

PRESIDENCY HANDBOOK

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I. INTRODUCTION

This handbook will give you both an overview of the characteristics of the Presidency and practical advice on how to execute it. Practice has played a large part in defining the role of the Presidency. Experience over the years has fleshed out the Presidency's role, the main features of which are described in this handbook. And remember that all along the road the staff of the [General Secretariat of the Council \(GSC\)](#) are there to help and assist you in every aspect of the work!



Europa building

THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL

The [Treaty on European Union \(TEU\)](#) and the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#) contain a number of provisions dealing with the role of the Council Presidency and the conditions under which it is exercised. However, the Presidency's overall role is not described by the treaties, nor are detailed instructions and procedures set out on how to execute it. To this end, the Council has adopted a set of rules and procedures, which you will find in [Comments on the Council's Rules of Procedure](#). To help member states to prepare their Presidencies, the GSC offers a wide range of types of support. For a comprehensive list of the types of support available, please see the [GSC service package for the Presidency](#).

Key tasks of the presidency

- Planning, coordinating and chairing meetings of the Council and most of the [Council's preparatory bodies, i.e. working parties and committees](#).

- Suggesting compromise solutions with a view to reaching an agreement in the Council ('honest broker').
- Representing the Council in its relations with the [European Parliament \(EP\)](#), the [Commission](#) and other EU institutions.
- Negotiating on behalf of the Council to reach agreements on legislative files with other EU institutions.
- Participating in the external communication effort on the activities of the Council

The [High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy](#) presides over the [Foreign Affairs Council](#), while Councils dealing with trade and enlargement are chaired by the rotating Presidency. This has implications for the chairing of the Council's preparatory bodies in this area. Hence, the [Political and Security Committee](#) and other working groups are chaired by a representative of the High Representative.

The presidency works in 'trio'

The Presidency is held by pre-established groups of three member states, called 'the trio', for a period of 18 months. The groups are put together on the basis of equal rotation among the member states, taking into account their diversity and geographical balance within the Union. Each member of the group chairs in turn, for a period of 6 months, all configurations of the Council, with the exception of the foreign affairs configuration. The same applies to most of the Council's preparatory bodies.

The order of Presidencies is defined by a [Council decision](#).



Trio presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia

There is only one Presidency

The counterpart to the single Council is the single Presidency ([Council's Rules of Procedure \(CRoP\)](#)), which is exercised on a permanent basis in the field of foreign affairs or by rotation in other areas. References to the Presidency or to the President are to any person chairing one of the Council configurations or one of the Council's preparatory bodies. Coordination between the different Council configurations, including their preparatory bodies, and between the various persons involved in the Presidency, is therefore essential.

The Presidency is neutral

The Presidency is, by definition, neutral and impartial. It is the moderator for discussions and cannot therefore favour either its own preferences or those of a particular member state. This means taking due account of all positions expressed.

The obligation to be neutral exists alongside the political dimension, which is reflected in the priorities set in the choice and handling of dossiers. These priorities reflect the stage of maturity of dossiers and the deadlines that apply to them, as well as the political priorities that the Presidency wishes to set for its semester.

In its role as moderator, the Presidency must also take action where it notes a stalemate; this may require compromise suggestions to reconcile the different interests involved in a single

issue or a set of interconnected issues, which inevitably means that political choices have to be made.

The Presidency is in the hands of the Council

The Presidency may propose any procedural decisions, which then must be taken by the Council by a simple majority¹. More specifically, any statement by or letter from the Presidency expressing a Council position, particularly regarding its relations with the other institutions, presupposes the agreement of the Council or the [Permanent Representatives Committee \(Coreper\)](#).

The Presidency deploys national resources

A major effort by the entire national administrative apparatus is required to get the Presidency prepared and up and running. The magnitude of this extra workload for national administrations (in both the capitals and permanent representations) should not be underestimated. The success of a Presidency depends to a large extent on how well it is prepared and how clearly responsibilities are divided between the capital and the permanent representation. In any case, the administration of the member state taking on the Presidency does not work in isolation. It has the support of the GSC.

Preparation of the Presidency

In the run-up to the Presidency, the GSC contributes to the preparations. It gives advice covering organisational, staffing and decision-making procedures and other aspects, including media guidance. In particular, before the start of the Presidency, it also offers a range of seminars and briefings to key officials at the permanent representation and in the capital of the member state concerned.

For information, please contact: prepareyourpresidency@consilium.europa.eu



Presidency preparation seminar

THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE COUNCIL

The role of the GSC is to assist the European Council and its President, and the Council and its Presidencies. This role applies to the Council and its preparatory bodies as an institution, irrespective of the Council configuration or of whether the Presidency is permanent or rotating.

Assisting the Presidency takes many forms. The GSC assists the Presidency by providing practical, procedural and strategic advice. The GSC is closely and continually involved in organising, coordinating and ensuring the coherence of the Council's work and the implementation of its 18-month programme. Under the responsibility and guidance of the Presidency, it assists the latter in seeking solutions.

The Secretary-General, Jeppe Tranholm-Mikkelsen, is the head of the GSC and holds overall political responsibility for its activities. In this work, the Secretary-General has ultimate responsibility for the organisation and execution of the services provided by the GSC as a whole, and to the Presidency in particular, for meetings of the European Council, the Council and its preparatory bodies. He or she takes part in meetings of the European Council, of the General Affairs Council and, where appropriate, of certain other Council configurations. He or she maintains close contact with Coreper.

The Secretary-General, or a director-general acting on his or her behalf, gives notice of the acts adopted by the Council. The normal practice is for the Presidency to be consulted prior to such notification. The Secretary-General or a senior Council official may, acting on the Presidency's instructions, represent the Council before European Parliament committees.

Planning of work and logistical support

The GSC supports the Presidency in its responsibilities for organising work, drawing up the working calendar, setting the dates of meetings, convening meetings and arranging briefings before meetings. The GSC supports the Presidency in all logistical matters, which are described in [practical arrangements](#).

Support in the decision-making process

Before and during meetings, the GSC informs the Presidency about the procedures applicable and draws up all relevant documents at every stage of the decision-making process (working parties, committees, Coreper and Council). It makes sure that those reports are circulated.

The GSC has an advisory role vis-à-vis the Presidency that manifests itself in different ways; in particular it is involved — to varying degrees — in working out the terms of Presidency compromises, in respect of both drafting and content.

The GSC assists and advises the Presidency in its relations with the European Parliament, and organises and accompanies the Presidency in its meetings with representatives of the EP, in particular in trilogues.

Advice in legal matters

The Legal Service of the Council is the legal adviser to the European Council and the Council. While the Legal Service is an integral part of the GSC, it is independent in the opinions it gives. Representatives of the service attend working party, committee, Coreper, Council and European Council meetings, and are called upon to answer any legal questions raised during discussions or to ensure the legal accuracy of texts to be adopted by the Council. Oral contributions by the Legal Service, which are in some cases set down in written form, play an important part in helping the Presidency and delegations to conduct proceedings.

The Legal Service, and in particular its team of legal/linguistic experts, is also responsible for ensuring the drafting quality of legislative acts.

External communication

Within the GSC, the Directorate-General for Communication and Information (COMM) is the leading service on external communication matters. It develops a wide range of communication material and activities to reach out to key audiences on the various Council/European Council/Eurogroup policies. The GSC explains the role of the Council and communicates its decisions; it does so in a factual and impartial way. The rotating Council presidency will, for its part, highlight issues that reflect its policy priorities and achievements. Successful communication depends on the complementary roles of the GSC and the presidency, and on working very closely together.

Ahead of and during each presidency, COMM offers strategic advice, training, communication products and infrastructure as well as day-to-day support to the presidency. At the same time, COMM also supports the presidency in engaging and informing the public via events, conferences and various communication and transparency channels - including through key multipliers.

A full presentation of the support provided by COMM before and during the presidency is available in the 'GSC Communication service package for the presidencies of the Council of the European Union'.

To initiate contact with COMM and start your presidency preparations, please contact Ms Nicole BAYER, Director Media and Communication, Email:

media.communication@consilium.europa.eu, Phone:

+32 2 281 89 31



Doorstep of President Michel

The GSC has created a [web portal](#) where you can find important information on how to prepare the Presidency; it contains handbooks, information about seminars and briefings, contact persons, etc.

The portal also contains information about meetings and meeting documents. It gives you the possibility of creating your own personalised dashboard with planned meetings and meeting documents. It is also possible to create text message or email alerts, so that you are informed promptly when your dossier is to be dealt with at a meeting.

Handbooks

Besides this handbook, there are also several other useful guides prepared by the GSC:

- [Comments on the Council's Rules of Procedure — European Council's and Council's Rules of Procedure](#)
- [Guide to the ordinary legislative procedure](#)
- [Ordinary legislative procedure — Guide for the Presidency](#)
- [FAQ — Organising the Presidency of the Council of the EU: Practical aspects](#)
- [Delegates handbook](#)
- [Translating for the Presidency](#)

II. GETTING READY FOR THE PRESIDENCY

Incoming Presidencies are encouraged to make initial contact with the GSC (Directorate for General Policy at prepareyourpresidency@consilium.europa.eu) about three to four years in advance. Preparatory meetings between the Presidency representatives and the relevant GSC officials will mostly be held in Brussels. The GSC will assist and guide you in all aspects of the Presidency. We outline below the steps that should be taken before the Presidency starts.

TRIO PROGRAMME AND TIMETABLE

For each 18-month period, the three next Presidencies together - trio - prepare a programme of Council activities for that period (see [example](#)). They have to present their draft programme in a single document to the [General Affairs Council](#) for endorsement no later than one month before the first member of the - trio - starts its Presidency. The draft is prepared in close contact with the President of the Foreign Affairs Council, the Commission and the President of the European Council. The GSC assists the 'trio' throughout this exercise.

For further information, please contact the GSC Antici and GSC Mertens.

Each Presidency presents, for each configuration (including the foreign affairs configuration), a working calendar of the meetings (see below) to be held by the Council during its semester. This timetable must be available seven months before the beginning of the semester concerned, and must also be presented in a single document.

[Example of working calendar of meetings](#)

Here are some tips for the Presidency on preparing the timetable:

- try to spread work out as evenly as possible over the semester, particularly in order to avoid an over-concentration of work at the end;
- avoid overlapping meetings so that members of Coreper (both I and II) can participate in Council meetings if necessary;
- avoid scheduling more than two Council meetings on the same day;
- do not schedule meetings on public holidays observed by the EU institutions, except in justified cases.

To ensure that the number of meetings scheduled by the Presidency matches the GSC's available resources, the Presidency should draw up a timetable for the meetings in conjunction with the Protocol and Meetings Directorate of the GSC (meetings.planning@consilium.europa.eu).

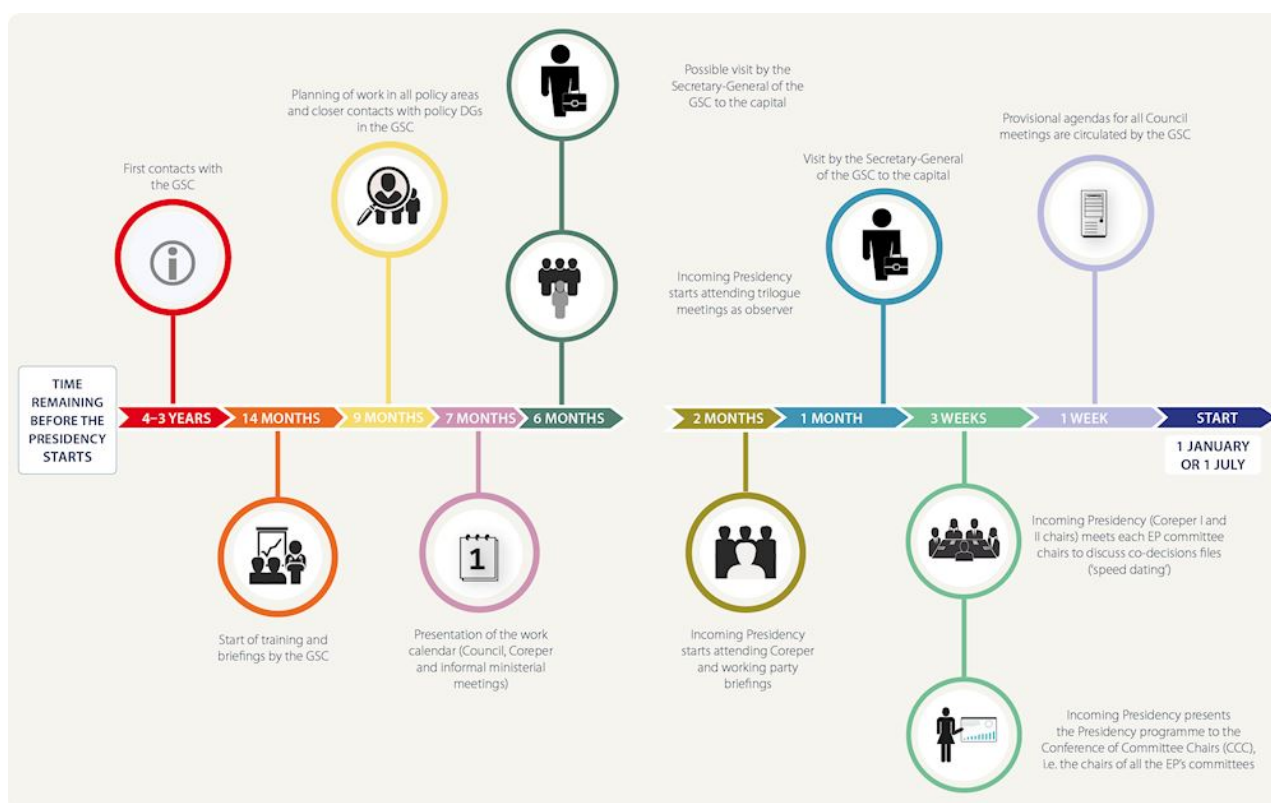
Changes to the timetable may sometimes be necessary, and the Presidency can always make changes by proposing to cancel or add a meeting or to change dates. In any event, the

Presidency should convene Council meetings only when there is a substantive agenda (that is, when there are policy decisions to be taken or political guidelines to be given). Sessions of the Council should not be convened for presentations or information points only. Limited use should be made of the option of adding extra Council meetings because of the costs involved and the availability of ministers.

It is also generally accepted that at least one month's notice is needed for unscheduled Council meetings, except in extraordinary circumstances. If it does change the timetable, the Presidency must make sure to consult Coreper. Any requests from the Commission or delegations for changes to the timetable must also be made in Coreper.

With regard to venues for meetings, the Council has its seat in Brussels. During the months of April, June and October, the Council holds its meetings in Luxembourg. In exceptional circumstances and for duly substantiated reasons, the Council or Coreper, acting unanimously, may decide that a Council meeting be held elsewhere. This can happen when a meeting of the Council is required to take decisions or give political guidelines in the margins of international negotiations (for example, a WTO ministerial session).

The Presidency must comply with the number of configurations in which the Council meets, in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.



Indicative timeline for Presidency preparations, showing the most important steps only

INDICATIVE AGENDAS

Each Presidency draws up draft agendas (see [example](#)) for all Council meetings scheduled for the following semester, setting out the legislative work and operational decisions planned.

Work on these provisional agendas is done in cooperation between the incoming Presidency and the GSC, and has to begin at least nine months before the Presidency starts.

Approximately six to eight weeks before the start of the Presidency, the GSC presents to the incoming Presidency a first draft. The Commission is consulted during the process and the EEAS contributes to the Foreign Affairs Council part.

The Presidency finalises the draft agendas and circulates them at the latest one week before the start of the Presidency. Subsequent substantive changes to the agendas should be confined to cases of strict necessity, as all delegations will gear their preparations towards this overview.

Good coordination between the institutions and a smooth transition between Presidencies mean that each Presidency should:

- update the list of files to be examined in the semester concerned;
- assess the importance of each file and its political or technical nature;
- in the case of files under the ordinary legislative procedure take particular account of the timetable that is imposed by the treaty and by the schedule of sessions of the Council and the European Parliament;
- use the presentation and terminology that have become established (see [ST 8338/1/15 REV 1](#) and the OLP guide).

CHAIRPERSONS AND OTHER KEY PERSONS

Chairpersons

One of the first tasks when setting up the Presidency is to appoint the chairs of the various working parties and committees. In all, about 170 working parties and committees need to be chaired. However, some working parties and committees are chaired by an appointed president, not by the rotating Presidency. Future chairs should be appointed in sufficient time to allow them to acquaint themselves with the proceedings and subjects. The GSC provides briefing programmes tailored to the needs of each Presidency.

Special provisions on the appointment of chairpersons

In accordance with Article 20(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure the Presidency can request that another delegation chairs a configuration of a Working Party during the period of the Presidency on behalf of the Presidency. Council is then asked to agree to these arrangements in accordance with Article 19(4) of the Council's Rules of Procedure. This is without prejudice to alternative Chairing Arrangements for EU coordination meetings on the spot.

For the budgetary procedure, meetings of the Council's preparatory bodies, other than Coreper, must be chaired by a delegate of the member state that is to hold the Presidency during the second six-month period of the year prior to the financial year in question.

List of Council preparatory bodies

Meeting coordinator

The Presidency must designate a person at the permanent representation as a meeting coordinator for the practical aspects of the organisation of meetings. The meeting coordinator acts on behalf of the chair of Coreper. This person will remain in regular contact with the GSC departments responsible for reserving rooms and interpreters (the Meeting Planning office within the Protocol and Meetings Directorate: meetings.planning@consilium.europa.eu), and he or she must have the authority to take on-the-spot decisions.

The meeting coordinator notifies the General Secretariat of the Presidency's priorities, particularly in cases where the demands of translation, document production, interpretation or meeting rooms exceed available capacities. The meeting coordinator needs to be empowered to inform the GSC of the Presidency's priorities, and must be able to negotiate with working party chairs and, if need be, arbitrate.

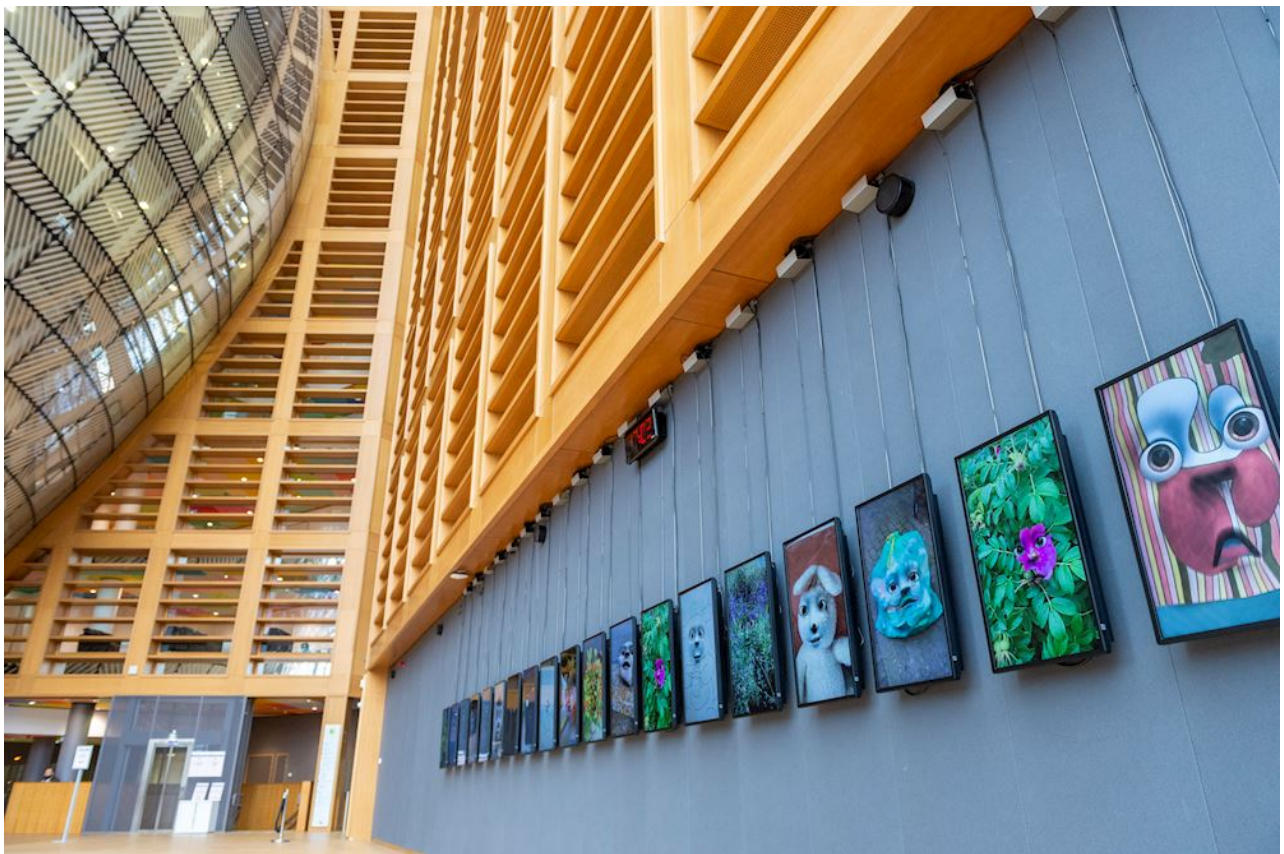
The meeting coordinator should, as far as possible, be free to work exclusively on these tasks, and should preferably have a thorough knowledge of the decision-making procedure.

DECORATION AND EXHIBITIONS

Each Presidency has the opportunity to present their country in an exhibition of their choice.

Various places in JL, EB and LEX can be decorated and furnished by the Presidency. Any suggestion for the use of those areas must be submitted to the Director of Protocol and Meetings for authorization. The project should be ready at least 3 months before the start of the Presidency.

For information and specifications of each area, please see [FAQ - Organising the Presidency of the Council of the EU](#), or contact: protocol@consilium.europa.eu



Entrance hall of Europa building - decorated by Presidency

III. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The decision-making process comprises several stages from the examination of a proposal until the final decision. Officials from relevant services of the GSC assist the Presidency throughout this process. The procedural aspects, including any consultation of other institutions and bodies of the Union, are explained in the [Comments on the Council's Rules of Procedure](#) (2016). Information and explanations regarding the ordinary legislative procedure are available in the [Guide to the ordinary legislative procedure](#) (2016) and in the [Ordinary legislative procedure - Guide for the Presidency](#) (2016).

[The list of Council preparatory bodies](#) is regularly updated and published by the GSC.

[The ordinary legislative procedure](#) is the standard procedure in EU law-making.

[The GSC service package for the Presidency](#) describes in detail the support that the Presidency can expect from the GSC, in particular in relation to this procedure. The GSC offers the following:

1. In-depth knowledge of the ordinary legislative procedure. This includes the possibility of providing guidance to the Presidency on the internal rules and processes of the other institutions — the role of key players, lead directorates-general, working groups and committees, as well as the Commission's programming of coming proposals.
2. Understanding of the positions of the three institutions (including political positions of delegations, the Commission, the EP's rapporteurs/shadows and political groups, as appropriate, depending on the stage of the file). The GSC can therefore provide comprehensive information on key developments of dossiers in the Commission and the EP (notably EP plenary/committee debates and votes).
3. Expertise in the process of achieving negotiating mandates in the Council. This includes:
 1. drafting compromise proposals, in close cooperation with the Council Legal Service;
 2. advising on:
 - the need for, and how to obtain, a mandate before starting negotiations;
 - the different procedures required to obtain Coreper or Council-level mandates (e.g. 'general approaches') as well as the implications and risks of each choice;
 - the Presidency's prerogatives and responsibilities before or in the absence of a negotiating mandate.
4. Expertise in the process of organising, preparing and conducting trilogues, making the Presidency fully aware of the Council's institutional prerogatives, so that trilogues can take place in an efficient and fruitful manner. This also includes, and as appropriate:
 1. written and/or oral briefings before each trilogue;
 2. strategic and tactical advice during trilogues (including on compromise solutions and key inter-institutional issues) and provision of clear conclusions on outcomes;

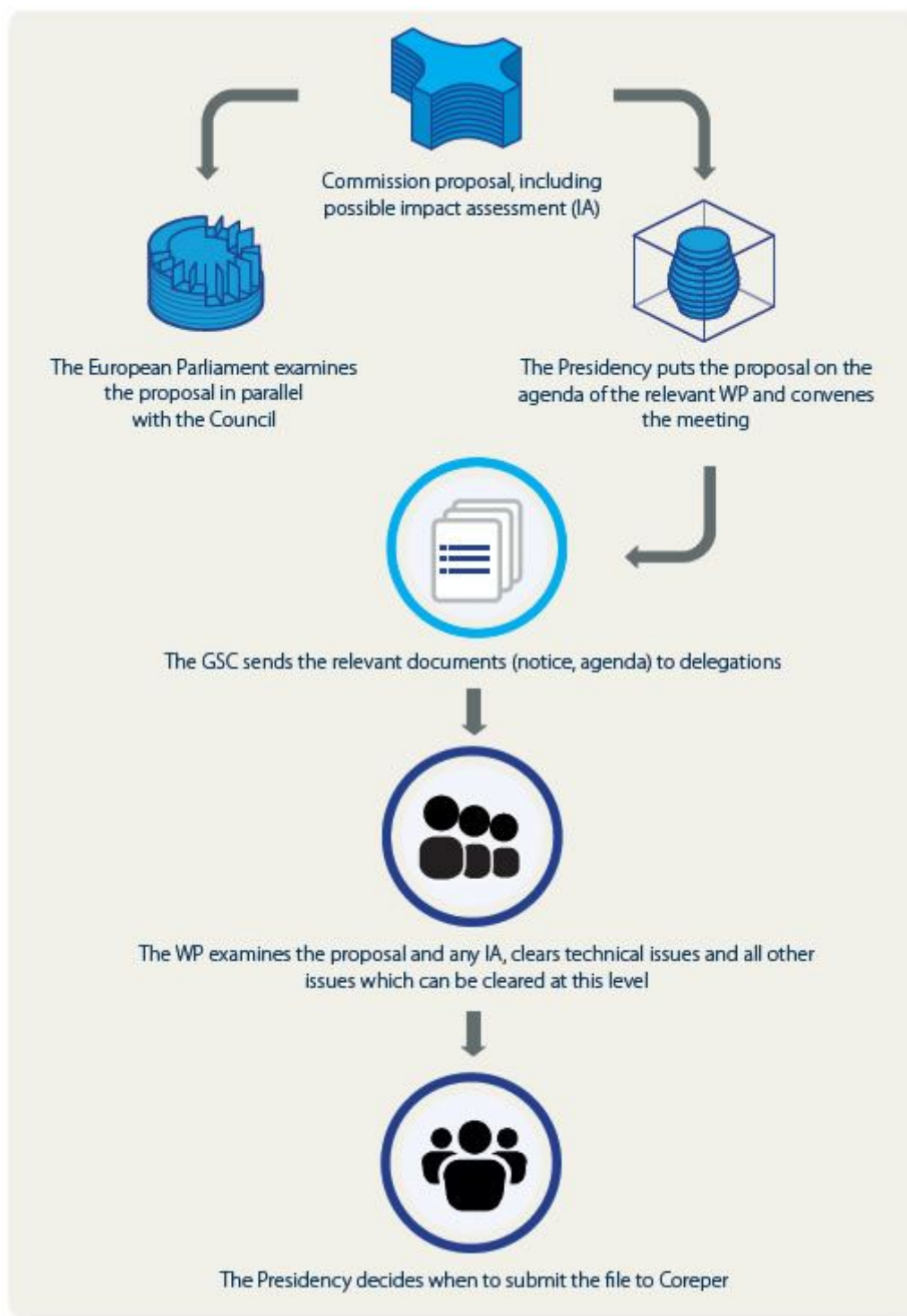
3. advice on the debriefing of delegations and on the process of concluding negotiations on a file.
5. Constant contact between the relevant GSC departments, the lead directorates-general, the Council Legal Service, the Directorate for Inter-institutional Relations (GIP2) and the Council Press Office. This includes:
 1. timely advance warning on important developments on files under the ordinary legislative procedure;
 2. close cooperation in the preparation of appropriate press releases including, whenever possible, joint inter-institutional communications.

WORKING PARTIES AND COMMITTEES

The working party or a committee is the first stage in the decision-making process within the Council. It follows similar rules of procedure to those of Coreper and the Council (see [Council's Rules of Procedure Annex V](#)). In a working party, the national delegates examine the proposal in depth, article by article, and explore compromise options. Horizontal or institutional issues normally require discussion in Coreper, as do the most difficult political questions.

A working party reports to Coreper only when it considers that sufficient groundwork has been done and that all issues that could be resolved at its level have been resolved. The decision to ask Coreper to resolve outstanding issues in relation to the dossier is for the Presidency to take, in consultation with the GSC.

Relations between the chair and the delegate representing the member state holding the Presidency must be clarified before the meeting. This is in order to avoid confusion with a national position and any contradictory situation that would compromise the clarity of discussions. It seriously compromises the authority of the chair if he or she presents the views of their member state!



First stages of the decision-making process within the Council

Preparations

The Presidency, with the assistance of the GSC, prepares the agendas for all working party meetings. It is usual, before every working party meeting, to set up a briefing between the Presidency and the relevant GSC officials (appropriate directorate-general, Legal Service). The Commission representative may be invited. The Presidency is responsible for setting up these briefings with the assistance of the GSC.

Once the GSC has received a Commission proposal in all language versions, the relevant working party is convened to examine it. With the Presidency's agreement, the GSC issues the notice of meeting and the agenda as well as all of the documents to be examined. They are

generally sent out at least one week before the meeting, the reason for this being that delegations would be unable, in most cases, to adopt positions on documents circulated at the last minute.

The choice of meeting dates takes into account the availability of meeting rooms and interpreting facilities, as well as likely dates for discussion in Coreper or the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA). The Presidency must organise the meetings of the various committees and working parties so that their reports are available before the Coreper meetings at which they are to be examined and, unless considerations of urgency require otherwise, the Presidency must postpone to a subsequent Coreper meeting any legislative items on which the committee or working party has not completed its discussions at least five working days prior to Coreper's meeting. In some cases, scheduled dates for meetings with the European Parliament will also need to be factored in.

Negotiations

The discussions and negotiations at the meetings are important, but for negotiations to be effective it is necessary to use the time between meetings. Thus, the chair, with the support of the GSC, can try to resolve outstanding issues through bilateral and multilateral exchanges with delegations and the Commission. The chair can also conduct written consultations by requesting delegations to submit written comments on a proposal. It is important for the chair to brief the working party on the results of his or her multilateral consultations or to circulate the comments received from delegations. This allows the chair to base the Presidency compromise proposals on delegations' comments in an objective manner.

For legislative proposals accompanied by an impact assessment, there is a Council procedure to be followed when examining such assessments. Detailed guidance, including a [checklist](#), is set out in Impact assessments - Guidance for working party chairs. The indicative guidance for working party chairs also includes information regarding the process for the Council to decide to carry out an Impact Assessment of an own substantial amendment. The Commission should be invited to present the impact assessment to the working party at the same time as it presents the legislative proposal.

The chair should organise the discussion at the working party in such a way as to enable delegations to express their views on the Commission impact assessment. When the legislative proposal is referred from the working party to Coreper/Council, the report should include a summary of the impact assessment discussion, if appropriate.

Outcome

In principle, the proceedings of working parties do not need to lead to an outcome. In general, new compromise texts are the next step for the examination of legislative proposals.

As far as an outcome is concerned, there are no final decisions nor votes in the working party. To get an indication, however, the chair can hold an informal poll of delegations' positions. At the end of the meeting, the chair will draw conclusions, summarising the content of the discussions and listing the points on which agreement seems possible, those raising political or horizontal questions to be referred to Coreper and perhaps also those requiring further examination at a subsequent working party meeting. The chair must in all cases ensure that a dossier is submitted to Coreper only when there is a reasonable prospect of progress or clarification of positions being achieved at that level.

Next steps

After the working party meeting, the GSC and the Presidency discuss what follow-up steps to take. These steps may include drafting compromises or other documents.

Once a working party chair comes to the conclusion that a dossier could be put on the agenda of Coreper, the chair informs the relevant desk officer at the GSC and the chair of the Antici or Mertens group (depending on the subject matter). The chair of the Antici or Mertens group will inform respectively the Coreper II or Coreper I teams in the GSC and will determine the date on which the item will be dealt with by Coreper. However, an item can be put on the agenda of Coreper only when the relevant service of the GSC makes a formal inscription to the GSC Coreper teams. On the basis of the inscriptions it receives, the GSC Coreper teams draw up draft agendas for Coreper I and II in consultation with the Presidency. The final draft is approved by the chair of the Antici or Mertens groups before the agenda is issued.

The Nicolaïdis Group

The Nicolaïdis Group assists with the organisation of meetings of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) — which is also involved in preparing for Coreper's CFSP- related work — for example by going through the provisional agendas in advance, deciding the order in which items should be taken and dealing, if necessary, with practical arrangements for the meeting.

Arrangements specific to the common foreign and security policy (CFSP)

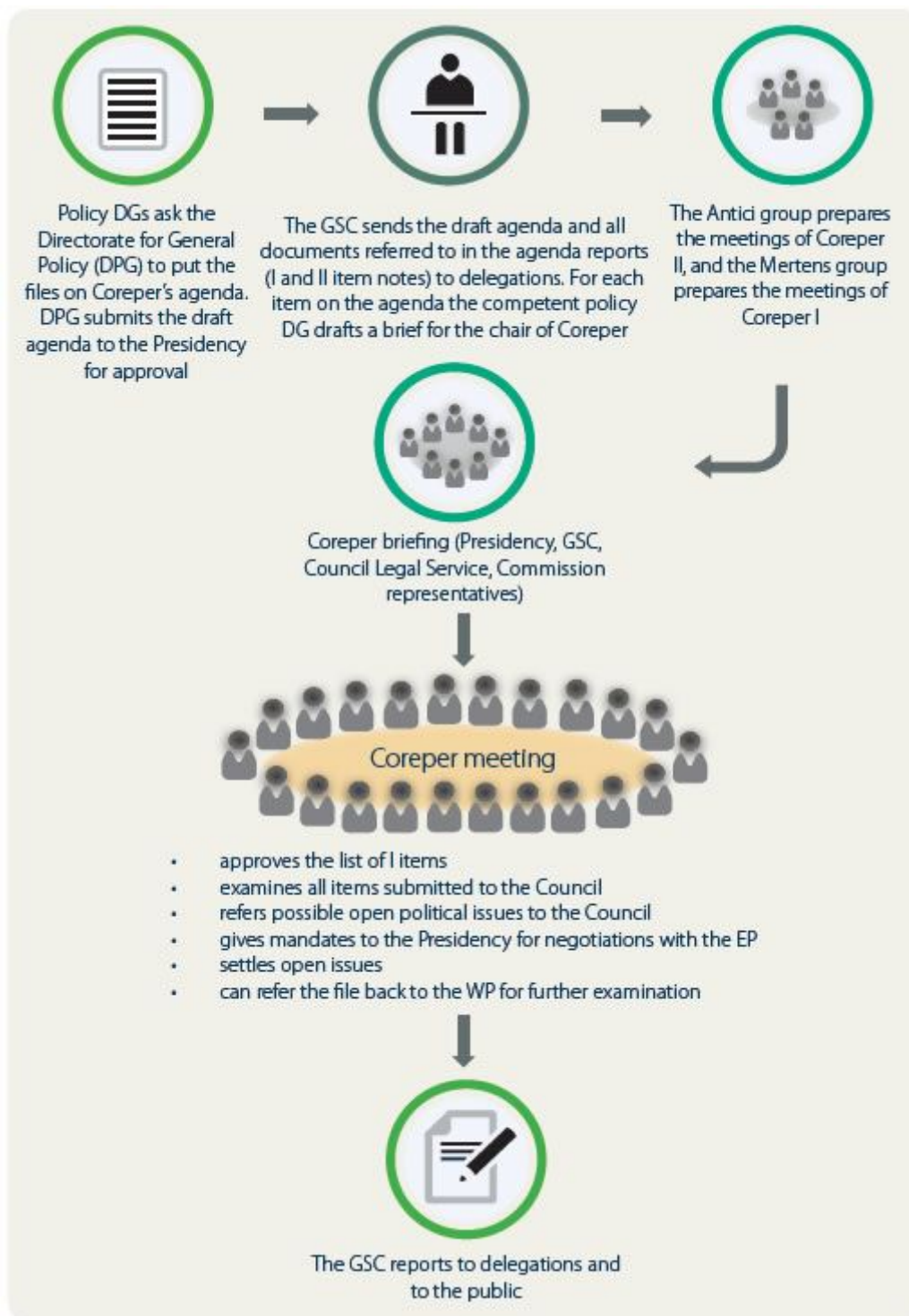
Working parties in the CFSP area meet with varying frequency. Notices of meetings, often with an annotated agenda, are normally sent to the capitals, the Commission and the permanent representations at least one week before the meeting.

They are mostly chaired by representatives of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, or by a rotating Presidency chair, with the assistance of the GSC. Working parties contribute to the preparation of Council decisions and/or positions by regularly bringing together experts from member states' relevant ministries ('capitals configuration') and/or permanent representations ('Brussels configuration'). They carry out their work on the basis of instructions from the [Political and Security Committee](#) (PSC) (in the field of CFSP) and/or Coreper.

The formal outcome of meetings of CFSP working parties is represented by the operational conclusions. These are drafted by the GSC in agreement with the Presidency and approved by the Member States who are thereafter bound by them. The operational conclusions can either be approved in the room (as it is the case with the PCS) and then distributed via COREU, or they can be agreed by a 'silent' procedure, which expires according to the timeline indicated in the COREU message.

Arrangements specific to justice and home affairs (JHA)

As a result of the integration of the Schengen acquis into the European Union, many of the meetings referred to above are also frequently held in 'mixed committee' format with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, as these countries are also involved in cooperation in this area. However, the mixed committee format cannot be a substitute for normal meetings.



Coreper (I and II) examines items previously discussed in the WP

COREPER — THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE

Coreper generally examines items that have been discussed previously in the working parties. Coreper is made up of the (deputy) permanent representatives of the governments of the member states and is responsible for preparing the work of the Council. This horizontal task applies to the Council in all its configurations, except for the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, for which preparations are traditionally carried out by the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) for most matters relating to agriculture, and to all areas falling within the Union's sphere of competence. Veterinary and zoo technical harmonisation, as well as the harmonisation of

plant health, animal feedingstuff and plant and seed legislation, traditionally go through Coreper.

Coreper's role is to ensure that the following are observed:

1. the principles of legality, subsidiarity, proportionality and providing reasons for acts;
2. rules establishing the powers of Union institutions and bodies;
3. budgetary provisions;
4. rules on procedure, transparency and the quality of drafting.

All items on the agenda for a Council meeting have to be examined in advance by Coreper, unless otherwise decided by Coreper (by simple majority) or, in urgent cases, by the Council (voting unanimously).

Coreper is divided into two parts:

- Coreper I, composed of the deputy permanent representatives, which meets on Wednesdays as a rule, but often also on Fridays, if needed;
- Coreper II, composed of the permanent representatives, which usually meets on Wednesdays as a rule, but can also meet on Thursdays, Fridays or Mondays, if needed.

The allocation of tasks, which is decided by Coreper itself, is:

- Coreper I: preparation of Council meetings in the following configurations: Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO), Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space) (COMPET), Transport, Tele- communications and Energy (TTE), Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH), Environment (ENV), and Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS);
- Coreper II: institutional matters and preparation of Council meetings in the following configurations: General Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Economic and Financial Affairs, and Justice and Home Affairs. It also prepares the European Council via the General Affairs Council, eurosummits and summits with third countries.



Coreper I meeting room



Coreper II meeting room

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE COUNCIL – COREPER

Provisional agenda

The provisional agenda of Coreper is finalised by the Coreper chair (via Antici or Mertens) the week before the meeting, before close of business on Friday to allow delegations proper preparation and also to avoid unnecessary costs and overtime for GSC services (translators, etc.). It is circulated to delegations by the GSC. At the beginning of the week of the meeting, a numbered and, if necessary, updated draft agenda is circulated to delegations.

The Coreper agenda is divided into two parts, as follows.

- Part I includes the items on which agreement has been reached at working party level and that can be endorsed by Coreper without debate. Should further work or a debate be necessary, the Presidency can decide to withdraw the item from the agenda or move it to Part II.
- Part II contains items requiring examination by Coreper, and 'Other business' items entered at the request of the Presidency, a delegation or the Commission. 'Other business' items will give rise to an oral or written communication from those requesting them, but cannot culminate in a decision.

An item can be included on the agenda with the indication 'possible', to enable the Presidency to withdraw or retain that item at very short notice. It is advisable to make only limited use of this procedure, as it makes planning and the work of delegations more difficult.

If one or more delegations so request, and Coreper agrees unanimously, a new item may be added when the final agenda is adopted at the start of the meeting. But this should be done only in exceptional circumstances.

The Presidency needs to organise the meetings of the various committees and working parties in such a way that their reports, usually prepared by the GSC for the Presidency, are available sufficiently in advance of the Coreper meetings at which they are to be examined. Unless considerations of urgency require otherwise, the Presidency must postpone to a subsequent Coreper meeting discussions on any legislative acts on which the committee or working party has not completed its discussions at least five working days prior to the week of the Coreper meeting.

It is essential that the abovementioned rules be respected. Non-respect of the rules creates unnecessary costs and inefficiencies. The GSC does not have the budgetary margins to accelerate processes (especially document translation and production) to compensate for deviations from the rules laid down in the Council's Rules of Procedure. This means that the GSC will not, save in exceptional circumstances, accept items for inclusion on Coreper agendas after 12.00 on the Wednesday (Coreper 1) or Thursday (Coreper 2) preceding the week of the meeting.

Preparations

Working from the provisional agenda, the GSC drafts short notes for the delegates on the items in part I ('I-item' note) and reports summarising the progress of discussions for items in part II. It also draws up for each item in part II an information note exclusively for the Presidency ('Brief for the chair of Coreper') (see below). This brief contains information on the procedure to be followed, useful information and tactical advice for conducting proceedings, the components of a compromise, speaking notes and background information, as well as any other material useful for moving the discussions forward. On CFSP-related items, the chair

may receive an additional information note prepared by the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The Presidency can also decide to make a specific compromise to get work moving. The compromise text is drafted by the Presidency, assisted by the GSC, usually in liaison with the Commission. For CFSP matters, this is done with the EEAS.

A preparatory meeting (briefing) is held before the Coreper meeting, attended by the Coreper chair together with the chair of the Mertens or Antici group, officials of the GSC dealing with the matters on the agenda, a representative of the Legal Service, GSC Antici/Mertens, GIP DG and a Commission representative. When the dossiers on the agenda concern the Union's external policies, the EEAS representative takes part in the preparatory meetings.

In general, and on the Presidency's initiative, eight weeks (Coreper 1)/six weeks (Coreper2) before the end of a Presidency, the incoming Coreper chair is invited to attend these briefings.

[Brief for the Chair - Coreper](#)

Conduct of Meetings ([Council's Rules of Procedure, ANNEX V](#))

At the start of the meeting, Coreper adopts its definitive agenda. This is when requests are made for items to be taken under 'Other business' or for new items to be placed on the agenda (see above) and the chair states in what sequence items will be discussed.

The chair then calls upon Coreper to approve the items entered in part I of its agenda. Such approval may occasion reservations and statements, but no discussion of substance can take place.

The Presidency announces its intentions regarding the conduct of the rest of the meeting.

As a rule, Coreper avoids long drafting exercises. Where it appears that improved wording is required for further work to proceed, the Presidency, aided by the relevant service of the GSC and, if necessary, the Legal Service, may be asked to redraft the text, or Coreper may request a working party to meet as a matter of urgency in parallel with Coreper proceedings.

Outcome

In principle, Coreper does not take decisions (except in the case of procedural decisions assigned to Coreper). At the close of discussions, the chair of Coreper may:

- note Coreper's agreement on the item under discussion and therefore suggest that it be entered as an 'A' item on the agenda of a forthcoming Council meeting or, in the context of preparations for a Council meeting, as a nominal 'B' item ("False B items" are agenda items which would have been 'A items' if one or more delegations had not wished to make a statement in the meetings.); or

- note agreement on a number of items, as well as substantive differences of views remaining on other points that need discussion at Council level; in such circumstances, he or she suggests that they be entered as Council 'B' items; or
- note that some matters need further examination by Coreper before being forwarded to the Council, and thus put the item back on the agenda for a future meeting; or
- ask the relevant working party to sort out the technical difficulties that have emerged at the Coreper.

In relation to files subject to the Ordinary Legislative Procedure, and in particular the preparation of informal trilogues with the European Parliament and the Commission, the Presidency seeks a mandate at Council or Coreper level in accordance with the rules of legislative transparency.

When Coreper prepares items that are on the agenda of a Council meeting, the GSC policy DG circulates, if applicable, a report to the delegations, after Coreper proceedings, summarising the progress made on each item to assist further discussion at Council level, and sends a briefing note to the Presidency. If full agreement has been reached in Coreper, the item is sent to the Council as a 'false B-item' or as an 'A-item'.

Within two weeks of the Coreper meeting, the GSC issues a public summary record of the outcome of Coreper's proceedings. It can be found on the [Council website](#).

Provisional agendas of Council meetings must be sent to the members of the Council and the Commission at least 14 days before the Council meeting, and preferably 21 days in the case of JHA meetings.

Supporting and preparatory groups

The Council's Rules of Procedures gives Coreper the possibility of creating groups to support and facilitate its work. To this end, the groups below have been created and entrusted with different types of supporting and preparatory tasks before Coreper meetings ([Council's Rules of Procedure, ANNEX V](#)).

The Antici Group

The Antici Group, set up in 1973, prepares the work of Coreper II. It is composed of the immediate assistants to the permanent representatives and a Commission representative, under the chairmanship of the rotating Presidency's Antici. Meetings of the group are also attended by a representative of the GSC and a representative of the Council Legal Service. The group is responsible for examining 'I items' (items under Part I of the agenda), reviewing Coreper agendas and deciding on the organisation of proceedings, particularly the order in which agenda items will be discussed.

The Antici meeting is also the time when delegations inform one another of their respective positions and state what items they want entered under 'Other business'.

The group reviews the minutes of meetings held by those Council configurations prepared by Coreper II, before those minutes are submitted as 'I items' to Coreper. The Antici Group may also be instructed by Coreper to deal with certain horizontal or particularly sensitive dossiers on an ad hoc basis.

The Mertens Group

The Mertens Group, which was set up in 1993, is composed of the immediate assistants to the deputy permanent representatives and performs the same function for Coreper I as the Antici Group and with an analogue composition. It also prepares for the approval of the list of committees or working parties that officially meet in the country of the rotating Presidency and it prepares the annual impact assessment report.

THE COUNCIL

The Council consists of a representative of each member state at ministerial level, who may commit the government of the member state in question. The Council meets in different configurations depending on the subjects for discussion. The frequency of Council meetings varies with the configuration.

COUNCIL CONFIGURATIONS

- General Affairs
- Foreign Affairs
- Economic and Financial Affairs
- Justice and Home Affairs
- Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs
- Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Innovation, and Space)
- Transport, Telecommunications and Energy
- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Environment
- Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

In line with the working calendar presented seven months before the beginning of the rotating Presidency, the Council meets when convened by its President on his or her own initiative or at the request of one of its members or of the Commission.

Each Council configuration, apart from the Foreign Affairs configuration, is chaired by the appropriate minister of the member state holding the Presidency. The Foreign Affairs Council

is chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who may, where necessary, be replaced by the member of that configuration who represents the member state holding the rotating Council Presidency. When the Foreign Affairs Council is convened to discuss trade policy issues, its President is replaced by the rotating Presidency.

Should it prove impossible for the member state holding the Presidency to provide a President for the Council, the position is filled temporarily by the member state next in line to hold the Presidency.

The General Affairs Council has horizontal responsibility for overseeing general coordination of policy and for ensuring coherence in the work done by the various Council configurations. It is also responsible for the preparatory work for European Council meetings, which includes drawing up an annotated draft agenda at least four weeks beforehand and holding a final preparatory meeting in the five days leading up to the European Council.

The Presidency can also decide that certain dossiers would best be negotiated and handled by the General Affairs Council. This is the case for negotiations on the multiannual financial framework, which are coordinated in advance by four consecutive Presidencies. Other examples include COVID 19 EU coordination, EU-UK relations as well as EU-Switzerland relations.

The Commission is invited to take part in Council meetings, although the Council may decide by simple majority to deliberate with the Commission not present ('in closed session'). The President and members of the Commission, as well as those of the Council, may be accompanied by officials who assist them.

The Council deliberates in public when examining and voting on draft legislative acts. The debates can be followed live on the Council website.



European Council meeting

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE COUNCIL – COUNCIL

The agenda

The Presidency draws up the provisional agenda for each meeting on the basis of the information available at least 14 days before each meeting. For the Justice and Home Affairs Council, the period is 21 days.

To enable national parliaments to express their views on questions that might be of particular interest to them, the Council may not place a legislative proposal or initiative on its provisional agenda for decision until eight weeks have elapsed since the submission of the proposal or initiative. In addition, a 10-day period must elapse between the placing of a draft legislative act on the provisional agenda and the adoption of a position. The Council may, however, deviate from the 8-week and 10-day periods for reasons of urgency.

It is mandatory to enter an item on the provisional agenda if a delegation or the Commission so requests at least 16 days before the Council meeting and if the documents required to allow for decision-making such as lists of A items and those for B items are available. After this deadline, unanimity is required to enter an additional item on the agenda.

The draft agenda is usually distributed to Coreper by the Presidency three weeks before the Council meeting. The provisional agenda shall also indicate by way of an asterisk the items on which the Presidency, a member of the Council or the Commission may request a vote. Such an indication shall be made once all the procedural requirements provided for by the Treaties

have been complied with. It is important for the agenda to also make a distinction between items for discussion and those for decision.

For each item on the agenda, the GSC drafts a brief to the President of the Council (similar to the brief to the chair of Coreper). This brief contains speaking notes and sets out the latest information that the GSC has on the state of the dossier, and outlines the main substantive, legal, procedural and tactical points that will assist the Presidency in conducting discussions. These briefs are exclusively reserved for the Presidency of the Council.

Brief for the President - Council

The provisional agenda (see [example](#)) is divided into two parts: 'Legislative deliberations' and 'Non-legislative activities'. Each of these two parts is divided into the following sections.

- A-items, which the Council may adopt without any discussion.

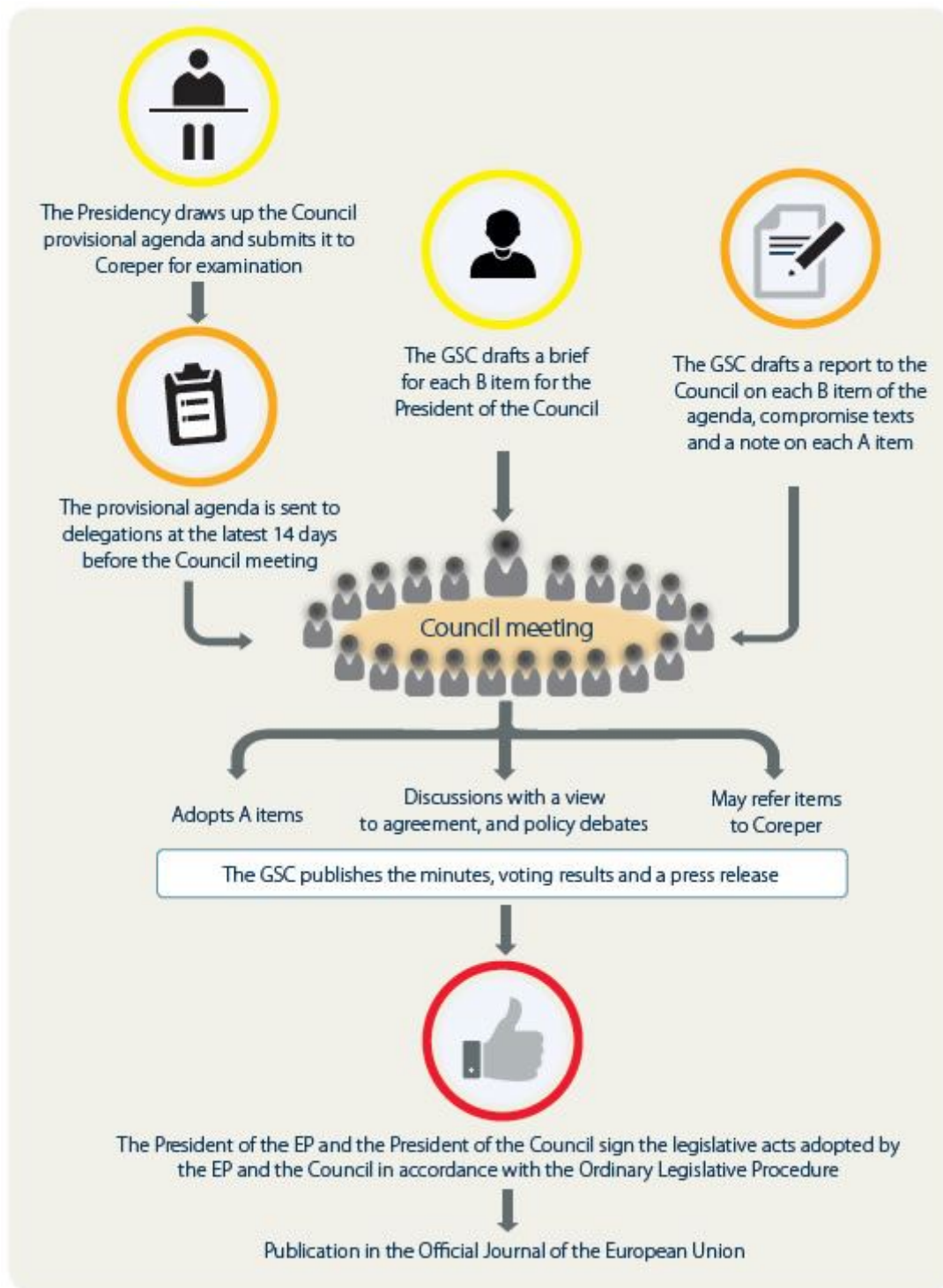
However, on the day of the Council meeting, a member of the Council may request the withdrawal of one of these items. The item is then being moved to a later Council meeting, or kept on the agenda — as a B-item — by a simple majority if the item had been entered within the deadlines stipulated.

Delegations may enter statements in the Council minutes when A-items are adopted.

- B-items, which are the items that the Council will discuss.

The agenda may also include 'Other business' items. These items may be placed on the provisional agenda at the request of a delegation without any advance notice, but may not lead to either a discussion or a Council decision. However, any request for the inclusion of an 'Other business' item must be accompanied by an explanatory document from the delegation submitting the request.

No items are to be placed on the Council agenda simply for presentation by the Commission or Council members, except where a debate on new major initiatives is envisaged ([Council's Rules of Procedure, ANNEX V, Para 6](#)).



The Council examines items previously discussed in Coreper

Preparatory briefing

A preparatory briefing, chaired by the President, is held before each Council meeting. It is usually held either on the day before the Council, or in the morning before the start of the Council meeting. Depending on the Council configuration, the briefing is attended by the (deputy) permanent representative, the Secretary-General and/or the director-general of the GSC department concerned, the legal adviser or a representative of the Legal Service and, where appropriate, representatives of the Commission.

Council proceedings

For efficiency and cost reasons, the Presidency should avoid having proceedings continue beyond 21.00.

The President conducts the proceedings in the following order.

- Noting of 'Other business' items and any requests for changes to the agenda;
- Adoption of the agenda;
- Adoption of the 'A' items, taking account of any statements or reservations. These 'A' items are normally adopted *en bloc*. If an item is the subject of a statement by one or more members of the Council that is likely to give rise to a discussion or a request for withdrawal, it can either be withdrawn from the agenda or left on the agenda on the basis of a simple majority vote (see above). The adoption of the 'A' items in the first part of the agenda, 'Legislative deliberations', takes place in public session;
- Discussion of the 'B' items. Discussion of the 'B' items, under the header 'Legislative deliberations', takes place in public session.

Discussions may be of different types, as follows:

- Discussions with a view to an agreement (on a legislative text, a resolution, a statement, negotiating directives, etc.);
- Policy debates, which give members of the Council the opportunity to express their general positions without really embarking on the negotiation of a text. In such discussions, it is important for the President to limit the amount of speaking time (to three or four minutes) per delegation. The time-consuming practice of table rounds (*tours de table*) should be avoided.

The Presidency may ask members of the Council to inform it beforehand in writing of any reservations or changes they would like to make to the text (see [Council's Rules of Procedure, ANNEX V](#)).

The Presidency may, particularly in the event of a long-standing stalemate, formulate a compromise. Such a compromise may also be presented as part of a package deal covering several texts under discussion and may be tabled in Coreper or in the working party.

In addition to the 27 Council members, the members of the Commission, the Secretary-General and the representative of the Council Legal Service may take the floor in the Council. Other persons, such as EU special representatives or the chairs of special committees, may be invited by the President to address the Council.

In the context of legislative items, the President, after the discussion, draws the conclusions, which can be summed up as one of three main possible outcomes: agreement, referral or a vote.

- In the event of an agreement, the text is deemed to be approved ('political agreement'), although it may still have to appear as an 'A' item at a subsequent Council meeting for

adoption after legal/linguistic finalisation;

- In the event of a referral to Coreper (which can resend it to a working party), it is customary for the President to give some indications for subsequent proceedings, outlining the main points under discussion and stressing the potential solutions to which delegations are asked to give further consideration;
- In the event of a vote, the rules laid out below apply.

Voting

The Council can decide by simple majority vote (at least 14 Council members in favour), qualified majority voting or unanimity (all members in favour; abstentions do not prevent a decision from being taken).

Qualified majority voting

In qualified majority voting, which is the default rule, the size of each member state's population is also reflected. A qualified majority is reached if the following conditions are met:

When the Council acts on a proposal from the Commission or the High Representative:

- 55 % of the member states (i.e. 15 members if all member states participate in the vote) vote in favour; and
- they represent at least 65 % of the total population of the member states participating in the vote.

When the Council does not act on a proposal from the Commission or the High Representative:

- 72 % of the member states (i.e. 20 members if all member states participate in the vote) vote in favour; and
- they represent at least 65 % of the total population of the member states participating in the vote.

In addition, any blocking minority must include at least four Council members representing more than 35 % of the EU's population if all member states participate in the vote. When not all member states participate in the vote, a blocking minority must include at least the minimum number of members.

The figures for the population of the Union's member states are updated annually by Council decision based on statistics from Eurostat.

A voting calculator is available on [the Council's website](#) and in the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Simple majority voting and unanimity

Simple majority voting is mainly used for procedural matters and requests to the Commission to undertake studies or submit proposals.

In general, unanimity is required when the Council wants to diverge from a Commission legislative proposal and where the Commission is not prepared to amend its proposal. A unanimous vote is also the basic rule for the adoption of Council decisions in the area of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In some other exceptional cases, the treaties also require a unanimous vote.

Voting procedure

- The Council votes on the initiative of its President. The President is also required to open a voting procedure on the initiative of a member of the Council or of the Commission, provided that a simple majority of the Council's members agrees.
- Members of the Council generally vote in the order of the member states laid down for the holding of the Presidency.
- Any member of the Council may also act on behalf of one other member, but for no more than one.
- The presence of a majority of members of the Council is required — called the quorum (i.e. the presence of a minimum of 14 Council members).
- When the vote is taken, the President, assisted by the GSC, counts the votes and checks that there is a quorum. The result is then registered.

Written procedures

In exceptional cases of urgency, or in other special circumstances, a matter may be adopted by a written vote, where the Council or Coreper unanimously decides to use that procedure. Agreement by the Commission is also required where the written vote is on a matter which the Commission has brought before the Council. When the President has obtained written agreement for this procedure from all involved, he or she can proceed to the actual voting on the issue.

Moreover, on the initiative of the Presidency, in certain situations as set out by CRoP, the Council may also act by means of a simplified written procedure known as the 'silence procedure'. In that case, if no member of the Council objects, the proposal is deemed to be adopted at the end of the period laid down by the Presidency, depending on the urgency of the matter.

The GSC establishes that the written procedures have been completed.

Outcome of Council meetings

Publication of votes

When the Council votes on a draft legislative act, the results and explanations of votes, as well as the statements in the minutes, are made public.

A distinction is made between automatic publication and publication requiring a decision. The GSC assists the Presidency in all matters concerning the publication of votes and their explanations. The types of vote automatically published and those requiring a decision are described below. The votes made public can be found on the [Council's website](#).

The minutes

The outcome of Council meetings is recorded in the minutes drawn up by the GSC within 15 days of each meeting. The content of the minutes includes references to the documents submitted to the Council, decisions taken or conclusions reached by the Council and statements made by the Council, by a member of the Council or the Commission. Draft minutes are approved by the Council or Coreper after each Council delegation and the Commission have checked their content. When approved, the minutes are signed by the Secretary-General, who may delegate his or her power to sign to directors-general of the GSC. The minutes are also published on the [Council's website](#).

'Outcome of the Council meeting' document

The 'Outcome of the Council meeting' is drafted by the Council Press Office and contains the main conclusions of the meeting. This summary is drawn up under the responsibility of the GSC and does not commit the Council legally. It is made available on the Council's website.

Formal adoption of a text and signing

Texts are formally adopted after finalisation in all the official languages of the Union by the legal/linguistic experts. The acts adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure are signed by the President of the Parliament and the President of the Council. In practice, signing takes place in the margins of a plenary part-session of the European Parliament.

Acts such as those mentioned above and acts adopted by the Council must also be signed by the Secretary-General, who may delegate his or her power to sign to directors-general of the GSC.

The Secretary-General, or a director-general acting on his or her behalf, also gives notice of acts adopted by the Council to their addressees. The normal practice is for the Presidency to be consulted prior to such notification.

Publication in the Official Journal of European Union

Acts adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council, or by the Council only, are published in the [Official Journal of the European Union](#) in all official languages of the Union. The GSC ensures that all relevant documents are published. The Official Journal is published only in electronic format, which is the authentic version and produces legal effects.

Automatic publication of votes

The following are made public automatically:

- The results of votes and explanations of votes by members of the Council, as well as statements in the minutes and items in those minutes relating to the adoption of legislative acts;
- The results of votes and explanations of votes by members of the Council or their representatives on the Conciliation Committee provided for under the ordinary legislative procedure, as well as the statements in the Council minutes and items in those minutes relating to the Conciliation Committee meeting;
- The results of votes and explanations of votes by members of the Council, as well as statements in the minutes and items in those minutes relating to the adoption of non-legislative acts laying down rules which are legally binding in or for the Member States, by means of regulations, directives or decisions, on the basis of the relevant provisions of the treaties, with the exception of internal measures, administrative or budgetary acts, acts concerning interinstitutional or international relations or non-binding acts (such as conclusions, recommendations or resolutions).

Publication decided on by the Council or Coreper

- The results of votes are made public by a unanimous Council or Coreper decision taken at the request of one of their members when the Council acts pursuant to Title V (CFSP) TEU; in other cases, a Council or Coreper decision taken by a simple majority at the request of one of their members is required.
- When results of votes are made public, explanations of votes are also made public at the request of the Council members. Explanations of votes may only be published with due regard to the CRP, legal certainty and the interests of the Council. The Council's interests are a matter for the Legal Service.
- Statements entered in Council minutes and items in those minutes relating to the adoption of the acts referred to in the first and second indents are also made public by Council or Coreper decisions taken by a simple majority at the request of one of their members.

INFORMAL MEETINGS OF MINISTERS

The main purpose of informal meetings is to enable joint consideration and as free as possible an exchange of views on topics of general scope; they are not formal Council meetings

because they have not been convened as such under the Council's Rules of Procedure. It follows that such meetings cannot replace the Council's normal activities.

For further information please consult the respective part of [Comments on the Council's Rules of Procedure/European Council's and Council's Rules of procedure](#).

In order to preserve the informal nature of such meetings, the following [guidelines](#) must be followed:

- a maximum of five informal ministerial meetings may be held during any given Presidency;
- no official agenda may be drawn up;
- the presence of assistants is limited to a maximum of two per minister;
- discussions must in no circumstances require Council documents to be prepared, either before or after the meeting;
- formal conclusions or decisions cannot be arrived at; any press release must make this point explicitly clear.

At a logistical level, the GSC is not involved at all. The Presidency has to take direct responsibility for the organisation and for all costs incurred.

However, there is one exception to that rule: where an informal meeting of agriculture ministers is held immediately before or after a meeting of the SCA, the GSC provides ministers with technical assistance in all matters relating to meeting room facilities, including interpreting.

SPECIFIC TASKS OF THE PRESIDENCY

Preparations for and follow-up to the European Council

The planning, preparation and running of European Council meetings is the responsibility of the President of the European Council and his or her team. That said, the rotating Presidency has an important role to play, given the necessary synergies between the work of the Council and the European Council, and the fact that the formal preparations for each European Council meeting are dealt with in Coreper and the General Affairs Council, both chaired by the rotating Presidency.

While the formal strand of the European Council preparations is based on a set of straightforward rules and timelines set out in the [Rules of Procedure of the European Council](#), close collaboration between the President of the European Council and his Cabinet and the rotating Presidency is crucial in delivering on the European Council's guidance. This is true in many respects, from meeting planning and priority setting to follow-up and implementation.

At the highest level, the member of the European Council representing the rotating Presidency is the linchpin in contacts between the President of the European Council and the rotating Presidency. At the start of each European Council meeting, he or she is also asked to brief the other members on the implementation of earlier European Council conclusions, possibly highlighting specific problems. In the day-to-day running of the Presidency, the Coreper II chair is responsible for close collaboration between the two institutions.

The European semester

The European Semester — the annual process of economic policy coordination — involves a number of Council configurations, the European Council and the Commission. The semester is divided into two phases: the first runs from the publication by the Commission of the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) (previously known as the Annual Growth Survey) in late autumn to the March European Council; and the second runs from the March European Council to the June European Council.

In the first phase, the Council debates the ASGS in a number of configurations (Environment, Competitiveness, Education) and adopts conclusions in [EPSCO](#) (the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council) and in [Ecofin](#) (the Economic and Financial Affairs Council) as contributions. The outcome of these debates and Council conclusions are often summarised in a Presidency synthesis report submitted to the March [GAC](#) (General Affairs Council). The March European Council endorses the policy priority areas of the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey and provides guidance to member states on their national reform programmes and stability or convergence programmes. The European Council also endorses the draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area.

In the second phase of the semester, the Commission proposed country-specific recommendations, examined and approved in EPSCO and Ecofin in June. The June GAC then approved the integrated recommendations, which were subsequently endorsed by the June European Council and adopted by Ecofin in July. The European Semester 2021 cycle was temporarily adapted to coordinate with the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Recovery and Resilience Plans. The Commission published recommendations only on the budgetary situations in Member States.

The Presidency (for the second semester of each year), together with the incoming Presidency, presents a roadmap to the October GAC before the start of the European Semester cycle, outlining the milestones and Council discussions related to the European Semester. The Presidency should also ensure appropriate coordination with the chairs of the independent committees that prepare the meetings of Ecofin and EPSCO; this usually takes the form of round-table coordination meetings once or twice in the cycle, if necessary. These committees are the [Economic and Financial Committee](#), the [Economic Policy Committee](#), the [Employment Committee](#) and the [Social Protection Committee](#).

IV. THE PRESIDENCY'S RELATIONS WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

During its term, the Presidency will also have to manage many contacts with other EU institutions and bodies. Below is a summary of what is expected from the Presidency, always with the assistance of the GSC. The Directorate for interinstitutional relations (GIP.INST) provides detailed advice to the Presidency on all the issues below.



The European Parliament's building in Brussels

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

During its semester, the Presidency has to carry out a number of specific tasks in the context of relations and negotiations between the Council and the [European Parliament](#). The aim of these tasks is to facilitate interinstitutional relations. Before and at the start of the period of the Presidency, in particular, the Presidency presents its work programme to the [Parliament's plenary](#) and to individual [committees](#). It is also involved to a considerable degree in parliamentary debates, in particular in the plenary, but also in the Parliament's different [committees](#).

INDICATIVE TIMELINE FOR THE PRESIDENCY'S RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Presentation of the Presidency work programme

Before the Presidency

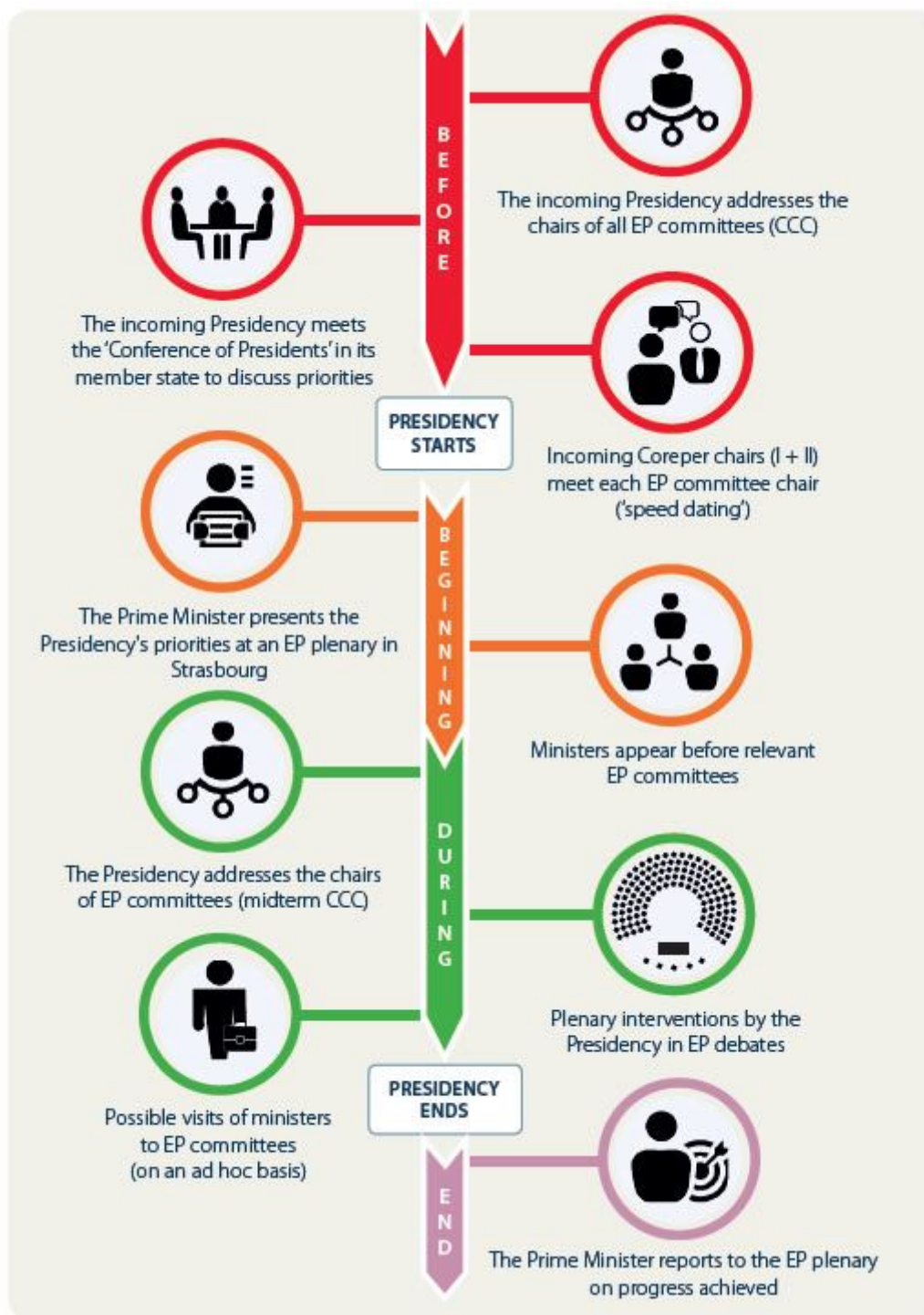
About a month before the beginning of the Presidency, a meeting is organised in the country holding the Presidency with the chairs of the political groups of the EP and the President of the EP (the "[Conference of Presidents](#)") to discuss the Presidency's priorities.

Similarly, a few weeks before starting its term, the Presidency meets the Chairs of the EP Committees to discuss the intentions of the EP and the Council regarding the files under the ordinary legislative procedure on the table during the so called 'Speed dating' meetings.

At the beginning of the Presidency

At the beginning of its term, the Presidency (usually at the level of Head of State or government) presents its priorities and programme to the European Parliament at a Strasbourg plenary session, and participates in the subsequent debate with MEPs.

At an early stage in its term, the Presidency also appears before most EP committees to present its programme and priorities for a given policy area and to answer questions on issues of relevance for each committee. The Presidency is usually represented at ministerial level by the president of the relevant configuration of the Council. The GSC assists the minister in preparing these so-called ministerial appearances.



Indicative timeline for the Presidency's relations with the European parliament

Plenary sessions - see also [the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament](#)

The Presidency intervenes on behalf of the Council in the following ways:

- Taking part in debates on the basis of a report;
- Making a statement on a specific subject (Council - or Council and Commission - statement(s)); statements do not necessarily relate to the work of the Council;
- Taking part in a 'topical debate' (which each group has the right to ask for at least once a year on a matter of major interest for EU policy as provided in the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament; (Not implemented since March 2020)

- Answering 'Oral Questions', which may be accompanied by a draft resolution, submitted to a vote the following day;

In addition, the Presidency can intervene on behalf of the High Representative, if a replacement is needed for issues falling exclusively or primarily in the area of CFSP.

The agenda for the plenary is drawn by the EP Conference of Presidents and is usually organised in such a way as to require the Presidency to be present on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. (NB mini-sessions in Brussels are on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning).

For plenary sessions, the Presidency usually designates a minister for relations with the EP. He or she represents the Council, although the Council may be represented by another minister for specific debates (typically — but not automatically — on budget issues). (With the agreement of the Presidency or at its request, the Council may also be represented by a member of the 'trio', by the next Presidency or by the Secretary-General.)



President Michel at the European Parliament

Involvement in committees

In addition to the ministerial appearances at the beginning of a Presidency, some committees may request additional appearances by ministers during the Presidency term in order to be kept updated on developments within the Council on specific dossiers.

These meetings are part of the Council's relationship with the Parliament. While they may provide at times useful opportunities to inform committees of developments within the

Council, the Presidency should carefully assess such additional participation on a case by case basis and avoid being drawn into negotiations or cross-examinations during these meetings.

When a minister is not available, senior officials of the Presidency may also appear before committees. This is, however, not systematic and needs to be decided on case-by-case, in the context of the issue and if a specific request of the European Parliament has been made.

The Secretary-General or a senior Council official may, acting on the Presidency's instructions, represent the Council before European Parliament committees.

During its term, the Presidency address the Conference of Committee Chairs (CCC), which consists of the chairs of all the EP committees to have an exchange of views on a main topic of mutual interest.

EP information and consent on international agreements

The European Parliament must be immediately and fully informed at all stages of the negotiation and conclusion of agreements between the EU and third countries or international organisations (Art. 218(10)TFEU). It is generally the negotiator — either the Commission or the High Representative — that briefs the Parliament. The Council informs Parliament of its decisions and requests Parliament's consent where appropriate.

Trilogues (ordinary legislative procedure)

There are trilateral meetings held between the three institutions during the legislative process, with a view to bringing the positions of the two co-legislators closer together in order to achieve an agreed outcome. Formal trilogues only take place at third reading or 'conciliation' stage that has become a rarity nowadays. Trilogues held during first or second reading phases are all informal. They are sometimes referred to as 'political', in addition, 'technical meetings' can also be organized.

- A political trilogue is one that is attended by MEPs (e.g. the chair of the EP committee dealing with the proposal, the rapporteur and the shadow rapporteurs) and that is intended to address the key political issues.
- A 'technical meeting' tends to be attended on the EP's side only by the EP Secretariat, and by MEPs' assistants and/or representatives of the political groups. It is intended to address issues of a technical and/or non-contentious nature and/or issues that are so technically complex that thorough discussion is required to ensure that the co-legislators share a common understanding.

For those legislative files where the Presidency has decided that the COREPER/SCA chair should head the Council Presidency negotiating team, the COREPER/SCA chair will normally attend only political trilogues, while the working party chair will also attend technical meetings. The question of whether an issue is 'political' or 'technical' should be agreed jointly

by the Council Presidency and the EP, at an early stage in the negotiations. The working party chair can also head the Council Presidency negotiating team at all levels.

Even when it is clear that an agreement will not be reached at first reading, continued contacts with the EP may be justified in order to define the points of disagreement more clearly. This would either pave the way for an early second reading agreement, or reduce the number of possible EP amendments at second reading.

See the [Guide to the ordinary legislative procedure](#) for more information.

Interparliamentary bodies and delegations

In most cases it is for the High Representative and his or her staff to participate in the meetings of international interparliamentary bodies and delegations.

Nevertheless, the Presidency may still be invited to participate - not necessarily at ministerial level - in certain meetings such as those of the European Economic Area Joint Parliamentary Committee (where the Presidency is included in its capacity as the EU Presidency of the EEA Council), or meetings relating to candidate countries.

The Presidency has also traditionally attended, normally at ministerial level, the meetings of the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, on behalf of the High Representative, on the state of relations between the European Union and the ACP states . This meeting can be held in the country holding the Presidency.

Attendance by MEPs at informal ministerial meetings

The incoming Presidency is often approached by the European Parliament about participation in informal ministerial meetings. These requests are generally made by the chairs of the relevant committees.

EP participation in these informal meetings is not governed by uniform rules. The practice varies depending on the set-up of each meeting. The Presidency must therefore strike a balance between, on the one hand, maintaining good relations with the EP and having exchanges with its representatives during informal meetings and, on the other hand, preserving a space in which ministers can hold discussions among themselves.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE

Apart from the relations established with the Commission and the [European External Action Service](#) (EEAS) in the context of the normal operation of the institutions, there are no specific obligations incumbent on the Presidency. However, during the preparation of the 18-month draft programme by the trio Presidency team the draft is prepared with the President of the

Foreign Affairs Council with regard to that configuration's activities during that period, and in close cooperation with the Commission.

However, when planning the Presidency work programme, it has become practice for the Presidency to meet the Commission. The Presidency is represented by the relevant ministers and the Commission by its President and relevant members.

There are also contacts between the Presidency and the EEAS to coordinate the work programme of the respective Council configurations.

THE COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Apart from courtesy visits, the Presidency has no specific formal obligations towards the [Court of Justice](#). There are, however, regular contacts between the Council Legal Service and the Court of Justice in the context of legal proceedings and, in particular, in the procedure for the appointment of judges.

THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

The Presidency invites the President of the [Court of Auditors](#) to present the Court's annual report to the Ecofin Council. The Council examines this report in the context of the discharge procedure. The Council examines special reports submitted by the Court of Auditors and adopts conclusions on the recommendations contained therein.

THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

As is the case with the EP, the Presidency presents its priorities to each of these consultative bodies (The [European Economic and Social Committee](#) and the [European Committee of the Regions](#)) at the beginning of its term, and the outcome at the end of its semester.

Ministers may occasionally be invited to intervene at plenary sessions of the committees — or in other forums organised by them — for discussions on specific topics, in particular on issues for which the Presidency had requested exploratory opinions from the committees.

The GSC follows and reports on some bureau meetings of the two committees, as well as on important plenary discussions.

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

The [parliament of the member state holding the Presidency](#) traditionally hosts and chairs the meetings of the [Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of](#)

[the European Union](#) (COSAC), which take place once during each Presidency.

The Presidency often presents its priorities either to the COSAC meeting, or to the COSAC preparatory meeting, known as the meeting of the chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs.

The GSC attends and reports on these meetings.

V. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

SECURITY AND ACCESS TO COUNCIL BUILDINGS AND MEETING ROOMS

It is important that the Presidency is aware of security measures designed to ensure the safe conduct of the Council's day-to-day work. The Presidency should therefore include the Directorate for Safety and Security when considering a number of aspects essential for safeguarding the effectiveness of the security system. These aspects include the application of security measures to meetings where classified information is discussed and collaboration regarding access control to certain meetings.

For information about accreditation, please see the Delegates handbook, Chapter IV: [Access to the Council buildings](#).

In the case of meetings of certain Council configurations, and of certain Council preparatory bodies, and Coreper, meeting access and attendance checks are carried out by the competent GSC services. Access and attendance checks at other meetings are carried out under the responsibility of the Presidency or by the GSC staff at the request of the Presidency.

For questions or advice on security issues, including where classified information is to be discussed, please email: security.clearances@consilium.europa.eu or call +32 (0)2 281 78 98.

Access to the Council meeting room

Access to the Council meeting room is open to a maximum of five persons per delegation, including the minister and permanent representative or his or her deputy. Only those in possession of a pass issued by the GSC may attend Council meetings (Article 5(3) and (4) CRP). Other members of delegations can follow the Council's discussions in a listening room, unless decided otherwise.

The Presidency is at liberty to adjust the composition of delegations around the table depending on the degree of technicality or political sensitivity of the matter discussed. Whatever the case, the GSC and the Legal Service are always present.



Council meeting room

Security measures applicable to meetings where classified information is discussed

In meetings where classified information is handled, it is very important that the chair ensures that the security measures are followed. All discussion of classified items must be organised in accordance with the [Council's security rules for protecting EU classified information](#). Meetings where information classified RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED or CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL is discussed can take place in any meeting room; however, meetings where information classified SECRET UE/EU SECRET is discussed must take place in a secured meeting room. Access to meetings classified CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above requires appropriate security clearance. Only individuals who have a need to know may attend the discussion of classified items. Classified information may not be handled using the meeting room's communication and information system.

At the beginning of each meeting where classified information is discussed, the chair must inform all participants of the security measures to be applied. Different measures apply according to the level of the classified information being discussed, as set out below.

Meetings where information classified RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED is discussed

At the beginning of the meeting, the chair will remind participants not to leave classified documents unattended. After the meeting, the chair will remind participants that they are to remove or return any classified information distributed for or during the meeting.

Meetings where information classified CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL is discussed

In addition to the measures mentioned above, the chair will remind delegations and interpreters that all electronic devices (portable computers, mobile phones, tablets, etc.) in the meeting room must be switched off for the duration of any CONFIDENTIAL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL items. This is due to the risk of eavesdropping. Electronic devices that cannot easily be deactivated cannot remain in the meeting room (or interpreting booths) during discussion of such items. They can be put in lockers that are available outside meeting rooms 20, 35 and 70.5 and in the Atrium hall in the Justus Lipsius building. Please note that the Atrium closes at 19.00. The chair will also remind participants that those who do not hold a valid security clearance are requested to leave the room during discussion of classified items.

Meetings where information classified SECRET UE/EU SECRET is discussed

Meetings where SECRET UE/EU SECRET items are discussed must always take place in a secured meeting room designated for this purpose. In addition to the measures mentioned above, the chair must remind participants that no mobile phones, portable computers or any other electronic equipment may be taken into the room. All such objects must be placed in the special-purpose lockers at the entrance to the room. No interpretation is provided at these meetings. The Directorate for Safety and Security will perform security clearance checks for all persons entering the room.

The Presidency has no discretion in these matters, but the GSC provides advice and assistance regarding the implementation of these rules. For questions, please email: security.clearances@consilium.europa.eu or call +32 (0)2 281 78 98.

SAFETY MEASURES IN COUNCIL BUILDINGS

It is important that the Presidency is aware of safety measures designed to ensure the safe conduct of the Council's day-to-day work, such as evacuation and emergency procedures. The Presidency could therefore consult the following information:

- Emergency and evacuation procedures for Council buildings
- Invacuation procedures for Council buildings
- [Leaflet](#) on emergency, evacuation and invacuation procedures

Works performed by external contractors should be authorised through a working permit, which is issued by the Safety Unit and will include safety measures to mitigate risks.

For questions or advice on safety matters please email: safety.unit@consilium.europa.eu

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Costs covered by the Presidency's member state

- The costs of meetings convened on the Presidency's initiative outside the institutional framework. This includes, mainly, those held in its own country as informal meetings of ministers, e.g. Coreper, the Political and Security Committee, the Special Committee on Agriculture and the 15 working parties and committees officially taking place in the country of the Presidency.
- Travel and accommodation expenses for GSC staff coming to the member state for briefings and training programmes in preparation of the Presidency.
- In some cases, travel and accommodation expenses for GSC staff participating in informal ministerial meetings.
- The cost of security staff to supervise contractors carrying out work for decoration and exhibitions in Council buildings. A security guard must be present in each area where work is being carried out, throughout the duration of the work.
- The cost of insurance for works of art which the Presidency displays in Council buildings.

The Member State holding the six-monthly Presidency is responsible for the costs not covered by the Council's budget, in particular as regards the organisation of informal meetings, seminars, and social and cultural events on the occasion of the Presidency, and chooses autonomously how it will finance such costs.

Member States holding the six-monthly Presidency that consider using private sponsorships to cover some costs of the above-mentioned activities are advised to carefully consider the possible impact of the choice of sponsors on the reputation of the Council or the EU.

Should the Member State holding the six-monthly Presidency decide to use private sponsorship to cover some costs, it should put in place all measures necessary to avoid any conflict of interests and any possible reputational risks for the Council or the EU arising out of the sponsorship.

The sponsorship cannot affect, or be seen to affect, the decision-making of the Council in any way or be provided in exchange for specific visibility for the sponsors in relation to the policy-making of the council. In particular, the Council's name or logo cannot be used by the sponsor in its activities.

Member States holding the six-monthly Presidency are encouraged, at their discretion, to establish clear and transparent rules, based on best practise, on sponsor selection criteria as well as on the terms under which sponsorships are awarded. Member States are also encouraged to publish, where appropriate, the list of selected sponsors.

Costs covered by the GSC

- A limited number of official meals (in principle, official meals are lunches). For more information, please see [FAQ - Organising the Presidency of the Council of the EU](#).
- Interpreting, up to a certain volume. For details, please see 'Interpreting' below.
- Translation of documents.

- Production of documents, including publication in the Official Journal.
- The costs of all meetings within the framework of the Council that are held in non-EU states, such as association or cooperation councils, are borne by the host state. However, interpreting costs can be charged to the Council budget, but this is subject to the prior agreement of the Secretary-General. The GSC generally helps with the practical organisation of such meetings.
- Each member state is entitled to a reimbursement up to a fixed annual amount for delegates' travel expenses. For the member state holding the Presidency this amount is increased by 50 %. The meetings giving the right to reimbursement are listed in the document below (Decision No 54/18).

INTERPRETING

For the system to work effectively, Presidencies must plan and schedule the meetings of working parties preceding Council meetings as carefully as possible. Meetings need to be planned in certain cases down to sub-area level. Presidencies must establish their detailed timetables for the entire semester at least three months before it starts, to make it possible for the GSC to plan the interpreting teams and calculate the estimated costs of interpreting requests from delegations at the beginning of each semester for the 'on-request' working parties.

There are different interpreting arrangements depending on the type of meeting to be covered.

A full interpretation regime (23/23) is provided for Council meetings, European Council meetings and meetings of up to 20 preparatory bodies, and is entirely funded from the Council's budget. For the other preparatory bodies, interpreting is provided 'on request'. The procedures and details for interpreting 'on request' and the interpreting arrangements for the different committees and working parties can be seen in the document below. Please note that there are preparatory meetings for which no interpreting is provided (which include, in particular, meetings outside the headquarters of the Council). The breakdown between delegations sharing official languages for the purpose of the financing of interpreting can be found in the document below.

In this context, cancelling meetings less than two weeks before the event should be avoided wherever possible. Late cancellation for a full regime can cost the Council budget EUR 68 000. For the preparatory bodies, provision is made for an overall annual budget totaling around EUR 2 million for each language. Delegations wishing to have active or passive interpreting for their language in the bodies in question may request it, with the cost being set off against the budget allocated. Requests exceeding the provision available for the language are borne by the requesting state. Unused amounts are automatically transferred to the budget for travel expenses unless there is a request by a delegation not to do so.



Interpretation

TRANSLATION

The Translation Service at the GSC translates major policy documents and legislation at certain key stages of the legislative procedure (approximately 40 % of all official documents).

Translation priorities are set through the core documents policy, which defines what documents are automatically sent for translation. During the legislative procedure, documents are generally translated only in the later stages. Thus, documents used for working parties are only occasionally translated, those used for Coreper are translated when possible, and those used for Council meetings are always translated.

The Translation Service also provides the Presidency with the translation of several document types that are translated only into the language of the Presidency: briefs for Council chairs, briefs for appearances at the European Parliament, the main results of Council meetings and other communications. Requests for translation are submitted by the GSC desk officer on behalf of the Presidency, based on the previously identified language needs of the Presidency ministers.

From three months before the start of the Presidency and throughout its duration, the English and French language units offer the Presidency a fast-track editing service for texts of up to 10

pages. These can include any documents related to the Presidency, such as draft conclusions, notes, speeches, invitations, Presidency work programmes and texts for the Presidency website. Requests for editing are emailed directly to the relevant language unit:

English: en.presidency-editing@consilium.europa.eu

French: fr.editing@consilium.europa.eu

For more information, please see the brochure below.

[Translating for the Presidency](#)

PROTOCOL

The Protocol Service at the GSC always assists the Presidency in all practical matters concerning protocol issues. Below is a short summary of useful information for the Presidency. For questions about protocol matters, please email: protocol@consilium.europa.eu or call +32 (0)2 281 77 00.

Member states, acceding states and candidate states

As a general rule, the protocol order for member states is based on the alphabetical order of the names of the member states in their national language. Member states are followed first by the acceding states, in the same alphabetical order, and then by the candidate states in the order of their applications for accession to the European Union.

The list of member states and candidate states and their two-letter ISO codes is accessible in the [Interinstitutional Style Guide](#). The code should be used for country abbreviation in official documents.

Languages

Language versions are listed in the alphabetical order of the official name of each language in its own language. In official documents the [two-letter language code](#) should be used.

Order of rotating Presidencies

The order of the rotating Presidencies is laid down by [Council Decision 2016/1316](#). Below is the order of the Presidencies from the first half of 2020 to the second half of 2030 in pre-established groups of three member states.

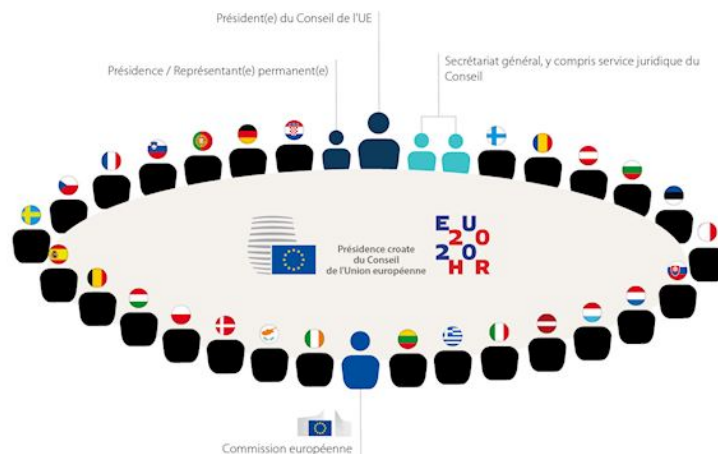
2019	Jan-Jun	ROMANIA	
2019	Jul-Dec	FINLAND	
2020	Jan-Jun	CROATIA	
2020	Jul-Dec	GERMANY	
2021	Jan-Jun	PORTUGAL	
2021	Jul-Dec	SLOVENIA	
2022	Jan-Jun	FRANCE	
2022	Jul-Dec	CZECH REPUBLIC	
2023	Jan-Jun	SWEDEN	
2023	Jul-Dec	SPAIN	
2024	Jan-Jun	BELGIUM	
2024	Jul-Dec	HUNGARY	

2025	Jan-Jun	POLAND	
2025	Jul-Dec	DENMARK	
2026	Jan-Jun	CYPRUS	
2026	Jul-Dec	IRELAND	
2027	Jan-Jun	LITHUANIA	
2027	Jul-Dec	GREECE	
2028	Jan-Jun	ITALY	
2028	Jul-Dec	LATVIA	
2029	Jan-Jun	LUXEMBOURG	
2029	Jul-Dec	NETHERLANDS	
2030	Jan-Jun	SLOVAKIA	
2030	Jul-Dec	MALTA	

Order of the Rotating Presidency

At meetings of the European Council, the Council and Council bodies, alphabetical protocol order is replaced by the order of Council Presidencies. The acceding states are always seated after the last member state in the order of the rotating Presidency.

As an example, the standard table plan shows the Council of the European Union seating arrangements (except for the Foreign Affairs Council) during the second half in 2021. For subsequent Presidencies, the seats of the member states rotate clockwise around the table.



Council of the European Union seating arrangements during Slovenia's Presidency in 2021

Placing of flags

Internal EU meetings

For internal EU meetings, the flags of the member states are placed in the alphabetical order of their names in their national language from left to right as you look at them. The flags of acceding states come next, in the alphabetical order of their names in their national language, followed by those of candidate states in the order of their applications to join the EU.

When an event is organised by the President of the European Council, the European flag precedes the flags of the member states. The same applies for all events organised by EU institutions or services.

When an event is organised by the Presidency, its flag comes first in the series and the European flag comes last. The flags of the other member states are placed in between, in the alphabetical order of the names of the member states in their national language.

Bilateral summit meetings between the Union and a third state, when taking place in Brussels

Only two flags (European and the flag of the third country) are flown. The flag of the third country is flown to the left of the European flag, as you look at them.

Multilateral meetings with third states, when taking place in one of the member states of the European Union

At multilateral meetings with third states, it is customary to fly the flags of all participating states and put the flag of the host state or the EU flag in first place. The alphabetical order to be followed may vary depending on the type of meeting. According to a well-established practice:

- at meetings such as EU–GCC, EU–ACP, ASEM and EU–ASEAN the alphabetical order in English is followed;
- at Union for the Mediterranean meetings the alphabetical order in French is followed.

Official photo sessions

When an official photo session is organised during a visit by a head of state or government or another high-level dignitary, the visitor and the host frequently pose in front of the flags. As a matter of courtesy, the host should ensure that his or her guest is to his or her right. The same rule applies at press conferences for physical flags.

In both cases, the flags are arranged so that the visitor and host can each pose or speak in front of his or her own flag for clearer identification.

Order of precedence

Order of precedence of institution

1. European Parliament
2. European Council
3. Council of the European Union
4. European Commission
5. Court of Justice of the European Union
6. European Central Bank
7. European Court of Auditors

Order of precedence of bodies and services

1. European External Action Service
2. European Economic and Social Committee
3. European Committee of the Regions
4. European Investment Bank
5. European Ombudsman
6. European Data Protection Supervisor
7. European Data Protection Board

Order of precedence among dignitaries of the institutions, bodies and services

1. President of the European Parliament
2. President of the European Council

3. Members of the European Council, including the President of the European Commission.
Among the members of the European Council the order of precedence is the following:
 1. head of state or government of the rotating Presidency
 2. other heads of state according to the order of Presidencies
 3. other heads of government according to the order of Presidencies, as well as the President of the Commission
4. Presidents of the Council of the European Union acting in that capacity (rotating Presidency as well as the High Representative)
5. President of the Court of Justice
6. President of the European Central Bank
7. President of the European Court of Auditors
8. High Representative (acting in that capacity)
9. Ministers acting as members of the Council
10. Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament and of the European Commission
11. President of the European Economic and Social Committee
12. President of the European Committee of the Regions
13. President of the European Investment Bank
14. Vice-Presidents of the European Central Bank
15. Members of the European Commission and of the European Parliament
16. Judges and advocates-general of the Court of Justice
17. President of the General Court
18. European Ombudsman
19. Members of the Board of Directors of the European Central Bank
20. Members of the European Court of Auditors
21. Permanent representatives
22. Vice-Presidents of the European Economic and Social Committee
23. Vice-Presidents of the European Committee of the Regions
24. Vice-Presidents of the European Investment Bank
25. Members of the General Court
26. European Data Protection Supervisor
27. Members of the European Economic and Social Committee
28. Members of the European Committee of the Regions
29. Registrar of the Court of Justice, secretaries-general and registrars of the institutions, bodies and services
30. Assistant European Data Protection Supervisor
31. Directors-general of the European institutions, bodies and services
32. Directors of the European institutions, bodies and services

Order of precedence among dignitaries of the institutions in the context of the external representation of the Union

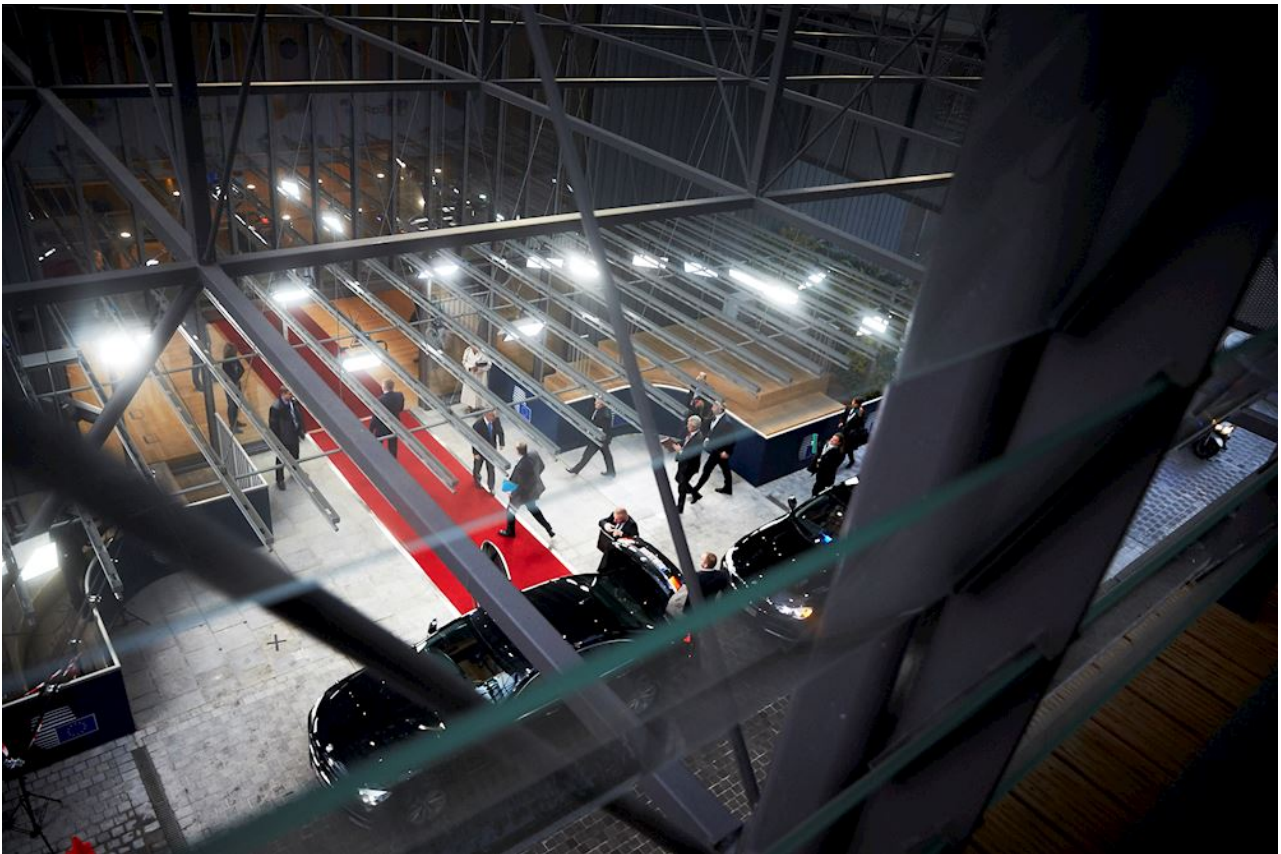
Notwithstanding the preceding list, as far as the external representation of the Union is concerned, the precedence of dignitaries is as follows:

1. President of the European Council
2. The President of the Commission
3. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Order for motorcades

As a general rule, the order of arrival of official motorcades follows the reverse protocol order; for departures, motorcades follow the order of protocol.

However, for practical reasons, at European Council meetings and the meeting of Council bodies, the order of arrivals and departures strictly follows the 'first come, first served' principle.



VIP entrance of the Europa building

VIP entrances

Reception of VIPs and their entourage normally takes place at the VIP entrances: in the Europa building at Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 165, and in the Justus Lipsius building at Rue Froissart/Froissartstraat 110. However, subject to prior notification, they may exceptionally use the pedestrian main entrances at Justus Lipsius, Rue de la Loi/ Wetstraat 175, and at the Europa building, Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 155. When using a pedestrian access point the VIP undergoes X-ray scanning, unless the Protocol Service is notified in time and a member of the permanent delegation can be present to confirm the identity of their VIP.

If the Council is meeting, the VIP entrance and access will remain open until the last VIP leaves the building - Europa or Justus Lipsius. A special request can be made to keep the VIP open for other kind of meetings.

Access via the VIP entrance is restricted to the following categories of visitor:

- Heads of state or government;
- Members of royal families;
- Ministers;
- State secretaries;
- Dignitaries of the European institutions, bodies and services;
- Secretaries-general and deputy secretaries-general of the European institutions, bodies and services, and of international organisations or similar bodies;
- Ambassadors and deputy ambassadors or equivalent;
- Persons designated by the Cabinet of the President of the European Council or the Private Office of the Secretary-General, by the Head of Protocol (or by delegation, the Protocol Service) or by the Head of the Directorate for Safety and Security (or by delegation, the Directorate for Safety and Security);
- Duly accredited persons accompanying the visitors specified above.

VIPs regularly attending meetings during the Presidency

VIPs who regularly attend meetings during the Presidency may obtain an electronic pass not only for entry via the automated pedestrian access points, but also for the automatic opening of the VIP access barrier for their cars (Rue Froissart/Froissartstraat 110 and Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 165). Their vehicles, with the appropriate sticker from the Directorate for Safety and Security, may be parked in the VIP car park on level CO.02 or in the courtyard opposite the VIP entrance. VIPs then enter on foot via the VIP entrance on level CO.02.

The aforementioned electronic passes may, at the request of the permanent representations, be given to the regular drivers of the VIPs in question.

The vehicles of members of the Council who do not have the aforementioned passes may be authorised to enter the VIP courtyard. For this to be done, the permanent representation must send to the Accreditation Service, in advance, the names of the VIPs and the registration numbers and makes of their vehicles.

Other VIPs

VIPs who occasionally visit the Justus Lipsius and Europa buildings (ministers and ambassadors, the President of the European Parliament and similar persons) may use the VIP entrance (Rue Froissart/Froissartstraat 110 and Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 165) to enter by car and then enter the building on foot via the VIP entrance, provided that the Directorate of Safety and Security has been notified in advance of their arrival.

Persons accompanying these VIPs in their cars must be accredited at the VIP entrance accreditation desk. If the Directorate for Safety and Security is notified in advance of their arrival, their passes are prepared in advance and made available as soon as they arrive at the VIP entrance. Otherwise they must go through the usual accreditation procedure.

Opening hours

Weekdays: 7.30-19.00

Closed (unless specific events or demand):

- Nights, weekends and holidays
- The month of August

Contact

During office hours (weekdays 8.30-17.00): security.secops@consilium.europa.eu

Outside office hours:

security.centre.jl@consilium.europa.eu / security.centre.be@consilium.europa.eu

For general security information in:

- Europa building, call +32 (0)2 281 89 10
- Justus Lipsius building, call +32 (0)2 281 78 51

Emergencies: call +32 (0)2 281 20 00

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

[Council's Rules of Procedure](#)

-

[Brief for the President \(Council\)](#)

-

[Brief for the Chair \(Coreper\)](#)

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[Translating for the Presidency](#)