

European Political Cooperation (1970-1993) An Institutional Approach

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ABSTRACT

Between 1970 and 1993, European Political Cooperation (EPC) was based on a minimal model of integration, the result of a compromise between the intergovernmental and supranational viewpoints of European partners. EPC, which was limited to the sovereign domain of foreign policy and relied upon an intergovernmental process, took place among the member states of European communities, but did so outside the community framework. The evolution of EPC was marked by considerable pragmatism, with a series of factors contributing to its deepening: actors such as member states, the European Commission, third countries, the process of European construction, and the international stage. Finally, political cooperation responded to the European goal of having Europe's voice heard in the world, and having a say in specific issues on the international scene such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Near East, Cyprus, Africa, Latin America, etc.



"October 27, 1970, adoption of the "Davignon Report" on political cooperation.
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The implementation of European Political Cooperation (EPC) during the 1970s marked a key moment in the process

of European construction. It helped take an important step towards political union, considered as the final goal of European integration from the outset, but which seemed inaccessible during the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout these two decades, Europeans were divided as to the form and content that political union should take. Two failures were sustained during this period. In 1954, the federally-inspired European Political Community was abandoned in the wake of the European Defence Community. Eight years later, the Fouchet plan, which proposed an intergovernmental form of political union, suffered the same fate. The question of political union was then put on hold until the end of the 1960s, when the Hague Summit (1969) gave new impetus for Europe, and opened the way for the implementation of EPC.

Between 1970 and 1993, when political cooperation gave way to a Common Foreign and Security Policy, EPC was based on a minimal model of integration, the result of compromise between the intergovernmental and supranational viewpoints of European partners. It evolved outside the community framework, and did not have a stable structure before 1987. Moreover, before its incorporation in the Single European Act, EPC was not legally binding. Created outside of the context of treaties, it involved the sole area of foreign policy, and was based for fifteen years on the Luxembourg (1970), Copenhagen (1973) and London (1981) reports, which were successively adopted by foreign ministers. EPC was based on an intergovernmental core. The primary organs were meetings of the foreign ministers and political directors, to which were added the rotating presidency and, from 1987 forward, support from a permanent secretariat, a group of correspondents, and geographical and thematic work groups. Links were nevertheless established between political cooperation and the European communities. EPC work took on a more confidential character, symbolized by implementation of the COREU system (1973), a telegraphic network ensuring rapid multilateral encoded communication. Finally, political cooperation responded to the European goal of having its voice heard in the world and having a say in particular issues on the international stage, such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Near East, Cyprus, Africa, Latin America, etc.

Arising from a gentleman's agreement between state actors, EPC developed as an "original product" of the European project. Its growth was caused by a series of factors that helped deepen the process. As political cooperation was based on a series of compromises between partners, its mode of operation helped it develop in a highly pragmatic manner. The actors—first and foremost national actors—were the primary factor influencing political cooperation, as well as the principal stakeholders in the development of EPC. Founded on cooperation between foreign ministries, political cooperation was fashioned on a dynamic of progressive unification between national administrations on all levels. The frequent meetings at the level of ministers, political directors, correspondents, experts or ambassadors created a true working community. Furthermore, through consultation, exchange and seeking out common positions, a feeling of belonging to political cooperation developed. The personal relations that were established, especially at the level of political directors and European correspondents, also brought about the emergence of a certain synergy within EPC, one that was fostered by maintaining these actors in their posts for a number of years. The representatives of small countries could moreover carry just as much weight as the representatives of large states, thanks to experience acquired within EPC and good knowledge of its workings. This coming together of national administrations augmented the European dimension in partners' foreign policy, with political cooperation gradually increasing in importance as a result.

The links established between political cooperation and the community framework also allowed the European Commission to have an influence on the evolution of EPC's operation. The Commission gradually took part in meetings at all levels of political cooperation, which allowed it to begin decompartmentalizing the economic and political components of European integration. By mobilizing its expertise and making itself indispensable for a certain number of policy issues, the Commission was able to establish its role in the EPC context beginning in the mid-1970s.

The evolution of the institutional system of the European Communities was another factor that contributed to

building political cooperation. The creation of the European Council (1974) had major consequences for EPC. A new balance was instituted in its operation, as the meetings of heads of state and government henceforth became the most important body in EPC. The European Council, appearing as the voice of Europe throughout the world, gave increased visibility and credibility to political cooperation. The implementation of these regular meetings also made it possible to precisely identify the role of political cooperation in the European process. By simultaneously overseeing EPC and the European communities, the European Council helped bring their courses of action closer together from the top-down.

The system underwent de facto changes, in that EPC addressed an increasing number of issues that soon involved every region of the world. The number of expert groups thus increased, gradually passing from two in 1970 (the Middle East, CSCE) to over ten at the end of the 1980s (Southern and Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, CSCE, UN, Euro-Arab dialogue, etc.).

The growing number of issues, along with the frequency of meetings, led the Europeans in 1973 to diversify EPC instruments and to adapt according to the circumstances. Common declarations were the primary method used by European partners to communicate their positions, enabling their voice to be heard on the international stage, and providing increased visibility. This process of position-taking also served to bring forth a common understanding regarding the different subjects addressed. In addition to common declarations, Europeans relied on instruments that were less visible from the exterior, such as ambassadorial or presidential proceedings. These instruments were quickly accompanied by crisis management capabilities (1974), needed for the implementation of urgent action as well as for political ends as an economic weapon (1977).

A final influence on the evolution of operations was pressure from third countries, especially those from the Western camp that were not indifferent to political cooperation. Fear of a *fait accompli*, or the desire to develop exchanges with Europeans on international questions, prompted certain European states and organizations to seek out association with EPC in one form or another. The United States (1974), Turkey (1972), Greece (1974) and countries from the European Council (1975) soon asked that informational channels be established with political cooperation. This offers clear proof that thanks to EPC, Europeans were seen as a single entity on the international stage.

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