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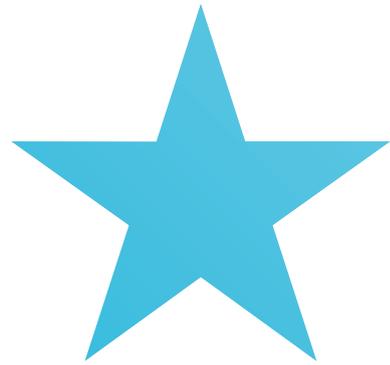
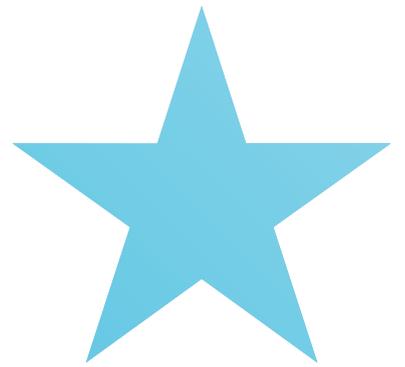


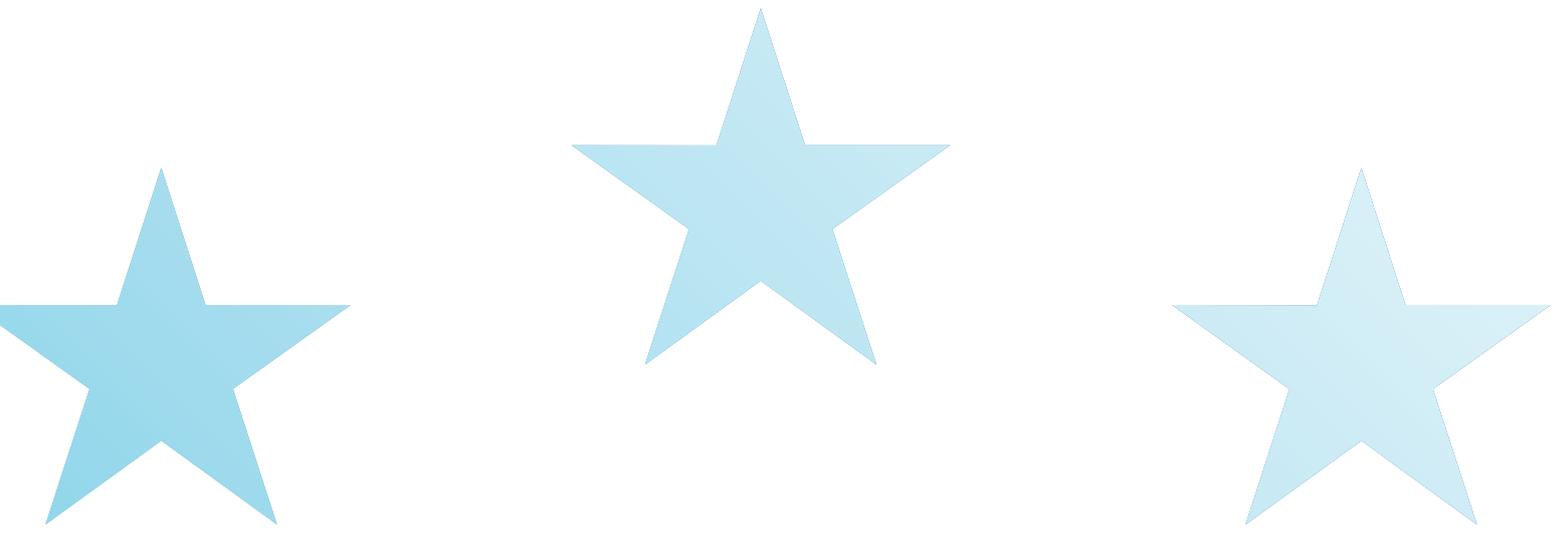
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Dealing with EU Affairs

Why do you want to deal with EU affairs? This is a core question that everyone has a different answer for.

There are multiple motivations, ranging from the salary benefits to the desire to work in a multicultural environment, but in almost all cases there is a certain positive idealism why people would like to work for a united Europe. Despite being an abstract concept, this is in fact a very strong driving force for many professionals, most of whom leave their home countries behind and move to Brussels, Luxembourg or other locations where EU institutions are present and where “European” policies are formulated.

Salary issues apart, I have tried to assemble in what follows some of the factors why the field of EU affairs seems attractive to many. It is also important for European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) competition participants to examine their own motivation: not only is this a question in the online application form and possibly in the structured interview at the Assessment Centre; it also helps everyone understand which type of position or job profile would suit their needs best.

1. Seeing how the EU Works in Practice: An important motivational factor for many who have started or are planning careers in both the public and private sectors is to see at first hand the day-to-day operation of the institutions and learn how EU policies are shaped. A national expert dealing with rural development funds for an Italian region, an official in charge of transposing the Services Directive in Latvia, a Portuguese lobbyist covering European research policy on behalf of a pharmaceutical company or a Japanese diplo-mat following European trade policy issues will all understand the power relations and everyday operation of the system only when having closely observed it and actively taken part in the decision-making procedures and policy formulation. With some hands-on experience, this can add both personal and professional benefits that can be taken advantage of in your later career.

2. Multicultural Environment: Brussels and Luxembourg are known for their international atmosphere with well over one hundred thousand “expats” living there on a long-term (or permanent) basis. This has a strong influence on the EU affairs working environment where even small firms and NGOs may have, say, just three employees who have four different citizenships and speak five languages. Apart from the opportunity to learn new languages or improve existing ones by interacting in those on a daily basis, this multicultural context has its rather positive influence on work morale and creates a truly intercultural environment.

This also has some very practical consequences. When applying for an EU affairs job or sitting an EPSO Assessment



Centre, all candidates must be aware of the cultural and linguistic sensitivities of their fellow candidates and those of the interviewers; stereo-types or national prejudices are taboo. (I once heard about a candidate who, when asked which language he would consider learning if accepted for the job, said that “I don’t really like German because it sounds too harsh” – unluckily for him, one of the jury members was Austrian. A hint: he could have formulated it in a positive way by saying “In fact I like Italian because of its musical sound”, without stating a negative opinion or hurting anyone’s sensitivity.)

Why do you want to deal with EU affairs? This is a core question that everyone has a different answer for.

3. Paradigm Shift: Many people agree that one of the great benefits of working in EU affairs is that their scope of thinking is not limited to their home country or region. It is a broadening experience to learn the different perspectives of people from other countries. EU-wide issues inevitably demand a broad pan-European approach, enlarging the lens through which events are viewed. Moreover, **most jobs in this field require travelling in Europe to meet decision- and policy-makers in Member States**, which further contributes to the shift in how they look at events.

4. International Networks: Like other international organisations, EU institutions attract a large number of foreign diplomats, businessmen and political activists who interact with each other and their official counterparts on a daily basis. Enlarging your personal and professional network is another motivational item for many; a mutually beneficial relationship with organisations that have offices in a number of European countries and beyond may prove useful for both parties. For instance, someone dealing with financial regulations can easily develop contacts with national experts covering this topic, along with other interest representatives such as BusinessEurope – contacts which can be highly useful in future endeavours.

With the above motivational factors in mind, let’s now take a brief overview of [EU affairs jobs](#) grouped into two major categories: those that offer work “**with**” the EU and those where employees work “**for**” the EU.



Working “with” the EU

European Union affairs cover a great number of policies, issues and interests; this is well reflected in the Brussels public affairs arena. Thousands of professionals deal with EU public affairs on a daily basis without being employed by one of the EU institutions. For some, undertaking any of the job profiles below is only a stepping stone into the EU institutions themselves, while others consider these positions and organisations better suited for their personality even in the long run, without the intention to join the institutions.

Here are a few examples of working “with” the EU:

I. DIPLOMATIC JOBS

Diplomatic jobs refer to job profiles that require a certain diplomatic status or involve a local or national government official being sent to Brussels or elsewhere for a multi-year period. The recruitment channel is almost exclusively through the national administration, though there are some exceptions as detailed below.

Each “PermRep” employs a large number of diplomats (from 40 to well over 200) who are both diplomats and experts.

1. Permanent Representations:

All 27 EU Member States and some other countries have a so-called “permanent representation” (or in case of most non-EU countries, so-called “missions”) in Brussels dealing exclusively with EU affairs, which are different from bilateral embassies which represent a country in Belgium rather than to the European Union as an entity. **Each “PermRep” employs a large number of diplomats (from 40 to well over 200) who are both diplomats and experts** in fields ranging from money laundering through pesticide regulations to fiscal matters. During their stay in Brussels their status is that of a diplomat; many are in fact civil servants from various ministries.

While administratively speaking these are officials recruited in their home country, they have been seconded to Brussels for a certain number of years to represent their Member State mainly in the working groups and political bodies of the Council of Ministers. (In the case of non-EU countries this obviously does not happen but those diplomats serve as the contact point for technical and political negotiations which affect their country’s interests). Those having an expertise in a certain field and with the ambition of becoming a seconded diplomat can enquire at the Permanent Representation of the country of their citizenship or ask the national ministries or government offices’ EU department whether they are in need of EU experts.

2. Regional Representations:

Several EU regions and capitals (such as Lower Saxony’s or the city of Budapest’s Brussels representation office) have their outposts in Brussels to follow EU policy developments, send information home, organise events aiming to increase the visibility of the city or region they



represent and network with others to create partnerships for project consortia. These offices sometimes employ civil servants who were sent from home to Brussels for a longer period of time, while others tend to work with any professional who can offer them the right expertise in their field, regardless of their nationality. Those familiar with a certain region's political priorities, language and culture can successfully apply for positions and thus deal with EU affairs from a special regional perspective.

Seconded experts may work in any Agency or Directorate General of the European Commission doing similar work to that of EU officials.

3. Seconded National Experts: Such experts, also referred to as ENDs (derived from the French abbreviation of “*Expert National Détaché*”) work in EU institutions on a temporary basis, mainly the European Commission, while being formally employed by their home government administration. Accordingly, ***seconded experts may work in any Agency or Directorate General of the European Commission doing similar work to that of EU officials***, for example in DG Environment to cover the Slovenian perspective on a certain special protection zone regulation, or in the European Medicines Agency as an expert in the veterinary medicines sector.

EU institutions and Agencies generally publish calls for ENDs and have these also published by the Permanent Representations from which they expect applications, so it is worth checking your PermRep's website or contacting the relevant personnel to notify you in case of vacancies. In most cases ministries or governmental offices in the Member States are also aware of vacancies; it is therefore worth asking around in the Prime Minister's office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other national bodies dealing with horizontal coordination of EU affairs as well.

4. International Organisations: Apart from the EU institutions, Brussels and various other European capitals host a number of international organisations that have formal and permanent contacts with EU bodies. These include the NATO, the Council of Europe, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) and its various specialised bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) or the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and others.

These international organisations, while their primary agenda is obviously different from that of the EU, have official links and employ several people to liaise with European institutions. Their recruitment system and job profiles vary, but those with an interest in EU affairs may be tempted to discover these related fields well. The status and salary of those employed by the above institutions is in most cases comparable to a diplomatic status with various degrees of immunity, specialized tax regime and other benefits.



II. POLITICAL JOBS

The label “political” refers to a rather different job profile than those of diplomats, though in the EU arena this distinction is not as sharp as it may be in a national context. Political jobs have more to do with high-level policy-making than technical rules or project dossiers. Some people are attracted to these positions given their visibility and the high-level issues tackled while others dislike them for the occasional involvement of party politics and allegedly limited focus on execution. Below is a summary of political jobs in the EU affairs arena.

Each Member of the European Parliament has at least one, two or even three assistants, there are more than 1500 assistants with this job profile.

1. Assistant to a Member of the European Parliament (MEP): One of the most common ways to start a career in the EU arena is to become a personal assistant to an MEP. Given that currently there are 736 Members in the European Parliament (751 as of 2014) and **each Member of the European Parliament has at least one, two or even three assistants, there are more than 1500 assistants with this job profile.** Though since June 2009 parliamentary assistants are

formally employed by the European Parliament and therefore may not fully fit the “working with” category, they do represent a special group inasmuch as the decision about selection rests entirely with the MEP. This way, while the Staff Regulations have been amended to cover the assistants’ status, they do not need to pass a recruitment competition to be eligible for appointment; on the other hand, their contracts are always for a temporary period.

This job in fact offers a truly exciting first-hand experience of how European politics are made, though it must not be forgotten that working for a single person requires a very good “chemistry” between the assistant and the MEP, not to mention the need for perseverance and stamina to be always available in case something comes up (and it always does).

Assistants are in no way limited to working only for their fellow compatriots – so as long as they possess the required linguistic skills and subject matter expertise, they have the opportunity to be offered a position by an MEP of any nationality. Thus a Czech university graduate speaking fluent French may be hired by a Belgian MEP or a Bulgarian junior professor may get to work for a British MEP given his English skills and familiarity with Balkans issues which the MEP happens to be involved with.

Given the European Parliament’s profile as a political institution and the fact that it is politically active MEPs who are seeking assistants, the way to approach this job is often via political parties; some MEPs require political affiliation or party membership while others seek expertise in a certain policy they are responsible for.



2. Political Groups in the European Parliament: The European Parliament has currently seven political groups (and some non-attached members), each of which has its own secretariat and staff. These political groups, such as the Group of the European People's Party or the European Conservatives and Reformists, have specialists who, depending on their policy field expertise and their linguistic-cultural background, variously deal with relations with the media and affiliated political parties and political organisations in the Member States. They also follow legislative dossiers in the European Parliament's committees and assist the MEPs belonging to the given political group. Most of the groups organise their own recruitment competitions (which Online EU Training regularly monitors and we [publish it on our EU job listing page](#)) and offer similar benefits to those EU officials enjoy but, unlike in the case of EPSO exams, political affiliation understandably plays an important role in the selection process.

3. Advocacy Groups: Similarly to Washington D.C., Brussels has a large number of advocacy groups aiming to make their voice and agenda heard. While one may argue whether they truly fit into this category of "political" jobs, Greenpeace, Oxfam and various human rights, religious, pro-democracy and other organisations have indeed strong political views they wish to voice. Job seekers sharing these ideas can certainly find the opportunity to work with EU affairs on a continent-wide basis while representing a cause they sympathize with.

As an example, the campaign by Humane Society International and others to ban the seal trade from Canada required intensive contacts with the European Commission's

DG Trade and DG Environment, along with senior diplomats dealing with animal welfare and trade issues in the Council of Ministers, and liaising with MEPs in the relevant Parliamentary committees and making contacts with other advocacy groups and officials to achieve their goal.

III. ACADEMIC JOBS

There are dozens of think-tanks and research institutes covering and analysing EU affairs, many in Brussels and several located around European centres of EU studies.

1. Think-tanks: The best-known think tanks in Brussels include the Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bruegel, the Centre for European Studies (CEPS), the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) to name just a few. Research institutes in Florence, Warsaw or London are also widely known. These think-tanks carry out research projects in a large number of policy fields in order to provide forward thinking and critical review to EU decision-makers.

By analysing existing policies and offering strategic proposals for legislation, think-tanks and research institutes play a crucial role in European policy making.



By analysing existing policies and offering strategic proposals for legislation, think-tanks and research institutes play a crucial role in European policy making. Those individuals having a more academic interest with skills to carry out interviews, organise conferences and speak in various forums will have good chances to fill vacancies offered by these organisations.

Their tasks mainly include monitoring legislative changes on the EU public affairs scene, offering strategic forecasts, organising consultations with policy makers, carrying out advocacy campaigns, raising awareness of their perspective and presenting briefings to senior officials in the framework of representing their clients.

IV. INTEREST REPRESENTATION JOBS

Interest representation, or as generally referred to, lobbying companies employ thousands of people interested in EU affairs approached from a sectoral perspective. Private sector contracts are obviously subject to the conditions offered by each individual company.

1. EU Consulting Companies and Public Affairs groups: Large international public affairs (PA) consultancies such as Fleishman-Hillard or Hill & Knowlton are all present in the Brussels arena along with their smaller counterparts, active in all sectors including e.g. renewable energy or the aerospace industry. **Their tasks mainly include monitoring legislative changes on the EU public affairs scene, offering strategic forecasts, organising consultations with policy makers, carrying out advocacy campaigns, raising awareness of their perspective and presenting briefings to senior officials in the framework of representing their clients.**

The contacts with EU officials are rather close, regulated on both sides by strict codes of conduct and ethical rules to respect the principle of impartiality and transparency. Consulting companies offer a great way to learn about EU affairs in a practical way and understand how a policy change can affect a certain sector.





2. Law Firms covering EU-related issues: International law firms dealing with EU affairs tend to have competition law or regulatory affairs as their chief focus given their clients' needs and the European Commission's extremely powerful role in formulating and enforcing EU rules in these fields. Lawyers dealing with state aids, mergers and acquisitions, cartels and related issues can always find vacancies, though they must bear in mind that the workload in these firms tends to be very challenging.

In some cases law firms carry out other tasks related to EU affairs such as legislative monitoring or interest representation towards EU officials and MEPs. This is generally in relation to issues that have more legal implications than public affairs concerns so a law firm is considered to be better placed to tackle them than a lobbying firm.

3. Industry and Trade Associations: Along with the above companies dealing with issues and clients on a horizontal basis, there are hundreds of industry associations in the Brussels EU arena such as the European Chemical Industry Council (ECIC), the American Chamber of Commerce Office to the European Union (AmCham-EU) or the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) and many others.

These associations, while dealing with a single sector, may touch upon several related issues: for instance, the EFPIA deals with intellectual property legislation, research issues, internal market (free movement of goods) issues, smuggling and counterfeiting challenges, public health efforts and even trade policy issues towards third countries in relation to medicine exports. Trade and industry associations usually have close contacts with those EU institutions that are relevant to their agenda, and they employ professionals with a background in natural, political or legal science.



Working “for” the EU

To become a permanent EU official, one must without exception pass EU competitions organised by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO).

Having looked at the working “for” options, let’s consider how working in an EU institution may be possible under different contracts. The type of contract generally depends on the recruitment method used: *to become a permanent EU official, one must without exception pass EU competitions organised by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO)*, while e.g. EU trainees may be accepted based solely on their online applications. As regards the place of work, the vast majority of the approximately 40,000 EU employees are located in Brussels and Luxembourg, while Commission and Parliament representation offices and EU Agencies located in the Member States also host a certain number of people. Some 5000 national diplomats, temporary agents and EU officials are posted to European External Action Service representations around the world.

Within this category of working “for” the EU, I think it is worth separating out the “formal” part of employment (*the type of contracts available*) and the “content” part of the work, i.e. *the specific job profiles*. First, let’s see a short description of the various positions and contracts EU institutions can offer.

I. CONTRACT TYPES

EU traineeship is a very common and popular way to gain first-hand experience of the institutions in Brussels or Luxembourg.

1. Trainee (also commonly called by its French name “*stagiaire*”): An **EU traineeship is a very common and popular way to gain first-hand experience of the institutions in Brussels or Luxembourg.** Traineeships last five months with two intakes a year, the first batch between 1 March and 31 July while the second batch starts on 1 October and lasts until 28 February the following year; candidates must have at least a Bachelor’s degree to apply.

Trainees are offered a modest monthly allowance of around 800–1000 euros to cover their living and subsistence expenses, though some traineeships in the European Parliament and elsewhere may be non-remunerated.



The largest number of trainees, about 600 per intake, are welcomed by the European Commission in Brussels and Luxembourg, while all other institutions and advisory bodies, including the European Parliament, the Court of Justice of the EU, the Court of Auditors, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank, European Central Bank, the European Ombudsman and the European Data Protection Supervisor, offer a limited number of traineeships each year.

Having done a traineeship in an EU institution or body can be a very positive element in a CV when seeking a European affairs position

Having done a traineeship in an EU institution or body can be a very positive element in a CV when seeking a European affairs position after successfully passing an EU recruitment competition. Trainees are always allocated to posts throughout the organisation and depending on their background, are assigned tasks such as preparing background briefings, researching certain legislation, carrying out financial analysis or note-taking in meetings, all of which offers a real insight to how institutions operate.

2. Temporary Agent, Contract Agent:

As their names suggest, both of these contracts offer fixed-term employment for clerical, administrative or policy-making tasks, depending on the job profile and the candidate's background. EU Agencies, located all over the EU, almost exclusively offer temporary agent contracts that are concluded for three years, renewable for another two; permanent officials are seldom posted or recruited to an Agency though there are cases when this happens.

From time to time EPSO organises so-called CAST ("Contract Agents for Specific Tasks") exams related to an upcoming enlargement or an expected rise in demand for certain short-term tasks.



On the other hand, EU institutions do employ a large number of temporary and contract agents both for reasons of replacing staff on maternity leave or to fill temporary vacancies in positions that have been newly created and where no permanent official or successful recruitment competition candidate can be found at short notice. Temporary and contract agent recruitments are based on candidates' CVs and a selection interview; however, **from time to time EPSO organises so-called CAST ("Contract Agents for Specific Tasks") exams related to an upcoming enlargement or an expected rise in demand for certain short-term tasks.** These exams follow the same pattern as general EPSO exams, though in some cases candidates may only be required to pass the pre-selection phase such as verbal and numerical reasoning tests.

Temporary or contract agents of non-EU citizenship may also be employed by Commission or European Parliament representations in EU Member States or in EU delegations around the world to become, for instance, assistant to the Head of EU Representation in Tokyo or carry out political reporting in the Commission's Prague representation office. The European External Action Service also offers such contracts to Member State diplomats who are temporarily seconded to the EEAS. Vacancies are announced on EPSO's website or on the EU Agencies' individual websites, both which are monitored daily by the Online EU Training team so we offer [one-stop-shop information on current EU vacancies](#) so those in search of jobs do not need to browse through dozens of links.

3. Permanent Posts (AD, AST):

To become a permanent or established EU official of any grade, candidates must pass the [recruitment selection competition organised by EPSO](#). In most cases these are open competitions where anyone with the required citizenship and meeting the formal criteria can apply; however, EU institutions occasionally organise internal competitions where established officials of a lower grade may have fast-track advancement in the hierarchy or temporary agents may become permanent officials.

EU officials are always grouped into two major categories called **"Assistants" (AST)** and **"Administrators" (AD)**. AST profiles require a high school diploma for AST1 level and a certain number of years of work experience for AST3 level, while AD profiles require at least a Bachelor's level degree but no work experience for the AD5 entry level. In both cases applicants must have an EU citizenship, though in case of competitions linked to enlargement (e.g. Croatia), the citizenship requirement is extended to the would-be Member State. In both the AST and AD profiles there are multiple levels; thus we can talk about AST1 or AST3, all the way until AST11 while the AD category may go from AD5 (entry level Administrator) until AD16, the latter being the most senior level in the hierarchy of EU officials (Commissioners and MEPs have their own statute, therefore they are not ranked according this system).

Assistant job profiles include, for instance, performing organisational and human resource-related tasks for a Head of Unit in the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs or coordinating translation



files at the Council of Ministers' Estonian lawyer-linguist unit. Administrators may be policy officers in charge of the banking supervision legislation in DG Internal Market or head of unit (minimum AD9 level) at the Committee of the Regions dealing with cross-border cooperation projects and supervising a team of 15 people.

Senior managers having at least 15 years of work experience and significant managerial skills are sometimes recruited from outside the institutions or selected from among staff having reached the required level of seniority (minimum AD12) and placed in positions such as Director of Air Transport in the Commission's DG Transport. For further information on the benefits, allocations, health insurance and pension schemes for EU officials, please refer to the EU civil service website at the end of this text.



II. QUALIFICATIONS AND JOB PROFILES

Whatever a candidate's qualifications or type of contract may be, EU institutions offer a wide range of exciting job profiles. Though it may not be possible to get the desired position as the very first place of employment, being already on the "inside" offers the opportunity of internal mobility (transfers) between the institutions after an initial period of time while employees can keep their acquired administrative level, salary and other benefits.

Setting out with the desire to work "somewhere" in an institution is not necessarily the right approach: the goal is to match the right profiles and skills with relevant professional careers to avoid frustration, increase productivity and make it a win-win endeavour for both the employer and employee. That being said, many candidates with e.g. a linguistic background have decided to sit a competition for Public Administrators and consequently got to work in non-linguistic areas; similarly, someone with a veterinary diploma may be invited to work on the Common Agricultural Policy at the European Commission as long as they have passed the required open competition. This is just to underline that the original qualification is less limiting in the choice of career than many might assume.

I hope this ebook has been useful to identify the type of positions that exist "in" and "around" the EU and help in your job search in the European affairs arena.

If you need [free advice, contact us](#) and we'll be happy to help!



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About the Author



András Baneth is the author of *The Ultimate EU Test Book*, Europe's best-selling EU career preparation book to get an EU job. An entrepreneur and online communication expert, András also has a solid knowledge of EU institutions from his extensive experience at the European Commission and the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. A frequent lecturer at academic seminars in Europe and beyond, he is always happy to speak online, offline and in-between on online marketing, EU affairs or entrepreneurship. More info on his website at www.baneth.eu.



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