Answer the following questions; first discuss in pairs:

1. What do you know about the European Union and its institutions?
2. Do you know who is represented in the pictures below?

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission (EC) is the executive body of the European Union responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, upholding the EU treaties and managing the day-to-day business of the EU. Commissioners swear an oath at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, pledging to respect the treaties and to be completely independent in carrying out their duties during their mandate.

The Commission operates as a cabinet government, with 28 members of the Commission (informally known as "commissioners"). There is one member per member state, but members are bound by their oath of office to represent the general interest of the EU as a whole rather than their home state. One of the 28 is the Commission President (currently Jean-Claude Juncker) proposed by the European Council and elected by the European Parliament. The Council of the European Union then nominates the other 27 members of the Commission in agreement with the nominated President, and the 28 members as a single body are then subject to a vote of approval by the European Parliament. The current Commission is the Juncker Commission, which took office in late 2014.

The term Commission is used either in the narrow sense of the 28-member College of Commissioners (or College) or to also include the administrative body of about 23,000 European civil servants who are split into departments called directorates-general and services. The procedural languages of the Commission are English, French and German. The Members of the Commission and their "cabinets" (immediate teams) are based in the Berlaymont building in Brussels.

The European Commission derives from one of the five key institutions created in the supranational European Community system, following the proposal of Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister, on 9 May 1950. Originating in 1951 as the High Authority in the European Coal and Steel Community, the Commission has undergone numerous changes in power and composition under various presidents, involving three Communities.

Swear on oath at: to have formally promised to tell the truth

To pledge: to make a serious or formal promise to give or do something

Working in pairs, write a short summary about the European Commission and its functions
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament (EP) is the directly elected parliamentary institution of the European Union (EU). Together with the Council of the European Union (the Council) and the European Commission, it exercises the legislative function of the EU. The Parliament is composed of 751 (previously 766) members, who represent the second largest democratic electorate in the world (after the Parliament of India) and the largest trans-national democratic electorate in the world (375 million eligible voters in 2009).

It has been directly elected every five years by universal suffrage since 1979.

Although the European Parliament has legislative power that the Council and Commission do not possess, it does not formally possess legislative initiative, as most national parliaments.

It likewise has equal control over the EU budget. Finally, the European Commission, the executive body of the EU, is accountable to Parliament. In particular, Parliament elects the President of the Commission, and approves (or rejects) the appointment of the Commission as a whole. It can subsequently force the Commission as a body to resign by adopting a motion of censure.

The President of the European Parliament (Parliament’s speaker) is Martin Schulz (S&D), elected in January 2012. He presides over a multi-party chamber, the two largest groups being the Group of the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). The last union-wide elections were the 2014 elections.

The European Parliament has three places of work – Brussels (Belgium), the city of Luxembourg (Luxembourg) and Strasbourg (France). Luxembourg is home to the administrative offices (the ‘General Secretariat’). Meetings of the whole Parliament (‘plenary sessions’) take place in Strasbourg and in Brussels. Committee meetings are held in Brussels.

The Parliament, like the other institutions, was not designed in its current form when it first met on 10 September 1952. One of the oldest common institutions, it began as the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It was a consultative assembly of 78 appointed parliamentarians drawn from the national parliaments of member states (see dual mandate), having no legislative powers.

Its development since its foundation is a testament to the evolution of the Union’s structures without one clear "master plan". Some such as Tom Reid of the Washington Post said of the union, "nobody would have deliberately designed a government as complex and as redundant as the EU". Even the Parliament's two seats, which have switched several times, are a result of various agreements or lack of agreements. Although most MEPs would prefer to be based just in Brussels, at John Major's 1992 Edinburgh summit, France engineered a treaty amendment to maintain Parliament's plenary seat permanently at Strasbourg.
The body was not mentioned in the original Schuman Declaration. It was assumed or hoped that difficulties with the British would be resolved to allow the Council of Europe's Assembly to perform the task. A separate Assembly was introduced during negotiations on the Treaty as an institution which would counterbalance and monitor the executive while providing democratic legitimacy. Its early importance was highlighted when the Assembly was given the task of drawing up the draft treaty to establish a European Political Community. In this, the Ad Hoc Assembly was established on 13 September 1952[^1] with extra members but after the failure of the proposed European Defence Community the project was dropped.

Session of the Council of Europe's Assembly in the former House of Europe in Strasbourg in January 1967. Willy Brandt, German minister for Foreign Affairs, is speaking.

Despite this the European Economic Community and Euratom were established in 1958 by the Treaties of Rome. The Common Assembly was shared by all three communities (which had separate executives) and it renamed itself the European Parliamentary Assembly. The first meeting was held on 19 March 1958 having been set up in Luxembourg, it elected Schuman as its president and on 13 May it rearranged itself to sit according to political ideology rather than nationality. This is seen as the birth of the modern European Parliament, with Parliament’s 50 years celebrations being held in March 2008 rather than 2002.

The three communities merged their remaining organs as the European Communities in 1967 and the body was renamed to the current "European Parliament" in 1962. In 1970 the Parliament was granted power over areas of the Community's budget, which were expanded to the whole budget in 1975. Under the Rome Treaties, the Parliament should have become elected. However, the Council was required to agree a uniform voting system beforehand, which it failed to do. The Parliament threatened to take the Council to the European Court of Justice leading to a compromise whereby the Council would agree to elections, but the issue of voting systems would be put off till a later date.

*To merge*: to combine or join together, or to cause things to do this

**Discuss in pairs in order to answer the following questions:**

1. What does the European Parliament represent?
2. What are its function?
3. How are the MEPs elected?
4. Where do they meet?

Read the following text:

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Council of the European Union (often still referred to as the Council of Ministers, or sometimes just called the Council (Latin: Consilium)) is the third of the seven institutions of the European Union (EU) as listed in the Treaty on European Union. It is part of the essentially bicameral EU legislature (the other legislative body being the European Parliament) and represents the executive governments of the EU’s member states. It is based in the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, Belgium.

The Council meets in 10 different configurations of 28 national ministers (one per state). The precise membership of these configurations varies according to the topic under consideration; for example, when discussing agricultural policy the Council is formed by the 28 national ministers whose portfolio includes this policy area (with the related European Commissioners contributing but not voting).

The Presidency of the Council rotates every six months among the governments of EU member states, with the relevant ministers of the respective country holding the Presidency at any given time ensuring the smooth running of the meetings and setting the daily agenda. The continuity between presidencies is provided by an arrangement under which three successive presidencies, known as Presidency trios, share common political programmes. The Foreign Affairs Council (national foreign ministers) is however chaired by the Union’s High Representative.

Its decisions are made by qualified majority voting in most areas, unanimity in others. Usually where it operates unanimously, it only needs to consult the Parliament. However, in most areas the ordinary legislative procedure applies meaning both Council and Parliament share legislative and budgetary powers equally, meaning both have to agree for a proposal to pass. In a few limited areas the Council may initiate new EU law itself.

The General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, also known as Council Secretariat, assists the Council of the European Union, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Council and the President of the European Council. The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union. The Secretariat is divided into seven directorates-general, each administered by a director-general.

Write your written answers to the following questions:

1. Who chairs the meetings of the Council of the European Union?
2. What are the main functions of the Council of the European Union?
Read the following text:

**THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL**

The European Council, charged with defining the EU's overall political direction and priorities, is the institution of the European Union (EU) that comprises the heads of state or government of the member states, along with President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy also takes part in its meetings. Established as an informal summit in 1975, the European Council was formalised as an institution in 2009 upon entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. Its current President is Donald Tusk.

While the European Council has no formal legislative power, it is a strategic (and crisis-solving) body that provides the union with general political directions and priorities, and acts as a collective presidency. The European Commission remains the sole initiator of legislation, but the European Council is able to provide an impetus to guide legislative policy.

The meetings of the European Council, still commonly referred to as EU summits, are chaired by its president and take place at least twice every six months; usually in the Justus Lipsius building, the headquarters of the Council of the European Union in Brussels. Decisions of the European Council are taken by consensus, except where the Treaties provide otherwise.

The first summits of EU heads of state or government were held in February and July 1961 (in Paris and Bonn respectively). They were informal summits of the leaders of the European Community and were started due to then-French President Charles de Gaulle's resentment at the domination of supranational institutions (e.g. the European Commission) over the integration process, but petered out. The first influential summit held, after the departure of De Gaulle, was The Hague summit of 1969, which reached an agreement on the admittance of the United Kingdom into the Community and initiated foreign policy cooperation (the European Political Cooperation) taking integration beyond economics.

The summits were only formalised in the period between 1974 and 1988. At the December summit in Paris in 1974, following a proposal from then-French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, it was agreed that more high level, political input was needed following the "empty chair crisis" and economic problems. The inaugural European Council, as it became known, was held in Dublin on 10 and 11 March 1975 during Ireland's first Presidency of the Council of Ministers. In 1987, it was included in the treaties for the first time (the Single European Act) and had a defined role for the first time in the Maastricht Treaty. At first only a minimum of two meetings per year were required, which resulted in an average of three meetings per year being held for the 1975-1995 period. Since 1996, the number of meetings were required to be minimum four per year. For the latest 2008-2014 period, this minimum was well exceeded, by an average of seven meetings being held per year. The seat of the Council was formalised in 2002, basing it in Brussels. Three types of European Councils exist: Informal, Scheduled and Extraordinary. While the informal meetings are also scheduled 1½ year in advance, they differ from the scheduled ordinary meetings by not ending with official Council conclusions, as they instead end by more broad political Statements on some cherry picked policy matters. The
extraordinary meetings always end with official Council conclusions - but differs from the scheduled meetings by not being scheduled more than a year in advance, as for example in 2001 when the European Council gathered to lead the European Union's response to the 11 September attacks.

Tick TRUE (T) or FALSE (F) to these statements. Work individually:

1. The European Council is a summit of the European Presidents or Prime Ministers  
   T  
   F
2. They meet every month  
   T  
   F
3. Its role is to set general political directions  
   T  
   F
4. The President of the European Council is the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
   T  
   F