

Composition and operation of the Court of Justice

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The Court comprises 15 Judges, one for each Member State of the Union, and 9 Advocates General. They are appointed for a renewable term of six years by common accord of all the Member States. They are chosen from among experts in the law who offer the requisite guarantees of competence and independence. They are assisted by the Registrar who is, in a sense, the Secretary-General of the Court. The Judges select one of their number to be President of the Court of Justice for a term of three years. The President directs the work and the services of the Court and takes the chair at hearings and deliberations. In practice, when a case is brought before the Court, the President appoints a Judge-Rapporteur from among the Judges, who takes responsibility for prosecuting the case and for preparing the written procedure. The Court may then decide whether the case should be heard in a chamber of three or five Judges or in a plenary session, i.e. by all the Judges sitting together. In reality, the choice depends on the complexity and legal importance of the case. A Member State or one of the Union institutions may request that the case be heard by a plenary session, but, in most instances, the Court sits in chambers.