

CWS INSIGHT

– A Practitioner's Perspective

Peace in Practice

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Peace in practice

A practitioner's insight into the work of the EU Council of ministers

Bodil Stevnsboe Nielsen¹

The paper gives an insight into the practical work of the EU Council of ministers and how decisions are prepared and taken. It illustrates how the structures and rules facilitate a culture of compromise rather than controversy which enables the Council to find solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I have worked for 31 years in the General Secretariat of the Council of ministers of the EU, first as a political administrator and later as Head of Unit primarily in areas related to financial services and the Single Market. These are areas covered by the classic EU legislative procedure as it has evolved over the years. My work was primarily related to preparing decisions and legislative acts for examination by working parties, Coreper and the Council. I have always worked in direct contact with the delegations and especially the rotating presidencies of the EU. In this contribution, I aim to give an impression based on my personal experience of the daily work to bring about agreement between the Member States united in the Council of ministers

Peace is not brought about by magic or divine grace but by hard, unglamorous, and often downright dull work

It is worth remembering that all European States have a long and bloody history of war against each other as well as civil wars within several of the national states. Each Member State of the European Union has at some point in its history been at war, usually several times, with one or more of the other Member States. Yet since the foundation of the European Union², its Member States have largely been spared of further bloodshed. EU has therefore often been praised for bringing peace to Europe. Indeed, the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for having “over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.”³

Peace is not brought about by magic or divine grace but by hard, unglamorous, and often downright dull work. In the case of the EU, much of the hard and unglamorous work has taken place in the various institutions by practitioners acting within the powers assigned to them in the founding Treaties of the Union. The focus of this short article will be on the daily work of the Council.

The institutional role, structure and political importance of the Council have been extensively analysed in the academic literature. My aim is different. I wish to give an impression of the actual day to day workings of the Council to bring about agreement between the various Member States united in the Council of ministers, - not on one, two or three issues, but on hundreds of legislative acts, Council decisions and policy agreements. In other words: I will not describe the principles of engineering behind the machine, but rather what it looks like ‘in the engine room’.

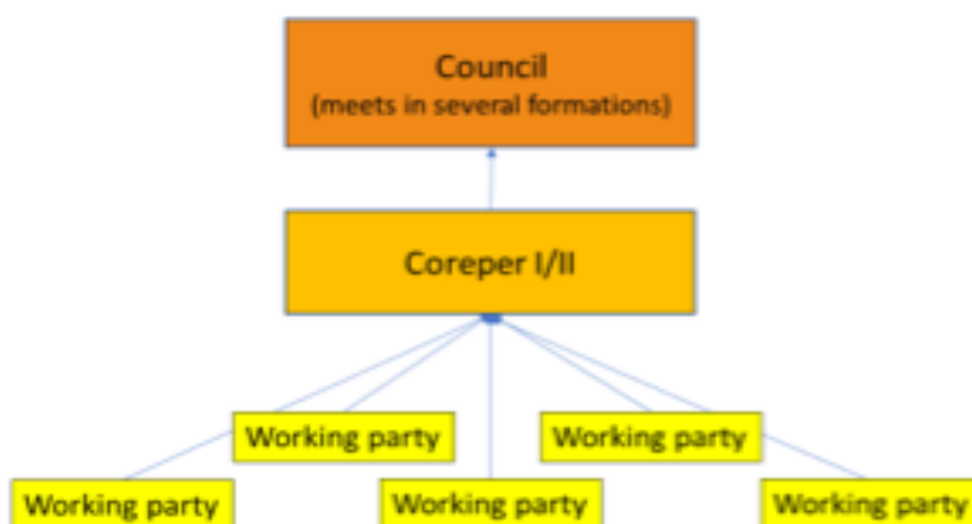
I have chosen to focus on the issues that defined the daily life in the Council as I knew it: the Working Parties, the Coreper, the Councils and the Presidency, as I have explained them below. My focus is on daily practice in the Council secretariat, not necessarily the features that are most politically important. I have also tried to keep strictly to the Council and its general secretariat and what goes on inside the Council.

The interaction between the EU institutions in the political process, vital as it is, falls outside my scope. The same is true for the daily functioning of the other EU institutions.

The working parties, Corepers and Councils

Let me briefly recall the basic three-layer structure of the Council and its preparatory bodies. Working parties of national experts or attachés constitutes the basic layer, the ambassadors or Permanent Representatives and their deputies constitutes the middle layer, and the Council of ministers constitutes the top layer of the decision-making structure. The Coreper⁴ meets once or twice every week, both in an “ambassador format” where each Member State is represented by the ambassador or Permanent Representative to the EU (Coreper II), and in its deputy format where the Member States are represented by the Deputy Permanent Representative (Coreper I).

Figure 1: The structure of the Council and its preparatory bodies



The daily life of the Council turns on the Working Parties. It is in the Working Parties that the greatest part of the Council work is done. Somewhere between 10 and 20 Working Party meetings are held each working day throughout the year – except in August and around Christmas and New Year. Although, the role of the Commission and its representatives in the decision-making process fall outside the scope of this article, it should be noted that Commission representatives take part in the whole process outlined in figure 1 and that the Commission is an integrated part of the common culture of the Council preparatory bodies. The superimposition of a fourth layer, in the European Council, since 2009 with a permanent President, has expanded but not fundamentally altered this structure.

“They know how far they can trust each other”.

The ambassadors in Coreper II prepare files to be examined by the politically more interesting Council formations (Justice, Foreign Affairs, General Affairs and Economy and Finance) and the deputies in Coreper I prepare the rest. The Council itself meets in its various formations⁷ less often than the ambassadors, usually varying from once or twice per Presidency (Education, Youth, Culture and Sports) to once a month (ECOFIN), but can be, and sometimes is, convened by the Presidency with short notice in case an important topic needs urgent examination. ECOFIN for instance was convened often and with short notice during the financial crisis and the sovereign debt crisis

In the Working Parties Member States are either represented by experts coming from the capitals to attend the meeting or by the relevant permanent attachés, e.g. the environment attachés, from the Permanent Representations. The attachés are usually stationed in Brussels for a period varying from two to five years (or longer) depending on the Member State. The Permanent Representatives and their deputies are usually stationed for periods of similar lengths. In the Council the Member States are represented by a government minister or state secretary, who comes to Brussels for the meeting and leaves again.

This institutional practice in the Working Parties and in the Corepers gives a certain stability to the decision-making process, which is important for the conflict resolution capacity of the Council. The involved players have time to get to know each other and learn to trust or at least to calibrate the other players. The delegates, especially the ones permanently stationed in Brussels, get to know each other well as they meet both professionally and socially – there even was a marriage. They not only know the technical details of the files under discussion, but they know how far they can trust each other in negotiations that are facilitated by a permanent culture of compromise seeking and shared experiences. Although, the negotiation “climate” varies from group to group and over time, the conditions for reaching compromise agreements are good and the adversarial nature of the discussions is masked by, and sometimes even disappear in the spirit of mutual camaraderie.

This is not the case for the Council meetings where the ministers often do not know each other, are unfamiliar with the technical details of the files and speak in publicly transmitted debates. Compromises are therefore often found at working party- or coreper level and ministers are presented with a *fait accompli*. To add “spice” to the Council debates, several Presidencies have tried to place open issues on the agenda of the Council for ministers to decide. But the issues are often of a very technical nature and ministers tend not to enjoy spending two hours on camera discussing topics like the heat-protective qualities of oven-gloves.

Where there are fundamental differences between Member States, the Council must act. The Council meetings, not including pre-meeting briefing sessions, usually last for 5-6 hours with a lunch break in the middle, but the President is free to extend the meeting for as long as s/he finds necessary. If a vital deadline is looming and the differences are difficult to reconcile, a meeting can run into the night or even until the next morning and can, depending on the deadline to be met, be continued the next day or a few days later.

This can of course occasionally lead to ministers getting to know each other well. The ECOFIN ministers who during the financial crisis and the sovereign debt crisis had to spend many days and often nights together each month, came to know each other well and developed a personal rapport. Indeed, one finance minister is quoted for saying that he always felt comfortable attending the ECOFIN meetings since his finance minister colleagues understood the economic problems he was facing much better than his cabinet colleagues at home.

The negotiations within the Council on legislation are transmitted to the public and remain available for some time on the Council website⁶ and documents to be discussed during public debates are publicly available. However, some parts of the Council meetings are not public, and Coreper and Working Party meetings are not web streamed and formal minutes are usually not made of ordinary Working Party meetings. While the Working Parties are not public, they are not secret either. Individual participants are often happy to communicate informally to outsiders on what happened at a particular meeting, it is just the official records which are not made. They used to be in the past, but the practice of producing them, has been abandoned since they were not particularly useful for several reasons.

First, formal decisions are rarely taken by Working Parties. All legal or politically binding decisions need confirmation by Coreper and/or Council. Second, individual participants normally make their own reports to their superiors right after the meeting with details of the points of relevance to the concerned delegation and such reports cannot await a more neutrally worded official version of the minutes arriving days or sometimes weeks after the meeting. Finally, the Presidency will always, on the basis of the discussions at the meeting, evaluate where common ground between delegations can be found on the various open issues. This evaluation will feed into the next presidency compromise on the text under discussion.

It can help the search for a compromise that no record is made that could show who has won or lost a point.

It can help the search for a compromise that no record is made that could show who has won or lost a point. The “winners” are content that the text is to their liking, the “losers” are at least not publicly shown to have lost. The aim of working party discussions is not to establish which delegations have “won” or “lost” most points, but to find a compromise text everybody can accept. Official minutes of Council and Coreper meetings are made, but they tend to be extremely succinct for the same reason.

There are no strict rules on when a file has to be presented to Coreper/Council. The decision rests with the Presidency. In practice, an item is inscribed on the Coreper agenda about a week, or sometimes less, before the actual meeting. For Council meetings the agenda has to be presented to Coreper around three weeks before the Council meeting and is examined by every Coreper meeting until the day of the Council. There are many demanding rules on how a file has to be prepared for Council, how long in advance the documents must be presented etc, but they are all trumped by the rule that the Council itself can by unanimity decide to disregard any of the procedural rules. Since nobody really wants to “rock the boat”, all delegations will usually accept tacitly any item, and any supporting document, the Presidency chooses to put on the agenda, regardless of the formal deadlines.

Both in Coreper and Council, some items appear on the agenda as “items to be agreed without debate”. In Coreper they are called I-items, in Council A-items. The items with debate are referred to as II-items or B-items respectively. The I/A items are all items where agreement between Member States exists and where a debate would therefore be a waste of time. Opposition from a Member State to the substance of the item is no hindrance for the item being agreed as an I/A item, the opposition is simply noted in the supporting document: “The XX delegation has indicated its intention to vote against”. However, all delegations must agree to the fact that an item is being prepared without debate, that the item is on the list of I/A items. This may perhaps sound contradictory, but it isn’t. Delegations often accept that an item is prepared without debate in Coreper or Council even if they are voting against the substance of the item, if the previous debate in the Working Party has shown that further debate is pointless and that positions are fixed. Since the Council and its preparatory bodies consider debate an inalienable right, Member States can always demand a debate on an item, either in the hope to sway other delegations to agree or, more often, because the delegation needs to be seen at home as having fought to the hilt for its position.

Sometimes these I/A items are mere routine items settled in responses to Parliamentary questions for instance - but sometimes they concern adoption of highly important and controversial legislation. This is not because there is anything to hide – all legislation adopted by Council is in any case public – it is simply because the final adoption of a legislative act always takes place after a thorough legal and linguistic review, so that the final adoption comes months after the political debates and battles, as explained below.

Before the Coreper meetings, usually the day before, the meetings are prepared by the so-called Antici (Coreper II) or Mertens (Coreper I) groups chaired by the current Presidency. These groups are named after their first Chairs, Mr Antici and Mr Mertens. The Antici group was set up first, and I never met the original Mr Antici, but I recall meeting Mr Mertens during a Belgian Presidency in the early nineties. The members are close collaborators of the Permanent Representative/Deputy Permanent Representative and are usually referred to as the Anticis/Mertens. You refer to a person as for instance the Latvian Antici or the Greek Mertens. The Anticis/Mertens prepare the Coreper meetings, check that items to be decided without debate - the so-called I-items - can really be adopted without debate. They note where there are outstanding reservations, prepare the order of the agenda of the Coreper meeting and give a rough guestimate of how long each item might take. These groups have no formal powers but given the very precise picture they get in advance of items to be debated at Coreper and possibly later in Council, they are not unimportant as a forum for informal exchanges of views.

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The role of the Presidency

Article 16 (9) of the Treaty of the European Union foresees that the Presidency of the Council shall be held by Member State representatives in the Council on the basis of equal rotation. In addition, the Council has decided to set up since 1 January 2007, a system of Council 18-month programmes agreed between the three Presidencies which hold office during the period concerned in the so-called trio system.

In practice the introduction of the trio system has not fundamentally altered the 6-month presidency system. It is still very much the current Presidency that matters. Every Presidency has obviously to coordinate with the Presidency before it, and later with the Presidency which succeeds it. The agenda of the Council is very much decided by what is put on the table by outside forces: the legislative acts in the process of being adopted, new proposals presented by the Commission, by political developments at national and international level and by current events. There is little scope for focusing too much effort on the usually rather general priorities in the 18-monthly trio programme.

The system of 6-month presidencies has been criticized as outdated and inconsistent with the need to focus on longer term priorities. Indeed, it was for this very reason that the Member States decided to provide for a permanent President of the European Council and of the Foreign Affairs Council, and why some specific working parties can be given a permanent chair.

In practice, the presidency remains the key to understand how the Council of Ministers works. Practically everything is decided by the Presidency, the number of meetings to be held, when to hold them and their agenda. Even the allocation of meeting rooms is not a secretariat's task but is decided by the Presidency - sometimes at the highest level. Therefore, if a frustrated Chair of a working party cannot get a meeting room for a meeting s/he deems of great importance, the only solution is an appeal to the Permanent Representative in charge of the Presidency.

The main task of the Presidency however, is to represent the Council to the outside world including the other EU institutions, which i.e. entails that the Presidency alone represents the Council in the ‘trilogue negotiations’ with the Parliament and the Commission. Regardless of whether the Presidency is held by a big or a small Member State, it is the Presidency which is responsible for the negotiations, for identifying areas of agreement and for finding possible compromises for areas of disagreements.

The Presidency is assisted by the permanent Council secretariat. The secretariat can do as much or as little as the Presidency requires. It is always responsible for all practical issues: that the meeting rooms are there, that interpretation is present according to the rules, that meetings are convened, that the Council’s rules of procedure are respected, that documents are distributed on time and translated as necessary. The Council secretariat also has a legal service, dedicated to providing the Working Parties, Corepers and Council with top-quality legal advice.

Even the allocation of meeting rooms is not a secretariat’s task but is decided by the Presidency, sometimes at the highest level

The secretariat also assists the Presidency in the political handling of the work. It can help the Presidency identify issues, redraft a compromise text, elaborate a compromise, work out a strategy for taking the negotiations further – but all is done under the responsibility of the Presidency. The secretariat briefs the Chairs of Coreper and Council both verbally and in writing on each item before each meeting and briefs the Chairs of Working Parties with a frequency that varies between once before each meeting to six times a day. Smaller Member States tend to make more use of the secretariat’s advice on political strategy than bigger Member States do, although that is not always the case. Other factors such as the personal “chemistry” between an individual chair and the responsible Council secretariat staff can also play a role. I have also noted that even the most self-confident Presidency who starts the Presidency believing they know it all, usually ends up relying on the secretariat’s advice.

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It is to a large extent presidential ambition that drives the work of the Council forward. Each Member State holds the Presidency only once every 13 or 14 years and the Presidency is therefore a big event in the political life of a Member State. Each Presidency acts as if they were in some sort of competition with other presidencies to score the highest number of agreements. All agreements count: agreements on Council conclusions on policy issues, agreements on mandates to negotiate with the Parliament in the trilogue process, agreements with the parliament in the trilogue process, in fact anything that can be negotiated and agreed upon. However, no official tally is kept of agreements reached and the official adoption date of legislative acts usually fall in the six-month period following all negotiations on the act. That does not matter, the race to squeeze as many agreements as possible into a Presidency is always on, and each Presidency acts as if the world would end on the last day of its presidency.

This of course gives rise to a degree of short-term thinking. At the same time, the relentless drive to always find agreements ensures that work is constantly driven forwards and that files are not left to languish in the Working Parties for ever. Every Presidency is sure at least to try to find agreement. When a legislative proposal is too big making it impossible for a Presidency to negotiate it and to bring it to a conclusion during their term, the Presidency is still expected to carry out negotiations with the intent of facilitating a future agreement by a subsequent Presidency. A Presidency that leaves a difficult legislative proposal to languish unexamined by a working party, comes in for a lot of criticism by the Commission, but also by other delegations, some of which are usually interested in taking the file forward. Additionally, the Parliament may exert political pressure if it finds the Council is not sufficiently active in taking negotiations towards a mandate to begin the trilogues. Only after negotiations have shown beyond any doubt that a legislative proposal is hopelessly stuck and that profound and irreconcilable differences exist between delegations, is a Presidency tacitly permitted to pay no more attention to it and let it die a quiet death by neglect, with no more negotiations taking place.

Delegations, compromises and voting

Much political analysis has been given to the political relations between the Member States in the Union. Focus has been on the bigger Member States and how they interact, slightly less attention has been paid to the smaller Member States. However, in practice the importance of each delegation in the Council is not determined solely by the size of the Member State it represents. The practical rule in the Council is that all delegations are equal. They are equal (in the few cases) when the Council votes by simple majority and more importantly, they are equal in the daily life of the Council.



Photo provided by author

This is starkly visible already in the way the meeting rooms for Councils, Coreper and Working Parties are laid out. Each delegation has the same number of seats regardless of its size. Malta has the same number of seats as Germany. During the debates there is no fixed speaking time allotted to any delegation, neither formally or informally. If the Luxembourg delegation feels it has more to say on a topic than the French delegation, it will do so. The influence of the speaker depends as much on the quality of the arguments as on the size of the delegation speaking.

Malta has the same number of seats as Germany

Votes are only very rarely taken in the Working Parties. Formal votes having legal effects can usually only be taken by the Council itself, but even informal “votes”, at working party level are rare. Instead, the Chair takes the sounding of delegations’ positions and use this input to prepare a new compromise better suited to win the necessary majority. Only at the end of the negotiations at working party level, just before going to Coreper, may the Chair seek to clarify the position of each delegation on a particular text.

In Coreper, informal votes or sounding out the voting intentions of each delegation take place more often than in the Working Parties, and the position of all delegations at Coreper level, on a text, should be clear before presenting the text to the Council. Occasionally the positions of delegations are set out in the formal report, drafted by the Council secretariat, and presented to the Council. However, the position of delegations is often left deliberately vague “Some delegations have expressed doubts on Article x” or “A number of delegations have still not been in a position to indicate their final position on Article Y”. This is because positions often move in the final stages of a negotiation and there is no need to lock in a delegation that might be willing to change position and join an existing or emerging majority. The position of each delegation should in any case be clear to all who attended the Coreper examination of the issue.

It is not always an obvious task to pinpoint the position of a delegation in a debate. Sometimes questions can be counted as both support or opposition when a delegate says something like: “My delegation supports the Presidency compromise proposal on the table. However, we would like Article X to have a broader scope and Articles Y and Z to be adjusted accordingly.” This can be interpreted either as opposition – the delegation does NOT like the compromise on the table – OR it can be interpreted as support – the delegation clearly stated that it supported the compromise although it ideally would have liked a slightly different drafting. At a working party, or even at Coreper, the Chair can, if necessary, ask a delegation to clarify; but at Council level ministers are reluctant to hint that a colleague has not been sufficiently clear, by asking him/her to clarify. The usual fall-back in the Council would be to interpret an ambiguous statement, to mean support for the compromise text on the table. After all, delegations prefer to be part of an emerging majority or consensus. If a compromise is broadly acceptable, they will, in the end, support it.

No delegation, however large and powerful the Member State it represents, can ever get everything it would ideally want.

This is a general rule of life in the Council. To insist to the end on your original points leads you nowhere. An institution like the Council of ministers requires genuine willingness to compromise continuously. No delegation, however large and powerful the Member State it represents, can ever get everything it would ideally want. The winner is the delegation who realises this and negotiates accordingly. Many theories have been elaborated on the theme of negotiations and the powerplay between the negotiating parties. In the Council this has been distilled into a very simple rule: “To get, you must give.” I have several times seen how a delegation which mistook stubbornness for strength and stuck consistently to its original position has simply been left out of an emerging compromise. The other delegations simply will not accept it.

The desire to compromise is, at least to some extent, driven by the fact that the Treaty now requires only a qualified majority, as opposed to unanimity for most decisions. When you look at the voting pattern of the Council⁷, it looks as if the Council mostly votes with unanimity, even where the Treaty only requires a qualified majority. However, it is the qualified majority voting (QMV) which brings this unanimity about. Delegations usually only vote against a proposal if they are strongly opposed, and even so, only if they, for reasons of national politics, need to be seen as being publicly against. Less strong opposition is usually marked by an abstention. Delegations do not usually like being seen as “losers” who could not sway the Council to their own point of view. So unless opposition is strong, or it needs to be on the record, a delegation will swallow its remaining objections and vote with the majority. Even if the delegation at the time of the political agreement in Council in the web-streamed debate had expressed opposition, it often, months later, when the text is up for final adoption in the Council, quietly decides either to abstain or even to join the majority.

All politically agreed legislative texts must be revised to ensure legal and linguistic consistency in all official languages before they can become legally binding acts. It is these revised texts which are legally adopted by the Council and the Parliament. The final adoption therefore usually occurs months after the political agreement was reached. The votes both in the Parliament and in the Council on legislative acts are always public, but this is not enough to generate any public attention, coming as it does, long after the political battles were fought.

Astonishingly, 80 % of all EU legislation is adopted in the ordinary legislation procedure which requires the Council to vote by qualified majority. In the past, under the system agreed in the Nice Treaty, each Member States was allotted a fixed number of votes based on, but not directly proportional to, their size as measured by number of inhabitants. Under the system introduced with the Lisbon Treaty and in force since 2014, a qualified majority required 55% of MS (in the EU of 28 this means 16) having at least 65% of the total population of the EU. The total population of the EU and of each Member State is calculated and published each year by Eurostat and the voting parameters thus must be constantly updated. In practice this is no longer done manually.

A simple app by the Council, which can be downloaded from Google Play Store or Apple App Store, makes it easy to calculate all the various voting permutations, necessary when estimating the support for a compromise in the final stages of negotiations on a text, or during a Coreper or a Council debate



Photo provided by author

With each new enlargement extra chairs were added around the table, new names added to the mailing lists and more flags flew in front of the buildings, but the structures and the working methods remained essentially unaffected.

Past, present and future

In the years since the Council was first set up, the basic structures and the method of daily work has changed very little. The structures I have worked with, and which were put in place already in the 1960s, have proved remarkably resilient and adaptable to the important changes in Europe since then.

In the period I worked for the General Secretariat from 1986 to end 2017, the Council has grown from 12 Member States in 1986 to 15 in 1995, 25 in 2004, 27 in 2007 and 28 in 2013, sadly soon to shrink to 27 in 2019. With each new enlargement extra chairs were added around the table, new names added to the mailing lists and more flags flew in front of the buildings, but the structures and the working methods remained essentially unaffected. Moreover, with the accession of new Member States, new languages were added reaching more than 20 official languages although the fundamental principles remained the same. Even the “big bang” enlargement with 10 new Member States in 2004 changed less than many had hoped or feared. Despite predictions that the Council could not function with 25 Member States the same way it had functioned with 15, it did just that.

Will the structures and working methods continue to hold in the future? The departure of the UK will not in itself change much to the way the Council works. There will just be 27 instead of 28 delegations. The departure of the big Member State that had English as its official language may have an impact on the daily working languages of the EU. However, all through my years in the EU, I have seen English continuously gaining ground and it is at present by far the most common language used in all informal communication among officials and delegates. Personally, I have a hard time seeing that change following the departure of the UK, but time will tell.

It is difficult at this stage to foresee what could pose a serious threat to the Council. Obviously, given that the Council is the creation of the Member States, the Council is

The Council has previously survived a Member State which stayed a member but refused to cooperate or even be present in the Council when France followed the policy of “the empty chair” in the 1960s. And the Council will survive the departure of the UK. It has adapted to all developments within the EU over the years, including the forming of the Euro Area where cooperation is closer than within the EU of 28 or 27, so personally I am confident it will continue.

Should nationalist policies gain further terrain in the Member States, the result could be an increased role for the Council in the EU since the Council is the institution where the Member States are represented and where national positions and policies can be debated. Whether the culture of compromise and consensus could survive prolonged and sustained conflicts among mutually hostile Member States is a different question. What would change the Council beyond recognition, however, would be if federalist ideas instead gained ground and the EU developed into a fully-fledged federal state, where the Council would be turned into a US style senate. To judge the likelihood of that happening goes well beyond the scope of this article.

Member States are working together in the Council not because they have ceased to be States with their own interests but because they have found a better way to be states and to further their own interests, rather than the age old one of divisions and war.

Conclusion

Being a practitioner in an academic debate on the EU can feel like being a chimpanzee in an animal behavioural seminar. What is important to the chimpanzee is not necessarily so to the scientists studying it.

I have tried to highlight some of the practices that constitute daily life in the Council and to give an overview of how the work of the Council is carried out. In this I have been imprecise since to every rule there is at least one exception. I have been incomplete as I have concentrated on the classic EU work as I knew it and have not covered the new and expanding areas of security, justice and governance of the Euro Area, although I believe that what I have written in this article is also valid in these areas. Finally, in highlighting what I find important, based on my own work, I have of course been biased.

In conclusion, let me just say that if my many years in the Council working with the Member States on a daily basis has taught me anything, it is that for all the talk of the EU as a federal entity, Member States are working together in the Council not because they have ceased to be States with their own interests but because they have found a better way to be states and to further their own interests, rather than the age old one of divisions and war. For all its bureaucratic tediousness and slowly grinding procedural wheels, such a better way exists and is being used. The Nobel Peace prize was well deserved.

Endnotes

- 1 Former head of Unit, Council of the European Union, General secretariat. Any views given in this Article are the author's and do not express the position of the Council.
- 2 Under other names: the Coal and Steel Community, the EURATOM and the European Economic Community.
- 3 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/summary/>
- 4 An acronym from the French: COmité des REprésentants PERmanents. It has now become a standard term in daily language.
- 5 For a list of the Council formations, see <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/configurations/>
- 6 <https://video.consilium.europa.eu/en/webcasts>
- 7 For the final votes cast see:
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/general-secretariat/corporate-policies/transparency/open-data/voting-results/>

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