

Organisation of the European Commission

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Organisation of the European Commission

Organisation before 1967

The High Authority had a President and a Vice-President, appointed by the governments of the Member States for a two-year term of office (Article 11 of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)). In fact, two Vice-Presidents were appointed. The President was responsible for:

- ensuring the smooth functioning of the administration;
- ensuring that decisions taken by the High Authority were carried out;
- establishing the draft agenda for meetings;
- liaising with the other ECSC institutions.

The High Authority was organised on the basis of the principle of collective responsibility. The High Commissioners constituted a body, and that body took decisions and was accountable for those decisions to the Common Assembly. Although decisions were taken collectively, that did not mean that all decisions were unanimous. Although a consensus was always sought, a decision might be taken by a simple majority of members.

Initially, all High Authority members dealt with all spheres of activity. However, as time went on, the members began to specialise more and more in a particular field, although a division of tasks never became official. This specialisation only related to the study and the preparation of an issue: the decision was still taken collectively.

With regard to the division of work, the ECSC Treaty provided for the setting-up of study committees, including an economic study committee (Article 16).

In order to perform its duties, the High Authority had to establish a suitable administrative structure. The creation of working parties, responsible for preparing the deliberations of the High Authority and for coordinating the work of the various departments, led to a streamlining of the institution's work. At the end of 1953, there were six working parties, each comprising four members of the High Authority: Market, Mergers and Transport; General Objectives; Social Problems; Investment, Production and Finances; External Relations; Administrative Matters.

The High Authority was organised into departments, and it introduced all the internal measures required to ensure the smooth functioning of those departments. The first Rules of Procedure and the General Organisational Rules were adopted on 5 November 1954.

Until the Merger Treaty of 8 April 1965, the High Authority was deemed to be a relatively coherent and homogenous institution. This was also the result of Jean Monnet's wish to create a small group able to establish close contacts with national authorities and experts but which transcended national expertise in the common European interest.

In 1958, after the entry into force of the Treaties of Rome of 25 March 1957 establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom), the new Commissions were established.

The EEC Commission had one President and two Vice-Presidents, while the Euratom Commission had one President and just one Vice-President. They were appointed for a period of two years, and their term of office was renewable (Article 161 of the EEC Treaty and Article 130 of the Euratom Treaty).

The organisation and administration of the departments of both Commissions were governed by their Rules

of Procedure (EEC Commission Rules of Procedure of 9 January 1963 and Euratom Commission Rules of Procedure of 8 June 1960).

Following the example of the High Authority, the two new Commissions divided up the work into areas or specific sectors of activity, which were assigned to the members. Similarly, the Commissions appointed members to form working parties, and those members were permitted to establish private offices with the task of assisting them. The EEC Commission also had an executive secretary who helped the President to prepare the meetings.

As regards administrative structures, the High Authority endeavoured to establish efficient cooperation with the EEC Commission and the Euratom Commission in order to avoid administrative and technical duplication of efforts. The three executives decided to create common services: a common legal service, a common statistical service, and a common press and information service.

From 1960, the departments of the High Authority were structured into directorates-general, in the same way as the EEC Commission, whose Rules of Procedure set out that the directorates-general were to be broken down into directorates, with the directorates being further broken down into divisions. The basic unit in the administrative structure was the division.

The general organisation of the High Authority and the EEC and Euratom Commissions was maintained, with a few changes here and there, until the executives merged in July 1967.

Organisation after 1967

In 1967, the ECSC High Authority, the EEC Commission and the Euratom Commission were replaced by a Single Commission by virtue of the Merger Treaty of 8 April 1965. The Treaty established the principle of the single administration of the Communities (Article 24).

The Single Commission decided to maintain the administrative structures of the three institutions until a unified structure was created on 28 March 1968. In practice, there is a large degree of continuity with the structure of the previous executives, particularly the EEC Commission.

As before, the Commission of the European Communities remains organised, and acts, as a body in compliance with the measures set out in the Rules of Procedure (Provisional Rules of Procedure of 6 July 1967, repealed by the Rules of Procedure of 17 February 1993, which were also repealed by the Rules of Procedure of 18 September 1999).

The Commission has a **President**. The Commission may appoint one or two **Vice-Presidents** from amongst its Members. The Merger Treaty – as amended by the Act of Accession of Spain and Portugal in 1986 – provided for the appointment of six Vice-Presidents, but the 1992 Treaty on European Union restricted this number to a maximum of two. Similarly, the President's term of office, which the Merger Treaty laid down at two years, became five years, thereby coming into line with the term of office of the Members of the Commission.

The role of the President was reinforced by the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam: it defined the political guidelines that the Commission must follow when carrying out its task (Article 219 of the EC Treaty). The President represents the Commission.

The principle of collective responsibility does not exclude the division of tasks, so the President assigns to Members of the Commission particular areas of activity (*portfolios*) for which they bear special responsibility in terms of preparing work and executing decisions. The number of portfolios, their substance and their importance have varied over the years.

To ensure an optimum division between conventional portfolios and specific tasks, Declaration 32 annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam provides for the President of the Commission to enjoy broad discretion in the

allocation of tasks within the college, as well as in any reshuffling of those tasks during a Commission's term of office. The Declaration also notes the Commission's intention to reorganise its departments and notes the desirability of placing external relations under the responsibility of a Vice-President.

The President forms **working parties** from amongst the members of the Commission (known as 'Groups of Commissioners') and he appoints the chairmen thereof. These groups can be permanent or *ad hoc*. The Commission President determines their composition and their mandate, and he retains the right to chair any group of which he is not a member.

Commission Members appoint **private offices** (cabinets) which are responsible for assisting them in the performance of their tasks and in the preparation of the Commission's decisions. To this end, the Commission Member responsible gives instructions to the departments concerned.

The Commission has a **Secretary-General** whose role is vast. He assists the President in the preparation of Commission activities and meetings; he also assists the chairmen of the working parties in preparation for and the holding of meetings; he ensures that the proper procedures are implemented and monitors the execution of decisions. He ensures coordination between departments and checks that the rules governing the layout of documents submitted to the Commission are observed. He takes measures to ensure the notification and publication of Commission acts in the Official Journal of the European Union, (which was known as the Official Journal of the European Communities until 2003) and the forwarding to other Community institutions of documents drawn up by the Commission and its departments. In general, he is responsible for official relations with the other institutions of the European Communities; he monitors their work and reports back to the Commission.

The Commission is composed of many departments, organised into **directorates-general** and **equivalent services**. In principle, the directorates-general and the equivalent services are broken down into **directorates**, and these are then broken down further into **units**.

In order to respond to specific needs, the Commission may create **specific structures** responsible for particular assignments, and it determines their powers and their operating methods.

A certain number of decentralised bodies (agencies), set up by regulations adopted by the Council acting on proposals from the Commission, exercise various powers in particular areas.