

The Treaty of Amsterdam

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The Treaty of Amsterdam

In Article N of the Treaty on European Union, signed at Maastricht on 7 February 1992, provisions were laid down for the revision of the Treaty in 1996. Accordingly, the Fifteen convened an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in Turin on 29 March 1996, which, under the successive Presidencies of Italy, Ireland and the Netherlands, drew up a draft treaty that was adopted by the Amsterdam European Council on 16 and 17 June 1997. Only minor amendments were made before the Treaty was signed in Amsterdam on 2 October by the Foreign Ministers of the 15 EU Member States. After being ratified by all Member States, the Treaty of Amsterdam entered into force on 1 May 1999.

Meeting in the composition of the Heads of State or Government, the IGC paid particular attention to a number of issues: ways of bringing Europe closer to its citizens; the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice; strengthening the common and foreign security policy (CFSP); reforming the institutions and the functioning of the Union in order to make it more democratic and efficient in preparation for the enlargement to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs), Malta and Cyprus. The negotiations were also characterised by intense questioning from some countries on the appropriateness of providing for a possible two-speed Europe. The European Commission took part in all IGC negotiations, while the European Parliament was only consulted at periodic meetings.

The Treaty of Amsterdam, building on the existing Treaties, amended certain provisions of the Maastricht Treaty and the Treaties establishing the European Communities and of other related Acts. Most notably, it permitted the strengthening of the position of human rights within the Union, the incorporation of the Schengen *acquis* into the European Union, the repeal of the United Kingdom's derogation on social policy, and the establishing of an area of freedom, security and justice, which strengthened the means for taking action in matters of foreign policy. However, the progress made by the Treaty of Amsterdam with regard to the institutions was, overall, rather limited. The Member States therefore agreed to hold further negotiations, prior to any new enlargement, on those matters which were not resolved by the end of the IGC. The principle of enhanced cooperation was also laid down in the Treaty in order to allow those Member States that wished to do so to cooperate more closely to do so through the Union's institutions and means for taking action, without harming the process of European integration as a whole.