

Report on European Political Cooperation (London, 13 October 1981)

Caption: On 13 October 1981, in London, the Foreign Ministers of the Ten adopt a report on European Political Cooperation (EPC) that sets out a more coherent approach to international issues and to matters of security.

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Report on European political cooperation (London, 13 October 1981)

The Foreign Ministers of the ten Member States of the European Community have examined the development of European political cooperation. It is their constant concern that this should be improved, and to this end they have considered how it might be further strengthened.

Political cooperation, which is based on membership of the European Community, has developed to become a central element in the foreign policies of all Member States. The Community and its Member States are increasingly seen by third countries as a coherent force in international relations. The Foreign Ministers of the Ten note that in the years since the foundations of European political cooperation were laid in the Luxembourg Report (approved by Heads of State and Government on 27 October 1970) and the Copenhagen Report (approved by Foreign Ministers on 23 July 1973 and subsequently agreed by Heads of State and Government) significant progress has been achieved towards the objectives set out in those reports.

The development of European political cooperation over these years has shown that it answers a real need felt by the Member States of the European Community for a closer unity in this field. It is a mark of its proven value that European political cooperation has steadily intensified and its scope continually broadened. This development has contributed to the ultimate objective of European union.

The Foreign Ministers agree that further European integration, and the maintenance and development of Community policies in accordance with the Treaties, will be beneficial to a more effective coordination in the field of foreign policy and will expand the range of instruments at the disposal of the Ten.

The Foreign Ministers believe that in a period of increased world tension and uncertainty the need for a coherent and united approach to international affairs by the members of the European Community is greater than ever. They note that, in spite of what has been achieved, the Ten are still far from playing a role in the world appropriate to their combined influence. It is their conviction that the Ten should seek increasingly to shape events and not merely to react to them.

As regards the scope of European political cooperation, and having regard to the different situations of the Member States, the Foreign Ministers agree to maintain the flexible and pragmatic approach which has made it possible to discuss in political cooperation certain important foreign policy questions bearing on the political aspects of security.

The ten Foreign Ministers also consider it timely to renew their commitment to implement fully the undertakings in the Luxembourg and Copenhagen Reports. In particular they underline the importance of consultation among the Ten, which lies at the heart of European political cooperation. They emphasize their commitment to consult partners before adopting final positions or launching national initiatives on all important questions of foreign policy which are of concern to the Ten as a whole. They undertake that in these consultations each Member State will take full account of the position of other partners and will give due weight to the desirability of achieving a common position. They note that such consultations will be particularly relevant for important international conferences where one or more of the Ten are to participate, and where the agenda will include matters under discussion in European political cooperation or on which the Ten have a common position.

The Foreign Ministers note that it is increasingly possible for the Ten to speak with one voice in international affairs. Where substantial common positions have been achieved, they undertake to give due prominence to these by means of appropriate references in national statements on foreign policy questions. At the same time they emphasize that not merely a common attitude but joint action, which has always been an objective of European political cooperation, should be increasingly within the capacity of the Ten.

The Foreign Ministers have also examined the machinery and procedures of political cooperation and have agreed on certain practical improvements which are set out in the following part of this document.

Ministerial meetings

Formal meetings

1. The agenda for meetings at ministerial level will include only items of major importance.

The agenda will, where possible, also be annotated in such a way that the discussion will concentrate on matters for decision.

The analyses and draft texts submitted to ministers should contain either precise recommendations or clearly defined options so that the ministers can make decisions for future action.

When declarations are issued by ministerial meetings and the European Council, they should as a rule be accompanied by a list of posts in third countries where the local representative of the Ten will draw the declaration to the attention of the host government. In the absence of such a list the Presidency has discretion to take action on its own initiative.

Gymnich-type meetings

In order to protect the informal character of these meetings, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Consultations are confidential.
- There will be no formal agenda, official interpretation or officials present (except for a presidency notetaker).
- The Presidency will summarize for the attention of partners any guidelines of an operational nature that emerge from the meeting.
- The press will only be briefed on subjects authorized by the Ten. The Presidency will be responsible in the first instance for such briefing, the lines of which will be agreed in advance with partners.

The Political Committee

2. The Political Committee is one of the central organs of European political cooperation. It is responsible for directing the work of the working groups and for the preparation of discussions at ministerial level.

The Political Committee will ensure the effective operation of working groups by giving them a clear mandate to report on matters of current interest. The Presidency will make the proposals necessary to achieve this. The working groups will however, remain free to suggest topics for reports to the Political Committee.

The Correspondents' Group

3. In order to permit the Political Committee to focus on the more important items on its agenda the European correspondents will identify those working group reports which are not likely to require substantive discussion in the Political Committee.

Working Groups

4. Working groups' reports will include a summary drawing the attention of the Political Committee to points which will require decisions for future action, or on which the Political Committee should concentrate.

In general, partners' comments via the COREU system on the oral reports of working groups should

concentrate on points of substance and not of drafting.

If the Presidency considers a partner to be particularly well qualified on an agenda point at a working group meeting, it may request that partner to introduce the discussion on that topic.

Studies

5. Even when partners do not hold the Presidency, they should be encouraged to offer proposals and ideas for consideration by the working groups.

At present most of the efforts of political cooperation are devoted to reacting to world events as they occur. In future the Political Committee may wish to take a longer-term approach to certain problems, and to institute studies to that end. Such studies are already mentioned in the Copenhagen Report (Part II, paragraph 15) and should wherever possible be undertaken by existing working groups.

The Ten may also prepare studies on areas where their positions diverge (e.g. subjects on which they do not vote unanimously at the United Nations).

It is particularly important that the confidentiality of these studies should be maintained.

Confidentiality

6. The success of the process of political cooperation depends to a large degree on its confidentiality; certain particularly delicate matters need to be handled in a way which guarantees that the required level of confidentiality is maintained. In such cases papers will be transmitted to the foreign ministries via embassies, and distributed within foreign ministries by the European correspondent.

Procedures for EPC/third country contacts

7. As European political cooperation intensifies and broadens, the Ten as such will appear as significant interlocutors. Third countries will increasingly express the desire to enter into more or less regular contact with them. It is important that the Ten should be able to respond effectively to these demands, in particular *vis-a-vis* countries of special interest to them, and that they should speak with one voice in dealings with them.

The Presidency may meet individual representatives of third countries in order to discuss certain matters of particular interest to the country in question.

The Presidency may respond to a request for contacts by a group of ambassadors of Member States of organizations with which the Ten maintain special links.

The Heads of Mission of the Ten in a country which expresses the desire for closer contacts with EPC may meet representatives of that country in order to hear its views and to explain the position of the Ten.

If necessary, and if the Ten so agree, the Presidency, accompanied by representatives of the preceding and succeeding presidencies, may meet with representatives of third countries.

If necessary, and if the Ten so agree, the Presidency may meet the representative of a third country in the margins of a ministerial-level meeting of the Ten.

Procedure for political cooperation in third countries

8. In view of the increasing activities of the Ten in third countries, it is important that the Heads of Mission of the Ten maintain the practice of meeting regularly in order to exchange information and coordinate views. In considering their response to significant developments in the country to which they are accredited, their

first instinct should be to coordinate with their colleagues of the Ten.

The participation of the Head of Mission at political cooperation meetings should remain the rule. When this is impossible he may be represented by a member of his Mission.

The Political Committee welcomes joint reports from Heads of Missions of the Ten. These may be prepared in response to a request from the Political Committee or, exceptionally, on the Heads of Missions' own initiative, when the situation requires it. Recommendations for joint action are particularly valuable.

Where reports are made on the Heads of Missions' own initiative, it is for them to decide whether to draft a joint report or to report separately on the basis of their joint discussions. An equally acceptable alternative is for the Presidency to draft an oral report on its own authority reflecting the views expressed.

Contacts in the capitals of the Ten

9. In certain capitals of the Ten the practice has developed of regular meetings between the nine Heads of Mission and the political director of the host government. This has proved useful and is to be encouraged.

The Presidency

10. As political cooperation has developed, the areas of agreement among the Ten have enlarged and the range of subjects handled has become more extensive. The workload of the Presidency in its role as spokesman in the European Parliament, and in contacts with third countries, has also increased. These trends may be expected to continue, particularly in the light of the enlargement of the Community.

As a result it has become desirable to strengthen the organization and assure the continuity of political cooperation and to provide operational support for the Presidency without, however, reducing the direct contact, pragmatism and economy which are among the chief virtues of the present arrangements.

Henceforth the Presidency will be assisted by a small team of officials seconded from preceding and succeeding presidencies. These officials will remain in the employment of their national foreign ministries, and will be on the staff of their embassy in the presidency capital. They will be at the disposition of the Presidency and will work under its direction.

The burden of work during the Presidency falls particularly heavily on the foreign minister who is President-in-Office. The Ten note that should he wish to do so the President may delegate certain tasks to his successor; he may also request his predecessor to finish tasks which are close to completion when the Presidency is handed over.

Relations with the European Parliament

11. In accordance with the Luxembourg and Copenhagen reports, which underline the importance of associating the European Parliament with political cooperation, there are frequent contacts between the European Parliament and the Presidency. These take the form of four annual colloquies with the Political Affairs Committee, answers to questions on political cooperation, the annual report on political cooperation, and the presidency speeches at the beginning and end of its term of office which now usually include political cooperation subjects.

The contacts between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament have been extended to include informal meetings between ministers and the leaders of the different political groups represented in Parliament; these informal meetings provide a further opportunity for informal exchanges on political cooperation.

Taking account of the need to further strengthen ties with the directly-elected Parliament, the Ten envisage the possibility of more frequent reference to resolutions adopted by Parliament in the deliberations,

communiqués and declarations of the Ten, and in ministers' opening statements at colloquies with the Political Affairs Committee of Parliament.

The Ten note that after a meeting of the European Council the President of the European Council will make a statement to Parliament. This statement will include political cooperation subjects discussed at the meeting.

Relations between the activities of political cooperation and those of the European Community

12. The Ten will provide, as appropriate, for political cooperation meetings on the occasion of Foreign Affairs Councils. The Presidency will ensure that the discussion of the Community and political cooperation aspects of certain questions are coordinated if the subject-matter requires this.

Within the framework of the established rules and procedures the Ten attach importance to the Commission of the European Communities being fully associated with political cooperation, at all levels.

Crisis procedures

13. The Political Committee or, if necessary, a ministerial meeting will convene within forty-eight hours at the request of three Member States.

The same procedure will apply in third countries at the level of Heads of Mission.

In order to improve the capacity of the Ten to react in an emergency, working groups are encouraged to analyse areas of potential crisis and to prepare a range of possible reactions by the Ten.