

Chapter 3

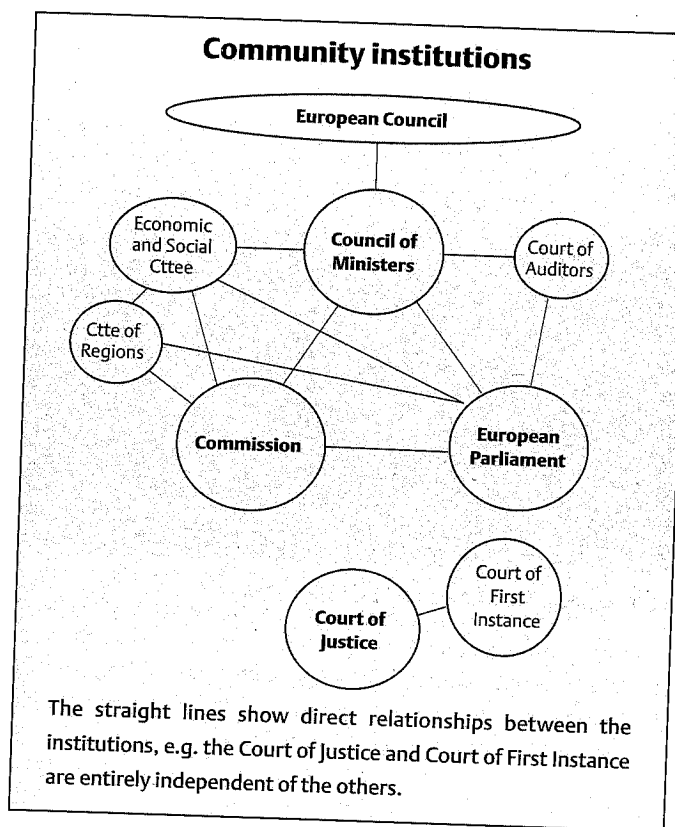
How the EU is governed

The EU has major economic and environmental powers, and is increasingly active in foreign policy, defence, and internal security. How is this power used and controlled? How is the Union governed?

The answer, according to many intergovernmentalists, is through cooperation among the governments of member states: the other institutions are peripheral to the Council in which the governments are represented, and this fact will not go away. But while the Council is still the most powerful institution, federalists regard the Parliament, Commission, and Court of Justice not only as sufficiently independent of the states to have changed the nature of the relationships among them, but also as major actors in a process that may, and should, result in the Union becoming a federal polity.

The European Council and the Council

The Council consists of ministers representing the member states; and at the highest level there is the European Council of Heads of State or Government together with the President of the European Commission. Heads of state are included in the title because the Presidents of France and Finland participate as well as their prime



ministers, since they have some of the functions performed by heads of government elsewhere.

The European Council meets three or four times a year and takes decisions that require resolution or impulsion at that political level, sometimes because ministers have been unable to resolve an issue in the Council, sometimes because a package deal involving many subjects, such as a major amending treaty or a seven-year financial perspective, has to be assembled. The European Council