

The European Community and its Institutions

Background

Faced with the devastation of Europe after the Second World War, a group of visionary European politicians — among them Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer — decided to lay the foundations for a united Europe, without nationalism and its contentions, in order to prevent a similar conflict from arising again. They sought to build Europe "brick by brick" into a permanent structure. This European community, which would be formed from common institutions, would have as its purpose the economic and political rapprochement of the European peoples.

These common institutions were originally known as "communities" and included the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), established in 1951; the European Economic Community (EEC), founded in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome; and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM), the treaty for which was also signed in 1957.

These three institutions gradually came to be seen as a single "community," and in 1967 they were brought under the auspices of a single council of ministers and a single commission responsible for applying their treaties.

Institutions

Commission of the European Communities

The Commission of the European Communities comprises 23 branches which, like government departments, deal with various sectors of activity. The Commission ensures that treaties are applied, it prepares recommendations and opinions relating to these treaties, and exercises the mandates entrusted to it by the Council of Ministers. The Commission has exclusive power to initiate EC legislation and policies.

European Council

The European Council is composed of heads of state and government of the member countries. It meets at least twice a year — in the capital of the country holding the presidency of the Council of Ministers (the presidency alternates every six months among the member states). The European Council discusses internal and foreign policy matters and is responsible for setting the EC's general course of action.

Council of Ministers

This is the legislative and decision-making body of the EC in areas within its jurisdiction under the treaties. Each member state delegates to the Council a minister conversant in the matters under discussion. The councils on general affairs (foreign ministers), economy and finance, and agriculture usually meet once monthly.