



Council of the European Union



[The Council of the European Union](#)

The Council of the EU is the institution representing the member states' governments. Also known informally as the EU Council or the Council of Ministers, it is where national ministers from each EU country meet to adopt laws and coordinate policies. The Council of the European Union has its roots in the Special Council of the European Coal and Steel Community. While its powers were very limited during this time, they were soon expanded through the Rome Treaty of 1957. Later, it became the Council of the EEC with the Merger Treaty of 1967 and then the Council of the EU with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. Finally, the Lisbon Treaty brings us to today's situation, in which the Council shares legislative powers with the European Parliament.



Composition

The Council is composed of government ministers from each country. Which ministers have a seat at the table differs according to the policy area to be discussed. The presidency is held on a rotational basis, which each country holding it for six months at a time. The Council is supported by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), as well as over 150 working parties and committees, made up of national civil servants.

Powers and functions

The Council has central decision-making competences together with the Parliament. Together, they control proposals made by the commission. This is known as the co-decision procedure.

By itself, the Council has exclusive competences in questions of citizenship, taxation and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The main function of the Council is to represent the interests of the various member states through their national leaders.

Decision making

Depending on the area concerned, the Council takes its decisions by a simple majority, a qualified majority or unanimously. Simple majority means that there are more votes than against, which means that 14 votes are necessary. The Council's qualified majority voting mechanism is the most common one, with about 80% of the Council's decisions being taken using this procedure. The rule can be found in the Treaty of Lisbon, in Article 16 (4, first paragraph). Under this article, a favourable vote is required from at least 55% of the members of the Council representing at least 65% of the Union's population. In practice, this means at least 15 Member States out of 27. Unanimity means that all members have to vote in favour and is only required by the Treaty for decisions in a few areas, which are, however, among the most important (taxation, social policy, etc.). If you are interested in how various country combinations voting together could lead to adoption or rejection of a proposal, you can see this in the voting [calculator](#) on the Council website.