

The role of the European Council

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The role of the European Council

The European Council provides the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and defines its general political guidelines (Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union (EU Treaty)).

The Treaty establishing the European Community (EC) made the European Council responsible for debating, on the basis of a Council report, a conclusion on the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and of the Community. On the basis of this conclusion, the Council adopts a recommendation setting out these broad guidelines (Article 99 of the EC Treaty).

The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam laid down a new task for the European Council in the area of employment. Each year, it considers the employment situation in the Community and adopts conclusions thereon, on the basis of a joint annual report by the Council and the Commission (Article 128 of the EC Treaty).

The European Council also defines the principles of and the general guidelines for the common foreign and security policy. The advisory role of the European Council extends to matters with defence implications (Article 13 of the EU Treaty).

The Treaty of Amsterdam clarified the powers of the European Council. It decides on common strategies to be implemented by the Union in the areas where the Member States have important interests in common (Article 13(2) of the EU Treaty). It decides on the integration of Western European Union (WEU) into the Union, and its powers to establish guidelines also apply to WEU (Article 17 of the EU Treaty).

In practice, the European Council plays an essential role in the development of Community integration, acting as an instrument giving political impetus.