

The seat of the Council of the European Union

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The seat of the Council of the European Union

The constituent treaties provided for the seat of the institutions to be determined by common accord of the governments of the Member States (Article 289 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (EC), Article 189 of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) and Article 77 of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)).

At the end of a conference held in Paris on 24 and 25 July 1952, and after lengthy discussions, the city of Luxembourg was finally selected as the provisional meeting place of the ECSC Special Council of Ministers. Accordingly, unless it decided otherwise as its rules of procedure permitted, the ECSC Special Council of Ministers convened its meetings in the capital of the Grand Duchy. From 1952 to 1967, it held its meetings in the Cercle Municipal Building on Place d'Armes. Its secretariat moved several times, but from 1955 to 1967 it was housed in a building in Luxembourg's Verlorenkost district.

Following the entry into force of the Rome Treaties, the Foreign Ministers of the Six stated — in a Declaration dated 7 January 1958 — that they were determined to reach agreement on the seat of all the European institutions and agreed that the Councils of the two new Communities would meet at the instance of their Presidents. In practice, the Château de Val Duchesse was the venue for meetings of the Councils until autumn 1958. Subsequent Council meetings were held at 2, Rue Ravenstein in Brussels.

At the same time as the signing, on 8 April 1965, of the Treaty establishing a single Council and a single Commission, a decision was taken on the provisional seat of certain institutions. The representatives of the governments of the Member States agreed that Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg would continue as the provisional workplaces of Community institutions, and that during the months of April, June and October the Council would hold its meetings in Luxembourg. After the merger of the executive bodies, which came into force in 1967, the departments of the secretariat responsible for ECSC affairs, which had remained in Luxembourg, joined the single secretariat of the Council in premises in the Ravenstein Building. In 1971, the Council and its secretariat moved into the Charlemagne Building in Brussels, not far from the seat of the Commission in the Berlaymont Building. The shortage of space owing to successive enlargements became increasingly apparent as early as 1974, prompting the administrative branch of the General Secretariat of the Council to move to new premises in the immediate vicinity at 76, Rue Joseph II. Subsequently, during the 1980s, the Council, ever in need of additional space, rented new offices (in the Nerviens, Frère Orban and Guimard Buildings) in order to accommodate its language divisions. In addition, the Council sometimes meets in Strasbourg, in the capital cities of the Member States and even outside Europe (e.g. in Tokyo in 1974 for the GATT talks and in Washington during the same year on the margins of the Energy Conference).

On 12 December 1992, at the meeting of the representatives of the governments of the Member States in Edinburgh, it was decided by common accord to establish the seat of the Council in Brussels. It was also confirmed that, during the months of April, June and October, the Council would hold its meetings in Luxembourg. This decision permanently established the Belgian capital as the seat of the Council.

In May 1995, the Council moved again, this time to the Justus Lipsius Building, on Rond Point Schuman in Brussels. Faced with constantly increasing staff numbers, the Council continued to rent the Frère Orban Building in order to accommodate the new Finnish and Swedish language divisions.

In 1997, the Protocol on the seats of the institutions, annexed to the Treaties by the Treaty of Amsterdam, confirmed the terms of the Edinburgh decision. The Protocol thus finalised the location of the seats of the institutions of the European Union.

In addition, so as to remedy the shortage of space, the Council rents various other office buildings (including the Kortenberg, Froissart, Espace Rolin, Woluwé Heights, Lex and Résidence Palace Buildings) as well as owning the Justus Lipsius Building. During the months of April, June and October, when the Council holds its meetings in Luxembourg, it uses the Kirchberg Conference Centre.

Lastly, in accordance with the provisions of the Rules of Procedure of the Council, it may, under exceptional circumstances and for duly justified reasons, decide to hold one of its meetings elsewhere.

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