



Influencing the European Union



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The IES is committed to promoting the crucial role of environmental science in society and an evidence-based approach to decision and policy making. Influencing the European Union is one of the best ways to achieve this. It plays a fundamental role in directing environmentally related policy across Europe, and has significant power over environmental issues internationally. However, the legislative, parliamentary and bureaucratic structure of the EU is vast and complex, often daunting and intimidating to any individual or organisation who seeks to influence it. The IES has therefore put together this information pack to inform members of the structure of the EU and the various routes to influence EU issues, policies or legislation.

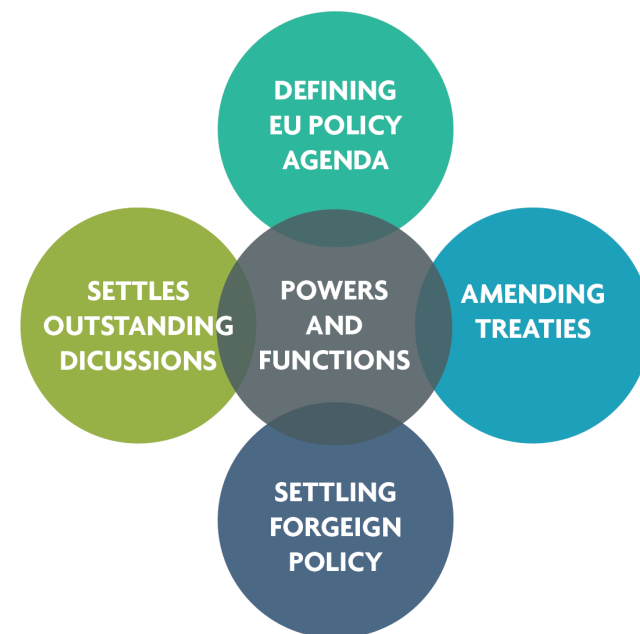


Figure 1. Role of the European Council (Source: Bond 2011)

are shared with the European Parliament. Council Meetings are attended by relevant ministers from each Member State associated with the subject being discussed. If environmental issues are being discussed then the Minister for Environment from each Member State might travel to Brussels.

Council meeting are planned and prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) who, residing permanently in Brussels are essentially Member States' EU ambassadors. They promote Member States' national interests in COREPER meetings, which are planned and prepared by Council Working Groups. These are composed of staff members from each COREPER member and meet in Brussels weekly.

The Environment Council meets three to four times a year and 'has the task of fostering the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities which respects the need, in particular, to ensure a high level of environmental quality (Consilium 2011).

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Comprising 751 members, the European Parliament is the only directly elected body of the EU, and represents the citizens of Europe. It has legislative power, alongside the Council, in deliberating policy proposals by the European Commission.

It also controls the EU budget and supervises the European Commission.

Elected once every five years, the European Parliament meets for plenary assembly in Strasbourg every month for four days and in Brussels six times a year for two days. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) sit in one of seven political groups, based on party affiliation rather than national origin.

There are 73 UK members of the European Parliament, 23 of which belong to the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group, 21 to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, 20 to the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and 6 to the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. Others are scattered across the remaining parties and some are so-called 'non-attached' members.

There are 20 parliamentary committees, associated with specific areas of EU engagement, which plan and prepare work for the Parliamentary meetings. Committees consist of between 25 and 71 MEPs, have a chair, bureau, a secretariat and their political make-up reflects that of the Parliament assembly. Meeting in Brussels once or twice a month, committees debate in public, and draw up, amend and adopt legislative proposals and own-initiative reports. They scrutinise European Commission and Council proposals and may draw up reports for plenary assembly presentation. Additionally, Parliament may commission sub-committees, special temporary committees to deal with specific issues and formal committees of inquiry into maladministration of EU law.

With 68 members the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee, is one of the largest Parliamentary committees. 'In the field of environmental policy ENVI looks at issues relating to climate change, measures against pollution of air, land and water, waste management and recycling, the handling of dangerous and toxic substances and the protection of biodiversity. Sustainable development, international and regional measures to protect the environment and civil protection fall within its remit' (Europarl 2011).

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission is the EU's main executive body, representing the interests of Europe as a whole. It is the only EU body that can make legislative proposals to the Council and Parliament (called 'the right of initiative'). It manages and implements EU policies and the budget, enforces European law and represents the EU outside of Europe. The Commission

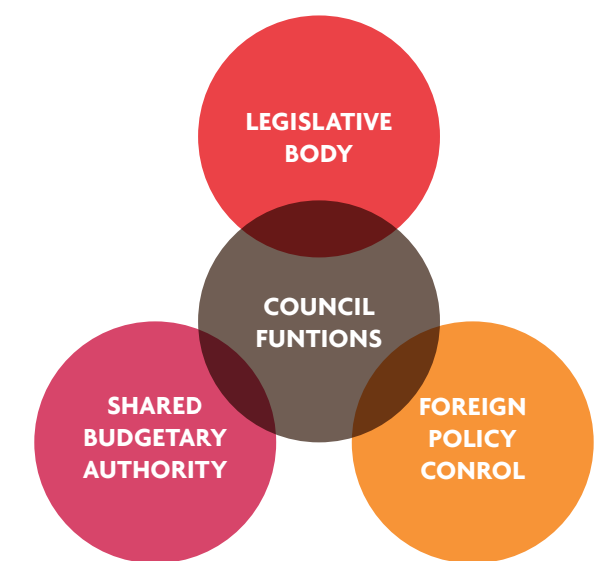


Figure 2. Role of the Council of the European Union (Source: Bond 2011)

is headed by a President, elected every five years, and 28 Commissioners (known as the College of Commissioners) one selected by each member state and approved by Parliament and Council. They are each responsible for a specific portfolio of EU matters and meet every week in Brussels.

Divided among numerous departments or Directorates-General (DG), the European Commission is administered in Brussels by some 23,000 staff. Under a specialist Commissioner and headed by a Director-General, each DG oversees a specific EU policy area. DGs draft laws, only becoming official when adopted by the College of Commissioners them during their weekly meeting.

There are several DGs relevant to Environmental Issues:

- The Environment (ENV)
- Climate Action (CLIMA)
- Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE)
- Energy (ENER)

Figure 3 shows the current structure of the College of Commissioners.

THE EU – AN INTRODUCTION

The EU comprises the legislative and parliamentary body for 28 EU Member States, representing and governing over 500 million people. There are seven EU institutions, four of which are directly relevant to policy making:

- The European Council
- The Council of the European Union
- The European Parliament
- The European Commission

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

As the EU's 'supreme political authority' and comprising the Heads of State of all Member States, the European Council defines the general political direction and priorities of the EU. European Council meetings, or 'summits', take place twice every six months where members negotiate major and pressing political issues relating to the EU, subsequently issuing Guidelines, Declarations or Resolutions. These have no legislative basis and must be jointly translated into EU law by the Council of the European Union and European Parliament.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Usually referred to as "the Council", this body comprises governmental ministers of each EU Member State, where they are expected to defend and promote their own countries' national interests. The Council functions as a legislative body – deliberating policy proposals by the European Commission – and as a budgetary authority. Both of these responsibilities

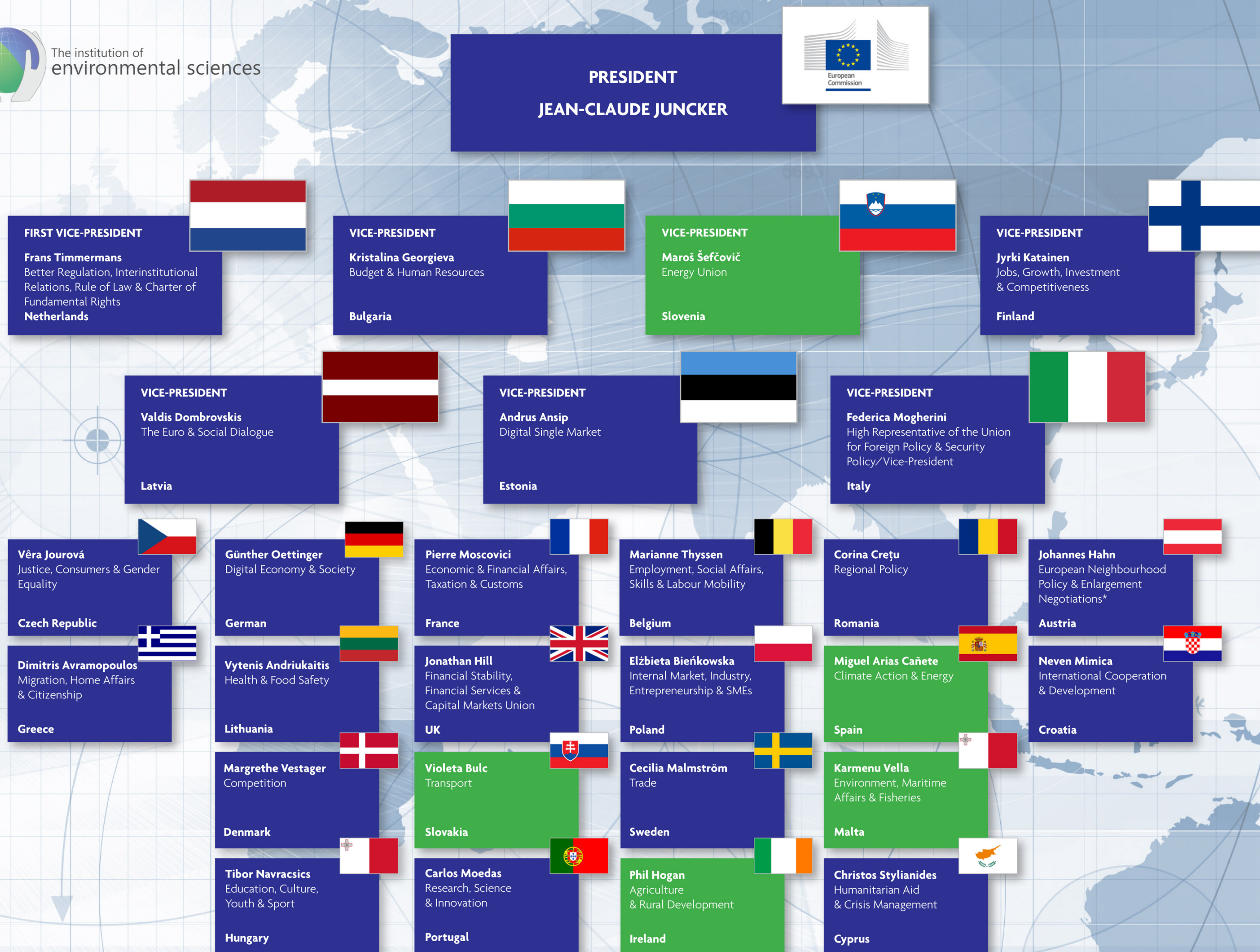


Figure 3. The structure of the current College of Commissioners under President Juncker. Commissioners with portfolios of relevance

to environmental scientists are highlighted in green.

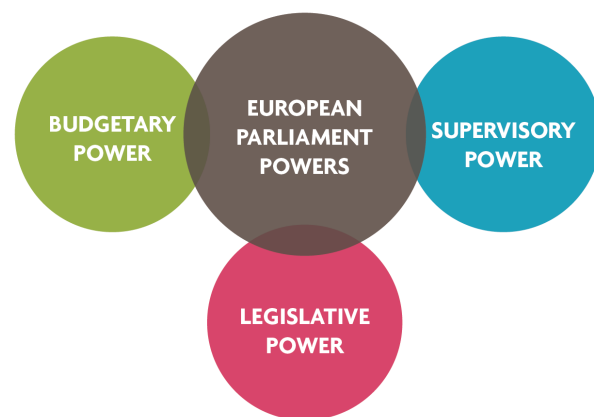


Figure 4. Role of the European Parliament (Source: Bond 2011)

INFLUENCING THE EU

Clearly, the EU is vast and complex. Identifying which institution to go to, which individuals to contact and where your issue fits into EU policy, politics and practice can be difficult. It is important to know exactly what you want to do. Do you want to advocate a new policy, change existing legislation or influence a legislative proposal that is currently being deliberated? What is your goal, and when will you know you have achieved it?

EU LEGISLATURE

Once you know exactly what it is you are doing, it is important to identify what type of EU legislature you want to influence. There are several different forms of legislative act that the EU can pass:

EU Regulations are the most direct form of EU law, having binding legal force throughout every Member State and override any national laws dealing with the same issue. Regulations are passed either jointly by the Council and Parliament, or by the Commission alone.

EU Directives lay down certain objectives that Member States must achieve by a specific date. National authorities are free to decide how to implement Directives through their own legislative and political framework.

Decisions are EU laws relating to specific cases, Member States, parties or individuals. They are fully binding on the person or entity to which they are addressed, and often require them to do, or stop doing something. They may come from the Council, or the Commission.

Recommendations and Opinions have no legal force. However, being issued by either the Parliament or Council they do have political weight and may direct action by a specific EU institution on a specific issue.

LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE

Most EU legislation is passed using what is known as the **ordinary legislative procedure** or co-decision. Co-decision begins with a legislative proposal by the Commission, followed by a debate by the Council and Parliament who propose amendments and finally approve its adoption as EU law. This process may comprise up to three 'readings' (see **Figure 6**).

a. Pre-Proposal: Once you have identified the relevant DG, you can identify which relevant policies are being drafted and the associated officials responsible. If there is an associated Expert Group comprising external stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who advise the drafting, try and get involved.

b. Commission Proposal: This is where the Commission draft a legislature proposal for the issue at hand. Networking with relevant Commission officials, likeminded lobbyists and other EU dignitaries such as MEPs or Council Members is crucial at this stage. Ensure you are not a 'lone voice'.

c. First Reading: Following the proposed legislation through the co-decision process, your attention should turn to the Parliament and Council.

- The Parliament will begin drawing up a report of the proposed legislation, which will be voted on in plenary.



Figure 5. Role of the European Commission (Source: Bond 2011)

Identify the committee responsible for the examination of the proposed legislation, and the report. Find any 'friendly' MEPs on the committee to convey your issue to and offer to help draft amendments. Before the Parliament votes in plenary, try to advocate your issue to as many MEPs as possible.

- In the Council, identify the Working Groups, COREPER members and Council members who are involved with the proposed legislation. Keep track of their dialogue and try to organise meetings with Council officials at every level.

After the European Parliament has voted in plenary on its report, the Council may accept the proposed legislation, in which case it is adopted or rejected, in what is known as the Common Position.

d. Second Reading: The Parliament must approve, reject or amend the Council's Common Position within three months during the second reading. Unlike the first reading, Parliament amendments can only be adopted with an absolute majority of MEPs. If approved by Parliament, the Council has a further three months to approve or reject the Parliament's amendments. If rejected, the Parliament and Council enter a Conciliation Committee.

e. Third Reading: It is very unusual for environmental issues to reach a third reading during the co-decision process.

WHO TO CONTACT AT THE COUNCIL?

It is best to start at the national level. Identify the Council Members, COREPER members and Working Group officials relevant to your issue responsible for the UK government position.

Get into contact with the Permanent Representation for the United Kingdom, headed by the UK's permanent Representative to the EU, Ivan Rogers. Environmental matters are managed by the Deputy Permanent Representative, Shan Morgan. The Social Affairs, Environment and Regional Policy Team is counselled by Mayerling O'Regan.

WHO TO CONTACT IN THE PARLIAMENT?

Again, begin at the national level. Identify your constituency MEP, and research their interests, committee memberships and parliamentary activities. They may be in a Committee or an informal Intergroup (similar to a UK All-Party Groups)

relevant to your issue. Contact their assistant to request dialogue with your MEP. They may advise you to contact other, more relevant MEPs. Additionally, research the most relevant Committee to your issue (e.g. ENVI) to identify other MEPs that are likely to take interest in your issue.

It is important to approach an MEP in the right manner and at the right time to effectively engender their support. Try and approach them during their constituency 'surgeries' in their own country. In the UK these normally occur on a Friday. MEPs travel to Brussels weekly, and stay there usually from Monday or Tuesday until Thursday. Before contacting an MEP, either in Brussels or by phone, check their calendar to see if they will be busy, in a plenary session, Committee or party group meeting. Contacting assistants on a Friday, after their MEP has gone home is often a good way of being heard.

Once you have an MEP on board, they may raise awareness of your issue in a variety of ways. They can ask oral parliamentary questions (PQs) in plenary to make public statements and raise awareness in Parliament. Written PQs are used to request detailed information from the Council or Commission. They may organise public hearings in Committees, inviting NGO representatives to speak or discuss the issue in Intergroup meetings. MEPs can also sponsor you to hold events at the European Parliament.

WHO TO CONTACT AT THE COMMISSION?

Identify key Commission officials involved in your area of interest, and establish a good working relationship. When drafting policy, the Commission often welcomes external opinion and expertise. Being familiar with relevant officials is the first step towards influencing EU policy.

Start trying to contact Commissioners, Directors General and Unit Heads, though these individuals are much more difficult to get hold of and engage with. However, if you can make them aware of your issue, this is an extremely effective way of influencing EU policy.

A map of the co-decision process of the EU Parliament and Council is shown in **Figure 6**. A list of the relevant groups or committees within the main legislative and parliamentary bodies and links to the other sources used for this document appear in the appendix.

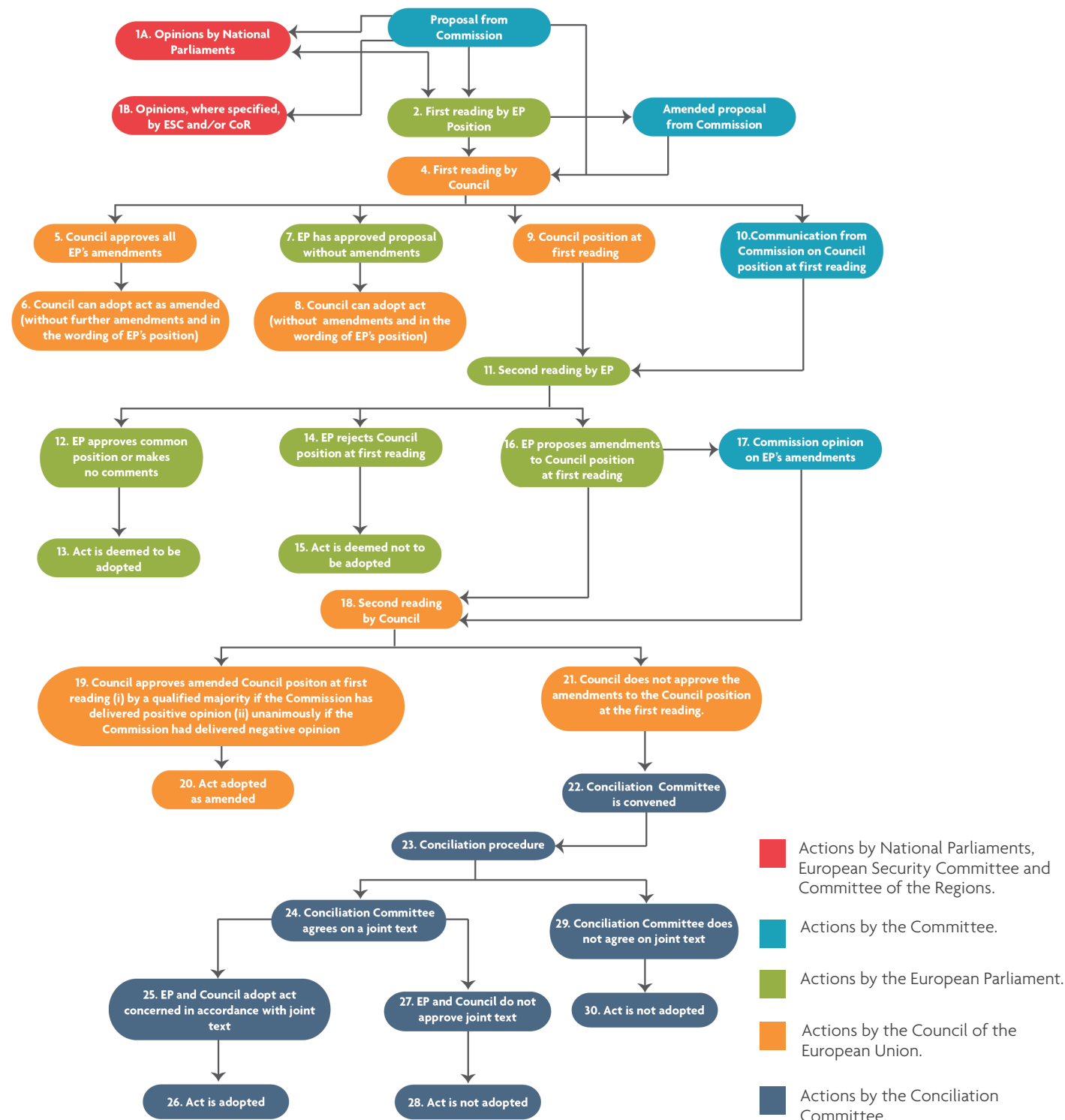


Figure 6. The EU ordinary legislative procedure (Source EU Commission website)

Appendix

Appendix 1: List of relevant EU bodies and individuals

The European Council

www.european-council.europa.eu

The Council of the European Union

www.consilium.europa.eu

The Environment Council

www.consilium.europa.eu/policies/council-configurations/environment?lang=en

The Permanent Representation for the United Kingdom

ukeu.fco.gov.uk/en

Social and Environmental Team

ukeu.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/22947319/110620-ukrep-contacts-socialenv

The European Parliament

www.europarl.europa.eu

The Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee

www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/ENVI/home.html

Chair: Giovanni La Via (Italy)

UK Members and Substitutes:

Members:

Catherine Bearder
Seb Dance
Ian Duncan
Julie Girling
Glenis Willmott

Substitutes:

Paul Brannen
Jacqueline Foster
Diane James
James Nicholson
Julia Reid

Kay Swinburne

Keith Taylor

Relevant Intergroups

Sustainable Hunting, Biodiversity, Countryside Activities and Forests

www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/intergroupes/List_VII_LEG_01_Hunting.pdf

Urban

www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/intergroupes/List_VII_LEG_04_Urban.pdf

Water

www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/intergroupes/List_VII_LEG_10_Water-Wasser.pdf

Welfare & conservation of animals

www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/intergroupes/List_VII_LEG_22_Animal_Welfare.pdf

Climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development

www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/intergroupes/List_VII_LEG_25_Climate_change.pdf

The European Commission

ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

Relevant Directorates General

The Environment (ENV)

ec.europa.eu/dgs/environment/index_en.htm

Commissioner: Karmenu Vella

Director General: Karl Falkenberg

Climate Action (CLIMA)

ec.europa.eu/dgs/clima/mission/index_en.htm

Commissioner: Miguel Arias Cañete

Director General: Jos Delbeke

Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE)

ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/index_en.htm

Commissioner: Karmenu Vella

Director General: Lowri Evans

Energy (ENER)

ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy/index_en.htm

Vice - President Energy Union: Maroš Šefčovič

Commissioner: Miguel Arias Cañete

Director General: Dominique Ristori

Appendix 2: Other sources

Bond (2011) Influencing the European Union. An advocacy guide

www.bond.org.uk/pages/euinfluencing.html

EU Legislature

EU Regulations

ec.europa.eu/eu_law/introduction/what_regulation_en.htm

EU Directives

ec.europa.eu/eu_law/introduction/what_directive_en.htm

Decisions

ec.europa.eu/eu_law/introduction/what_decision_en.htm

Recommendations

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recommendation_%28European_Union%29

Legislative Procedure

ec.europa.eu/codecision/stepbystep/text/index_en.htm

Who to contact in the Parliament?

Identify your constituency MP

www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/search.html

Committees

www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00aab6aedf/Committees.html

Intergroups

www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00c9d93c87/Intergroups.html

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About the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES): The IES is a membership organisation that represents professionals from fields as diverse as air quality, land contamination and education - wherever you find environmental work underpinned by sound science.

A visionary organisation leading debate, dissemination and promotion of environmental science and sustainability, the IES promotes an evidence-based approach to decision and policy making.

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