

The role and the operation of the Court of First Instance

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The role and the operation of the Court of First Instance

At present, around 450 cases per year are brought before the Court of Justice of the European Communities. Given the steady increase in the number of cases, in 1989, the Member States set up the Court of First Instance in order to relieve the pressure on the Court of Justice and to strengthen judicial safeguards available to citizens. The Court of Justice, therefore, is able to focus on its essential task, i.e. the interpretation of European law.

The Court of First Instance comprises 15 Judges with jurisdiction to rule at first instance on all actions brought by individuals or undertakings against the institutions of the Union. For example, any issues arising from competition law and disputes between the Union and its officials servants fall within its remit.

The Court of First Instance sits in chambers of between three and five Judges, usually without an Advocate General. The Court of Justice may hear appeals lodged against decisions of the Court of First Instance. Currently, several hundred cases per year are brought before the Court of First Instance. However, only the Court of Justice is empowered to interpret Community law on the basis of questions posed by national courts.