

The European Community in the World

Although there is no single body responsible for foreign affairs within the EC, its member states do work together in a number of areas. The EC maintains diplomatic relations with more than 100 countries and with numerous international organizations. It is involved in international conferences on trade and development, and in North-South dialogue with developing countries. The EC has observer status at the United Nations.

The EC has signed trade and cooperation agreements with numerous countries, including Canada. It is a party to 37 international conventions, 17 of them on an exclusive basis (i.e., member states did not sign them). It has also committed significant amounts (12 billion European Currency Units (ECUs) for the period 1990-95) for aid and investment in the 69 developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific which are party to the Fourth Lomé Convention.

During the 1980s, the EC worked to develop a political identity commensurate with its growing economic influence. The member states decided to intensify their consultations and information-sharing on foreign policy initiatives.

The Single European Act gave official status to this intergovernmental consultative procedure, known as European political cooperation (EPC), and established a secretariat to assist the presidency in preparing and implementing EPC activities. The Commission is now fully involved in the work of the EPC.

The Treaty on European Union, scheduled to take effect on January 1, 1993, adds depth to EPC and establishes a common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Although still intergovernmental, the new process calls for systematic cooperation and consultation on foreign policy and security, and gives to the Commission a right of initiative equal to that of the member states, which it does not currently have within the framework of the EPC.

Moreover, under the CFSP, there are plans to develop a common defence policy, and the concept of a common defence as such has not been ruled out. Attached to the treaty is a declaration of the Union of Western Europe outlining the organic links with the EC and NATO.

The foreign policy decisions of EC-member countries are of the greatest import to Canada. The best example of this is the mediation of the EC and its member states in the Yugoslavian conflict.

In recent years, the EC and its member states have increasingly spoken in one voice on a growing number of matters. Through the European Commission, member states have mechanisms to implement the economic and trade aspects of foreign policy, regarding both the EPC and the CFSP, on a community-wide scale. An example of this is the leading role played by the Commission in coordinating western assistance for the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.