The European Union and the Council of Europe

Basic information and a Comparison

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2. How does the European Union work ?[1]

The European Union is more than just a confederation of countries, but it is not a federal State. It is, in fact, something entirely new and historically unique. Its political system has been constantly evolving over the past 50 years and it is founded on a series of treaties - from those signed in Paris and Rome in the 1950s to the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice, agreed in the 1990s.
Under these treaties, the member states of the Union delegate some of their national sovereignty to institutions they share and that represent not only their national interests but also their collective interest. The treaties constitute what is known as 'primary' legislation. From them is derived a large body of 'secondary' legislation that has a direct impact on the daily lives of European Union citizens. It consists mainly of regulations, directives and recommendations.
These laws, along with EU policies in general, are the result of decisions taken by three main institutions:

- the Council of the European Union (representing the member states),
- the European Parliament (representing the citizens) and
- the European Commission (a politically independent body that upholds the collective European interest).

This **institutional triangle** can function only if the three institutions work closely together and trust one another. "In order to carry out their task and in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty, the European Parliament acting jointly with the Council and the Commission shall make regulations and issue directives, take decisions, make recommendations or deliver opinions". (Article 249 of the Treaty of Maastricht).

The Council of the European Union
The Council of the European Union is the EU's main decision-making institution. It was formerly known as the 'Council of Ministers', and for short it is simply called 'the Council'.
Each EU country in turn presides over the Council for a six-month period. Every Council meeting is attended by one minister from each of the member states. Which ministers attend a meeting depends on which topic is on the agenda. If foreign policy, it will be the Foreign Affairs Minister from each country. If agriculture, it will be the Minister for Agriculture. And so on. There are nine different Council "configurations", covering all the different policy areas including industry, transport, the environment, etc. The Council's work as a whole is planned and co-ordinated by the General Affairs and External Relations Council.
The preparatory work for Council meetings is done by the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper), made up of the member states' ambassadors to the EU, assisted by officials from the national ministries. The Council's administrative work is handled by its General Secretariat, based in Brussels.
The Council and European Parliament share legislative power as well as responsibility for the budget. The Council also concludes international agreements that have been negotiated by the Commission. According to the treaties, the Council has to take its decisions either unanimously or by a majority or "qualified majority" vote.
On important questions such as amending the treaties, launching a new common policy or allowing a new country to join the Union, the Council has to agree unanimously.

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[1] Fontaine, P (2003); pp. 15 - 23

In most other cases, qualified majority voting is required - in other words, a decision cannot be taken unless a specified minimum number of votes is cast in its favour. The number of votes each EU country can cast roughly reflects the size of its population.

Comparison of voting weights *Population in millions on 1 January 2006*						
Country	Population		Nice		Penrose	
Germany	82m	16.7%	29	8.4%	9	9.3%
France	63m	12.8%	29	8.4%	8	8.2%
UK	60m	12.3%	29	8.4%	8	8.2%
Italy	59m	11.9%	29	8.4%	8	8.2%
Spain	44m	8.9%	27	7.8%	7	7.2%
Poland	38m	7.7%	27	7.8%	6	6.2%
Romania	22m	4.4%	14	4.1%	5	5.2%
Netherlands	16m	3.3%	13	3.8%	4	4.1%
Greece	11m	2.3%	12	3.5%	3	3.1%
Portugal	11m	2.1%	12	3.5%	3	3.1%
Belgium	11m	2.1%	12	3.5%	3	3.1%
Czech Rep.	10m	2.1%	12	3.5%	3	3.1%
Hungary	10m	2.0%	12	3.5%	3	3.1%
Sweden	9.2m	1.8%	10	2.9%	3	3.1%
Austria	8.3m	1.7%	10	2.9%	3	3.1%
Bulgaria	7.7m	1.6%	10	2.9%	3	3.1%
Denmark	5.4m	1.1%	7	2.0%	2	2.1%
Slovakia	5.4m	1.1%	7	2.0%	2	2.1%
Finland	5.3m	1.1%	7	2.0%	2	2.1%
Ireland	4.2m	0.9%	7	2.0%	2	2.1%
Lithuania	3.4m	0.7%	7	2.0%	2	2.1%
Latvia	2.3m	0.5%	4	1.2%	2	2.1%
Slovenia	2.0m	0.4%	4	1.2%	2	2.1%
Estonia	1.3m	0.3%	4	1.2%	1	1.0%
Cyprus	0.77m	0.2%	4	1.2%	1	1.0%
Luxembourg	0.46m	0.1%	4	1.2%	1	1.0%
Malta	0.40m	0.1%	3	0.9%	1	1.0%
EU	493m	100%	345	100%	97	100%

A minimum of 255 votes (74%) of the total of 345 will be required to reach a qualified majority.

In addition,

- a majority of member states (in some cases two thirds) must approve the decision, and
- any member state can ask for confirmation that the votes cast in favour represent at least 62% of the EU's total population.

The European Council

The European Council brings together the presidents and prime ministers of all the EU countries plus the President of the European Commission. The President of the European Parliament also addresses every European Council.

Its origins go back to 1974, when the EU's political leaders (the "heads of State or government") began holding regular meetings. This practice was made official by the Single European Act (1987). The European Council now meets, in principle, four times a year. It is chaired by the President or Prime Minister of the country currently presiding over the Council of the European Union.

Given the growing importance of EU affairs in national political life, it is appropriate that the national presidents and prime ministers should have these regular opportunities to meet and discuss major European issues. With the Treaty of Maastricht, the European Council officially became the initiator of the Union's major policies and was empowered to settle difficult issues on which ministers (meeting in the Council of the European Union) fail to agree.

The European Council has become a major media event, since its members are all well-known public figures and some of the issues they debate can be highly contentious. It also discusses current world problems. Its aim is to speak with one voice on international issues, developing a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The European Council is thus the EU's highest-level policymaking body. Some Member States would like it to become the government of Europe, and want one of its members to represent the Union on the world stage. Would this person be chosen by the European Council or would it automatically be the President of the European Commission? There is disagreement over this question.

In the mean time, the role of "Mr Europe" is played by the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (a post created by the Treaty of Amsterdam), who is also Secretary-General of the Council. This is currently Jose Manuel Barroso.

The European Parliament

The European Parliament is the elected body that represents the EU's citizens and takes part in the legislative process. Since 1979, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been directly elected, by universal suffrage, every five years.

Until the 2004 elections there are 626 MEPs. Thereafter, enlargements of the EU will increase that number up to 785. The number of MEPs from each country is as follows:

Country	MEPs
Germany	99
France, Italy and United Kingdom	78
Poland and Spain	54
Romania	35
Netherlands	27
Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Portugal	24
Sweden	19
Austria and Bulgaria	18
Denmark, Finland and Slovakia	14
Ireland and Lithuania	13
Latvia	9
Slovenia	7
Cyprus, Estonia and Luxembourg	6
Malta	5
Total	**785**

Parliament normally holds its plenary session in Strasbourg and any additional sessions in Brussels. It has 17 committees that do the preparatory work for its plenary sessions, and a number of political groups that mostly meet in Brussels. The Secretariat-General is based in Luxembourg.

Parliament and the Council share legislative power, and they do so using three different procedures (in addition to simple consultation).

First, there is the "cooperation procedure", introduced by the Single European Act in 1986. Under this procedure, Parliament gives its opinion on draft directives and regulations proposed by the European Commission, which can amend its proposal to take account of Parliament's opinion.

Second, there is the "assent procedure", also introduced in 1986. Under this procedure, Parliament must give its assent to international agreements negotiated by the Commission, to any proposed enlargement of the European Union and to a number of other matters including any changes in election rules.

Third, there is the "co-decision procedure", introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992). This puts the Parliament on an equal footing with the Council when legislating on a whole series of important issues including the free movement of workers, the internal market, education, research, the environment, Trans-European Networks, health, culture and consumer protection. Parliament has the power to throw out proposed legislation in these fields if an absolute majority of MEPs vote against the Council's "common position". However, the matter can be put before a conciliation committee.

The Treaty of Amsterdam added another 23 and the Treaty of Nice a further seven to the number of fields in which the co-decision procedure applies.

Parliament and the Council also share equal responsibility for adopting the EU budget. The European Commission proposes a draft budget, which is then debated by Parliament and the Council. Parliament can reject the proposed budget, and it has already done so on several occasions. When this happens, the entire budget procedure has to be re-started. Parliament has made full use of its budgetary powers to influence EU policymaking. However, most of the EU's spending on agriculture is beyond Parliament's control.

Parliament is a driving force in European politics. It is the EU's primary debating chamber, a place where the political and national viewpoints of all the member states meet and mix. So Parliament quite naturally gives birth to a good many policy initiatives.

Parliamentary debates are dominated by the political groups. The largest of these are: · the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats - the EPP-ED group; · the Party of European Socialists - PES.

Parliament played a key role in drawing up the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (proclaimed in December 2000) and in setting up the European Convention following the Laeken European Council in December 2001. Last but not least, Parliament is the body that exercises democratic control over the Union. It has the power to dismiss the Commission by adopting a motion of censure. (This requires a two thirds majority). It checks that EU policies are being properly managed and implemented - for example by examining the reports it receives from the Court of Auditors and by putting oral and written questions to the Commission and Council. The current President of the European Council also reports to Parliament on the decisions taken by the EU's political leaders.

The European Commission

The Commission is one of the EU's key institutions. Until 1 May 2004 it had 20 members (two each from France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, one from each of the other countries), appointed for a five year period by agreement between the Member States, subject to approval by Parliament.

On 1 May 2004, when 10 new member states joined the EU, the number of Commissioners also increased by 10. From 1 November 2004, the new Commission has only 25 members - one per country. After the accession of Rumania and Bulgaria, the Commission counts 27 members.

The Commission acts with complete political independence. Its job is to uphold the interest of the EU as a whole, so it must not take instructions from any member state government. As "Guardian of the Treaties", it has to ensure that the regulations and directives adopted by the Council and Parliament are being put into effect. If they are not, the Commission can take the offending party to the Court of Justice to oblige it to comply with EU law.

The Commission is also the only institution that has the right to propose new EU legislation, and it can take action at any stage to help bring about agreement both within the Council and between the Council and Parliament.

As the EU's executive arm, the Commission carries out the decisions taken by the Council - in relation to the Common Agricultural Policy, for example. The Commission is largely responsible for managing the EU's

common policies, such as research, development aid, regional policy etc. It also manages the budget for these policies.

The Commission is answerable to Parliament, and the entire Commission has to resign if Parliament passes a motion of censure against it. It was when faced with just such a motion of censure that President Jacques Santer tendered the collective resignation of his Commission on 16 March 1999. Romano Prodi became President of the Commission for the period 1999-2004. He was succeeded by Jose Manuel Barroso.

The Commission is assisted by a civil service made up of 36 "Directorates-General" (DGs) and services, based mainly in Brussels and Luxembourg. Unlike the secretariats of traditional international organisations, the Commission has its own financial resources and can thus act quite independently.

The Court of Justice

The Court of Justice of the European Communities, located in Luxembourg, is made up of one judge from each EU country, assisted by eight advocates-general. They are appointed by joint agreement of the governments of the member states. Each is appointed for a term of six years, after which they may be reappointed for one or two further periods of three years. They can be relied on to show impartiality.

The Court's job is to ensure that EU law is complied with, and that the treaties are correctly interpreted and applied.

It can find any EU member state guilty of failing to fulfil its obligations under the treaties. It can check whether EU laws have been properly enacted and it can find the European Parliament, the Council or the Commission guilty of failing to act as required.

The Court of Justice is also the only institution that can, at the request of the national courts, give a ruling on the interpretation of the treaties and on the validity and interpretation of EU law. So, when a question of this sort is brought before a court in one of the member states, that court may - and sometimes must - ask the Court of Justice for its ruling.

This system ensures that EU law is interpreted and applied in the same way throughout the European Union. The Treaties explicitly allow the Court to check whether EU legislation respects the fundamental rights of EU citizens and to give rulings on questions of personal freedom and security.

The Court of First Instance, which was set up in 1989 and consists of one judge from each EU country, is responsible for giving rulings on certain kinds of case, particularly actions brought by firms or private individuals against EU institutions, and disputes between the institutions and their employees.

The Court of Auditors

The Court of Auditors, set up in 1977, has one member from each EU country, appointed for a term of six years by agreement between the member states, after consulting the European Parliament. The Court of Auditors checks that all the European Union's revenue has been received and all its expenditure incurred in a lawful and regular manner and that the EU budget has been managed soundly. It has the right to audit the accounts of any organisation that is handling EU funds and, where appropriate, to refer matters to the Court of Justice.

The European Economic and Social Committee

When taking decisions in policy areas covered by the EC and Euratom treaties, the Council and Commission consult the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Its members represent the various interest groups that collectively make up "organised civil society", and are appointed by the Council for a four year term.

The EESC has to be consulted before decisions are taken in a great many fields (employment, the European Social Fund, vocational training, etc.) On its own initiative it can also give opinions on other matters it considers important.

The Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the regions (CoR), set up under the Treaty on European Union, consists of representatives of regional and local government, proposed by the member states and appointed by the Council for a four-year term. Under the Treaty, the Council and Commission must consult the CoR on matters of relevance to the regions, and the Committee may also adopt opinions on its own initiative.

The European Investment Bank

The European Investment Bank (EIB), based in Luxembourg, finances projects to help the EU's less developed regions and to help make small businesses more competitive.

The European Central Bank

The European Central Bank (ECB), based in Frankfurt, is responsible for managing the euro and the EU's monetary policy. Its work is described in greater detail in Chapter 7.

The European Convention

The institutions and other bodies described above are the main cogs in the EU's decision-making machinery. But the system needs overhauling if the EU is to continue working effectively. That is why the European Convention was set up by the European Council at Laeken in December 2001. Its 105 members represented the governments of the Member States and candidate countries, the national parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission, under the chairmanship of former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Its job was to propose a new way of running the European Union after enlargement.

The EU faces two main challenges. First, enlargement over the next decade or two will bring the total number of member states to perhaps 30 or 35. Can the Council be expected to reach unanimous agreement on anything with so many ministers around the table? Will EU decision-making not simply grind to a halt? How will the Union be governed? Who will speak for Europe on the world stage? Where will the final frontiers of the European Union be drawn? After all, the Council of Europe (not an EU institution) already has 45 member states including Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the Caucasus countries.

Second, the EU's citizens want to have a greater say in shaping EU policies, but they find it hard to understand the EU's highly complex decision-making system and they perceive "Brussels" as too remote from their daily lives. Hence the need for a Constitution that clearly sets out who is responsible for doing what in the European Union. A Constitution that specifies the powers and responsibilities of each EU institution and what should be left to the authorities at regional and national level.

The EU needs to invent a new form of "governance" that is simpler, more democratic and brings Europe closer to its citizens. So the Convention drafted a Constitution designed to meet these needs, and presented it to the European Council in June 2003. In the meantime is the Constitution replaced by the Lisbonne Treaty (to be ratified by members before the end of 2008).

3. The Council of Europe [2]

3.1 An overview

A statute built on human rights
Any European state can become a member of the Council of Europe provided it accepts the principle of the rule of law and guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms to everyone under its jurisdiction.

Aims
The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation which aims:
- to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;
- to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity;
- to seek solutions to problems facing European society (discrimination against minorities, xenophobia, intolerance, environmental protection, human cloning, Aids, drugs, terrorism, organised crime, etc.);
- to help consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform.

46 member states
Set up on 5 May 1949 by 10 countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom), joined by Greece and Turkey in August 1949, the Council of Europe now has 46 member states* : Iceland and Germany (1950), Austria (1956), Cyprus (1961), Switzerland (1963), Malta (1965), Portugal (1976), Spain (1977), Liechtenstein (1978), San Marino (1988), Finland (1989), Hungary (1990), Poland (1991), Bulgaria (1992), Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania (1993), Andorra (1994), Latvia, Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"(1995), Russian Federation and Croatia (1996), Georgia (1999), Armenia and Azerbaijan (2001), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2002), Serbia and Montenegro (2003), Monaco (2004).

The Council of Europe should not be confused with the European Union. The two organisations are quite distinct. The 25 European Union states, however, are all members of the Council of Europe.

Candidate for membership
Belarus is applicant state since 12 March 1993.

Observer status
Canada, the Holy See, Japan, the United States of America and Mexico enjoy observer status with the Council of Europe's intergovernmental bodies.

* October 2004

Palais de l'Europe
The Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg (France) is the Council of Europe's headquarters.

Wide-ranging activities
The Council of Europe covers all major issues facing European society other than defence. Its work programme includes the following fields of activity: human rights, media, legal co-operation, social cohesion, health, education, culture, heritage, sport, youth, local democracy and transfrontier co-operation, the environment and regional planning.

A framework for co-operation
- The Committee of Ministers is the Council of Europe's decision-making body, and is composed of the foreign affairs ministers of all the member states (or their Permanent Representatives).
- The Parliamentary Assembly is the Organisation's deliberative body, the members of which are appointed by national parliaments.

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[2] Copied from: The Council of Europe (2003); pp. 7 - 17

- The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe is a consultative body representing local and regional authorities.

Governments, national parliaments and local and regional authorities are thus represented separately.

Summits give fresh impetus
To reinforce European stability, particularly after the fall of communist regimes, the Council of Europe gained fresh political impetus at the highest level through summit meetings of heads of state and government. Two summits have been held to date.

In Vienna in 1993, the political leaders of the 32 states which were members of the Organisation at the time responded to the challenge by determining a course of action for enlargement.

In Strasbourg in 1997, with 40 member states, political leaders adopted a Plan of Action based on four broad themes: democracy and human rights, social cohesion, security of citizens and education for democracy and cultural diversity. This is the blueprint for the Council's programme of work in the new millennium.

Conferences of specialised ministers
The Council of Europe periodically organises conferences of specialised ministers (for justice, education, family affairs, health, environment, local authorities, migration, equality between women and men, labour, mass media, culture, sport, youth, etc.).

The conferences analyse the major problems arising in their sectors and foster ongoing contact between ministries dealing with the same subjects in member states. They work out projects to be implemented jointly, and propose activities for the Council's work programme.

Building Europe day by day
The Council of Europe's work leads to European conventions and agreements in the light of which member states may subsequently harmonise and amend their own legislation to comply with them.

Some conventions and agreements are also open for adoption by non-member states. The results of studies and activities are available to governments in order to foster co-operation and social progress in Europe.

The Council of Europe also adopts partial agreements, a form of "variable geometry" co-operation, which allow a number of states to carry out a specific activity of common interest with the consent of other members.

A platform for voluntary associations
By granting consultative status to over 400 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Council of Europe is building a real partnership with those who represent ordinary people. Through various consultation arrangements (including discussions and colloquies) it brings NGOs into intergovernmental activities and encourages dialogue between members of parliament and associations on major social issues.

An international staff
Approximately 1800 international civil servants recruited from the member states make up the staff of the Organisation's secretariat which is headed by the Secretary General.

European funding
The Council is financed by the governments of member states whose contributions to the organisation's budget are calculated in relation to their population and wealth. The ordinary budget of the Council of Europe for the year 2004 amounts to 180,5 million euros.

Official languages
The official languages are English and French, but we also work in German, Italian and Russian. A number of texts exist in several languages on the website: **www.coe.int.**

3.2 The Committee of the Ministers

The Committee of Ministers is the Council of Europe's decision-making body. It comprises the foreign affairs ministers of the 46 member states, or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg. It is both a governmental body, where national approaches to problems facing European society can be discussed on an equal footing, and a collective forum, where Europe-wide responses to such challenges are formulated. In collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly, it is the guardian of the Council's fundamental values, and monitors member states' compliance with their undertakings.

Voice of the governments

Decisions and action
The Committee of Ministers decides on the activities of the Council of Europe. It also determines the action to be taken on recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, and on the proposals from various intergovernmental committees and conferences of specialised ministers. It approves the Council's programme of activities and budget.

Dialogue
The Committee of Ministers' discussions cover all questions of common political interest except defence: the political aspects of European integration, developing co-operation, safeguarding democratic institutions and protecting human rights - in other words, all problems which require concerted pan-European solutions.

An active body
The foreign affairs ministers of the 46 member states meet twice a year to review political issues and matters of European co-operation and to give the necessary political impetus to the Council's activities. They meet once a week at ambassador level and their deliberations are supplemented by meetings of rapporteur groups and working groups which consider certain issues in depth before decisions are taken.

Each minister chairs the Committee for a six-month term of office which traditionally changes in May and November.

Flexibility
When projects are not supported by all member states, the Committee of Ministers has the option of launching them under partial agreements which allow some members to pursue joint activities in certain areas.

On the other hand, enlarged agreements enable member states (or some of them) to work with certain non member states, giving them the benefit of the Council's permanent structure.

3.2.1 European solutions

Powerful instruments
The Committee of Ministers' decisions are sent to governments in the form of recommendations, or are embodied in European conventions and agreements which are legally binding on states that ratify them. The Committee also adopts declarations and resolutions on current political issues.

Over 190 conventions have been drawn up to date. They are concerned mainly with human rights but cover other areas which affirm and strengthen the Council of Europe's democratic, social and cultural cohesion.

Most of the Committee of Ministers' decisions require a two-thirds majority of votes cast but a simple majority is sufficient for procedural questions.

Specialist preparation
Conventions and recommendations are drafted by government experts responsible to the Committee of

Ministers, thereby providing for the interaction of political interests with technical and sectoral considerations. Many political initiatives are also taken at regular conferences of specialised ministers.

Democracy and solidarity
The Council of Europe has set up co-operation and assistance programmes for the new member states to allow them to draw on the Council's experience. The programmes are based on the results of intergovernmental collaboration at the Council - its reference texts, networks of experts and co-operation structures. Their purpose is to consolidate, strengthen and accelerate democratic reform in these countries so that they can integrate gradually and harmoniously into the processes and structures of European co-operation, above all the Council of Europe. The Confidence-Building Measures Programme has been established with a view to supporting civil society initiatives aimed at improving reciprocal knowledge and co-operation between majority and minority communities.

3.2.2 Guardian of values

Defending the Statute
Countries joining the Council undertake to accept the principles of the rule of law and their people's prerogative to basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. They also undertake to collaborate sincerely and effectively to achieve greater unity, and to facilitate their economic and social progress. Each member state is responsible for honouring these commitments and the Committee of Ministers ensures that they do so.

In the event of a serious violation by a member state of its obligations under the Statute, the Committee of Ministers can suspend the state's right of representation, invite it to withdraw or even decide that it has ceased to be a member of the Council.

Implementing conventions
The Committee of Ministers also ensures that conventions and agreements between member states are implemented. This is crucial in the case of human rights texts, the most important of which (the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities) provide for supervisory machinery.

The Committee of Ministers' responsibilities with regard to the European Convention on Human Rights reflect the importance of this convention, which is the cornerstone of the system of human rights protection in Europe. In supervising the execution by member states of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the Committee of Ministers plays an essential role in maintaining the credibility of a system without precedent in the world.

Respecting commitments
In accordance with the philosophy that has governed the Council's enlargement since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Committee of Ministers has exercised its responsibilities in an impartial and constructive spirit, emphasising dialogue and the gradual establishment of political and material conditions conducive to positive development. To this end, the Committee has introduced a monitoring system, which ensures that all member states respect their obligations. It offers all members the conditions and resources needed to nurture the Council's founding values.

The enlargement of the Council of Europe has led to significant changes in the organisation and role of the Committee of Ministers, with considerable development in the political aspect of its work.

Dialogue and complementarity
The Council of Europe has strengthened its dialogue with Europe's elected representatives at national and local levels and extended its political discussions to non-member states, including a number of non-European states with observer status (the United States, Holy See, Canada, Japan and Mexico). It has intensified its co-

operation with other European organisations, particularly the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and with the United Nations.

In the new millennium
In achieving this change of direction, the Committee of Ministers has, on occasion, received the political impetus it needed from the highest level. Two summits of heads of state and government have been held, in Vienna (8-9 October 1993) and in Strasbourg (10-11 October 1997). In adopting the "Budapest Declaration - For a Greater Europe Without Dividing Lines" in May 1999, the ministers set the Organisation's agenda for the twenty-first century.

3.3 The Parliamentary Assembly

The Parliamentary Assembly is one of the Council of Europe's two main statutory organs and represents the main political tendencies in its member states. The Assembly sees itself as the driving force in extending European co-operation to all democratic states throughout Europe.

Europe's democratic conscience
The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly was the first European assembly to be created in the history of our continent. With delegations from over 46 national parliaments, it is the most widely-based European assembly.

The Assembly is free to choose its own agenda; it deals with topics of current or potential importance including problems of contemporary society and aspects of international politics.

Its deliberations provide significant guidelines for the activities of the Committee of Ministers and the intergovernmental sectors of the Council of Europe, and also influence governments when members relay them to their national parliaments.

The historic events in central and eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s set the Assembly a unique challenge, that of helping to bring these countries into the fold of European democracies and encouraging genuine parliamentary co-operation between all European nations. The Assembly thus contributes to building a greater Europe without dividing lines.

The special guest status created by the Parliamentary Assembly in 1989 allowed parliamentary delegations from the emerging pluralist democracies of central and eastern Europe which were not full members of the Organisation to attend the Assembly's plenary sessions and committee meetings. The contacts and exchanges thus established encouraged the process of democratisation in these countries and facilitated their accession to the Council of Europe.

Structure and organisation: mirroring the European democracies
The Parliamentary Assembly's 315 members and their 315 substitutes are elected or appointed by national parliaments from among their own members. Each country has between 2 and 18 representatives depending on the size of its population. National delegations to the Assembly are composed in such a way as to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups in their parliaments.

The Assembly has five political groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD), European Democratic Group (EDG), Liberal, Democratic and Reformers' Group (LDR), and Group of the Unified European Left (UEL). Some members of the Assembly choose not to belong to any political group.

The Assembly meets quarterly for a week in plenary session in the Chamber of the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg. Sittings are public. It also holds a spring meeting in one of the member states.

The Assembly elects its president from among its members, traditionally for three consecutive one-year terms. The President, Vice-Presidents (18 at present) and the Chairs of the 5 political groups form the Bureau of the Assembly.

The Assembly also elects the Council of Europe's Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, the Secretary General of the Assembly, the judges of the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

Its work is prepared by specialist committees dealing with: political affairs, legal affairs and human rights, social, health and family affairs, culture, science and education, environment and agriculture, economic affairs and development, migration, refugees and demography, equal opportunities for women and men, and the honouring of obligations and commitments by member states.

Debates on European and world events
The agenda for each session features debates on European and world events and more generally, matters where action at European level is needed. Prominent dignitaries from all over the world have contributed to these debates (King Juan Carlos, François Mitterrand, John Paul II, Helmut Kohl, Mikhail Gorbachev, Václav Havel, Hosni Mubarak, Yasser Arafat and many others).

The Assembly also provides a discussion forum for other international organisations such as the OECD, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Space Agency and several specialised agencies of the United Nations.

Non-governmental organisations take part in a certain number of committees as observers and provide a valuable input to important events organised by the Assembly.

Initiatives leading to concrete results
Since 1989, the Assembly has assisted in crisis management throughout Europe. Its political debates have frequently been based on the findings of on-the-spot visits and ongoing dialogue with the states concerned. In this way, it has strengthened the Council of Europe's political role.

Assembly representatives make regular on-the-spot visits across Europe to gather first-hand information for drafting Assembly reports, undertake election observation and engage in parliamentary diplomacy.

The texts adopted by the Assembly provide significant guidelines for the Committee of Ministers, national governments, parliaments, political parties and other important areas of society. The Assembly has also initiated many international treaties, known as European conventions, and other legal instruments, forming the basis of a truly European system of legislation.
The best known of these is the European Convention on Human Rights, opened for signature in 1950 (see section on "Human rights: protection, promotion and prevention"). The Assembly is consulted by the Committee of Ministers on all draft conventions before they are adopted.

The Assembly also holds regular conferences, symposia and public parliamentary hearings on major topical issues such as: violence, intolerance, the environment, immigration, drugs, bioethics and the media.
These hearings take the form of a dialogue between parliamentarians and specialists.

What's the difference?
The *Parliamentary Assembly* comprises parliamentary representatives of all the Council of Europe's member states, who are elected or appointed by national parliaments.

The *European Parliament* comprises the directly elected representatives of the 27 member countries of the European Union.

Member states and their representation
Albania (4), Andorra (2), Armenia (4), Austria (6), Azerbaijan (6), Belgium (7), Bosnia and Herzegovina (5), Bulgaria (6), Croatia (5), Cyprus (3), Czech Republic (7), Denmark (5), Estonia (3), Finland (5), France (18), Georgia (5), Germany (18), Greece (7), Hungary (7), Iceland (3), Ireland (4), Italy (18), Latvia (3), Liechtenstein (2), Lithuania (4), Luxembourg (3), Malta (3), Moldova (5), Monaco (2), Netherlands (7), Norway (5), Poland (12), Portugal (7), Romania (10), Russian Federation (18), San Marino (2), Serbia and Montenegro (7), Slovak

Republic (5), Slovenia (3), Spain (12), Sweden (6), Switzerland (6), "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (3), Turkey (12), Ukraine (12), United Kingdom (18).

Observer status
The parliaments of Canada, Israel and Mexico enjoy observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly.

Special guest status
The special guest status of the Parliament of Belarus was suspended on 13 January 1997.

4. Bibliography

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