

Interview with António Vitorino: the role of the European Commission (Lisbon, 24 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] Given your experience as a European Commissioner, can you outline for us briefly the Commission's role in the EU's institutional structure?

[António Vitorino] I think that the Commission's role is essential, because it's simultaneously the driving force behind integration because it has the sole right to propose legislation — only the Commission can submit draft legislation. Secondly, it's the defender of the general interest and must therefore pay particular attention to Member States' interests, which are diverse and which depend, for example, on the size of the states (large or small), on their historical experience (North or South), and even on the peculiarities of their own national legal systems — continental legal systems, common law systems, etc. In other words, we need an institution which, being the guardian of the general interest, being independent and not receiving orders from individual governments, acts as an honest and effective broker in relations between them. The Commission is, therefore, a body which initiates procedures and one which also helps the other institutions to achieve the results that European citizens expect from the Union.