



**EUROPEAN UNION
THE COUNCIL**

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SEMDOC
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NOTE

from : the Secretary-General

to : the General Affairs Council

Subject : Operation of the Council with an enlarged Union in prospect
- Secretariat's report

1. The European Union will undergo its most significant development over the next decade as it enlarges to bring in many new members. The impact of previous enlargements, as well as of the expansion of the Council's activities, and the evolving legislative relationship with the European Parliament, are already highlighting shortcomings in the Council's deliberations and the consistency of its decisions. The future increase in its membership will oblige the Union to adapt the operation of all its institutions. The scale and intensity of the challenge posed by the coming enlargements is particularly great in the case of the Council. This challenge will not be met unless major coordinated reform is initiated at every level in order to preserve the Council's capacity for coherent and efficient action and decision-taking on which, in the final analysis, the capacity of the Union itself largely depends. It is this challenge which has prompted the Secretariat, drawing on its first-hand insider expertise, to produce the above-mentioned report as a starting point for detailed consideration of the issues involved. It must be stressed that this report deliberately refrains from addressing issues which would require Treaty revision.

2. The Secretariat's report endeavours to present in a systematic, logical and ordered way the many suggestions for improving the Council's operation which have surfaced in recent years. The report is not itself a prescription for action, nor does it take a stance for or against any of the suggested avenues to be explored. Its purpose is to act as a useful tool for stimulating reflection on how the Council can function effectively with many more members.
3. The report is divided into two broad sections. The first deals with the structure and organisation of the Council and the European Council, and lists suggestions on the role and operation of the General Affairs Council, ECOFIN and other specialist Councils, as well as the Council's legislative function and its role in external communication. The second section of the report analyses shortcomings in the preparation and conduct of Council meetings and lists ideas for improving preparation at all levels, reforming negotiating and working methods, as well as on enhancing the role of the Presidency and the Council Secretariat.
4. The issues highlighted in the report are of varying degrees of sensitivity. A number of practical suggestions could be implemented fairly swiftly either by the Presidency or the Secretary-General, acting within their respective responsibilities. Other practical measures will require agreement among all Member States before they can be implemented. The more political aspects of the Council's functioning will ultimately require detailed consideration by the Council and the European Council.
5. As far as following up this report is concerned, a detailed overall examination of the issues could be undertaken over the coming months with a view to drawing up operational recommendations, including measures to ensure their observance and enforcement, before the Helsinki European Council in December. In the light of initial views expressed by delegations, COREPER, given its intimate experience of the Council's working methods, would appear to be the body best equipped to carry out such a detailed examination under the overall responsibility of the General Affairs Council.