

The EC is run by institutions in which all member countries take part. The *Commission* is currently made up of 13 Commissioners appointed jointly by the national governments (two each from Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and France; one each from the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg). The Commissioners act independently of the nine national governments in the Community interest and are answerable only to the European Parliament. The Commission employs about 10,000 officials, mostly in Brussels.

The Commission seeks to promote the interests of the EC as a whole. It is empowered to:

- submit proposals for EC action to the Council of Ministers and implement the latter's decisions;
- mediate at meetings of the Council, sometimes amending its own proposals to help reach a compromise acceptable to all the member states;
- administer various EC activities, notably the common agricultural policy;
- act as guardian of the Community's Treaties, if necessary taking legal action against firms or member governments that have failed to comply with EC rulings;
- represent the Community in negotiations involving trade with non-member countries and other sectors such as energy and fisheries, where the member states have agreed to act together.

The *Council of Ministers* is the Community's principal decision-making body. It is composed of ministers from each of the member governments. Which particular minister attends, depends upon the subject under discussion (e.g.: finance, agriculture, transport or energy).

Major decisions tend to be taken at meetings of EC foreign ministers. Ministers represent and defend the interests of their own country, while seeking to reach agreements that help attain the Community's goals. Decisions by the Council of Ministers must be based on Commission proposals and generally become EC legislation. Ministers hold their sessions in Brussels and Luxembourg. Member states preside over the Council in turn.

EC foreign ministers meet regularly outside the formal EC framework to coordinate their countries' foreign policies.

A *Committee of Permanent Representatives* (COREPER), consisting of the member countries' ambassadors accredited to the EC in Brussels, prepares the Council's work.

The *European Parliament* scrutinizes proposed Community laws through its fifteen specialized committees and acts as the EC's public forum, debating issues of public importance and questioning the Commission and Council. It also supervises the Commission and has the power, although it has never done so, to dismiss it by a motion of censure. With the Council of Ministers it controls the Community budget.

The Parliament meets in Strasbourg and in Luxembourg, where its secretariat is located. Its 410 members, directly elected in June 1979 for the first time, sit together as party groups, and not according to nationality.

The *EC Court of Justice*, based in Luxembourg, comprises nine judges and four advocates-general chosen by the nine governments. It interprets Community law, when requested to do so by national courts, and ensures that the law is observed in the application of the EC Treaties.

Decisions of the Court take precedence over decisions of national courts in matters of Community law; its rulings are binding on member countries, on Community institutions and on individuals.