

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 the 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

keynote of their interest in this issue and efforts to conciliate remains the Venice declaration of June 1980. It can be summed up in three points: the need for a global settlement; Israel's right to security; the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. The declaration was important for two reasons. It defined a possible peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict and it formed the basis of a European initiative. The then President of the Council of Ministers, Mr Gaston Thorn, since appointed President of the European Commission, was asked to make an explanatory tour of the Middle East. Many other ministers have followed in his footsteps, demonstrating their determination to keep the initiative alive. They have also attempted to elaborate the European position in order to keep abreast of positive developments, such as the peace treaty with Egypt, and negative aspects, such as the proliferation of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, the annexation of the Golan Heights and the invasion of Lebanon. The latter event illustrated once again the close links between political cooperation and Community activities proper. A meeting of the Community-Israel Cooperation Council and the signature of a new financial protocol were postponed as a signal of the disapproval of Member States. It should also be noted that political cooperation, with the support of the European Commission, has promoted a Euro-Arab dialogue, covering a variety of areas, including some falling within the competence of the Community.

- *Asia*: in the context of the cooperation agreement signed by the Community and the Association of South-East Asian Nations, close political links were established. Europe adopted a common stance on the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and helped to relieve the suffering of refugees. Earlier, Member States adopted sanctions against Iran in an attempt to secure the release of the American hostages. The conflict between Iran and Iraq is a current preoccupation of political cooperation, both because of its particularly bloody nature and the threat it poses to European oil supplies.
- *Africa*: this continent, especially the southern part of it, has been another constant concern of political cooperation discussions. Community countries have condemned apartheid and established a code of conduct for subsidiaries of European firms operating in South Africa. They supported the efforts of the United Kingdom to secure the independence of Zimbabwe. They also take a close interest in developments in Namibia. A number of Member States are among the group of nations nominated by the United Nations Security Council to monitor moves towards the independence of this country.
- *America*: in recent years political cooperation has taken a much closer interest in relations with American countries. It has carefully studied the development of relations with the United States. It has also demonstrated the willingness of Community countries to assist in the political stabilization of Central America. A special aid programme has been created towards this end. Recent relations with Latin America have been dominated by economic sanctions taken by the Community against Argentina as an act of solidarity following the invasion of the Falklands. Note that two Member States felt unable, for reasons of national policy, to renew these measures.
- *United Nations*: for several years Member States have been trying to harmonize their efforts in the United Nations. The presidency makes an annual political cooperation

speech, on behalf of Member States. Constant efforts are made to ensure that Member States vote the same way and give common explanations of vote. This undertaking is complicated by the often differing traditions and interests of Member States. Greek membership necessitated renewed efforts towards harmonization. Beforehand, however, the Community adopted common positions up to 70% of the time.

Like all experimental undertakings, political cooperation has had its weaknesses and even its failures. Even when a common approach has been achieved, it has often been difficult to judge its impact. But, after 12 years, the results are for the most part positive. The Community is still far from achieving a common foreign policy. But political cooperation has overcome the doubts and uncertainties of its beginnings and established a legitimate role. Its value is now rarely, if ever, contested. Over the years, it has become an increasingly important element in the joint activities of the Member States and an indispensable corollary of Community activities proper. It has, up to a point, 'Europeanized' the foreign policies of all Member States. The frequent contacts and almost automatic process of consultation has developed a kind of 'Community reflex'. In dealing with international problems or in the increasing number of multilateral conferences, both in the United Nations and in direct contacts with third countries, the Community presidency often calls for meetings or joint initiatives by diplomats of the Member States. Increasingly, these diplomats have come to be seen as part of a single organization, likely to speak with one voice. It is significant that China has recently shown an interest in regular exchanges of views on political cooperation subjects.

The last 12 years have seen the rapid development of a political machinery and the elaboration of new methods of working together. Little by little, political cooperation has grown out of being a mechanism for making statements and become an operational force, making use of Community powers and resources.

The importance of political cooperation and the need to strengthen it further have just been underlined by the solemn declaration on European Union which Community Heads of State or Government signed at the June 1983 European Council in Stuttgart. Beyond this, the draft treaty on European Union currently under debate in the European Parliament attaches great importance to political cooperation, as part of a gradual movement towards European Union, which could one day embrace security issues ■