

European Political Cooperation

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The concept of European Political Cooperation (EPC) had been under discussion since the early 1960s but had not been implemented due to the differences of opinion in this area between General de Gaulle and his partners. After de Gaulle's retirement from political office, economic and political events taking place beyond the borders of Europe gradually made it necessary for the Member States to align their foreign policies more closely. At the Hague Summit of 1–2 December 1969, the Foreign Ministers of the Six were instructed to draw up a report on the potential for cooperation in foreign policy.

On 27 October 1970, the Foreign Ministers meeting in Luxembourg adopted the Davignon Report, which laid the foundations for political cooperation between Member States in the area of foreign policy. A further step towards European Political Cooperation was taken in Paris on 9–10 December 1974, when the Heads of State or Government undertook to strengthen their cooperation and to coordinate their diplomatic action in all areas of international affairs affecting the interests of the European Economic Community (EEC). On 30 November 1976, the Nine examined the Tindemans Report on the European Union and noted that European Political Cooperation should promote convergence in the exercise of national sovereignty.

Another report on European Political Cooperation was approved on 13 October 1981 at a meeting of EEC Foreign Ministers in London. The London Report came in the wake of an urgent appeal made in November 1980 by Lord Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary and future Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). It reasserted the willingness of the Ten to adopt a coherent and concerted approach to international and security issues. The report included the obligation for consultation before any national initiatives on foreign policy questions affecting all the Member States were launched.

Following this, European Political Cooperation was the focus of the initiatives for the establishment of a European Union. The German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, called for a strengthening of EPC in a speech he made in Stuttgart on 6 January 1981. His example was followed by his Italian counterpart, Emilio Colombo, speaking on 20 January. These coordinated speeches led to a draft text for a European Act being published on 6 November 1981. It was presented to the European Council in London on 26–27 November 1981, and it made provision for better coordination of EEC Member States' Community and European activities. The draft European Act confirmed the leading role of the Council of Foreign Ministers in European Political Cooperation and proposed the setting up of an EPC secretariat. The draft European Act was neither a treaty nor a binding legal document but rather a political declaration that did not require parliamentary ratification. The Genscher-Colombo initiative, which sought to revive the process of European integration and strengthen EPC procedures, paved the way for the Solemn Declaration on the European Union made by the Ten in Stuttgart on 19 June 1983. Although it did not go as far as the initial proposals submitted by Mr Genscher and Mr Colombo, the Stuttgart Declaration did, nevertheless, recognise the European Council's pre-eminent political role and gave the Commission, the Council and Parliament a direct say in EPC and in the future development of the European Union. It emphasised the need for Member States to improve coordination between their embassies in third countries and to adopt common positions at international conferences and within international organisations. The Stuttgart Declaration was challenged by some Member States, including Denmark and Greece, but how it would be implemented remained quite vague.

The Single European Act (SEA) of February 1986 institutionalised the EPC that had been carried out since 1976, codified previous EPC practices and established a small permanent secretariat in Brussels to assist the Presidency of the Community. It set the objective of a European foreign policy, extending it to include the political and economic aspects of security but excluding the area of defence. Europe's independence and the defence of democratic principles and human rights were referred to explicitly as being objectives of European Political Cooperation. The Single Act laid down that the Twelve should consult each other in order to adopt common political positions if possible.