

The Council of the European Union is the executive body where the interests of Member States are directly expressed and is the most important body in the legislative process of the European Union. It is made up of the EU Member States' Ministers who are mandated to assume obligations on behalf of their countries. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the Foreign Affairs Council – FAC is chaired by the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (Federica Mogherini), and the General Affairs Council – GAC is chaired by the Foreign Minister of the EU Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Council of Ministers has the following powers and responsibilities:

1. to pass laws along with the European Parliament (under co-decision procedure);
2. to sign international agreements on behalf of the EU;
3. to make decisions regarding the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, based on the guidelines of the European Council;
4. to coordinate the activities of Member States and adopt the criteria in the field of police and judicial cooperation;
5. to agree on the EU budget along with the EP.

The Council of Ministers shall act unanimously, by a simple majority or a qualified majority. If the Council makes decisions on important and sensitive issues (e.g., amendments to the founding treaties, the creation of a new common policy, admission of a candidate country to the EU, tax and social security issues), the principle of unanimity – consensus is required. In many areas, however, the principle of unanimity is changed by qualified majority (justice and home affairs, some foreign and defense policy issues, as well as the issue of the composition of the Committee of Regions and the Economic and Social Council). In case of decisions by qualified majority, votes are weighted in the Council. The current weighting system of votes will remain in force until 2014 when it will move to the principle of a double majority voting system (55% EU Council members representing at least 65% of the EU's population), which will be implemented progressively from 2014 until 2017 when it will become mandatory. The Lisbon Treaty provides, however, for the possibility of blocking minority Council decisions, by at least four EU members (so-called Ioannina compromise, thanks to which a minority within the EU may request to reconsider the decisions of the Council that are not in their vital interest).