for implementing the European legislation (directives, regulations, decisions), budget and programmes adopted by Parliament and the Council of Ministers;
- 3) It acts as guardian of the Treaties and, together with the Court of Justice, ensures that Community law is properly applied;
- 4) It represents the Union on the international stage and negotiates international agreements, chiefly in the field of trade and cooperation;
- 5) It is responsible for managing EU budget.

The Commission's proposals relate to fields defined by the Treaties, in particular transport, industry, social policy, agriculture, the environment, energy, regional development, trade relations and development cooperation. The Commission's initiatives relate only to those areas where Community-level action would be more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level. The aim of these proposals is to defend the interests of the Union and its citizens.

Once a Commission proposal has been presented to the Council and the European Parliament, the three institutions work together to reach a satisfactory result. The Council generally decides on Commission proposals by qualified majority voting (or unanimity if it decides to reject a proposal), and the Commission examines the European Parliament's amendments before presenting an amended proposal.

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Once the Council and the European Parliament have adopted a piece of legislation, it then has to be implemented in practice. As a rule, it is the Member States themselves which are responsible for the practical application of Community rules. However, in some fields, the European Commission can issue the necessary implementing rules. It is, for example, responsible for the planning and implementation of the common agricultural policy, regional development policy, cooperation with the countries of central and eastern Europe and development cooperation with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. The Commission is also in charge of the research and technological development programmes.

The Commission is responsible for managing the Community budget, under the supervision of the Court of Auditors. The European Parliament uses the Court of Auditors' annual report to grant the Commission discharge for the implementation of the budget.

As the Guardian of the Treaties the Commission ensures that European legislation is applied correctly in the Member States in order to maintain confidence between the Member States, economic operators and private individuals. Its obligation is to take steps to deal with infringements of Community obligations. If a situation cannot be settled through the infringement procedure, the Commission refers the matter to the Court of Justice, which ensures that the law is observed in the interpretation and application of the Treaties. The Commission also monitors companies' respect for the competition rules, under the supervision of the Court of Justice.

As the executive body of the European Union the Commission represents the Union on the international stage. It negotiates international agreements on the external aspect of EU policies.

Since 1995, the European Commission has consisted of 20 members or "Commissioners", appointed by the Member States after a vote of approval by the Parliament. Before taking up their posts at the Commission, many of them were national or European MPs, even ministers or senior ministerial staff in their countries of origin, and thus bring a wealth of valuable skills and experience to the Commission.

The 20 Commissioners command a staff of around 16,000 officials working in 24 specialised departments, known as "Directorates-General", or in various other services. A particularly important department as regards legislative procedure is the Secretariat-General, which oversees the decision-making process within the Commission and maintains the links with other institutions.

The Commission has a Representation office in all EU Member States as well as in many other countries with which the EU maintains contacts. There is a Delegation of the EC also in Tbilisi, responsible for Georgia and Armenia.

Each of the larger Member States nominates two Commissioners and the others one each. The Commission is reappointed every five years after they have been approved by the European Parliament, within six months of the elections to the European Parliament. This interval gives the new Parliament time to approve the Commission President proposed by the Member States, before the President designate constitutes his future team,

in collaboration with the governments of the Member States. Parliament then gives its opinion on the entire college through a process of approval. Once accepted by the Parliament, the new Commission can officially start work the following January.

**The European Commission's Directorates-General and Services:**

**European Anti-Fraud Office** – The mission of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is to protect the interests of the European Union, to fight fraud, corruption and any other irregular activity, including misconduct within the European Institutions. In pursuing this mission in an accountable, transparent and cost-effective manner, OLAF aims to provide a quality service to the citizens of Europe.

**Eurostat** – Eurostat's mission is to provide the European Union with a high-quality statistical information service. Eurostat is the Statistical Office of the European Communities situated in Luxembourg. Its task is to provide the European Union with statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions.

**Press and Communication** – Its mission is to inform the media and citizens of the activities of the Commission, to communicate the objectives and goals of its policies and actions and to inform the Commission of the evolution of opinion in the Member States.

**Publications Office** – It is the publishing house of the institutions and other bodies of the European Union. It is responsible for producing and distributing EU publications on all media and by all means.

**Secretariat General** – It reports to the President. One of its tasks is to see that the Commission observes the principle of collective responsibility. The Secretariat-General's responsibilities include providing technical secretarial services, advice, organisation, mediation and coordination (of both form and substance) in the preparation of and follow-up to Commission decisions, departmental activities and relations with other institutions. It organises and coordinates the work of the Directorates-General, ensuring collective responsibility and overall coherence in the Commission's action in conformity with political priorities established by the President.

**The European Commission's policies are:**

**Agriculture** – Its objectives are to increase agricultural productivity, to stabilise market, to assure the availability of supplies, to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices.

**Competition** – The mission of Competition Directorate General is to enforce the competition rules of the Community Treaties in order to ensure that competition in the EU market is not distorted, thereby contributing to the welfare of consumers and the competitiveness of the European economy. Competition Directorate General's main activity areas are: Anti-Trust, Merger Control, Liberalisation and State Intervention and State Aid.

**Economic and Financial Affairs** – DG's main activities are: economic surveillance (Euro area and EU), monitoring budgetary policy and public finances, economic policy coordination, legal, practical and institutional aspects of EURO, financial markets and capital movement, economic relations with third countries, financing.

**Education and Culture** – Main goals of Education and Culture DG are to bring people together to foster respect and understanding, to create a European knowledge area and to support the development of cultural and audio-visual sectors.

**Employment and Social Affairs** – DG Employment & Social Affairs has the task of promoting a modern, innovative and sustainable European Social Model with more and better jobs in an inclusive society based on equal opportunities. Its main policy areas are: Employment policy; Working life policy, including labour standards, the modernisation of work and the development of social dialogue; Social protection; Social inclusion; Equality between men and women; Equal opportunities and anti-discrimination.

**Energy and Transport** – It is responsible for developing and implementing European policies in the energy and transport field. Its mission is to ensure that energy and transport policies are designed for the benefit of all sectors of the society, businesses, cities, rural areas and above all of citizens.

**Enterprise** – The mission of the Enterprise Directorate General is to address the entire business environment to enable enterprises to strengthen their competitiveness, grow and develop in a way that is compatible with the overall EU goal of sustainable development. Its main tasks are: Completing and managing the Single Market for products; Competitiveness and improvement of the business environment; Innovation and research framework programmes; Non-legislative sectoral activity; Coherence and cooperation with other policy areas.

**Environment** – Its main role is to initiate and define new environmental legislation and to ensure that measures, which have been agreed, are actually put into practice in the Member States.

**Fisheries** – It is the Directorate-General responsible for the Common Fisheries Policy, which covers all fishing activities, the farming of living aquatic resources, and their processing and marketing, on the legal basis of Article 33 (ex 39) of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

**Health and Consumer Protection** – The mission of DG is to implement the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Treaty and derived legislation so as to ensure that a high level of human health and consumer protection is attained throughout the EU. It's responsible for the following areas: Public Health; Food Safety; Veterinary and Phytosanitary Standards and Controls including Animal Welfare; Scientific Advice; and Consumer Protection.

**Information Society** – The Information Society DG is playing a key role in implementing the Europe's heads of state "vision": to make Europe the world's most competitive and dynamic economy, characterised by sustainable growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

**Internal Market** – The role of the Internal Market Directorate-General is to co-ordinate the European Commission's overall policy to ensure that the European Internal Market functions effectively and to formulate and execute Commission policy in key areas of the Single Market. The aim is to eliminate unjustified obstacles to the free movement of goods and services and to freedom of establishment. The DG also has to co-ordinate and supervise the rules concerning public procurement, financial services, postal services, professional recognition, protection of personal data, company law, accounting, industrial and intellectual property, commercial communications and electronic commerce with a view to ensuring the free movement of goods and services.

**Joint Research Centre** – The mission of the JRC is to provide customer-driven scientific and technical support for the conception, development, implementation and monitoring of EU policies. As a service of the European Commission, the JRC functions as a reference centre of science and technology for the Union.

**Justice and Home Affairs** – The role of this DG is closely linked to one of the major objectives of the European Union, namely to ensure that the whole European Union is an "area of freedom, security and justice" (AFSJ). Policies that the Amsterdam Treaty has put within the JHA are external borders, immigration and asylum, and judicial co-operation in civil matters. JHA policy fields that continue to be run by co-operation between Member States are customs and police co-operation and judicial co-operation in the criminal field.

**Regional Policy** – The Regional Policy Directorate-General is the department in the European Commission responsible for European measures to assist the economic and social development of the less-favoured regions of the European Union under Articles 158 and 160 of the Treaty.

**Research** – The Directorate General's mission is to develop the European Union's policy in the field of research and technological development and thereby contribute to the international competitiveness of European industry, coordinate European research activities with those carried out at the level of the Member States and to promote a better understanding of the role of science in modern societies.

**Taxation and Customs Union** – This Directorate General administers, and controls the application of the Customs Code and operates a strategy to ensure that the national customs administrations apply the law as if they were a single customs administration. It ensures that Community law is respected in order to ensure a full implementation of the single market and to support the construction of economic and monetary union.

**Development** – The objective of the DG is to foster sustainable development designed to eradicate poverty in developing countries and to integrate them into the world economy. Putting equality at the centre of its policies, the Directorate General for Development gives priority to defending the interests of the most disadvantaged developing countries and the poorest sections of the population in economically more advanced developing countries.

**Enlargement** – This DG has the responsibility for the Enlargement of the Union. It is currently responsible for the pre-accession process, accession negotiations and all bilateral relations with thirteen candidate countries.

**EuropeAid Co-operation office** – EuropeAid Co-operation Office's mission is to implement the external aid instruments of the European Commission which are funded by the European Community budget and the European Development Fund. The Office is responsible for all phases of the project cycle which ensures the achievement of the objectives of the programmes established by the Directorates-General for External Relations and Development and approved by the Commission.

**External Relations** – The tasks of External Relations DG are: relations with European countries which are not members of the European Union and not part of the enlargement process; relations with non-european countries; programming Tacis assistance to Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asian Republics; relations with international organisations, i.e. United Nations, NATO, WEU, OSCE, the Council of Europe.

**Humanitarian Aid Office - ECHO** – ECHO's task is to ensure goods and services get to crisis zones fast. Goods may include essential supplies, specific foodstuffs, medical equipment, medicines and fuel. Services may include medical teams, water purification teams and logistical support. Goods and services reach disaster areas via ECHO partners.

**Trade** – DG Trade has the task of conducting the Union's commercial policy in accordance with the objectives set out in Article 133 of the Treaty: "to contribute, in the common interest, to the harmonious development of world trade, the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and the lowering of customs barriers".

**Budget** – The activities of the Budget Directorate-General are: Securing from the budgetary authority - the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers - the resources needed to implement the European Union's policies; Managing the budgetary regulatory framework; Implementing the budget in terms of both revenue and expenditure; Drawing up the annual accounts of the institutions and reporting on the implementation of the budget; Contributing, in the form of advice and training and by providing control and management tools, to sound financial management in Commission departments.

**Financial Control** – The most important single legal base is the Financial Regulation for the General Budget. Legal requirements include, first and foremost, the examination and visa of proposed financial transactions.

**Group Of Policy Advisers** – The Group of Policy Advisers is a unit of the European Commission that reports directly to the President. Its task is to provide timely, informed and impartial advice to the President and Commissioners on all aspects of issues relating to the future policy of the European Union.

**Internal Audit Service** – The mission of the Internal Audit Service is to audit the internal control systems that exist within the European Commission in order to assess their effectiveness and, more generally, the performance of Commission departments in implementing policies, programmes and actions with a view to bringing about continuous improvement.

**Joint Interpreting and Conference Service** – The Joint Interpreting and Conference Service (JICS) is the largest interpreting service in the world. It is a joint service, providing high-quality interpretation in Brussels and elsewhere in the world, for the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and other bodies of the European Union.

**Legal Service** – The Legal Service provides comprehensive in-house assistance to the Commission and all its departments. Its resources have to be deployed to cover all Commission activities and areas of responsibility. In each area, it must be able to assist the Commission in its functions of drafting legislation and conducting international negotiations, as guardian of the treaties and in the exercise of the implementing powers conferred on it by the Community legislator or by the Treaties.

**Personnel and Administration** – The brief of the DG consists essentially of undertaking regulatory, support and service activities for the Commission and its Directorates-General, the Commission's own staff, the other institutions and the Member States.

**Translation Service** – The principal mission of the Translation Service is to enable the Commission, in the most efficient and cost-effective way, to meet its legal and political obligations and needs with respect to the languages in which it has to conduct its written communications.

The seat of the Commission is in Brussels. The Commission usually meets once a week on Wednesdays in Brussels. During Parliamentary sessions it meets in Strasbourg.

They discuss the policy of the EU and adopt proposals for legislation and political documents. On the agenda for the members of the Commission are only the most important questions. Many other decisions are taken by a written procedure. Each Commissioner has specific areas of responsibility and is answerable for the work of the department/directorate-general concerned. The European Commission always acts as a single body. This means that it can only take decisions if they are approved by a majority of its members. Each Commissioner is expected to give his/her unconditional support to the entire policy of the Commission.