

involvement in the legislative process, being the provisions which require the co-decision procedure.

Bilateral and Multilateral Relations with Third Countries

Articles 113 and 228 of the EC Treaty empower the Commission to negotiate all of the Union's bilateral and multilateral agreements on behalf of the Member States. The Commission's negotiating mandate does not extend to the right to formally conclude international agreements, a right which resides with the Council.

Under Article 229 of the EC Treaty, the Commission is responsible for the maintenance of all appropriate relations with third countries, such as Canada, the UN and the organisations established under its auspices (the FAO etc.), the WTO, and other multilateral bodies in which the EC holds a membership. The Commission also acts in a representative capacity in relations with organisations in which the Union has unofficial or observer status, such as the G7.

The European Parliament

The Operation of the Parliament

The Parliament's rights and duties are:

- Democratic representation of Union citizens;
- Participation in legislative and budgetary processes;
- Participation in the Union's initiatives within the framework of the CFSP and cooperation in JHA;
- Receipt of petitions and administration of the office of Ombudsman;
- Votes on motions of censure against the Commission for inappropriate activities;
- Initiation procedures in the ECJ against the Council, or the Commission, for failure to act, or to protect Parliament's own interests;
- Submission of written and oral questions to the Council, to the High Representative for CFSP, and to the Commission.

Parliamentary sessions, committee meetings and political group meetings take place in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. The Parliament meets in plenary session in Strasbourg for one week per month, with a number of additional two-day sessions in Brussels. Committee preparatory sessions for the

plenary session also take place in Brussels over a period of one to two weeks. A further one to two weeks of political group meetings occur in Brussels, Luxembourg or the MEP's home country. Each MEP also spends time in their home country constituency, as time permits.

The Present Powers of the European Parliament

The present powers of the European Parliament are greater than those first set out in the EC Treaty. They are also expected to increase as a result of the Treaty of Amsterdam which broadens the application of the "co-decision" procedure. The EC Treaty conferred only a limited consultative role on the Parliament: the right to make proposals for legislation was reserved for the Commission; the right to adopt legislation was reserved for the Council.

The powers of the European Parliament have developed since. The Parliament should be consulted in important Community matters such as agriculture, transport, competition, and association agreements. In a number of areas, the Parliament has a co-legislative rather than merely consultative role.

An increasing number of association agreements between the Community and Third States provide for joint Parliamentary Committees. These Committees, consisting of European and national parliamentary representatives, serve as discussion forums, rather than decision-making bodies. Association agreements with Turkey, the European Economic Area (EEA), as well as the "European Agreements" with Central and Eastern European countries have all contributed to the creation of such Committees.

In addition, Parliament fulfils a "supervisory" role with regards to the Community budget and the ongoing activities of the Commission and the Council. As the sole directly-elected Community body, this enhanced role is considered as a means of injecting democratic control at the EU level over the Community legislative process. This supervision of the Parliament also contributes to the increased openness and transparency needed to combat the "democratic deficit" perceived in the Union by the citizens.

The SEA first extended Parliament's participation in the legislative process in 1986. It increased the instances where Council must consult Parliament before adopting an act by introducing the cooperation procedure⁷, calling for two readings of legislative proposals by the European Parliament and the Council with the active participation of the Commission.

⁷See Part IV.