

Rules of procedure of the Council of the EU

Article 20

The Presidency and the smooth conduct of discussions

1. The Presidency shall be responsible for the application of these Rules of Procedure and for ensuring that discussions are conducted smoothly. In particular, the Presidency shall ensure that the provisions of Annex V concerning the Council's working methods are complied with.

To ensure that discussions are conducted properly it may also, unless the Council decides otherwise, take any appropriate measure necessary to achieve the best possible use of the time available during meetings and in particular:

- (a) restrict the numbers per delegation present in the meeting room for discussion of a particular item, and decide whether to authorise the opening of an overflow room;
- (b) set the order in which items are to be taken and determine the duration of discussions on them;
- (c) organise the time allotted for discussion of a particular item, in particular through limiting the time during which participants may speak and determining the order in which they may take the floor;
- (d) ask delegations to present in writing their proposals for amendment of a text under discussion before a given date, together with a brief explanation if appropriate;
- (e) ask delegations which have identical or similar positions on a particular item, on a text or on part of a text to choose one of them to express their shared position at the meeting or in writing before the meeting.

2. Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 19(4) to (6) and to its powers and its overall political responsibility, the six-monthly Presidency shall be assisted in all its responsibilities by the other members of the pre-established group of three Member States referred to in Article 1(4) on the basis of the 18-month programme or pursuant to other arrangements agreed between them. It shall also be assisted, where appropriate, by the representative of the Member State next holding the Presidency. At the Presidency's request and acting on its instructions, that representative or a member of that group shall replace it as and when required, shall relieve it, where necessary, of certain tasks and shall ensure the continuity of the Council's proceedings.

ANNEX V

Council working methods

Preparation for meetings

1. The Presidency shall ensure that a file is submitted to Coreper by a working party or by a committee only when there is reasonable prospect of progress or clarification of positions being achieved at that level. Conversely, files may be referred to a working party or to a committee again only when necessary, and in any event only with the remit to tackle precise, well-defined problems.
2. The Presidency shall take the steps necessary to advance work between meetings. It can, for example, with the agreement of the working party or committee, undertake in the most efficient way necessary consultations on specific problems with a view to reporting back to the working party or committee concerned on possible solutions. It can also conduct written consultations by requesting delegations to react in written form to a proposal before the next meeting of the working party or committee.
3. Whenever appropriate, delegations shall set out the positions they are likely to take in a forthcoming meeting in written form before that meeting. When that includes proposals for amending text, delegations shall suggest specific wording. Wherever possible, written input shall be submitted jointly by delegations maintaining identical positions.
4. Coreper shall avoid going over ground already covered in the preparation of its proceedings. That shall apply in particular to 'I' items, to information on the organisation and order of its business and to information on the agenda and organisation of forthcoming Council meetings. Wherever possible, delegations shall raise 'Any other business' items when Coreper's proceedings are being prepared rather than in Coreper itself.
5. The Presidency shall convey to delegations as soon as possible when Coreper's proceedings are being prepared all the information necessary to allow thorough preparation of Coreper's proceedings, including information on what the Presidency expects to achieve from the discussion on each agenda item. Conversely, the Presidency shall, as appropriate, encourage delegations to communicate to the other delegations, when Coreper's proceedings are being prepared, information on the positions they will be taking in Coreper. In this context the Presidency shall finalise Coreper's agenda. The Presidency may convene more frequently the groups that prepare Coreper's proceedings, when required by circumstances.

Conduct of meetings

6. No item shall be placed on the Council agenda simply for presentation by the Commission or by a Council member, except where a debate on new major initiatives is planned.
7. The Presidency shall refrain from placing on Coreper's agenda items for information only. Such information, e.g. on the outcome of meetings in another forum or with a third State or another institution, procedural or organisational questions, etc., should instead be transmitted to delegations when Coreper's proceedings are being prepared, whenever possible in written form, and should not be repeated in Coreper.
8. At the start of a meeting, the Presidency shall give any further information necessary regarding the handling of the meeting and in particular indicate the length of time it intends to be devoted to each item. It shall refrain from making lengthy introductions and avoid repeating information which is already known to delegations.
9. At the start of a discussion on a substantive point, the Presidency shall, depending on the type of discussion which is needed, indicate to delegations the maximum length of their interventions on that point. In most cases interventions should not exceed two minutes.
10. Full table rounds shall be proscribed in principle; they may be used only in exceptional circumstances on specific questions, with a time limit on interventions set by the Presidency.
11. The Presidency shall give as much focus as possible to discussions, in particular by requesting delegations to react to compromise texts or specific proposals.
12. During and at the end of meetings the Presidency shall refrain from making lengthy summaries of the discussions and shall confine itself to concluding briefly on the results (substance and/or procedure) achieved.
13. Delegations shall avoid repeating points made by previous speakers. Their interventions shall be brief, substantive and to the point.
14. Like-minded delegations shall be encouraged to hold consultations with a view to the presentation by a single spokesperson of a common position on a specific point.
15. When discussing texts, delegations shall make concrete drafting proposals, in writing, rather than merely express their disagreement with a particular proposal.
16. Unless indicated otherwise by the Presidency, delegations shall refrain from taking the floor when in agreement with a particular proposal; in this case silence shall be taken as agreement in principle.