

How European Political Cooperation worked

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European Political Cooperation originated in measures that were basically intergovernmental in character and based on consensus. It nurtured a diplomacy based on high-sounding statements and the adoption of a very general stance on international problems. Thus, during the 1980s, the Member States of the European Community adopted common positions, sometimes backed up by economic sanctions or inducements. This was apparent particularly in the case of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Israeli-Palestinian talks, the Middle East, the CSCE, nuclear disarmament, East-West relations, the Argentine invasion of the Falklands, the Iran-Iraq war, Vietnam's armed intervention in Cambodia, the end of apartheid in South Africa, and international terrorism and the role therein played by Libya. Member States also tried to speak with one voice on the international stage.

European Political Cooperation was articulated principally through the European Council, the Council of Foreign Ministers and the Presidency of the European Community. The European Council, set up in 1975 and given official status by the 1986 Single European Act, established the basic policy principles and, at least twice a year, signalled the main thrust of Member States' policies in the area of political cooperation and external relations. The Foreign Ministers of the Member States met at least once a month to review the international situation. The current Presidency, assisted by its predecessor and successor in forming the *troika*, had the right to propose action and played an important role as spokesman. Support and follow-up for EPC was provided by the Political Committee (a monthly meeting of senior civil servants from the Foreign Ministries) and the small permanent political secretariat. Although enshrined in the 1981 London Report and the 1986 Single European Act, the Commission's role in the development of political cooperation remained relatively marginal. The European Parliament was regularly informed of decisions taken in the context of EPC mainly through its Political Affairs Committee. It could also adopt resolutions, such as the resolution of 9 July 1981, which was based on a report submitted a week earlier by the British MEP, Diane Elles, on behalf of the Christian-Democratic Group. Elements of this resolution recommending increased prior consultation, the setting up of a real permanent political secretariat and increasing the Commission's role in EPC, featured in the October 1981 London Report.