

Presidency's progress report on the IGC (21 and 22 June 1996)

Caption: Extract from the Presidency's report on the progress of the work of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), drawn up at the Florence European Council of 21 and 22 June 1996, concerning the extension of qualified majority voting within the Council. The objective of the report is to provide an overall picture of the work carried out so far and to identify the major trends emerging vis-à-vis key political issues in preparation for the next stage of the IGC.

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Florence European Council (21 and 22 June 1996) Presidency's progress report on the Intergovernmental Conference

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Chapter II - The institutions of a more democratic and more effective Union

[...]

II – Council

1. Qualified-majority voting and unanimity

(a) The Presidency concludes from the discussions that the extension of qualified-majority voting is seen as making for greater efficiency in the decision-making process of an enlarged Union, although it has been emphasized that other considerations — such as the acceptability of Union decisions — have to be taken into account.

At this stage it would seem that none of the criteria envisaged for such an extension (*en bloc* approach; consistency between voting rules applicable to the internal market and to certain policies closely linked to it, exceptions limited to constitutional or quasi-constitutional areas) can be accepted unanimously, and there is some support for the idea that an extension can only be achieved on a case-by-case basis. It has also been noted that the introduction of a super-qualified majority (as an intermediate arrangement between unanimity and the present qualified majority) might be helpful in finding agreement.

(b) It is fairly generally accepted that, owing to their ‘constitutional’ implications, the political sensitivity attached to them, or the economic importance of the matters involved, certain areas should in any case be subject to unanimity.

(c) Initial discussions indicate that revision of the Treaties should continue to require common accord, at least as regards the adoption of texts that have to be ratified. However, some believe that the question of the rules for the entry into force of amendments to the Treaties should be given further consideration.

2. Qualified-majority threshold and weighting of votes

(a) It is fairly generally felt that the threshold for qualified-majority voting should stay as it is (62 votes out of 87). Mention has been made of the need to maintain the Ioannina Compromise.

(b) The possible adjustment of the current system of weighting — which appears in the mandate explicitly given to the Intergovernmental Conference by the European Council — has generated two schools of thought:

- those who believe that the current weighting should be maintained and extrapolated — as such — when enlargements take place; this position is based mainly on the fact that the distortions alleged by some between population and number of votes have not been proven, and the Council's method of taking decisions cannot ignore the principle of equality between Member States (the European Parliament being responsible for representing the people) and that there is not in reality any ‘bloc’ of less populated States, as can be seen from Council practice; and
- those who believe that, in the interests of valid representation, and in order to ensure that the Union's action is acceptable to the people, it is necessary to ensure that the Union's decisions are backed by a significant proportion of the population. This may be achieved:

— either by altering the current weighting to ensure a better balance between number of votes and population;

— or by introducing a system of dual majority (either in terms of votes and population, or in terms of number of States — e.g. two thirds — and population).

In this connection, it has been suggested that the current weighting could be adjusted solely with the aim of maintaining, after enlargement, the ratio that exists today in terms of votes between the more populated Member States and the less populated Member States.

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