



BEFORE YOU START READING

Working with a partner, discuss the following questions:

- What is the role of the European Parliament? How does it relate to the commission?
- In your opinion, can the EU legislate on matters concerning only one member-state? Should it have this power?
- What powers does the EU have, and what powers are still in the control of the national governments?



THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

You will read a series of texts¹ describing changes to some European institution that came into effect in 2009 with the treaty of Lisbon. For instance, the responsibilities of the European parliament have changed. ***In what ways have its powers changed?***

Greater powers for the European Parliament

The members of the European Parliament are elected by direct universal **suffrage** every five years to represent the citizens of the member countries. Parliament's powers have been gradually extended with every new treaty. The Treaty of Lisbon is no exception, giving more powers in relation to lawmaking, budget and international agreements:

Lawmaking: the 'co-decision procedure' has been extended to several new fields. This means that Parliament now has the same degree of lawmaking power as the Council in some areas where it used to be merely consulted or not involved at all. These areas include legal immigration, **penal** judicial cooperation, police cooperation (Europol) and some aspects of trade policy and agriculture. The Parliament now has a role to play in almost all lawmaking.

Budget: the new treaty confirms the established practice of working with a **multiannual** financial framework, which Parliament must approve. Parliament and the Council determine all expenditure together. This innovation creates a new balance between the two institutions when approving the EU's budget.

International agreements: under the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament's **assent** is required for all international agreements in fields governed by the ordinary legislative procedure.

ARE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS TRUE OR FALSE?

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The power of the Europarliament has tended to increase. | T | F |
| 2. No law can now be passed without approval by the EU parliament. | T | F |
| 3. The European budget is approved every year by the EU parliament. | T | F |
| 4. The Europarliament and the Commission now share similar powers. | T | F |
| 5. New treaties must be approved by the European parliament. | T | F |



WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING WORDS MEAN?

- a) suffrage: _____
- b) penal: _____
- c) multiannual: _____
- d) assent: _____

¹ Adapted from: http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/glance/democracy/index_en.htm



SUBSIDIARITY

The new treaty also describes the principle of **subsidiarity** (αρχή της επικουρικότητας). **What is subsidiarity, and how is it protected?**

A greater role for national parliaments

The treaty gives the national parliaments greater scope to participate alongside the European institutions in the work of the Union. A new clause clearly sets out the rights and duties of the national parliaments within the EU. The greatest novelty lies in new power to **enforce** subsidiarity. Subsidiarity means that (except in the areas where it has exclusive powers) the EU acts only where action will be more effective at EU-level than at national level. Any national parliament may **flag** a proposal for EU action which it believes does not respect this principle. This **triggers** a two-stage procedure:

- if one third of national parliaments consider that the proposal is not in line with subsidiarity, the Commission will have to re-examine it and decide whether to maintain, adjust or withdraw it
- if a majority of national parliaments agrees with the objection but the Commission decides to maintain its proposal anyway, the Commission will have to explain its reasons, and it will be up to the European Parliament and the Council to decide whether or not to continue the legislative procedure.



COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH BY PARAPHRASING THE TEXT:

The principle of subsidiarity means that the EU must not legislate if _____

If many national parliaments _____ the Commission has _____ options: to _____, _____ or _____.

If the Commission do not withdraw or adjust a proposal, then they _____.

A proposal that has been flagged by many parliaments but not changed, can only _____.



THE EU AND MEMBER STATES

The Lisbon treaty distinguishes between three broad types of policy areas in which the EU can exercise power, with or without the co-operation of the national governments. Before you read on, can you **match the policy types with their definitions?**

Exclusive Powers	Only national governments can legislate, but the EU can help as necessary
Shared powers	Only the EU can legislate
Complementary action	The EU and the national governments co-decide

Relations between the EU and its member countries

Three categories of powers are identified:

- **Exclusive powers:** in fields like the **customs** union, the common trade policy and competition, only the Union may legislate
- **Supporting, coordinating or complementary action:** in areas like culture, education and industry, the Union may only support action by the member states (by providing **funding**, for example)
- **Shared powers:** in other fields, like the environment, transport and consumer protection, the Union and the member states share lawmaking power, not forgetting subsidiarity.

After joining the European Union, countries remain members by choice. The Treaty of Lisbon includes a **voluntary withdrawal clause**, recognising that the member states may always withdraw from the Union if they wish to.

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING BOXES WITH EXAMPLES OF POLICY AREAS

Exclusive Powers:

Supporting, coordinating & complementary action:

Shared powers:



OTHER PROVISIONS

The following extract describes other provisions of the treaty that concern the way people can get involved in EU decision making. Before reading on, take a moment to consider if the following statements are true in your opinion:

- a. Ordinary people do not really know what happens behind the closed doors of EU committees.
- b. Ordinary people cannot really get involved in EU decision making.

Transparency in the Council of Ministers

National parliaments and citizens are now able to see which decisions have been taken by which national ministers in the Council, since all its **deliberations on** legislative matters are made public.

More participatory democracy

There are already many ways in which European citizens can find out about and take part in the political process of the EU. The newest of these is the citizens' initiative, whereby one million citizens, from any number of member countries, will be able to ask the Commission to present a proposal in any of the EU's areas of responsibility. The practical details of this initiative will be worked out once the Treaty of Lisbon takes effect.



- To what extent do you think that these changes address the concerns expressed above? Are they in the right direction? Do you think that there are additional steps that should be taken?

REWRITE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES, STARTING WITH THE WORDS GIVEN

1. Citizens are now able to see which decisions have been taken.
It is now _____ .
2. They will ask the Commission to present a proposal.
The Commission _____ .
3. There are already many ways in which European citizens can find out about the EU.
Many ways _____ .
4. A new way to participate is the citizens' initiative. The practical details of this initiative will be worked out later.
The citizens' initiative, _____ .



WRITING

RESEARCH

Several other changes that are described in the treaty of Lisbon including:

- Changes in the composition of the European parliament
- The creation of offices such as the President of the EU and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy
- Changes in the voting process

Find out more about these changes and make notes. Here are some resources you can use:

- http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm
- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6901353.stm>
- <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/index.php>



WRITING

Write a 250-word text summarizing the changes, and briefly commenting on them.