

European political cooperation

European File

In a troubled, rapidly changing world, dominated by the great continental powers, European countries acting alone have struggled to make their voices heard or shape the course of events. Admittedly, the European Community is increasingly seen by its partners as a single unit. More than 100 countries have direct, diplomatic ties with the Community. By volume of imports and exports, the Community is the world's largest trading power. It has a common customs tariff. It has concluded free trade agreements with its neighbours in the European Free Trade Association and a multitude of commercial and cooperation agreements with over 80 developing countries. The Community has observer status at the United Nations and takes part in international trade conferences (under the GATT) and development meetings such as Unctad and the North-South dialogue. It is in constant contact with the other major powers of the industrialized world. The Community takes part, for instance, in the Western economic summits, alongside the United States, Canada, Japan and four of its own Member States. It has signed agreements with many countries, not only on trade, but also on research, nuclear energy, the environment and fisheries.¹

And yet most foreign policy matters remain outside the scope of the Treaty of Rome. Here, more keenly than elsewhere, Member States remain sensitive to the preservation of their national sovereignty. The Community countries have, nevertheless, gradually come to realize that cooperation in this difficult area should be strengthened.

¹ See *European File* No 2/82: 'The European Community in the world'.

- The Member States are looking for a way to make their views known and play a more active role in world affairs. The combined voice of 270 million Europeans carries further than those of Member States, taken separately.
- It is increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between international, economic ties and foreign policy pure and simple. The process of economic integration of Community countries must entail a degree of convergence in foreign policy if it is to progress smoothly. Common economic policies inevitably affect a whole web of relations with non-member States. It would, for instance, be difficult for the Community to sign a cooperation agreement with a country whose policies are bitterly condemned by its Member States. On the other hand, a Member State cannot expect to develop relations with another country without broaching the subject of trade, which lies within the competence of the Community.
- The objective of the Community is to bring about a closer and closer union between the peoples of Europe. Such a union is necessarily political and must eventually embrace, in one form or another, foreign policy issues.

European political cooperation represents a preliminary step towards tackling these problems. From its outset, it has been seen by member governments as the natural and almost inevitable consequence of the economic union promoted by Community institutions. This cooperation can be defined as an attempt gradually to align the foreign policies of Community countries, while respecting their national sovereignty. For the time being, this exercise has no basis in the European treaties but is increasingly attracting the support of Community institutions.

Brief history

There is no treaty or regulation to provide a legal foundation for political cooperation. It has grown up on a voluntary basis, through a series of reports and meetings.

- At The Hague in December 1969, the Heads of State or Government of the then six Member States took simultaneous decisions to begin membership negotiations with the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, to extend Community activities and to study the best way of achieving progress in the matter of political unification, within the context of enlargement.
- At Luxembourg in October 1970, Community Foreign Ministers adopted the Davignon Report (named after the current Vice-President of the European Commission, who was then political director of the Belgian Foreign Ministry). A fundamental principle of this report was that a harmonization of foreign policy was as essential a step towards political union as Community action proper. The report suggested that political cooperation should be launched as an intergovernmental operation between sovereign States. This cooperation was to ensure through regular exchanges of information and consultations a better mutual understanding of the great international problems; to strengthen their solidarity by promoting the harmonization of their views, the coordina-

tion of their positions, and, where it appears possible and desirable, common actions. would be difficult to draft a more cautious and less binding agreement ! To put th agreement into effect, the Luxembourg report envisaged a series of procedures, which will be described later in their up-to-date form.

- In Copenhagen in July 1973, the Foreign Ministers of the enlarged Community adopted a new report which marked the first stage in the successful development of political cooperation. This report did not change the spirit of Member States' aims, but bolstered the procedures and clarified their objectives and moral obligations: the purpose of the consultations is to seek common policies on practical problems; the subject dealt with must concern European interests whether in Europe itself or elsewhere where the adoption of a common position is necessary or desirable. On these questions each State undertakes as a general rule not to take up final positions without prior consultations with its partners.
- In Paris in December 1974, Community Heads of State or Government decided to form themselves into a European Council to deal both with Community issues and political cooperation. Once again the nature of political cooperation remained unchanged but its objectives became more ambitious: gradually to adopt common positions and coordinate their diplomatic action in all areas of international affairs which affect the interests of the European Community. The leaders also asked the then Belgian Prime Minister, Mr Leo Tindemans, to draw up a report summarizing progress towards European Union. At the end of 1975, Mr Tindemans recommended the development of a common foreign policy, with an obligation on Member States to agree common positions. This would have ended the principle of 'voluntary' political cooperation. His ideas were not taken up.
- In London in October 1981, a further report by the Foreign Ministers declared that political cooperation 'which is based on membership of the European Community, has developed to become a central element in the foreign policy of all Member States'. There followed a clear statement, without the qualifications of earlier days, of intent to go beyond the stage of coordination and harmonization and to make political cooperation an operational force. The ministers stated that 'in a period of increased world tension and uncertainty the need for a coherent and united approach to international affairs is greater than ever. They note that, in spite of what has been achieved, the Ten are still far from playing a role in the world appropriate to their combined influence. It is their conviction that the Ten should seek increasingly to shape events and not merely to react to them'. Political cooperation was therefore not simply to make the Ten better heard on the world stage. It was to permit Member States to play a more active role.

How it operates

Political cooperation procedures have gradually strengthened to the point where the London Report was able to set them down in a kind of formal code. But as a, perhaps excessive, hang-over from the original, intergovernmental character of political cooperation, it was still given no secretariat of its own. To run political cooperation there is no

equivalent to the European Commission or even the secretariat of the Council of Ministers. Suggestions that a political secretariat should be created, to provide the kind of basic assistance which is frequently needed, have so far been rejected.

- The apex of the political cooperation system is the European Council, which unites the Heads of State or Government of Member States, their Foreign Ministers and the President and one member of the European Commission. These thrice-yearly summits deal both with Community issues and political cooperation. Part of each meeting, sometimes the largest part, is devoted to international problems and the drafting of statements which set out the position of Member States.
- The Foreign Ministers of the Ten meet at least once every three months to deal with political cooperation issues. Other meetings take place at the monthly sessions of the Council of Ministers, mainly taken up with Community problems. In addition, the ministers gather once every six months for informal so-called 'Gymnich-type' meetings, called after the castle near Bonn where the first meeting of this kind took place in 1974. Political cooperation issues traditionally occupy an important place at such meetings.
- The nerve centre of political cooperation is the Political Committee, made up of the political directors of the foreign ministries of the Ten. It meets at least once a month to prepare for ministerial meetings. In addition, it supervises and directs the work of expert groups of foreign ministry officials, set up to deal with particular problems. The Political Committee is assisted by a Correspondents' Group of senior ministry officials, which prepares meetings and monitors the implementation of decisions.

In its operations political cooperation is marked by pragmatism and an avoidance of bureaucracy. A telex network called Coreu (European correspondence) maintains a permanent contact between the Ten. The principal coordinating role is given to the country which holds the presidency, according to the same six months' rotation used in internal Community affairs. The duties of the presidency are considerable. It has to organize meetings and act as spokesman for all the governments in the European Parliament, in international arenas such as the United Nations and in contacts with third countries. All this represents a substantial burden, especially for the smaller countries. To lighten this load, the London Report decided to 'provide operational support for the presidency'. This was not to consist of a permanent administration but 'a small team of officials seconded from preceding and succeeding presidencies'.

Special arrangements are also made for relations between the political cooperation process and:

- The European Commission: at first the Commission had only a tentative connection, in areas related to Community activities. It now takes part in all political cooperation meetings and is actively involved at all levels. This involvement is justified by the growing interdependence of Community activities proper and political cooperation. To increase its effectiveness, political cooperation is relying more and more on the financial and trading powers of the Community in relations with third countries. At the

same time, some Community decisions are preceded by an examination at the political cooperation level.

- The European Parliament: since its first direct elections in 1979, Parliament has also become a significant factor in political cooperation. The presidency gives regular reports to the Assembly's Political Affairs Committee on political cooperation work. It also replies to members' questions during plenary sessions. There is also a flow of activity in the other direction. Parliament has shown an enormous interest in international affairs. It has produced many resolutions and reports on political cooperation subjects. In January 1983, for instance, the Assembly held a long debate on the role of Member States in resolving the conflict in the Middle East. It also discussed European security problems. Parliament's resolutions are not binding on governments but do influence the political cooperation process.

Principal themes

There are a number of subjects which are traditionally excluded from political cooperation, notably the military aspects of European security. These issues are dealt with by NATO and the Western European Union, to which not all Community Member States belong. Nevertheless, the Member States confirmed in their London Report that it was possible to discuss together 'certain important foreign policy questions bearing on the political aspects of security'.

The principal themes of political cooperation have included:

- *East-West relations*: during the four years of negotiations leading to the signature of the Final Act of the European Conference on Security and Cooperation (Helsinki, July 1975), Community countries, including those which were candidates for membership at the beginning, maintained a united front on all essential points, through a constant concertation of views. It was this exercise which led the European countries to discover the potential of political cooperation and to play a decisive role in the Helsinki discussions. This united front was maintained during the subsequent conferences in Belgrade and Madrid. Community countries were also able to make their voice heard during the Afghan and Polish crises. At the end of 1979 and the beginning of 1980, reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was undoubtedly slowed down because of technical reasons. This led to consideration of the need for machinery for calling emergency meetings. The Afghan issue was eventually given close and constant attention. Member States came out in favour of a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan. They also took action at Community level not to undermine the United States embargo on cereal exports to the Soviet Union. Later, on the occasion of the Polish crisis, Member States warned against outside intervention and, through the Community, gave emergency food aid. Since the military clamp-down in Poland, Member States have been exerting pressure for a return to a more liberal regime.
- *The Middle East*: political cooperation has allowed Member States to align their, once quite disparate, views on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the means of solving it. The

