Introduction
The Committee of the Regions (CoR) brings together elected local and regional government representatives from across the EU to discuss European policy. It is one of two ‘consultative bodies’ of the European Union (the other is the European Economic and Social Committee, EESC). The European Commission and European Parliament have to consult the CoR before making decisions, but they are under no obligation to take its advice. The Committee aims to involve European citizens, through their local representatives, in decisions that affect them.

History
The CoR was set up in 1994 under the Maastricht Treaty on the initiative of the Spanish and German governments. It has gained power under subsequent treaties and since 1997 has been trying to gain recognition as a full EU institution. Its stated political aim is to create a strong, open and transparent Europe where decisions are made closer to its citizens; a principle known as subsidiarity. It is a more politically motivated organisation than its sister organisation the EESC and has focused particularly upon promoting cohesion within the EU. The Committee sees itself both acting as a watchdog of integration and promoting the concept of ‘belonging’ to a European community.

The Lisbon Treaty (2007) strengthened the role of the CoR, obliging the Commission to consult the Committee throughout the legislative process.

In 2010 the Commission proposed to increase the CoR’s involvement in the legislative process, yet there were reports that some Commissioners wanted it to be disbanded to save money.

How does the Committee of the Regions work?
The CoR has 344 members drawn from local government who sit in political groupings. These members take part in the work of the CoR’s six Commissions, which look at different areas of policy: finance, employment; social policy; the environment; vocational training and transport. Issues raised are then discussed in plenary sessions that take place five times a year. These in turn make recommendations to the Commission and Parliament. Every two years it elects a President and two Vice-Presidents. A Bureau oversees implementing CoR recommendations, while the entire operation is supported by a small secretariat.

Apart from its consultation role, it is also very active in organising conferences and meetings for regional organisations from across the EU. The most notable of these have been the Conventions of Regions and Cities, where delegates from local authorities across the EU come together to discuss problems that affect them all. It also attempts to supervise the way in which two key structural funds operate – the Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, which aim to bring the standard of living in poorer EU regions up to the average.

Facts and figures
- The Committee of Regions has 350 members, comprising of regional and locally elected representatives from the 28 EU countries.
- The 2015 budget for the CoR is just under €90 million.
How does a General Election actually work?

The UK is a liberal democracy. This means that we democratically elect politicians, who represent our interests. It also involves that individual rights are protected.

The type of liberal democracy we have is a constitutional monarchy, where the powers of the monarch are limited by the terms and conditions put down in the constitution.

Parliamentary system

The UK has a parliamentary system of democratic governance. Unlike presidential and semi-presidential systems, there is an interconnection between the legislative (law-making) and executive (law-enforcing) branches of government in a parliamentary system. In the UK, this means that the executive (consisting of the Queen and the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) is accountable to the legislature or Parliament (House of Commons, House of Lords and devolved Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland).

Appointed Prime Minister (or chancellor) as Head of Government and a monarch (or ceremonial president) as Head of State.

First-Past-The-Post

Members of Parliament in the House of Commons are elected using the first-past-the-post electoral system. Each of the 650 voting constituencies in the UK are represented by an MP. During the general and most local elections, the candidate with most of the votes becomes the local representative. Candidates campaign door-to-door, hold debates and publish manifestos (comparable to shopping list of what they are planning to do once they are in power). Eligible voters, about 46m in the UK, receive their polling card once they register online, or they can vote by post.

Party with most of the votes is invited by the Queen to form a government. If there is no clear winner, there is a hung Parliament. In this case, a minority or coalition government can be formed. A minority government does not have an overall majority in Parliament. A coalition government means that two or more political parties agree to share power in government. If that does not work out, new elections may be called.

“...”

“...”

“...”

Arguments

For

- The Committee of the Regions is a positive effort to bring EU decisions closer to the European public.
- Because it is made up of local elected representatives, it has democratic legitimacy.
- Because member states’ political and cultural models vary hugely, it is useful to have a place where community leaders from different places can meet and discuss common problems.

Against

- The idea that the EU is made up of ‘regions’ and not countries is dangerous because it challenges the idea of the nation state. It is a way of creating deeper EU integration through by-passing national governments.
- Since it was established, the CoR has been pushing to get more power and be recognised as an EU institution. This would just create yet more EU bureaucracy and expense.

“...”

“...”

“...”

Technical Terms

- **Subsidiarity**: this idea, contained in all EU treaties, is designed to ensure that all decisions are taken at the closest possible level to the citizen.
- **Cohesion**: term used to describe moves towards ironing out differences of wealth and economic performance across the EU.

Links