Committees and working parties

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Committees and working parties

The extent of its areas of competence led Coreper to set up working parties and committees to carry out preparatory work and research on its behalf, while others were set up by the Council itself. Committees and working parties may be set up only by the Council or Coreper, or with their approval. However, a number of special committees were set up under the founding Treaties to coordinate the Council's activities in particular areas. The Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) was also set up by decision of the Member States' governments on 12 May 1960 to speed up the implementation of the common agricultural policy under the EEC Treaty. The SCA and the committees established by the Treaties and the Council are known as the 'high-level' committees.

Working parties meet whenever necessary, to discuss matters falling within their remit and draw up reports for Coreper (or the SCA). Ad hoc groups are set up to carry out particular tasks over a fixed period of time and 'standing' groups deal with individual sectors.

The General Secretariat of the Council regularly updates and publishes a list of the Council's preparatory bodies. Only committees and working parties on this list may meet as preparatory bodies of the Council.

The list also includes horizontal groups closely associated with Coreper and responsible for preparing its meetings. These are the Antici Group, the Mertens Group and the Friends of the Presidency Group. The preparatory group for Coreper II known as *the Antici Group* was set up in 1975 on a proposal from the Italian Chairman of Coreper II at the time. The preparatory group for Coreper I, *the Mertens Group*, was then set up under the Belgian Presidency in 1993. These two groups, consisting of the Permanent Representatives' assistants and Deputies, are responsible for finalising Coreper's agenda. *The Friends of the Presidency Group* operates as a horizontal ad hoc body whose task, under Coreper's responsibility, is to study the multidisciplinary aspects of particular issues.

High-level committees

A number of special committees are responsible for preparing the work and coordinating the activities of the Council in a particular area. The most important among them are:

— the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA)
— the Economic and Financial Committee
— the Article 133 Special Committee
— the Political and Security Committee (PSC)
— the Article 36 Coordinating Committee.

— The **Special Committee on Agriculture** (SCA) prepares the work of the Council relating to the common agricultural policy. It was established by the Decision of the representatives of the governments of the Member States of 12 May 1960 on the acceleration of the rate of attainment of the objectives of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, and is the only committee to have been set up by intergovernmental decision. Unlike the other committees, the SCA reports directly to the Agriculture Council without passing through Coreper.

— The **Economic and Financial Committee** was set up on 1 January 1999, at the beginning of the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union, as a replacement for the **Monetary Committee** (Article 114 of the EC Treaty, introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992), which was originally established under former Article 105 of the EEC Treaty and was the first committee to be set up within the Council.

The task of the Economic and Financial Committee, which has an advisory role, is:

— to deliver opinions, at the request of the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative, for submission to those institutions;

— to keep under review the economic and financial situation of the Member States and of the Community and to report regularly thereon to the Council and to the Commission;

— to contribute to the preparation of the work of the Council concerning economic and monetary policy;

— to examine the situation regarding the movement of capital and the freedom of payments, and to report to the Commission and to the Council on the outcome of that examination.

The Member States, the Commission and the European Central Bank each appoint a maximum of two of its members.

— The **Article 133 Special Committee**, appointed by the Council, designated by its present name since the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam and previously known as the **Article 113 Special Committee**, assists the Commission in conducting the negotiations that it undertakes on behalf of the Community in the area of tariffs and trade. Following the Treaty of Nice reform of 2001, the Commission is required to submit regular reports to the Committee on the progress of negotiations (Article 133 of the EC Treaty). The Committee reports to the Council on the progress of negotiations that will result in the conclusion of agreements.

— The **Political and Security Committee (PSC)** (the new title for the '**Political Committee**' set up by the Treaty of Nice) came into being in the early 1970s in order to work in connection with European Political Cooperation. Its new role was laid down by the 1992 Treaty on European Union: the Committee monitors the international situation in areas covered by the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and contributes to the definition of policies by delivering opinions. It also monitors the implementation of agreed policies. Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Nice, the PSC may, for the purposes of a crisis-management operation and for the duration of the crisis, be authorised by the Council to take the appropriate decisions itself on the political monitoring and strategic management of the operation (Article 25 of the Treaty on European Union). It is responsible for preparations for the General Affairs and External Relations Council in the area of foreign policy and for preparing the discussions and conclusions of the European Council relating to the CFSP.

— In addition to coordination, the **Article 36 Coordinating Committee** (known before the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam as the **Article K.4 Coordinating Committee**) is responsible for delivering opinions and contributing to the preparation of the Council's work in the area of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (Article 36 of the Treaty on European Union).

Apart from these committees provided for in the Treaties, there are also committees set up by decision of the Council, including the Economic Policy Committee and the Military Committee.

— The **Economic Policy Committee** was set up in 1974 to replace the Short-term Economic Policy Committee, the Budgetary Policy Committee and the Medium-term Economic Policy Committee. The new committee's task is to promote coordination of the Member States' short- and medium-term economic policies.

— The **European Union Military Committee** (EUMC), set up by the Council in 2001, consists of the Member States' Chiefs of Defence, represented by their military representatives. Its task, in the field of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), is to provide the Political and Security Committee (PSC) with military recommendations and advice on all military matters within the European Union. The EUMC is the forum for military consultation and cooperation between the EU Member States in the field of conflict prevention and crisis management.