

The European Community and the World

Although there is no single entity within the European Community (EC) that handles foreign affairs, the EC and its member states work together in several areas. The EC maintains diplomatic relations with more than one hundred countries and numerous international organizations. It takes part in international conferences on trade and development, as well as in North-South dialogue with developing countries. The United Nations recognizes the EC as an observer.

In the 1980s, the EC realized it had become an economic giant but nevertheless remained a political dwarf. Its members decided to consult among themselves more often and inform one another of their foreign policy initiatives. The Single European Act that came into force on July 1, 1987, enshrined this consultation procedure – called European Political Co-operation (EPC) – and established a secretariat to assist the president in planning and implementing EPC activities.

The EC has signed trade and co-operation agreements with numerous countries, including Canada. The EC is party to 37 international conventions, including 17 on its own, that is, without the member states having signed. It has committed significant funding (12 billion European Currency Units (ECUs) for 1990-95) to assist and invest in the 69 developing countries belonging to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group which is party to the Lomé Convention.

The EC members are countries whose foreign policy decisions are of greatest significance to us, and the EPC is their forum of discussion. In recent years the EC has expressed itself with one voice on a number of subjects. The Commission of the European Communities also provides the EPC with the means for implementing EC policy. The best example in this regard is undoubtedly the leading role played by the commission in co-ordinating Western assistance to East European countries.

However, the EPC must be distinguished from the EC's external relations, even though the commission and the EC's ministers of foreign affairs are involved in both activities. The EC's external relations concern its international jurisdictions as prescribed in the EC's constituent treaties (trade policy, fisheries, economic assistance, and so on).