

Decision-making at European Union level involves various European institutions, in particular

- » the European Commission,
- » the European Parliament (EP),
- » the Council of the European Union.

In general it is the European Commission that proposes new legislation, but it is the Council and Parliament that pass the laws. Other institutions and bodies also have roles to play.

The rules and procedures for EU decision-making are laid down in the treaties. Every proposal for a new European law is based on a specific treaty article, referred to as the 'legal basis' of the proposal. This determines which legislative procedure must be followed. The three main procedures are 'consultation', 'assent' and 'co-decision'.

Under the consultation procedure, the Council consults Parliament as well as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR).

Parliament can:

- » approve the Commission proposal,
- » reject it,
- » or ask for amendments.

If Parliament asks for amendments, the Commission will consider all the changes Parliament suggests. If it accepts any of these suggestions it will send the Council an amended proposal.

The Council examines the amended proposal and either adopts it or amends it further. In this procedure, as in all others, if the Council amends a Commission proposal it must do so unanimously.

The assent procedure means that the Council has to obtain the European Parliament's assent before certain very important decisions are taken.

The procedure is the same as in the case of consultation, except that Parliament cannot amend a proposal: it must either accept or reject it. Acceptance ('assent') requires an absolute majority of the vote cast.

This is the procedure now used for most EU law-making. In the codecision procedure, Parliament does not merely give its opinion: it shares legislative power equally with the Council. If Council and Parliament cannot agree on a piece of proposed legislation, it is put before a conciliation committee, composed of equal numbers of Council and Parliament representatives. Once this committee has reached an agreement, the text is sent once again to Parliament and the Council so that they can finally adopt it as law.

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