

Conclusions of the Seville European Council: excerpt on the European Council's reform

Caption: This excerpt from the Conclusions of the Presidency of the Seville European Council of 21 and 22 June 2002 on the reform of the Council includes Annex I regarding Rules for the organisation of the proceedings of the European Council.

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Seville European Council (21 and 22 June 2002)

Presidency Conclusions

1. The European Council met in Seville on 21 and 22 June 2002. The meeting was preceded by an exposé given by the President of the European Parliament, Mr Pat Cox, followed by an exchange of views concerning the main items on the agenda.

[...]

I. The future of the Union

[...]

Reform of the Council

3. The European Council embarked upon a process of reform at Helsinki in December 1999, when it adopted a set of recommendations, and then in Göteborg and Barcelona, where it took note of the reports by the Secretary-General/High Representative focusing on four main subjects: the European Council, the General Affairs Council, the Presidency of the Council, and the legislative activity of the Council and transparency.

4. In the light of a summary report accompanied by detailed proposals submitted in Seville by the Presidency, the European Council held a detailed discussion on the subject and gave its agreement to a series of specific measures applicable, without amendment of the treaties, to the organisation and functioning of the European Council (see Annex I) and of the Council (see Annex II). This reform is a substantial change to present practices in the direction of enhancing the efficiency of the institution on the eve of an unprecedented increase in the number of Member States of the Union.

5. The European Council also took note of the Presidency's report on the current debate regarding the Presidency of the Union. It found that there was a general readiness to examine the question further, with the proviso that any change in the present system of six-monthly rotation would in any event have to continue to observe the principle of equality between the Member States. The European Council therefore asked the future Danish Presidency to take appropriate steps to continue discussions with a view to an initial report to the European Council in December 2002.

6. The European Council also gave a reminder of the importance which it attached to the effective implementation of all the guidelines and operational recommendations adopted by the Helsinki European Council on 10 and 11 December 1999. In particular, the Council is asked to study the question of the use of languages in the context of an enlarged Union and practical means of improving the present situation without endangering basic principles. In this context, a proposal should be submitted in due course and in any event there should be an initial report to the European Council in December 2002.

7. The new rules referred to in point 4 will enter into force under the next Presidency, unless otherwise provided. Consequently, the formal amendments to be made to the Council's Rules of Procedure will be adopted before 31 July 2002. The implementation of this set of provisions will be evaluated by the European Council in December 2003.

[...]

Annex I

Rules for the organisation of the proceedings of the European Council

In order fully to exercise its role of providing impetus and of defining the general political guidelines of the Union in accordance with Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Council has agreed on

the following rules for the preparation, conduct and conclusions of its proceedings:

Preparation

1. The European Council shall in principle meet four times a year (twice every six months). In exceptional circumstances, the European Council may convene an extraordinary meeting.
2. European Council meetings shall be prepared by the General Affairs and External Relations Council, which shall coordinate all the preparatory work and draw up the agenda. Contributions by other configurations of the Council to the proceedings of the European Council shall be forwarded to the General Affairs and External Relations Council not later than two weeks before the European Council meeting.
3. At a meeting held at least four weeks before the European Council, the General Affairs and External Relations Council, acting on a Presidency proposal, shall draw up an annotated draft agenda distinguishing between:
 - items to be approved or endorsed without debate;
 - items for discussion with a view to the definition of general political guidelines;
 - items for discussion with a view to the adoption of decisions as described in paragraph 9;
 - items for discussion but not intended to be the subject of conclusions.
4. For each of the items referred to in the second and third indents of paragraph 3, the Presidency shall prepare a brief outline paper setting out the issues, the questions to be debated and the main options available.
5. On the eve of the European Council meeting, the General Affairs and External Relations Council shall hold a final preparatory session and adopt the definitive agenda, to which no item may subsequently be added without the agreement of all delegations.

Except for urgent and unforeseeable reasons linked, for example, to current international events, no Council or committee may meet between the final preparatory session of the General Affairs and External Relations Council and the European Council meeting.

Conduct

6. In principle, the proceedings of the European Council shall last for one full day, preceded the day before by a meeting restricted to Heads of State or of Government and the President of the Commission, in line with current practice. The European Council meeting the next day shall continue until the end of the afternoon and shall be preceded by an exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament. Specific arrangements may be made if justified by the agenda.
7. Meetings in the margins of the European Council with representatives of third States or organisations may be held in exceptional circumstances only. They must not disrupt the normal conduct of proceedings of the European Council meeting and they must be approved at the same time as the draft agenda drawn up by the General Affairs and External Relations Council.
8. The Presidency shall ensure that business is conducted smoothly. To that end, it may take any measure conducive to promoting the best possible use of the time available, such as organising the order in which items are discussed, limiting speaking time and determining the order in which contributors speak.
9. In the context of enlargement and in exceptional cases, where an item is placed on the agenda of the European Council for a decision, the European Council shall discuss the item concerned. The political conclusions drawn from the positions emerging during the discussion shall be brought to the attention of the Council so that it may consider the implications for subsequent proceedings, in accordance with the applicable Treaty provisions.

10. Delegations shall receive summary briefings on the outcome and substance of the discussions on each item as proceedings continue. Such briefings shall be organised in such a way as to safeguard the confidentiality of discussions.

11. Each delegation shall have two seats in the meeting room. The total size of delegations shall be limited to twenty persons for each Member State and for the Commission. That number shall not include technical personnel assigned to specific security or logistic support tasks.

Conclusions

12. The conclusions, which shall be as concise as possible, shall set out policy guidelines and decisions reached by the European Council, placing them briefly in their context and indicating the stages of the procedure to follow on from them.

13. An outline of the conclusions shall be distributed on the day of the European Council meeting in good time for the start of proceedings. The outline shall distinguish clearly between those parts of the text which have previously been approved and which are not in principle subject to discussion and those parts of the text which the European Council is to discuss with a view to reaching final conclusions at the meeting.

[...]