


The first pillar of the European Union

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The Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992, provided for a three-pillar structure under a single pediment. The first pillar grouped together the amended articles of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC), each of which retained their legal personality. The Community pillar functioned in parallel to the intergovernmental pillars governing the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs (JHA) respectively.

By establishing the designation ‘European Community’ as a replacement for the European Economic Community (EEC), the Treaty on European Union formalised the fact that since the 1987 Single European Act in particular, by virtue of its tasks and objectives the Community had adopted an objective that went beyond the economic field alone. The European Community enjoyed new responsibilities, particularly the promotion of environmentally friendly economic growth, as well as responsibilities in fields such as employment, social welfare, quality of life and economic and social cohesion. The establishment of an internal market was also supplemented by Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the gradual and irreversible calendar for which was clearly laid down. The Treaty on European Union also gave the European Community new objectives concerning the entry and movement of workers in the internal market, the strengthening of industrial competitiveness, education, energy, civil protection and tourism. It also introduced new Community responsibilities in education and culture, vocational training, public health, consumer protection, industrial policy and trans-European networks.

Finally, with the introduction of the codecision procedure and the extension of certain procedures to other areas, the Treaty of Maastricht significantly reorganised the Community decision-making process by enshrining five procedures which, depending on the case, required a qualified majority or unanimity within the Council: the European Parliament assent procedure, codecision, cooperation, consultation of the European Parliament and no consultation of the European Parliament. The Community pillar also made changes to the institutions and to some of their powers.