



Council of the
European Union

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The strategic body of the EU



THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL – A STRATEGIC BODY

The European Council is the driving force behind the European Union, setting its course and its political priorities. Its policy orientations feed into the work of the Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the member states.

European Council meetings set the agenda for future policy-making and are therefore central to the life of the EU. That is why the meetings attract a large amount of media attention. It is not unusual for more than 2 000 journalists to flock to the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels to cover a European Council meeting.



Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, and Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission

WHO ARE ITS MEMBERS?

The European Council brings together Europe's political leaders, i.e. the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the EU leaders. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy also takes part in the meetings.

HOW OFTEN DOES IT MEET?

European Council meetings usually take place four times a year, with two meetings scheduled per period of six months, but the President is free to convene meetings to address urgent issues. Meetings are usually convened in Brussels and are preceded by a meeting with the President of the European Parliament.



European Council meeting on 18 December 2014

OUTCOME OF MEETINGS

The European Council does not adopt legislation. It agrees conclusions, which reflect the main results of discussions. The conclusions identify major issues to be dealt with by the Council and the European Parliament as co-legislators, or they may invite the European Commission to put forward proposals on specific issues.

VOTING AT THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The European Council takes most of its decisions by consensus. In a number of cases, however, qualified majority applies, such as the election of its President, and the appointment of the members of the Commission and of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

When the European Council decides by vote, neither its President, nor the President of the Commission nor the High Representative take part in the vote.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The work of the European Council is coordinated by its President, who prepares, chairs and leads the meetings and seeks general agreement among its members. Together with the President of the European Commission, he represents the EU at top level. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy represents Union interests in foreign affairs and security matters.

The President is elected for a term of two-and-a-half years, renewable once. The post of President of the European Council is a full-time job; the President may not simultaneously hold a national office. The current President is Donald Tusk, former Prime Minister of Poland. His term of office began on 1 December 2014 and runs until 31 May 2017.



Donald Tusk, President of the European Council

EURO SUMMITS

Along with European Council meetings, leaders of those EU countries that have the euro as their currency meet in Euro summit meetings to provide strategic orientations on the economic and fiscal policies in the euro area. In principle, meetings take place twice a year. The President of the Euro Summit and the President of the European Commission also take part in meetings. The President of the European Central Bank is invited as well.

Since euro area issues are of key political and economic importance to all 28 EU countries, these matters are regularly discussed at leaders' level in the European Council.

THE EURO SUMMIT PRESIDENT

The Euro Summit President is elected by euro area heads of state or government at the same time as the European Council elects its President and serves a two-and-a-half-year term. The current President of Euro Summits is Donald Tusk, who is also President of the European Council. His term of office will run until 31 May 2017.

For more information on the European Council:
www.consilium.europa.eu/european-council

THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE COUNCIL

The General Secretariat assists the European Council and its President. It provides advice and helps them in their work. It is headed by a Secretary-General, appointed by the Council.

The Press Service provides the media with information on the work of the European Council and the President's activities. It organises press events such as press conferences and background briefings, and issues press releases. Related video and photo material is made available before, during and after meetings and events.

For more information on the Press Service:
www.consilium.europa.eu/press

The Public Information Service answers requests for information about the work of the European Council in any official language of the EU.

For more information on enquiries:
www.consilium.europa.eu/infopublic

YOU SAID COUNCIL?

The *European Council* should not be confused with the *Council of the European Union*, also known as the Council of Ministers or the Council of the EU. The Council of the European Union is the institution where national ministers from each EU country meet to adopt laws and decisions, and coordinate policies.

The Council of Europe is not an EU institution; it is the Strasbourg-based human rights and cultural organisation which is totally separate from the European Union.



Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175
1048 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË
Tel. +32 (0)2 281 61 11
www.consilium.europa.eu

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