



the european convention

Points no. 9

Main points of the report by the Working Group on External Relations, presented to the plenary session of the European Convention on 20 December 2002.

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EXTERNAL POLICY: PRINCIPLES ESTABLISHED, A MORE COHERENT AND EFFICIENT APPROACH

As an introduction, the Working Group on External Action emphasised that the Union had much to gain from acting collectively on the international stage, since it was increasingly difficult for individual Member States to influence international developments when acting on their own and the process of European integration had led to new shared interests and values, the defence of which called for an integrated approach.

It also emphasised that external action would cover a wide range of areas, requiring arrangements and procedures that differed when it came to decision-making and implementation; this made coordination of the different areas for action essential.

The Group's first recommendation concerns **the grouping together in a single section of the constitutional Treaty** of the Articles from the current Treaties that cover the various aspects of external EU action.

The Group also raises the need to define in the Treaty **the general principles and objectives of EU external action**. In particular, Union action on the international stage should be based on the values which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement.

The Group recommends that, under the aegis of general principles and objectives, **the European Council should define the strategic interests and objectives of the EU** and establish parameters to guide EU and Member States' action.

In the view of the Group, the Treaty should establish that **the Union is competent to conclude agreements** on issues falling within the scope of its internal competences. The Council and the EU should act on such agreements according to the same procedure as would apply to internal legislative discussions on the same issues (in principle, qualified majority voting).

The Group also wishes to emphasise **the need to enhance coherence and efficiency between institutions and actors**. Within the Group, several options were developed: maintaining the role of the High Representative for the CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) and the role of the Commission in external relations, full incorporation of the High Representative's role within the Commission, a single person in the roles of both High Representative and Commissioner responsible for external relations. The last-named option, supported by a number of members of the Group, is close to that put forward by the European Commission; its terms, however, are not the same.

On enhancing coherence and efficiency in external action within each institution, there was a tendency in the Group in favour of:

- creating a specific External Action Council;
- establishing a focal point within the Commission for all external issues dealt with by the Commission.

In addition, a broad consensus emerged in the Group on some organisational recommendations:

- the establishment of one joint service, composed of DG RELEX officials, EU Council Secretariat officials and staff seconded from national diplomatic services;
- the creation of an EU diplomatic academy and an EU diplomatic service, alongside those of Member States.

On instruments, the Group considers it desirable to provide for "joint initiatives" by the High Representative and the Commission.

On decision-making

The Group emphasises that, in order to avoid CFSP inertia and encourage a proactive CFSP, maximum use should be made of existing provisions for the use of qualified majority voting, and of provisions allowing for some form of flexibility, such as constructive abstention.

It also recommends that the Treaty made it possible for the European Council to decide unanimously to extend the use of qualified majority voting in the field of CFSP.

On parliamentary monitoring of the CFSP, the Group recognised that the current provisions of Article 21 TEU were satisfactory (the European Parliament is kept informed and may make recommendations) but considered that they should nevertheless be supplemented to stipulate that the High Representative was to take part in the tasks described in Article 21.

Noting that the current CFSP budget had proved to be insufficient, and that current procedures were too cumbersome to allow for the rapid financing of activities, the Group recommends, inter alia, that the part of the budget allocated to the CFSP should have sufficient resources to meet unexpected crises or new political priorities at international level.

For international agreements, the Group recommends that the Treaty should include a single group of provisions on their negotiation and conclusion. Such a group should state that the Council of the EU authorises the opening of negotiations, adopts negotiating directives, concludes agreements and specifies who should act on behalf of the EU, according to the subject of the agreement: the High Representative, the Commission or, jointly, the High Representative and the Commission.

The Group declares its support for **single representation of the Eurozone** in international financial institutions.

Lastly, on representation for external affairs, the Group recommends inter alia that the Union should work to have changes made to statutes of international organisations to allow for Union membership and, when there is an agreed EU position, for the EU **to have a single spokesperson in international fora**.