

How European Political Cooperation worked in practice

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How European Political Cooperation worked in practice

During the Summit held in Paris from 19 to 21 October 1972, the Heads of State or Government of the Six and the three future EEC Member States confirmed their wish to step up their political cooperation and to give Europe the means whereby it could act as a coherent political entity on the international scene. At the same time as enlarging the Community, the Heads of State or Government sought to transform all their relations within a European Union by 1980, although they did not actually specify the institutional structures thereof. Four political cooperation meetings a year were to be held, and the Foreign Ministers were instructed to draw up a report on how best to improve the way in which European Political Cooperation worked. The first joint press releases appeared at the end of 1972.

The *Copenhagen Report* was adopted on 23 July 1973 by the Heads of Government, meeting in Denmark. It proposed that the principle of consultations between Foreign Ministers should be strengthened and that a group of diplomatic correspondents should be created within the embassies and chancelleries to facilitate the flow of information. Against the background of war in the Middle East, the Report also recommended the setting up of direct telex lines between the Foreign Ministries in order to ensure the distribution of documents and to coordinate agendas. This was the Telex Network of European Correspondents (COREU).

Meeting in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 December 1973, the Nine undertook once again to meet more frequently to discuss the future of the Community process. They also confirmed the importance of a European identity in the EEC's external relations. The 'document on European identity' defined their concept of society and laid down the guidelines for their foreign policy.

On a proposal from Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the new President of the French Republic, the Paris Summit (9-10 December 1974) established, alongside the basic Treaties, the European Council of Heads of State or Government. The European Council was a hybrid coordination and decision-making body. In principle, it was to meet three times a year and whenever necessary. As for political cooperation, the Nine planned to develop an agreed diplomatic strategy in all areas of international policy affecting the interests of the Community. The Nine also entrusted to Leo Tindemans, the Belgian Prime Minister, the task of submitting a detailed report on how the Community might be transformed into a European Union. In this way, they showed that a United Europe was the touchstone of their foreign policy.

This objective was confirmed a year later in the Tindemans Report on European Union commissioned by the Nine at the end of the December 1974 Paris Summit. The Belgian Prime Minister advocated the pursuit of a common strategy by the Member States in the crucial areas of their international relations in order to lay the foundations for a common foreign policy. As a start, Tindemans suggested the implementation of a common defence policy and enhanced cooperation in the production of armaments. On 30 November 1976, the European Council meeting in The Hague considered the Tindemans Report and confirmed that European cooperation on foreign policy issues would eventually lead to the elaboration of a common foreign policy.

European Political Cooperation (EPC) was seen in action on several occasions during the 1970s. The political solidarity of the Nine was made manifest in their joint appeal for a ceasefire in the Middle East on 13 October 1973, when the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was signed on 30 July 1975, in various joint statements in support of a peaceful solution to the Cyprus crisis in summer 1974, and in their unanimous condemnation of apartheid in South Africa.