

## Proceedings at European Council meetings

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The European Council meets at least twice a year, under the chairmanship of the Head of State or Government of the Member State which holds the Presidency of the Council (Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union). Initially, the 1974 Paris Declaration provided that the European Council would meet at least three times a year ('three times a year and whenever necessary').

The Declaration on the venue for the European Councils, annexed to the 2001 Treaty of Nice, provides for one European Council meeting per Presidency to be held in Brussels as from 2002, and when the Union comprises 18 members, for all European Council meetings to be held in Brussels.

In general, European Council meetings take place at the end of each half-year of the Council Presidency, in June and December. Extraordinary European Councils may also be convened for various reasons.

Arrangements for the meetings are at the discretion of the host country, but according to custom established over the years, European Council meetings proceed as follows:

— before the commencement of business on the first day, the European Council hears the President of the European Parliament. Proceedings begin officially after the President's address. The Heads of State or Government and the President of the Commission meet separately from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and the Commission Member. The proceedings are adjourned for dinner, where exchanges of views continue. In the interim and, where necessary, during the night, draft conclusions are drawn up by the Presidency;

— the second day begins with the distribution of the draft conclusions to the national delegations (by officers known as *Antici* who liaise between the European Council and the national delegations), and with their detailed review over 'working breakfasts'. Each delegation informs its Head of State or Government about the items in the draft conclusions to be deleted or strengthened, with silence being tantamount to acceptance. After the traditional 'family photo' of the participants, the meeting reconvenes, and the draft conclusions are written up definitively after the discussions have resulted in a consensus being reached. At the end of the meeting, a statement is drawn up, and the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission call a press conference.

European Council meetings are prepared by the General Affairs Council. The Secretary-General of the Council provides the Secretariat of the European Council and assists the Presidency in drawing up its draft conclusions. At the end of the European Council meeting, he is responsible for finalising and disseminating the final version of the conclusions.

The European Council must submit a report to the European Parliament after its meetings and a yearly written report on the progress achieved by the Union (Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union).