



MEDIA | Practical
GUIDE | information



Council Guide
VII

July 2007

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GUIDE

Practical
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Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this edition.

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://www.europa.eu>).

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION.....	5
The Council.....	5
The Presidency.....	6
● Pre-established order of Presidencies.....	6
The Secretary-General/High Representative (SG/HR).....	6
The European Council.....	6
THE PRESS OFFICE.....	7
Council press officers.....	7
The press office secretariat.....	8
● Joining the mailing list.....	8
Press briefings and Presidency press conferences.....	9
Background notes and press releases.....	9
Photo service.....	10
Transparency - Video-streaming, Public deliberations and debates.....	10
Access to documents.....	12
Press office internet page.....	12
SPOKESPERSON FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL/HIGH REPRESENTATIVE.....	13
ACCESS TO THE PRESS CENTRE.....	14
Accreditation procedures.....	14
Accreditation for European Councils.....	15
Informal ministerial meetings.....	15
Lobbyists.....	15
Working facilities.....	16
● Media workstations.....	16
● Television studio.....	17

CONTACT DETAILS.....	18
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Press office.....	18
Office of the spokesperson for the SG/HR.....	23
Press centre and audiovisual matters.....	25
Permanent representations and candidate countries.....	30
Press services of other EU Institutions.....	35

A FEW WORDS ON TERMINOLOGY.....	37
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A FEW WORDS ON DECISION-MAKING.....	40
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ANNEX: List of briefing rooms.....	42
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INTRODUCTION

The Council

The Council of the European Union is the EU's main decision-making body. It exercises legislative power in co-decision with the European Parliament for a wide range of Community issues. It is composed of one representative at ministerial level from each Member State, who is empowered to commit his/her government. Council members are politically accountable to their national parliaments.

The Ministers attending each Council meeting vary according to the subjects being discussed. Currently, the Council meets within the following nine configurations:

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

The first three configurations meet once a month, while the others meet two to four times a year. A number of informal meetings are organised during the year in the country of the Presidency, in addition to the formal Council sessions.

Council meetings take place at the Council's headquarters, the Justus Lipsius building, rue de la Loi 175 in Brussels, apart from in April, June and October when meetings are held in the Conference Centre (Kirchberg) in Luxembourg. However, pending completion of renovation work at the Plateau de Kirchberg, meetings in Luxembourg are currently held at the Kiem Centre.



The Presidency

Each Member State presides over the Council for a period of six months, in accordance with a pre-established order. The Presidency acts as the driving force in the legislative and political decision-making process. It convenes and chairs meetings, draws up agendas and works out compromises aimed at resolving difficulties. It represents the Council and the Member States in dealings with third countries and speaks for the Council before the European Parliament and other bodies.

- **Pre-established order of Presidencies**

Year	First semester	Second semester
2007	Germany	Portugal
2008	Slovenia	France
2009	Czech Republic	Sweden
2010	Spain	Belgium

See the Council website (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu> - Council) for the order of Council Presidencies until June 2018.

The Secretary-General/High Representative (SG/HR)

The Secretary-General of the Council/High Representative, assists the Council in matters relating to the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, in particular in the formulation, preparation and implementation of common foreign and security policy decisions, and when appropriate, acts on behalf of the Council at the request of the Presidency, through political dialogue with third parties.

The European Council

The European Council is the gathering of the Heads of State or Government of the Member States and the President of the Commission. These meetings are normally convened four times a year (twice during each six-month Presidency) and take place in Brussels at the Council's headquarters (Justus Lipsius Building).

Information notes are provided to the press in due time for accreditation and coverage of the event.

THE PRESS OFFICE

The Council's press office provides journalists with information and documentation on subjects under discussion in the Council and its preparatory bodies. The press office also manages a press centre and organises press conferences and briefings and the transmission of public debates and deliberations during Council sessions.

Council press officers

A team of press officers provide information on the Council's activities, each specialised in the work of specific Council configurations and policy areas (see pages 18/19 for contact details).

Unlike the spokesperson for the Secretary-General/High Representative (SG/HR), press officers (who provide off-the-record briefings only) should not normally be quoted directly. Nor should the term "Council official" or "Council source" be used when referring to information provided by Council press officers.

The spokesperson of the SG/HR may be quoted by name (see page 23 for details).

The press officers work in close co-operation with the spokesperson for the SG/HR.



The press office secretariat

More general information and documentation is available from the press office secretariat and on the website (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>). This includes:

- announcements on the timing of press briefings, Presidency press conferences and public deliberations and debates (see below)
- the preliminary agendas of Council meetings
- Council conclusions as they are adopted
- press releases following meetings of the Council and of the Parliament-Council Conciliation Committee, as well as press releases on specific decisions
- Presidency work programmes containing the dates of all Council meetings
- practical information on informal ministerial meetings and agendas for the weekly meetings of the Permanent Representatives Committee
- Common Foreign and Security Policy declarations and press releases on the signing of international agreements
- information on meetings of Association Councils, Co-operation Councils and other meetings with third countries.

During European Council meetings, the press office distributes declarations and Presidency conclusions. These can be found on the press office website (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>). A brochure with practical information for journalists is also published ahead of each European Council meeting.

● **Joining the mailing list**

By subscribing to the mailing list, journalists and other interested individuals and organisations can select which documents produced by the Council press office and by the office of the spokesperson of the Secretary General/High Representative they wish to receive automatically. (See <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press> - Join our mailing list).



Press briefings and Presidency press conferences

Presidency off-the-record press briefings are usually held a few days prior to Council meetings in the press conference room on level 00 (ground floor). Background notes are distributed and the Council's press officers are available for further information.

Presidency press conferences are normally held after each Council meeting and also during adjournments of the proceedings (e.g. before lunch) in the press conference room. They are announced over the closed-circuit television screens in the press centre on the day of the meeting. They can also be followed (in most cases live) by video-streaming, on the Council website (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/videostreaming>) as well as on EbS (Europe by Satellite), the EU's audiovisual service: (<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm>).

National press briefings take place in national briefing rooms on levels 01 and 02 (see Annex, pages 42/43). In addition, the Council's press officers provide informal briefings during Council meetings.

Background notes and press releases

Background notes produced by the Council's press officers provide information on the agenda items of forthcoming Council meetings.

A provisional version is made available on the internet page (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press> - Meetings and events) and in the press centre before the Presidency's press briefing. A definitive version is published after the briefing has taken place.

Council conclusions are made available in the press centre and on the internet in real time as they are adopted by the Council.



Council press releases are summarised accounts of the main decisions and discussions that take place during Council meetings. Conclusions and resolutions approved by the Council are published in the press release. Votes and explanations of votes are also published in the press release.

Press releases are initially published in English or French. Translations into other official languages are made available as soon as possible. Provisional versions can be downloaded from the internet page (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press> - Council) and are available in the press centre after Council meetings.

Photo service

The press office has a team of photographers, who provide coverage of major events taking place at the Council. Their photos are published in the photographic library on the internet page (<http://www.consilium.eu/press> - Photographic Library). They are made available free of charge and in high-definition format on condition that the legitimate copyright (Council of the EU) is mentioned.

Transparency - Video-Streaming Public deliberations and debates

Based on the conclusions of the European Council on 15 and 16 June 2006, a series of practical measures have been taken with a view to further enhancing openness and transparency in the Council, and enabling the citizens to acquire a better understanding of the Council's role and activities.

As from July 2006, all Council deliberations on legislative acts under the co-decision procedure have been held in public, as well as:

- the Council's first deliberations on legislative acts other than those adopted by co-decision and the subsequent deliberations on a particular act, unless the Council or the Permanent Representatives Committee decide otherwise;
- the General Affairs and External Relations Council's deliberations on the 18-month programme, and other Council configurations' deliberations on their priorities;

- the Commission's presentation of its five-year programme, of its annual work programme and of its annual policy strategy, as well as the ensuing debate;
- other public debates on important issues affecting the interests of the Union and its citizens.

To this end, the Council Secretariat provides video-streaming in the official EU languages of all Council deliberations and debates, which are open to the public via the following shortcuts on the Council's internet site: www.consilium.europa.eu:

- The "Open Sessions" shortcut provides the user with the list of the public deliberations and debates of forthcoming Councils, their date and the exact agenda item. By clicking on the agenda item, the internet user will have access to all documents related to this subject, including, following each public deliberation that leads to a vote on legislative acts, a detailed outcome of the voting. If you wish to follow the debates regularly we suggest that you bookmark these pages in your browser.

- The "Council live" shortcut provides Internet users with links to all types of public events such as press conferences, public interventions by the EU High Representative for the CFSP, as well as open Council sessions, whereas the links under the "Open sessions" banner lead the user directly to the web pages concerning the public deliberation items and items for public debates.

- By clicking the "Video Streaming" shortcut, a selection of live events, forthcoming events and latest archived events comes forward. If you choose the "More information" option, you will be provided with detailed information on the relevant Council meeting, in the form of links to a series of notes, including (as applicable) notification of the briefing by the Presidency, a background note, a press release, an audiovisual note and a link to the "Open Sessions" entry on the Council's internet website.

The press office endeavours to make sure that announcements on the timing of public deliberations and debates are as accurate as possible. Timing however depends on the planning of the Council meeting, and may therefore be subject to a last-minute change. Journalists may check the internet page (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press> - Meetings and events) or contact the press office secretariat to check on timing.

Access to documents

Journalists, as well as other members of the public, can have access to Council documents under the conditions laid down by texts in force.

To make it easier to find documents that might be requested, a public register of Council documents is available on the internet (<http://register.consilium.europa.eu>).

The register allows access to the full text of a large number of documents as soon as they have been circulated.

If the content of a document recorded in the register cannot be accessed, a request for access can be sent by e-mail to Council's transparency service: access@consilium.europa.eu or by fax: 32 (0)2 281 63 61.

Press office internet page

The press office internet page provides information and documentation on the work of the Council, in particular the latest news and press releases, declarations and Presidency conclusions, as well as provisional agendas and background notes for forthcoming Council meetings.

Press web page: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>.

SPOKESPERSON FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL/ HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

The spokesperson for Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council and High-Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (SG/HR), is Mrs Cristina Gallach.

The spokesperson's secretariat is situated on level 10 of the Council's headquarters (Justus Lipsius building, rue de la Loi 175, Brussels), adjoining the press office.

Information on the SG/HR's working diary, speeches, communications, reports, articles, curriculum vitae, etc. can be obtained by contacting the spokesperson's secretariat (see page 24 for contact details) or via the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/solana>).



ACCESS TO THE PRESS CENTRE

The press centre is situated on levels 00, 01 and 02 of the Council's headquarters (Justus Lipsius building, rue de la Loi, 175, Brussels) and is open from 09:00 to 18:00.

During Council meetings the press centre remains open for two hours after the end of the Presidency's final press conference.

During European Council meetings, in addition to the usual press centre areas, press facilities are available on levels 20, 35 and in the courtyard.

Accreditation procedures

Media representatives wishing to obtain a permanent press badge for access to the press centre should request accreditation from the inter-institutional accreditation committee managed by the European Commission to obtain access to all EU Institutions. Accreditation is valid for one year (renewable) and is only granted to media representatives who reside in or near Brussels. For further information on permanent accreditation criteria and procedures please contact the Commission's accreditation office (Tel.: 32 (0)2 299 01 70; fax: 32 (0)2 299 47 70; e-mail: Pier.Soldati@ec.europa.eu).

Media representatives who do not possess a permanent press badge issued by the Commission may nevertheless access the Council's press centre by presenting their national press card (document certifying professional status) together with an identity document. Prior to that, they are required to send a fax (+32 (0) 2281 80 26) to the press office (see page 20 for contact details), with if necessary, a letter from their employer, certifying their professional status. They will be issued a one-day badge by the Council's security service.

The same arrangements apply to access to the Council press centre in Luxembourg.

Accreditation for European Councils

Special accreditation is required for European Council meetings. Media representatives can apply for accreditation online via the Council's official website <http://www.consilium.europa.eu> from about six weeks in advance. Media access to the press centre and to areas subject to media coverage will be granted only to persons with proper accreditation. Official accreditation and personal identity documents must be carried at all times. Accreditation badges are strictly personal and must be worn visibly during the European Council meeting. For further details media representatives may contact the Council press office (see page 25 for contact details). Special accreditation may also be required for events such as summits with third countries taking place in the Council building.

Informal ministerial meetings

Each Presidency makes its own arrangements for informal ministerial meetings in their respective countries. Media representatives can apply for accreditation for these meetings on the Presidency website.

Lobbyists

Representatives of professional organisations may access the press centre to obtain documents and follow public deliberations and debates, but do not have access to the press centre during Council sessions and Presidency briefings. However, they can be briefed by a press officer the day following the Council. To arrange this, representatives should contact the relevant administrator.



Working facilities

The press centre offers the following facilities:

- an information and reception desk
- a documentation desk
- fax machines
- photocopiers
- telephone and internet connections (see below for details)
- TV screens with cable connection
- individual lockers
- a bar open during press briefings and Council meetings.

Media workstations

The press centre comprises 800 workstations (300 on level 00, 50 on level 01 and 450 on level 02) equipped with a telephone connection for analogue and/or digital modems as well as power supply. To access the telephones and internet, media representatives accredited to the European institutions can obtain a pin code from the press centre secretariat, which will be available in about 2 days.

In addition, there are two coin-operated telephones near the bar.

Media representatives are advised to bring their own computers as there are no computers available for public use. In addition to fixed internet connections, the press centre is equipped with a WIFI system enabling journalists to use laptops in the various press rooms.

The covering of the courtyard has made it possible to provide workspaces for an additional 600 journalists during European Councils.

Television studio

A TV studio has been built for journalists wishing to interview personalities such as the Secretary-General/High Representative or Member State Ministers or Heads of State or Government. Technical and reservation details are available on the Council website (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/presse/studioTV>). During 2007 a radio studio should also become available.



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Press officers are available only for enquiries from the media. Other enquiries should be directed to the Council's department for information to the public (tel.: 32 (0)2 281 56 50; e-mail: public.info@consilium.europa.eu).

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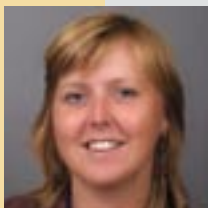
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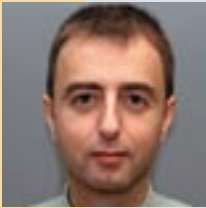
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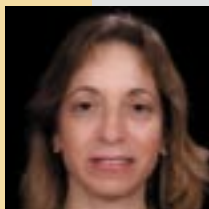
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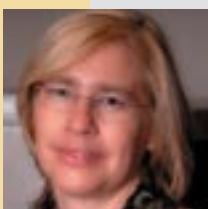
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A FEW WORDS ON TERMINOLOGY

Certain expressions used in our background notes and press releases have particular legal meanings and practical implications which journalists should be aware of in order to enable them to provide accurate information concerning the work of the Council and the decisions it takes.

In view of the fact that many Council decisions are made in co-decision with the European Parliament, journalists are advised to consult the Council's internet page on co-decision at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/codec>.

The following is a short selection of terminology that may require clarification:

General approach

The Council is said to agree on a "general approach" when there is agreement among delegations concerning the general orientation to be taken concerning an act (e.g. a draft directive or regulation). It means therefore that there is broad consensus on the substance of a legal act, although further fine-tuning is still required for a political agreement to be reached, and certain compulsory stages still need to be fulfilled (e.g. the Council must wait until it has received the opinion of another institution).

Common position

Under the co-decision procedure where the European Parliament and the Council act as co-legislators, a "common position" refers to the agreement reached by the Council (on the basis of the Commission's initial proposal), when the Council is not in a position to accept all the modifications adopted by Parliament during its first reading.

Adoption by the Council of a common position, which is then forwarded to Parliament, triggers the second reading of the co-decision procedure. This procedure allows Parliament, within a certain time-limit, to decide whether to accept or modify the common position. If the Council cannot accept the modifications made by the Parliament to its common position the co-decision process continues until both institutions agree on a "joint text" (conciliation procedure) or fail to do so.

Adoption of a common position by the Council is therefore not the final stage of the co-decision procedure. It refers only to an intermediary stage.

A common position in the co-decision procedure is not the same as a common position adopted in the context of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, and of cooperation on police and criminal justice matters. In these two areas, the term common position is the name given to a type of act by which the Council defines the Union's approach on a geographical area or on a given topic (e.g. a common position concerning the adoption of restrictive measures against certain third countries or measures to support the International Criminal Court).

Political agreement

The Council is said to reach a "political agreement" when it is in a position to approve the text of an act and that only technical work remains to be carried out, such as the legal-linguistic finalisation of the text in all EU official languages, before the act can be adopted formally.

After the Council reaches a political agreement, it forwards the text for formal adoption after legal linguistic revision as an "A item" (without discussion, see below) at a later Council meeting, in any configuration, irrespective of the subject matter. Political agreement constitutes the last stage before formal and final adoption of an act.



“A items”

“A items” are items that are adopted without discussion, in the “A part” of the Council’s agenda. Many important legal acts are adopted by the Council as A items. For instance, a legal act on which the Council has already reached political agreement (see above) will be formally adopted by the Council as an A item at a subsequent meeting, in principle without delegations intervening. Acts on which discussions at working group and Permanent Representatives Committee level have shown that there was agreement among governments will also be adopted as A items.

Lists of A items are in practice made available one day before the meeting where the Council is expected to adopt them and often they tend to be modified at short notice (deletion or inclusion of new items). It is thus difficult for the press office to know in advance, with complete precision, the whole list of A items for a given Council meeting. However, these items appear in the press release after the meeting. “B items” designate those topics of a Council agenda which will be the subject of a discussion by ministers during the Council meeting (points featuring on the “B part” of the agenda).

Conclusions

“Conclusions” are political acts adopted by the Council. They enable the Council to express itself on matters it considers important, notably in the field of external relations. They are not legally binding for Member States although they provide orientation on the Union’s position on a given subject or on future action by the Union. The same applies to other non-binding Council acts such as recommendations and resolutions.



A FEW WORDS ON VOTING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE COUNCIL

In many Community policy areas (e.g. internal market, agriculture, environment, transport), decisions are taken by the Council by a qualified majority.

In the fields of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, the Council decides mainly by unanimity.

Unanimity

The requirement for unanimity means that an act cannot be adopted if one government opposes it. However, abstention by one or several Member States does not prevent unanimity.

Qualified majority

A qualified majority is the minimum number of votes in favour of an act required in the Council for a decision to be adopted. The calculation is based on the number of positive votes, which means that abstentions are in practice equivalent to negative votes and can contribute to preventing the adoption of an act.

The qualified majority is reached if at least 255 positive votes out of a total of 345 (73.9% of the total) are gathered in favour of a decision, representing at least 14 States out of 27 (or at least 18 members when the Council does not act on the basis of a Commission proposal).

In addition, a Member State may request verification that the qualified majority represents at least 62% of the total population of the Union. If this is not the case, the decision is not adopted.



Weighting of votes

When a decision is taken by qualified majority in the Council, the distribution of votes is the following:














Germany, France, Italy, United Kingdom	29 votes
Spain, Poland	27 votes
Romania	14 votes
Netherlands	13 votes
Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal	12 votes
Austria, Sweden, Bulgaria	10 votes
Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Finland	7 votes
Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia	4 votes
Malta	3 votes
TOTAL	345

Simple majority

To take decisions of procedure (convening of a meeting, adoption of the agenda, approval of the minutes of a meeting, etc.), the Council decides by a simple majority of its members, i.e. by the positive vote of at least 14 out of 27 members, each of them having one vote.

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	Country	Level
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