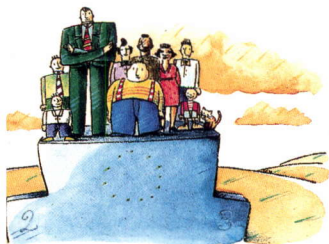


DEMOCRACY AT WORK IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



Europe
on the move



Once every five years, the citizens of the European Union are called upon to elect their representatives to the European Parliament. It is the most significant act of direct democracy in the life of the Union. The 1994 elections in the twelve Member States took place between June 9 and 12 1994. In these European elections, the 200 million or so voters were choosing the men and women who will on their behalf help shape the destiny of the European Union up to the threshold of the 21st century. The Parliament is one of the five institutions of the EU. The others are: the European Commission, the executive body, whose president is appointed by consensus among the 12 Member States and who, along with his colleagues, is now subject to a vote of investiture by the European Parliament; the European Court of Justice, the independent judiciary, which is made up of 13 senior judges; the Council of the European Union, which consists of ministers from member governments and which takes the main decisions, and the European Court of Auditors, the financial watchdog. The institutions draw their power from the founding Treaties of the European Union. These powers have evolved over the years. This is particularly true of the European Parliament. No parliament anywhere in the world has acquired its rights without a fight. Those of the European Parliament have been gradually extended, most recently in the 1992 Maastricht treaty. Further institutional reforms are foreseen when the Maastricht Treaty is reviewed in 1996.

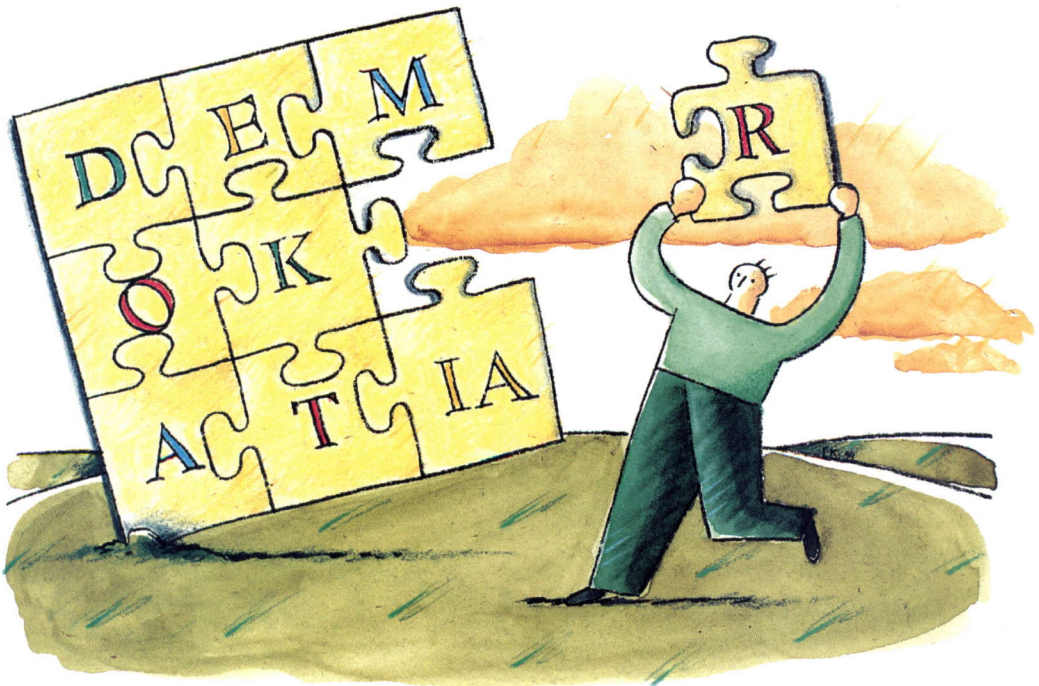
STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC CONTROL

The European Parliament of today has gained considerably in power and authority compared with the purely consultative body set up by the Rome Treaty in 1958. Its only real power then was the right to dismiss the European Commission through a vote of censure. In 1975 it acquired the right of rejecting the annual budget. In those days its members were nominated from amongst the members of the national parliaments of Member States. The first direct elections, whereby MEPs were elected under universal suffrage by voters in the Member States, took place in 1979.

The first real extension of the Parliament's legislative powers came in 1987 with the Single European Act (SEA). This gave Parliament — via the so-called cooperation procedure — the right to a second reading on draft

legislation concerning the single European market and to propose amendments. But the final decisions on these issues still lay with the Council. Under the SEA, Parliament acquired the right to veto treaties signed by the European Community (as the Union was called then) concerning the accession or association of non-member countries.

The Maastricht Treaty on European Union has marked another significant step in extending the authority of the European Parliament. The Treaty,





The European Parliament votes by raising hands. More notice is taken of the Parliament's votes now that its powers have increased.

which came into force in November 1993, extends the Parliament's right of co-decision with the Council of Ministers (now the Council of the European Union) to all legislation concerning the single market and to areas like the free movement of workers, research and development policy, the environment, health, education, and consumer protection. In these areas, Parliament now has the power to veto draft EU legislation it does not approve of. In addition, the cooperation procedure introduced in 1987 has been extended to new areas too.

As a result of the Treaty on European Union, the Parliament exercises additional democratic control over the European Commission. The President of the Commission is now designated by EU Heads of State or Government, after consultation with the Parliament before taking office. He and the entire Commission are also subject to a vote of investiture by the Parliament. In order to facilitate this function, the Maastricht Treaty extended the mandate of Commission members from four to five years to make it coincide

with the five-year legislature period of the Parliament.

Finally, the Treaty on European Union also enhanced the legitimacy of the European Parliament by enabling citizens of one EU country who are resident in another to vote and to stand as candidates in

Diagram showing how the European Union makes proposals and takes decisions. Over the years the Parliament has played an increasingly important part in this procedure.

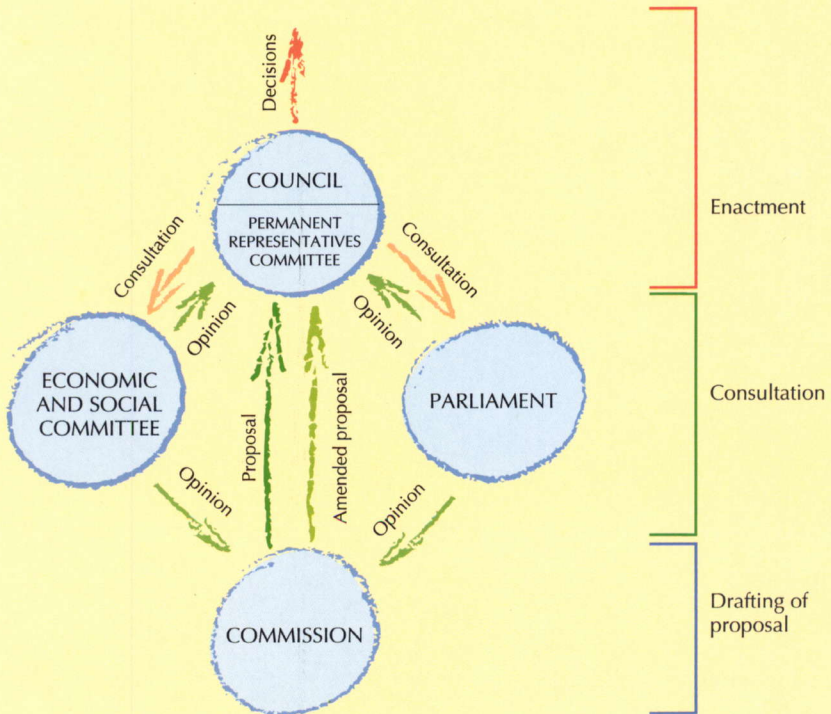
European and local elections in their host country. Mainly to take account of German unification, the number of MEPs has been increased to 567 for the June 1994 elections from 518 previously, although adjustments have been made in the contingents from virtually all Member States.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The Treaty on European Union has made the European Commission more accountable to the citizens of the Union, through their elected representatives in Parliament. The Parliament is now an equal partner with the Council of Ministers in deciding on new legislation concerning the important area of the single European market and other sectors such as research and development.

The Treaty also creates a Committee of the Regions consisting of representatives from the regions and local authorities within the Member States. The new body must be consulted on certain items of draft legislation.

THE COMMUNITY'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



Before preparing proposals and presenting them to Parliament and the Council for adoption, the Commission submits drafts of key directives to widespread consultations with advisory committees, expert groups and other forums.

However, it became clear that such practices did not go far enough in the minds of public opinion to give citizens access to enough information about what the EU was doing. Criticism was particularly sharp at the time of the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. The summits at Birmingham and Edinburgh in the second half of 1992 sought to respond to this by calling for a more open and transparent Union.

Europe's citizens expected a significant change in their relationships with the European institutions. At the level of the Commission, it became clear that new efforts had to be made in further widening consultations on initiatives with far-reaching implications, and in improving and speeding up the dissemination of information. Moreover, there was a need to construct the information and communication policy on new foundations and, last but not least, to improve public access to documents related to the preliminary stages of Commission proposals.

To this end, the Commission decided to make wider use of Green and White Papers, to introduce early announcements in the legislative programme of proposals where broad discussions would be required, and to launch a programme of simplification of legislation.

In addition to this, a number of other measures are being taken, such as strengthening the role of the Commission's offices in Member States, making more effective use of existing information relays and networks, and setting up a Users'



Advisory Council composed of representatives from the media, communications professionals and other interested parties. These will be drawn from the national and regional media in Member States.

The implementation of the new access to documents policy is a real test case of the Commission's willing-

ness to be open. Work in this area is based on a code of conduct between the Commission and the Council.

The Council of the European Union, whose members are ministers from the 12 Member States, is part legislature and part executive. Until recently it always met in closed session, although its individual members are of course accountable to their home governments and parliaments. The Council increased information on its activities and decisions by publishing the results of votes when it acts as a legislator. It started to make wider use of modern technology in its information and communications policies, put emphasis on more comprehensive and simple legislation and decided that some parts of formal sessions of the Council were to be televised.

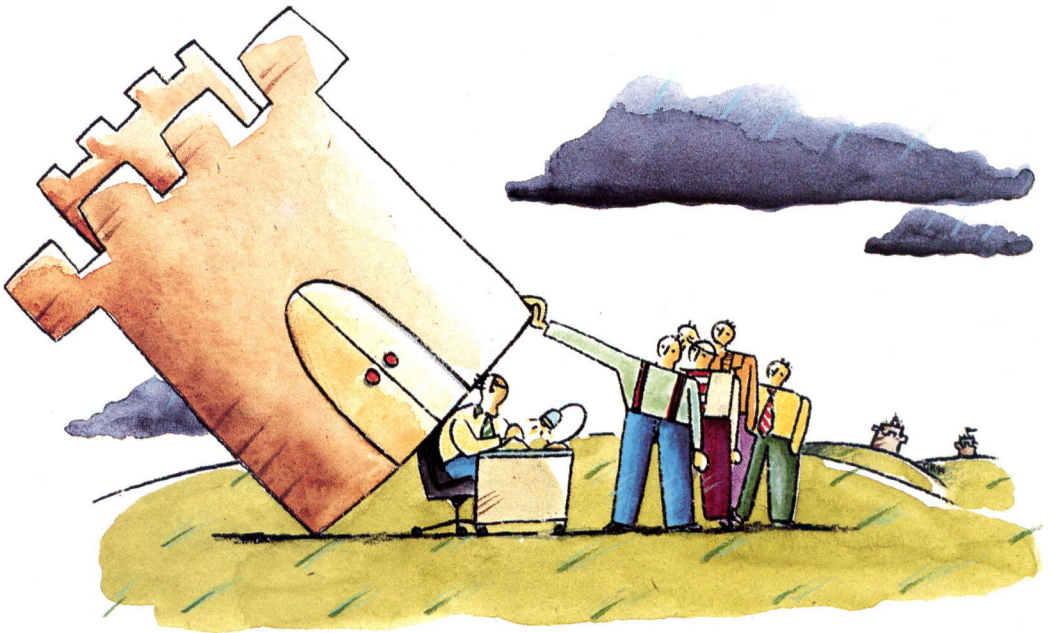
CONTROLLING THE ADMINISTRATION

Although MEPs and members of the Council are clearly accountable for their actions, the European Commission is still criticised as an unelected bureaucracy. How fair is this criticism?

For one thing, the European Parliament has always had the right to censure the Commission although it has never used this right so far. For another, we should not forget that elective office is not a requirement for ministers in some national governments in Europe.

The operational management by the Commission of the annual budget of the EU (which totals ECU 70 billion for 1994) is subject to the scrutiny and control of the Court of Auditors and the European Parliament.

The President of the Commission has considerable democratic legitimacy

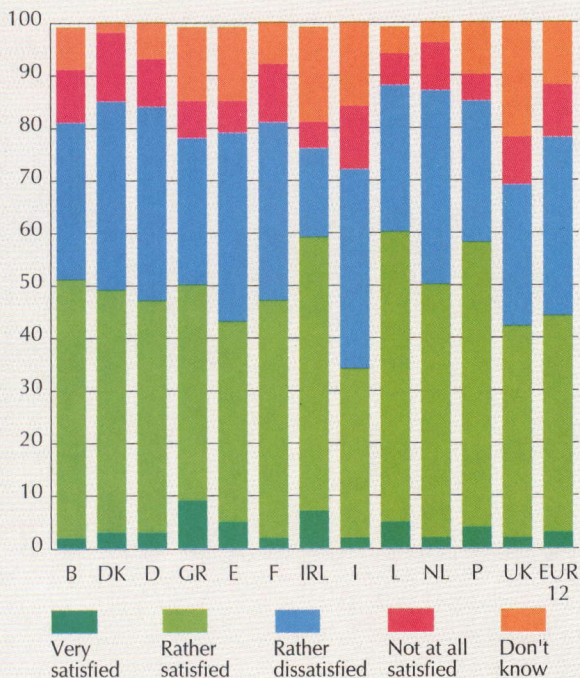


Levels of satisfaction with democracy in the Union

Europeans are only half satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Union. 44 % say they are 'very satisfied' or 'rather satisfied'. But the same percentage is 'rather dissatisfied' or 'not at all satisfied'. Twelve per cent of Europeans have no view on this question.

Most satisfied with the way democracy works in the Union are the Luxembourgers (60 %), the Irish (59 %), the Belgians (51 %) and the Dutch and the Greeks (both 50 %). Then come the Danes (49 %), the Germans and the French (both 47 %), the Spaniards (43 %) and the British (42 %). In Italy more are dissatisfied (50 %) than satisfied (34 %).

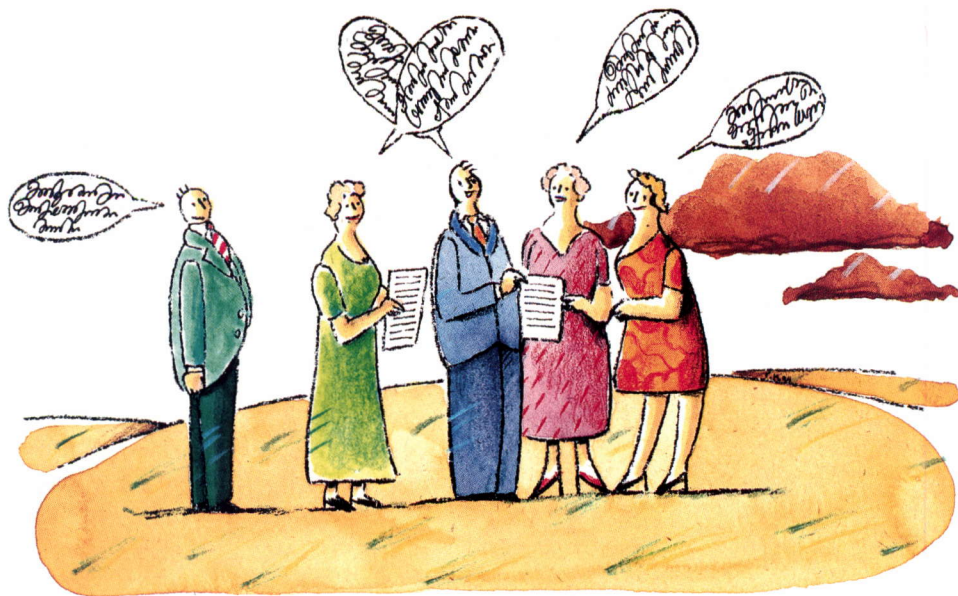
These figures are drawn from the results of an opinion survey in autumn 1993 in the 12 member states of the Union.



Source: Eurobarometer No 40

in that he is chosen by consensus by EU Heads of State or Government meeting within the European Council. He and the rest of the Commission are subject to a vote of investiture by the European Parliament before taking up their posts.

As a result of the Treaty on European Union, individual citizens have a right to petition the European Parliament. The Treaty also created the office of Parliamentary Ombudsman who investigates any complaints citizens may have concerning the way the European institutions exercise their responsibilities. The Parliament nominates the Ombudsman, fixes the rules and procedures for his tasks and receives his reports.



THE RIGHT TO KNOW: THE ROLE OF THE PRESS

The press, a vital instrument in the democratic process, plays an important role in ensuring the public's right to know what the EU is doing in the absence of more formalized public scrutiny. It ensures a high degree of openness in the decision-taking process. This was recognized by the Edinburgh meeting of Heads of State or Government who also decided that the Council of the EU should intensify formal contacts and briefings with the press.

More than 700 journalists from 40 countries follow the activities of the EU and its institutions on a daily basis. They have access to abundant source material in the form of statements, background texts and communiqués from the Commission and the Council.

They also have wide-ranging, but informal, access to Commission officials and representatives of Member States so that they can inform public opinion of what goes on behind the scenes.


Young people instantly like European Union. It will offer them far greater opportunities.



EKA



EN



This booklet appears in all the official Community languages – Spanish, Danish, German, Greek, English, French, Italian, Dutch and Portuguese.

European Commission

Directorate-General for Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual
Editor: Publications Unit, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels

Manuscript completed in May 1994

Drawings: Yannis Kouroudis

© ECSC-EC-EAEC, Brussels • Luxembourg, 1994

Reproduction is authorized, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

Printed in Belgium

COMMISSION OFFICES

Office in Ireland

39 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 — Tel. 671 22 44

Office in England

Jean Monnet House, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT —

Tel. (71) 973 1992

Office in Wales

4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG — Tel. 37 16 31

Office in Scotland

9 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH — Tel. 225 20 58

Office in Northern Ireland

Windsor House, 9/15 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7EG — Tel. 24 07 08

**Information services
in the USA**

2100 M Street, NW, Suite 707, Washington DC 20037 —

Tel. (202) 862 95 00

305 East 47th Street, 3 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza,

New York, NY 10017 — Tel. (212) 371 38 04

Commission offices also exist in the other countries of the European Union and in other parts of the world.



Office for Official Publications
of the European Communities
L-2985 Luxembourg

ISBN 92-826-8163-7



Catalogue number: CC-83-94-927-EN-C

ISSN 1022-8233

9 789282 681633 >