

## Decision-making in the European Union

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### The Community method

Based on the principle of institutional balance between the three main institutions, the Community method provides for the **Commission's** monopoly of the right to propose legislation, widespread use of qualified majority voting in the **Council** and active participation by **Parliament** in the legislative procedure.

Originally, decisions were taken broadly within the framework of the two Communities established under the Rome Treaties (the EEC and the EAEC or Euratom) by the **Council** (representing the Member States), acting on a proposal from the **Commission** (representing the Communities), and after consulting the **Assembly** (representing the peoples of the States of the Communities). Although initially counterbalanced by the integrating role of the supranational institutions with a more specialist nature, namely the Commission and the Court of Justice, the dominant role of the **Council** and, therefore, of the governments of the Member States in the decision-making procedures has changed over time to the benefit of the **Assembly**, which has gradually become a more democratic and political body.

Initially comprising delegates from the national parliaments, at its inception, the **Assembly** had a purely consultative role. Its legislative, budgetary and supervisory powers have gradually increased, as has its democratic legitimacy: it has been elected by universal suffrage since 1979. In 1987, the date of the entry into force of the Single European Act, the Assembly, officially known since then as the **European Parliament**, saw its powers increase substantially. Its involvement in decision-making procedures, which had initially been restricted to the consultation procedure, had expanded in 1975 to include the conciliation procedure and were now extended to include the assent procedure and the cooperation procedure. Later, the codecision procedure, established by the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, expanded to become the usual legislative procedure. In tandem with the evolution of Parliament, the **Council**, which had initially been the sole legislator, became the usual legislator under the Single Act and finally a colegislator alongside Parliament following the Amsterdam reforms in 1997 and the Nice reforms in 2001.

Decision-making in the 'decision-making triangle' is enhanced in many fields by the expert opinions of representatives of regional and local bodies (Committee of the Regions) or representatives of organised civil society (Economic and Social Committee).

### The intergovernmental method

The intergovernmental method, which governs decision-making under the second and third pillars (CFSP and PJCC), is based on a right of legislative initiative which is shared by the **Commission** and the **Member States**, decision-making by unanimity in the **Council** and a secondary role for **Parliament**. Parliament must be kept informed by the Commission and may table questions to the Council or make recommendations to it.