

# EU INSTITUTIONS | THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL



European Council  
Council of the European Union

**The Council of the European Union**, often called the Council of Ministers or simply the Council, consists of EU government ministers who meet to discuss, amend, and adopt laws and decisions. They coordinate the Member States' policies and represent their interests at the EU level.

This institution is a pillar of the EU's 'decision-making triangle' along with the European Parliament and the European Commission. It evolved since its first meeting in 1958, and adapted to the expanding dynamics of the EU, especially after significant changes brought by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 which streamlined decision-making with qualified majority voting.

**The European Council**, the EU's highest-level political body, convenes the heads of state or government from its Member States to set strategic priorities and provide political guidance, but without the power to legislate. Meeting at least four times a year in Brussels, these summits are led by an elected President who plays a crucial role in mediating and driving the EU's strategic agenda. It also addresses critical issues such as energy, migration, and crises like the conflict in Ukraine, with decisions generally made by consensus except for key appointments which require a qualified majority.

## Roles of the European Council

### Roles of the Council of the EU



#### Amend and adopt EU laws

In most policy areas, such as economic development, foreign trade, and agriculture, the Council of Ministers, alongside the European Parliament, amends, adopts, or rejects proposals from the European Commission using the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP) or other special legislative processes.



#### Develop the EU's foreign and security policy: drawing on European Council guidelines



#### Conclude agreements between the EU and third countries and international organizations



#### Adopt the annual EU budget



**Shapes** the EU's political trajectory and strategic objectives.



**Acts as a decisive force** during critical times, spearheading institutional reforms, foreign and security policy, reforming the eurozone, or initiatives to bolster Europe's global competitiveness.



**Can also define new areas of cooperation** for the EU Member States.



**Proposes, and ultimately elects** the President of the European Commission.

#### Appoints

- the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,
- the entire body of Commissioners, and
- the Executive Board of the European Central Bank (ECB), including the ECB president.



**Lays out the terms for EU enlargements.**



**Defines** the framework for a future relationship with countries leaving the Union (e.g. the UK after Brexit).



**Through its European Council conclusions**, issued after each summit meeting, the European Council steers institutional reform and new policy directions.





## The organization of the Council of the EU

The Council of the European Union, or Council of Ministers, includes EU Member State Ministers and functions in **10 configurations**, each tailored to specific policy topics.

- Each configuration, comprising 27 national ministers, handles distinct policy areas.
- While all configurations hold equal status, the General Affairs Council (GAC) manages broader issues like EU enlargement and financial frameworks, and prepares for European Council meetings involving EU leaders.
- The Council configurations follow a consistent format, except for the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), chaired by the High Representative/Vice President, supported by the EEAS, except in commercial policy discussions, where the presidency's trade minister presides.

The **rotating Presidency** of the Council of the European Union changes every 6 months among EU Member States, based on a predetermined schedule.

- During their term, the presiding nation's ministers chair Council meetings, set priorities, and drive the agenda, coordinating closely with the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The Council is supported by the **Committee of Permanent Representatives, or COREPER**, which comprises heads and deputy heads of diplomatic missions from the 27 EU Member States. As the Council of Ministers' top preparatory body, COREPER coordinates and preps the Council's meetings and is chaired by the Permanent Representative of the presidency-holding Member State.

- It aims for consensus on agenda items before they reach the ministerial level.
- COREPER I deals with technical policies like employment and environment, while COREPER II handles significant areas such as foreign affairs and economic policy.

## Main internal bodies of the Council of the EU

**The General Secretariat of the Council (GSC)** supports the European Council and the Council of the EU by organizing and maintaining coherence in their operations, providing logistical support, and assisting in negotiations across EU institutions.

Over 150 **specialized working parties and committees**, staffed by senior diplomats from EU Member States and collectively known as 'Council preparatory bodies,' formulate expert positions to achieve preliminary consensus and significantly influence the decision-making process.





To remember

**1. Configurations** of the Council (of the EU): meet only as frequently as required by the number of issues on the agenda, generally not more than 12 times a year, that is, once a month. The meetings are chaired by the representative of the Member State holding the rotating 6 months Presidency.

**2. Rotating Presidency** of the Council (of the EU): refers to the fact that every 6 months, starting on 1 January and 1 July, the Presidency of the Council moves from one EU Member State to another, based on a timetable and sequence set by the Council itself for many years ahead.

- The three consecutive countries that hold the Presidency of the Council are generally referred to as the 'trio', or by their old name, 'troika'.

**3. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:** role established by the Treaty of Lisbon to ensure more coherence in EU external actions and give a 'face' to the Union on the world stage. It expanded the previous post set up by the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999.

- The High Representative is also Vice-President of the European Commission and chairs the Council's Foreign Affairs configuration.

**4. Voting systems** by which the Council of the EU takes its decisions: depend on the policy area being discussed and are three: unanimity, qualified majority, and simple majority.

**5. European Council origins:** established in 1974 and formalized as an official EU institution by the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009. It originated from informal summits dating back to the 1960s. Then, leaders of the European Community states convened to address geopolitical and economic challenges.

**6. European Council mission:** responds to various European challenges, and holds at least four annual summits where EU leaders convene to discuss strategic issues, set action agendas, and direct the Commission on legislative proposals.

To differentiate between the institutions:

	Council of the EU (Council of Ministers)	European Council
<b>Role</b>	Negotiates and adopts EU laws	Defines the EU political direction and priorities, without legislative powers
<b>Membership</b>	National government ministers from each Member State, grouped by policy area	Heads of state or government of each EU Member State
<b>Leadership</b>	The Presidency of the Council is assigned to a different Member State every six months	President elected for 2.5 years, renewable once

