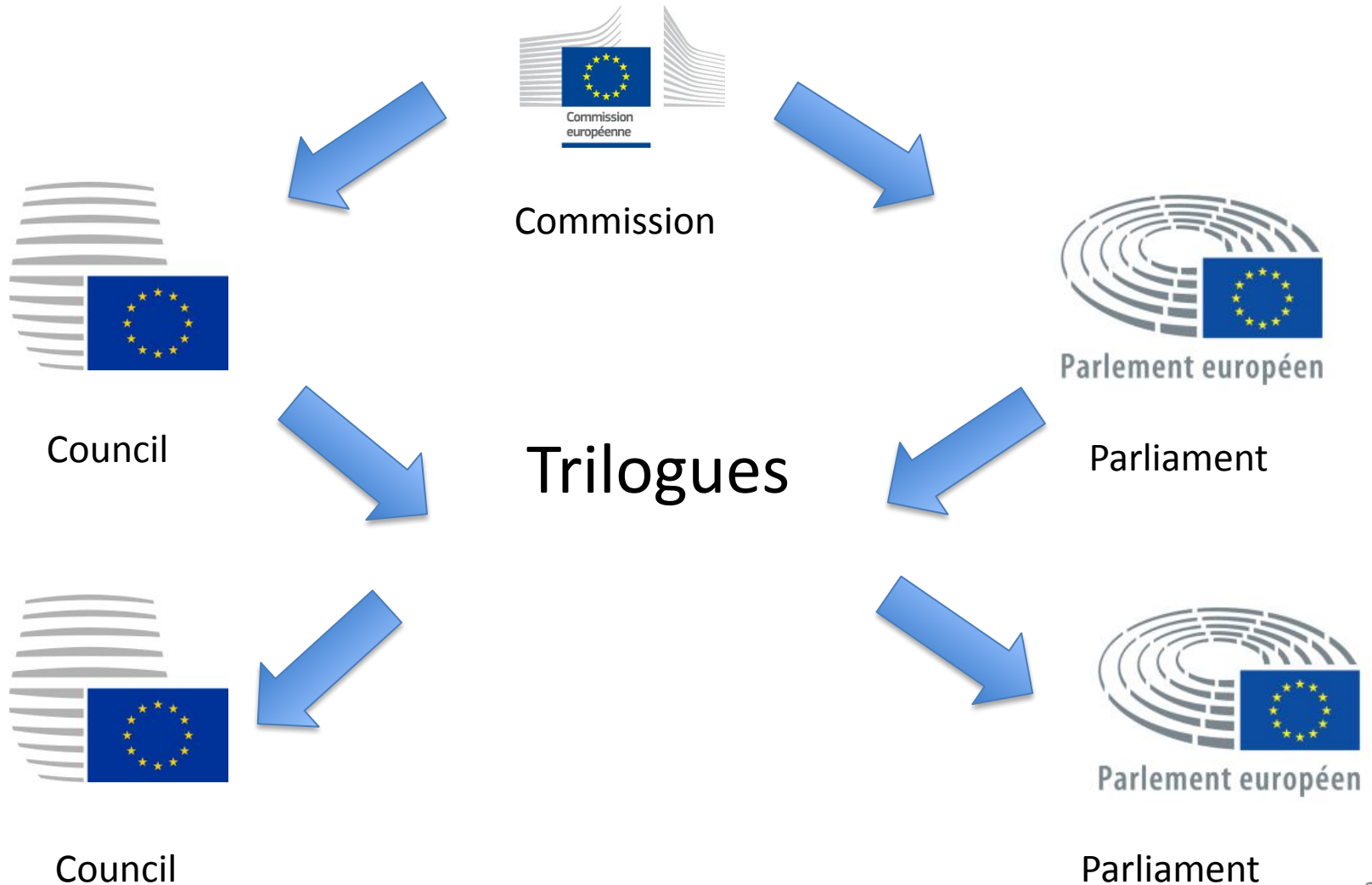




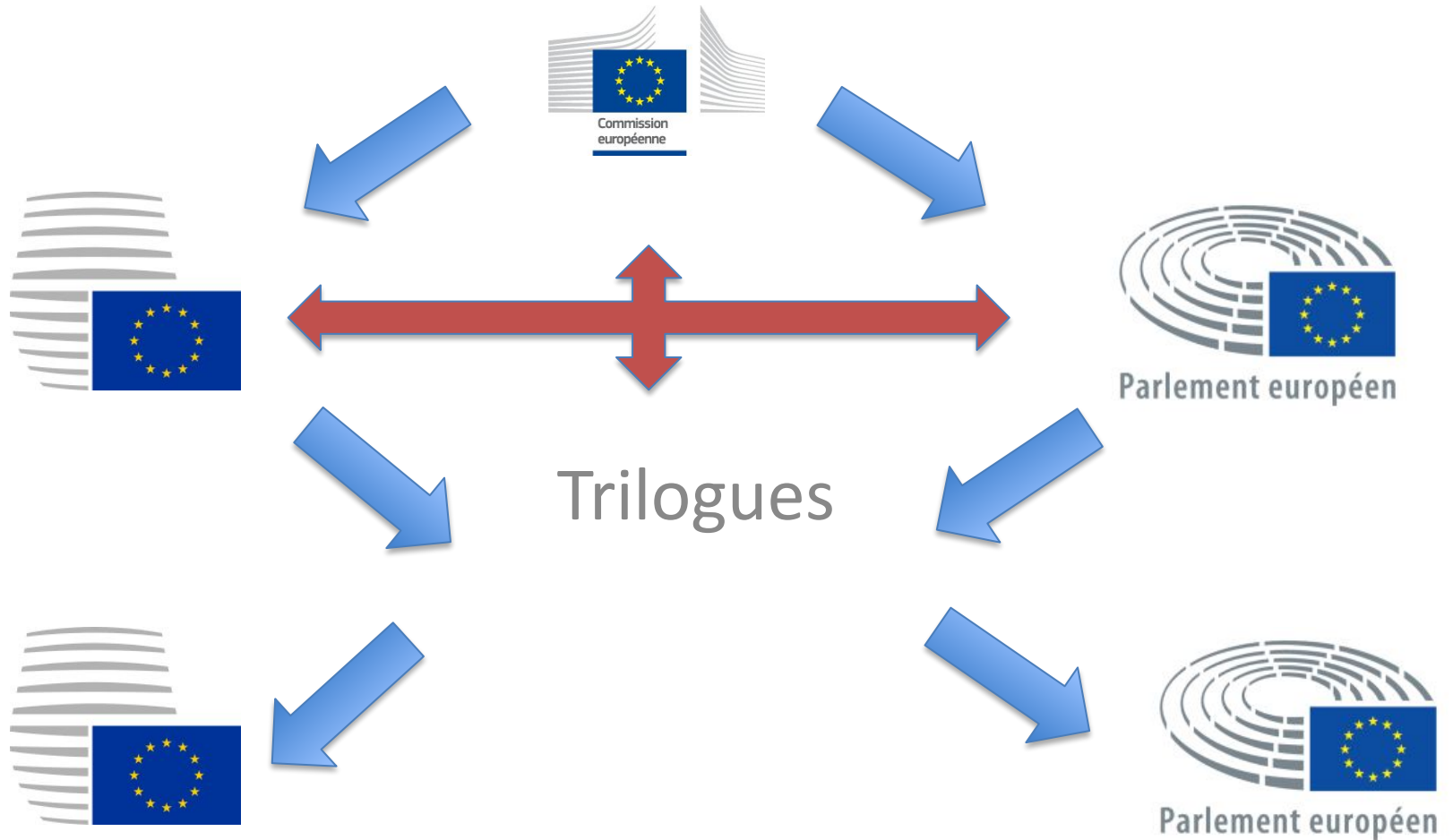
# Welcome to the Brussels bubble: tips on how to investigate the EU

by Jean Comte and Pascal Hansens

# Ordinary Legislative Procedure



# Ordinary Legislative Procedure



# Institutional EU Sources

- 1) Primary and most obvious sources
- 2) Secondary and less accessible
- 3) Focus on EU court of justice
- 4) Useful links

## Aims

1. Quickly show who to contact and for what purpose + essential databases, some well-known, some less so
2. Ask questions at any time, but we only have 1 hour and 15 minutes

# Primary and most obvious sources

- European Commission
- European Parliament
- Council of the EU

1. Spokespersons and press officers from EU institutions, political groups, and permanent representations are always a great starting point for digging into an EU-level topic
2. Don't overlook them, they often have access to highly valuable internal information

**tips:** Call first, write if you must ! Answers and trust come to those who ring. If you don't know the person, introduce yourself in writing and ask for an informal chat. Wait a day. If you don't hear back, give her or him a call.

Press officers from these institutions are increasingly responding on Signal but remain more accessible on WhatsApp. They have little presence on Telegram, except in the EP for far-left and far-right parties.

# European Commission

By far the most tightly wrapped up and controlled press team in the bubble. Written replies from the press team are slow and often vague due to lengthy approval chains. But sometimes, you can get some valuable information. Better to call for background.

## Spokesperson

- On-the-record (usually very flat and uninteresting)
- They never reply to “if” questions; never comment on comments.
- For valuable on-the-record quotes, call in the morning (before the Midday briefing) so they can prepare, then ask your question during the “podium of pain.”
- Off-the-record (sometimes useful, depending on the spokesperson). Better call or after the Midday briefing.
- They don't always have a deep understanding of the topics they cover.

## Press Officer

- Only off-the-record
- Often knows files better than spokespersons, but less free to speak
- Great for updates or non-public data (e.g. staff numbers, internal discussions)
- Can provide summaries of key internal meetings (e.g. Hebdo)

## Small tips

- **Save all press team mobile numbers !** even those you don't need to contact. Many will later join cabinets and key positions.
- Try to contact the members responsible for coordination and planning. They often have interesting insights.
- for accredited reporters, from the European Commission's press room, there is an elevator that provides direct access to the press officers' offices. Good for some chit chatting
- For informal chats and valuable insights, avoid Papillon's café and Exki at Rond-Point Schuman during the day. Too overcrowded, full of reporters and EU officials. Not comfortable to discuss.

# European Parliament

The EP's press team is much freer and more interesting than the European Commission. They are an excellent starting point for digging deeper into an issue. They are perfect for getting an overview of a legislative file, finding the right contact, quickly accessing a legislative timeline, anecdotes and even non-public documents (like compromise amendments)

## EP Spokesperson

- On-the-record/Off-the-record
- Valuable for insights into internal institutional life at the highest level (CoP, President's cabinet, EP position)

## EP Press Officers

- Freer than their counterparts at the European Commission.
- Provide valuable information on legislative files and political group positions within their committees, and legislative scheduling
- **Follow and attend the trilogues !**
- Call is always better. But you can get a lot per mail.

## EP Political Groups' Spokespersons and Press Officers

- Offer strong insight into both internal institutional dynamics and their political group's positions.
- Clearly biased.
- Very useful for understanding the positions of individual delegations within a political group.
- Help facilitate and direct contacts with MEPs, parliamentary assistants, and policy advisers.
- **tip:** Don't confuse political parties (outside the EP) and political groups (inside the EP)

# Council of the EU

The Council's press team is particularly interesting, as it has access to many internal documents (which can be read aloud but not sent) and can physically attend embassy meetings and working parties.

## **Spokesperson**

- Provides background information and can offer interesting quotes.
- Better to call for background information.

## **Press Officer**

- Very good understanding of the legislative files they cover.
- Shares a lot of off-the-record information, but rarely on individual national positions.
  - **tip:** With some, they can talk about geographical areas or culinary specialties to give clues.
- Can attend Coreper and Working Party meetings in person and comment.
- Better to call. But very accessible per mail/WhatsApp/Signal as well.

## **Permanent Representation Spokespersons**

- Gatekeepers of national experts and diplomats
- Can provide extremely valuable information on legislative negotiations.
- **tip:** Use Google + type “Council Press Team” → “List of press contacts in EU Member State Representations.” It will give you all press contacts per country in one single list

## **Presidency of the Council of the EU**

- Sometimes surprisingly transparent in the background. Especially when frustrated with the behaviour of certain delegations



# Secondary and less obvious and accessible sources

Secondary sources, though harder to access, are essential in EU reporting. They offer off-the-record insights, non-public documents, and a deep understanding of institutional dynamics. Invaluable and incontournables

## **European Commission**

- Cabinet members
- EU staff: Directors-General, Heads of Unit, Desk Officers in DGs

## **European Parliament**

- Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs)
- Political Group Policy Advisers
- SG, Committee Secretaries and Administrators

## **Council of the EU**

- National Attachés and Diplomats

## **Others**

- NGOs, lobbyists, consultants, think tanks, law firms

# European Commission

## Cabinet Members

Cabinet members are central to understand EU negotiations, trilogues, but also internal Commission dynamics. They work first for their Commissioner, not the institution, and can sometimes offer valuable insights on other Commissioners, especially when there is frustration or internal tension.

## How to find them

Check the team online and contact the responsible for communication for an informal chat; it often leads to useful info, and access to other members

- Use Google: *Commissioner's name + Team* => once on the team's webpage : CTRL+F + "*Communication*"

## EU Staff

Not easy to access and rarely talkative. But the good news being those highest up (often near retirement) tend to share the most, as they are freer and less afraid to speak openly to the press

## How to find them

- 1) Use Google: *DG name + organigram* or *DG name + organizational chart*
- 2) Use the *Who's Who* directory for the DG contact (head of unit does not work anymore)
- Alternatively:
  - a. 1) Google: "*Published Initiatives*" + *name of the legislative text*
  - b. 2) Read the impact assessment, identify the Lead DG and the responsible Unit.
  - c. 3) Use *Who's Who* to find contact details.

# European Parliament

## Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs)

Parliament assistants speak off the record and offer rich insights into EP politics and documents, but little on the Council or Commission. Often young and biased, they may lack sometimes expertise. Don't forget they are able to give a quote from their MEPS often very quickly. Faster than political group's press officers.

## Whose APA to contact?

- President of a political group → Information at the highest level (President of the European Parliament, group presidents, plenary session), intergroup dynamics, election strategy, overall alliances and conflict between political families. Not easily accessible
- Coordinator → Deed insight for a political group's overall strategy in a committee, political deals and alliances, overall negotiation dynamics
- Rapporteur → Key to understanding the content, political dynamics, and trilogue negotiations of a legislative text — and essential if you need a quote
- Shadow Rapporteur → Similar to the rapporteur, but represents another political group's perspective on a legislative file, offering alternative proposals and red lines
- **tip:** Experience shows that the Greens are the most accessible. They are an excellent starting point for getting started, exploring an issue, and understanding the dynamics.
- **tip:** call delegation of your nationality, it often helps.

## How to contact them

- 1) Google: *Name of MEP + European Parliament*
- 2) You can send an email to the MEP or try contacting the APA directly:  
**tip:** *firstname.lastname@europarl.europa.eu*
- For the coordinator, find the list of coordinators, often in the “about” section of each committee webpage
- For the President of a political group, just use the *Who's Who* directory to find their team.
- Alternatively, ask the political group's press officers for the APA's mobile number

# European Parliament

## Political Group Policy Advisers

Speaks off-the-record only, with deep knowledge and non public documents on legislative files and their political context. Insightful on political dynamics, very useful in trilogues. Though politically biased.

## How to contact them

- 1) Google: *Political group's name + staff*
- 2) Select the relevant committee and identify the appropriate policy adviser.

Or ask the political group's press officers for the email address or even mobile number.

## EP staff

Often overlooked, SGs and committee staff have full access to documents and a strong grasp of issues and institutional dynamics — and can be surprisingly open.

- For the EP Secretariat-General: go to *Who's Who* and search for the relevant contacts
- At committee level, it's more difficult than before and each committee has its own internal policy
  - 1) Try Googling: Name of the committee + secretariat or staff list (this works for some committees, e.g., IMCO, but it's less and less)
    - **Tip:** You can also email: [COMMITTEE ACRONYM]-secretariat@europarl.europa.eu
  - Example: imco-secretariat@europarl.europa.eu

# The Council of the EU

## National Attachés and diplomats

Diplomats and attachés speak off the record, know Council dynamics well, and can explain their country's position, but not trilogues, unless briefed by the presidency during the Wed Coreper.

## How to contact them

- Through the Permanent Representation spokesperson
- Sometimes, the Permanent Representation provides all expert contacts directly, even mobile numbers (e.g., Finland).
- **tip:** Current best perm reps : small countries, unhappy small countries, or Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Estonia, Czechia.
- **tip:** Start with a press officer at the Council for context, then contact smaller, discontented countries likely to talk and use that to prompt reactions from others. By doing so, you will be able to reconstruct a good picture of intergov negotiations on a specific legislative file or EU issue.

# Others

- **NGOs** – Open, talkative, info-rich but not always the best informed, and strongly biased. Great for investigative leads though.
- **Lobbies** – Similar to NGOs but much better well-informed, very accessible, and of course biased.
  - **tip:** use the Transparency register to find them, or read the contributions in the published initiatives' webpage to find the most relevant one.
  - **tips:** Read the excellent book livre "Au coeur du lobbying européen" (only in French), from a certain Jean Comte
- **Consultants** – Very useful, very closely working to the Commission and with the internal staff to help them, access to mountains of internal docs. Start with the big ones (FTI, Deloitte, etc.)
- **Law Firms** – Valuable for competition cases. Discreet but insightful.

# Focus on the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)

**If you ignore the Court of Justice, you are missing the most powerful and yet least scrutinized EU institution.**

EU court cases are a goldmine for investigative reporters. They reveal hidden fights between countries and Brussels, how big companies try to dodge rules or get special treatment, and where EU money really goes. They show when the Commission fails to act, how groups fight for the environment, privacy, or access to documents, and how whistleblowers and activists push for change. Each case gives a rare look behind the scenes of EU power.

## **Who to contact**

- CJEU Press Officers - Your entry point for official information, case updates, and help navigating court procedures
- Rapporteur Judges, General Lawyer and Legal Secretaries (Who's Who): They draft the key legal arguments in each case, knowing who they are can reveal legal leanings and networks  
**tip:** firstname.surname@@[curia.europa.eu](mailto:curia.europa.eu) OR LinkedIn !
- Law Firms - Often represent powerful clients in high-stakes EU cases: their filings, strategies, and client lists are rich sources
- Scholars (especially College of Europe, otherwise European affairs departments at national universities), experts who can decode complex rulings, spot trends, and explain the broader legal and political impact

# A non-exhaustive list of useful databases and sources

## European Commission

### Press team of the European Commission

Try to contact the members responsible for coordination and planning. They often have interesting insights.

[https://commission.europa.eu/about/contact/press-services/press-contacts/commissions-spokespersons-service\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/about/contact/press-services/press-contacts/commissions-spokespersons-service_en)

### Register of Commission Documents

You can find all institutional communications, working papers, background papers, and technical notes that support the Commission's main proposals, PV, etc.

<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/>

### Published initiatives

All public consultations led by the European Commission. A goldmine of info, where you can retrieve the points of view and position papers of the most relevant stakeholders, and some data as well

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives_en)

**Transparency register.** Another absolute goldmine for reporters, where you can see who lobbies, the groups of interest, the topics on which they lobby, how much they spend on lobbying, etc

[https://commission.europa.eu/about/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/transparency-register\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/about/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/transparency-register_en)

### Eur-Lex

Where you can access all EU law, cases by the Court of Justice, and EU public documents.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>

### Infringement database

The European Commission's infringement database is an essential resource, providing direct access to crucial information on ongoing legal violations and non-compliance by EU member states, enabling in-depth analysis and the discovery of hidden stories that impact European law and policy.

[https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/search-infringement-decisions/?lang\\_code=en&langCode=EN](https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/search-infringement-decisions/?lang_code=en&langCode=EN)

### Eurostat

Offers a goldmine of reliable, granular statistical data across a wide range of topics, empowering in-depth investigations into economic, social, and environmental trends while uncovering insights that can drive powerful, evidence-based stories. Don't forget to critically assess the quality and accuracy of the data.

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

### EBS

European Broadcasting Service, offers live and on-demand video and audio coverage of EU institutional activities, including press conferences, parliamentary sessions, and official events.

<https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/ebs/both/>



# European Parliament

## EP Press Team

Organised by Member States and policy areas

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/contacts>

## First Spokespersons of the Political Groups

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/contacts/5/all-political-groups>

## EP Legislative Observatory (Oeil)

Oeil is essential for EU coverage. It provides a quick understanding of legislative files, identifies key MEPs (rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs), tracks the legislative process, and offers national parliaments' feedback. An indispensable starting point for investigative work or reporting on legislative matters.

[https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2023/0438\(COD\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2023/0438(COD))

## EP Think Tank

A valuable resource for EU research, offering clear, credible studies, briefings, and numerous sources. Better than ChatGPT :-)

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/home>

## Multimedia Centre

Access to all hearings and media content from the EP.

<https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en>

## EP Public Register

Provides free access to most official documents produced or received by Parliament since December 2001.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/home/welcome.htm>

## Plenary Sitting Website

Comprehensive information including agendas, tabled texts, amendments, vote results (by number, name, nationality, political group), minutes, debates, transcripts, and adopted texts. To focus on a specific plenary session, scroll down the main page to find the calendar and select the desired date.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/home.html>

## Written Parliamentary Questions

A repository of all written questions posed by MEPs to the European Commission. A continuous source of inspiration for new stories. For questions with replies from the European Commission, refer to the "Most recent questions with answers" section.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/parliamentary-questions.html?tabType=wq&tabActif=tabLastSecond#sidesForm>

## IPEX

Repository of documents exchanged between national parliaments in EU member states and the European Parliament.

## National Parliaments' Spokespersons List

<https://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-WEB/about/speakers>

## EP Petitions' Register

A valuable resource for investigative reporters, revealing citizens' real-life struggles, systemic failures, and issues often overlooked by reporters. These petitions can lead to great stories, offering journalists an early warning system for potential scandals.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/show-petitions>

# Council of the EU (and permanent representation)

## **Council's Press Team (by policy fields)**

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-contacts/>

## **Press Contacts from EU Member States' Permanent Representations**

Comprehensive list of press contacts from EU Member States' Permanent Representations.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ek1dc14f/spokespersons-for-delegations-trombinoscope-20052025.pdf>

## **Council's Document Register**

Find various types of documents, including minutes, general approaches, and occasionally the notable four-column documents.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents/public-register/latest/>

## **Public Votes of Member States**

Access results of votes from Member States on legislative texts.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents/public-register/votes/>

## **Multimedia newsroom of the Council**

An invaluable resource for reporters by providing timely, high-quality audiovisual content directly from the heart of EU decision-making—essential for accurate, fast, and visually engaging news coverage.

<https://newsroom.consilium.europa.eu/>

## **Council live**

**Even better !** The Council of the European Union's Council Live platform offers real-time streaming of EU Council meetings

<https://video.consilium.europa.eu/home/en>

# EU Court of Justice

## **Press Officers**

Contact the press officers for information on the Court's activities.

[https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/Jo2\\_25870/](https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/Jo2_25870/)

## **Curia's Document Register**

Find all documents related to case-law.

<https://curia.europa.eu/juris/recherche.jsf?cid=3044088>

## **Judicial Calendar**

Get an overview of all upcoming and past court judgments.

[https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/Jo1\\_6581/en/](https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/Jo1_6581/en/)

## **Broadcast of hearings**

[https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/p1\\_1477137/en](https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/p1_1477137/en)

# To Request Documents

## **Ask the EU**

This is the platform used by most journalists and NGOs to request documents and follow up on requests. You can choose not to make your requests public immediately upon submission (very useful for writing an article without revealing your sources). Perfect for finding inspiration for stories and supplementing information obtained by others.

<https://www.asktheeu.org/help/about>

## **European Commission:**

<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-request/home>

## **Council of the EU:**

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents/public-register/request-document-form/>

## **European Parliament:**

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/requestdoc/secured/form.htm>

## **Curia:**

[https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/P\\_95917/](https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/P_95917/)

# And of course

**Who is who.** The EU Whoiswho directory remains a valuable resource for identifying officials within EU institutions. However, it's important to note that the European Commission has implemented a policy change that removes the contact details of officials below the Head of Unit level from the directory.

<https://op.europa.eu/en/web/who-is-who>

# Thank you!

For questions or to get in touch:

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