

General Affairs Council conclusions on transparency and public access to Council documents (29 June 1998)

Caption: Conclusions of the 2111th General Affairs Council meeting of 29 June 1998 on transparency and public access to the documents of the Council of the European Union.

Source: Press Releases. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: Council of the European Union, [11.12.2006]. 9730/98 (Presse 227). Available on http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/09730.EN8.htm.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/general_affairs_council_conclusions_on_transparency_and_public_access_to_council_documents_29_june_1998-en-8244cb9c-f561-4c5a-b532-c5775b43da14.html

Publication date: 06/09/2012

**2111th Council meeting
- General Affairs -
Luxembourg, 29 June 1998**

[...]

Transparency

Public access to Council documents - Council conclusions

"In the context of the bi-annual review of Council Decision 93/731/EC on public access to Council documents provided for in Article 9 of that Decision, the Council has adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council takes note of the report from the Secretary-General on the implementation of Council Decision 93/731/EC of 20 December 1993 on public access to Council documents during 1996 and 1997.
2. The Council notes that there has been a significant increase in requests for Council documents and welcomes the increase in positive responses given to these requests, which has risen to 78% in 1996/1997, up from 58.7% in 1994/1995. This evolution reflects the experiences of the Council and the General Secretariat in the day-to-day conduct of that policy and proves the Decision's value in promoting openness and transparency.
3. In a spirit of openness and transparency, access to Council documents should be granted, whenever possible, when the Council acts as legislator. In those cases, article 4, paragraph 2 of the Decision (refusal of access in order to protect the confidentiality of the Council's proceedings) will continue to be invoked only as strictly necessary.
4. The Council notes that the identification of Council documents will be facilitated by the creation, as soon as possible, preferably during 1998, of a listing of Council documents available via Internet, following the Council decision of 19 March 1998.
5. The Council notes that increased access to documents is but one aspect of its aim to make its work more open and transparent to the citizen. It therefore welcomes the initiatives taken to inform the public about the Council's activities, including the publication of an Information Guide to the Council by the General Secretariat, the active policy in informing the public about the public sessions of the Council, as well as recent improvements in the Council web site and the establishment of a public E-mail address."

Openness - Council conclusions

"Taking into account the result of the seminar on information about the European Union, held in Brussels on 27 March 1998 by senior officials from Member States information departments and representatives of several EU institutions, the Council has adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council considers that the seminar on information about the European Union has demonstrated the benefits of exchanging experiences on information policy concerning European Union questions and public awareness about the European Union.
2. The Council agrees to organise, in cooperation with the Commission, periodic seminars, where appropriate, as well as specialised meetings on issues of particular interest (European parliament elections, information to EU enlargement candidates...) or specific communication vectors (Internet, audiovisual services...) in order to create a platform for permanent exchange of ideas and experiences and to achieve better coordination between the various actors involved. This cooperation should contribute towards a better adaptation of information activities to the real needs of both the specialized and the general public, to avoid duplication and to provide the EU institutions with a regular feedback from Member States.

3. The Council welcomes the Commission's intention to establish an information exchange mechanism, based on the Internet, to enable the various actors in the information field, at a EU as well as at national level, to receive regularly information about new products and new initiatives of the EU institutions and the Member States and to allow a permanent exchange of views on information policy about European matters. The Council believes that such a mechanism could usefully build on existing networks, rather than duplicating them.
4. Networking could also be particularly appropriate for enhancing cooperation between the managers of Internet servers of national administrations and EU institutions with the aim of achieving closer links between the services offered at national and Community levels.
5. The efforts made in the field of new technologies should go hand in hand with better coordination of information activities involving direct contact with the citizen, for instance visitors programmes and in particular those targeted at the media.
6. The Council supports increased cooperation between EU institutions in information policy."