

Lisbon Treaty

Came into force 1 December 2009

Makes EU more democratic

The Treaty gives citizens a stronger voice in decision making



National parliaments in each member state are given a greater role in examining EU laws before they are passed to ensure the EU does not deal with matters that should be dealt with at a national or local level.

The European Parliament shares decision making with the Council of Ministers in a larger number of areas. These include agriculture, fisheries, structural funds and the EU budget. What was formerly known as co-decision has become the ordinary legislative procedure. This means that directly elected MEPs have more say in lawmaking.

The Council of Ministers meets in public when considering and voting on draft laws.

The ordinary legislative procedure is extended to Justice and Home Affairs, renamed Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters. Formerly decisions in this area were made on an intergovernmental basis.

Under the Citizens' Initiative, citizens who gather one million signatures for a petition can require the European Commission to advance new policy proposals

The treaty contains a secession clause that allows a member state to withdraw from the Union.

Makes EU more efficient

More decisions will be taken in the Council of Ministers by qualified majority voting rather than by unanimous vote.

From 2014 decisions reached by qualified majority voting will need the support of 55% of the member states representing at least 65% of the EU population.

Important policy areas such as taxation and defence will continue to be decided by unanimous vote.

To promote continuity and consistency in the conduct of EU affairs, the President of the European Council will be elected for a maximum period of five years. Previously the position was held for six months on a rotating basis by the head of state of the country holding the EU Presidency.

The European Council becomes an institution of the EU in its own right.

Gives EU stronger voice in the world

A new position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who will also be a Vice-President of the Commission, has been created to give the EU a single voice in external affairs.

The High Representative will head up the new European External Action Service that will provide a foreign ministry and diplomatic corps for the EU.

Other provisions

Security and defence

Outside its own territory the EU has in the past undertaken peace keeping and conflict prevention missions. The Lisbon Treaty extends its role to disarmament operations, military advice and assistance, and restoring stability after conflicts. It also creates the possibility of enhanced cooperation among member states that wish to work more closely together in defence areas.

Justice and crime

The Lisbon Treaty contains provisions that strengthen the EU's ability to fight international cross-border crime, illegal immigration, trafficking of people, arms and drugs.

In these areas the role of the European Parliament and the Court of Justice will be strengthened and more decisions will be taken by qualified majority voting.

In recognition of member states' different legal systems and traditions, member states will reserve the right not to adopt a new measure if it conflicts with a fundamental aspect of its own criminal justice system.

The UK and Ireland, having regard to their common law systems and their being outside the Schengen border control scheme, will have the right to decide on a case by case basis whether to adopt new laws in this area.

Human rights

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights becomes legally binding. This means that when the EU proposes and member states implement new laws they must respect the rights set down in the charter.

Climate change

The Treaty sets as a specific objective increased cooperation among member states in combating climate change.

Federal aspects

The increased power of the directly elected Parliament, the inclusion of justice and home affairs within the EU's regular decision making process and the increased scrutiny of legislation by national parliaments expands the federalist structure of the EU.

For the full text of the Treaty use the index at
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:SOM:EN:HTML>