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EU law

The European Union (EU) has a legal system and law of its own - the main rules and principles are laid down in the founding Treaties. The EU can adopt legal and legislative acts, which the Member States have to respect and to apply.

The law of the EU is legally binding and publicly available in all [EU official languages](#). Via the website [EUR-Lex](#) you have access to the complete text of EU legal documents in all those languages and you can search for a certain law or piece of legislation.

Sources of EU law

The two main sources of EU law are: primary law and secondary law.

Primary law is constituted by treaties laying down the legal framework of the European Union. Secondary law is composed of legal instruments based on these treaties, such as regulations, directives, decisions and agreements. In addition, there are general principles of EU law, the [case law](#) developed by the European Court of Justice and [international law](#).

A distinguishing feature of EU law is that it can be directly enforceable before the courts of the EU Member States ("direct effect") and that laws of the EU Member States may be held inapplicable when it conflicts with EU law ("supremacy" of the latter).

Primary EU law (the Treaties)

Primary law can be seen as the supreme source of law in the European Union. It is at the top of the European legal order and consists mainly of the following [treaties](#):

- the "founding" treaties: the [Treaty on European Union](#), the [Treaty on the functioning of the EU](#), and the [Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community](#),
- the protocols and annexes to the treaties, the treaties on accession of Member States to the European Union, and other treaties.

Together, these treaties set out the division of powers between the Union and the Member States, define the decision making process, the powers of the EU institutions and the scope of their activities within each policy area.

The latest revision of primary EU law has been carried out by the [Treaty of Lisbon](#), which entered into force in December 2009 (the treaties referred to above include the amendments by the Treaty of Lisbon).

Secondary EU law (legislation, agreements, etc.)

Secondary law comprises so-called unilateral acts and agreements.

Unilateral acts are mainly those listed in Article 288 of the [Treaty on the functioning of the EU](#): regulations, directives, decisions, opinions and recommendations. In addition, there are specific acts based on previous treaties: for instance, in the area of criminal matters 'framework decisions' continue to apply (they were adopted

before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, when judicial and police cooperation in criminal matters had a specific status - you can find more information on this at the following link: [summaries - criminal matters until November 2009](#)). Legally binding acts adopted by legislative procedure (such as regulations, directives and framework decisions) are referred to as legislative acts or "legislation".

Agreements comprise: international agreements or conventions, signed by the Community or the European Union and a country or organisation outside the EU, agreements between Member States and interinstitutional agreements concluded by different EU institutions.

Summaries of legislation and further information

The [EUR-Lex](#) website, in addition to providing full texts of all EU law documents, contains "[Summaries of EU legislation](#)" which presents the main aspects of EU legislation in a concise and easy-to-read manner. There are approximately 2000 summaries of EU legislation, disseminated under thematic areas corresponding to the [activities of the EU](#). The themes range from agriculture to transport, presenting comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of EU legislation. What is not covered, however, are legal decisions having only temporary interest, such as decisions on grants.

Moreover, the [EUR-Lex](#) database follows all legislative proposals during the decision-making process of the EU institutions, and [Europe Direct](#) complements the above by offering user-friendly summaries of sometimes rather long and technical EU legislation (it also responds to citizens' enquiries regarding the EU).

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