

Working structures of the Council of the European Union

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Working structures of the Council of the European Union

Since the establishment of the Special Council of Ministers of the ECSC in 1952, and then of the EEC and EAEC Councils in 1958, the institution's working structures, although they have developed over the years, have remained basically the same. They are as follows:

- the **Presidency**, which is held by each Member State in rotation. Its role as the driving force behind the Council's work and of representation in interinstitutional and external relations has expanded, particularly since the entry into force of the EU Treaty (see above, *Composition*, and below, *Powers*);
- the **General Secretariat**, designed initially as an administrative and logistical infrastructure for the Council. Its responsibilities have steadily grown in importance, particularly in relation to its function of assisting the Presidency. Its role developed considerably following the establishment of a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) in 1993 (see below, *Organisation*);
- the bodies which prepare the ground for Council decisions: in the first place, at expert level, the **working parties** and the **committees**, followed, at the senior official/ambassador level, by the **Committee of Permanent Representatives** (Coreper). In the Special Council of Ministers of the ECSC, these two levels corresponded to the technical subcommittees (called technical committees from 1953) and the Coordinating Committee (Cocor).

The working parties, the committees and Coreper prepare the ground for the taking of decisions by the Council at political level, i.e. at ministerial level. The number of working parties and committees and the tasks that they perform has grown in parallel with the expansion and diversification of the tasks of the Council. To this day, Coreper has continued to be a pivotal body (see below, *Organisation*).

Outside EU structures, this structural model is also reflected in the context of European Political Cooperation (EPC) as formalised by the Single European Act in 1986. EPC has a presidency, a secretariat and bodies which prepare the discussions between the Ministers, and also a political committee. However, although the seat of the Council was, in practice, their workplace, the EPC structures remained independent until the EU Treaty entered into force in 1993 and the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) was established. Under the EU Treaty, there is a single institutional framework for all the Union's activities. The Council, and hence its Presidency, its General Secretariat and its preparatory bodies, now conduct their business both as part of the Community pillar and in the two new fields of intergovernmental cooperation: the CFSP (the successor to EPC) and cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs (JHA).

In the CFSP field, as well as the preparatory and decision-making bodies in the present organisational structure (especially the Political and Security Committee, Coreper and the General Affairs and External Relations Council), there are also a number of specific structures for dealing with the requirements associated with organising the European Union's civil and military capacity for conflict prevention and crisis management. In the CFSP field, the Council, alongside its traditional role as a decision-making body, plays a strategic planning role and an operational role in the implementation of political decisions.

The following structures have also been set up in the General Secretariat (see below, *Organisation*):

- the Secretary-General of the Council acts as the 'High Representative for the CFSP';
- the Private Office of the Secretary-General/High Representative (SG/HR) includes, as services reporting directly to the SG/HR, a Policy Unit (PU) [set up as the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (PPEWU)], a Military Staff, a Joint situation centre (SitCent) of the European Union and a Communication Centre (COMCEN);
- a police unit has been set up in Directorate-General E of the General Secretariat so as to enable the EU to plan and run police operations.

The SG/HR is assisted by special envoys, whom the Council may appoint whenever it deems necessary (see below, *Powers*).

There is also a European Union Military Committee (EUMC) chaired by a four-star flag officer and composed of the Chiefs of Defence of the Member States (see below, *Organisation*).

Lastly, the Defence Ministers usually take part in the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) twice a year, and generally also meet informally twice a year.