

The EU and how it works at the UN

What is the European Union?

The 1957 Treaty of Rome laid the foundation for the European Community (EC), a milestone in the process of western European integration and the forerunner of today's EU. It looked forward to creating an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe, setting out the basis for a common market and an eventual economic and monetary union. The European Community continues to exist today as a vehicle for many policies within the larger EU framework.

The project's success — especially as seen in its ongoing increase in membership and its growing economic importance in the world — is a unique example of integration between sovereign States, going far beyond normal intergovernmental cooperation. Unlike the UN, NATO or the OECD, this European venture was, from the outset, conceived as a supranational structure with common institutions, including a Council, a Commission, a Court of Justice, a Court of Auditors and a directly elected Parliament (representing over 450 million European citizens after enlargement). Both the European Parliament and the Council have important roles in the decision-making process, notably in the approval of legislation and adoption of the budget, which gives the Community its own resources. European Community legislation has precedence over national legislation and is subject to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice.

In 1992, building on the success of the EC, European leaders signed the Treaty of Maastricht, which established the European Union. This Treaty significantly deepened the relationship between member countries in the areas of monetary policy and justice and home affairs. It also confirmed the Union's desire to assert its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a CFSP, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy. In December 2000, the European Council meeting in Nice decided to take the CFSP further by adopting a common European security and defence policy.

The European Council, bringing together the Heads of States or Government of the EU Member States, provides the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and defines the general political guidelines.

The Union's principal decision-making body across the spectrum of its activities is the Council of the European Union. The Council is composed of one representative at ministerial level from each Member State, who is empowered to represent his government, politically accountable to the national parliament.

Every six months (*) an EU Member State takes over the presidency of the Council and its preparatory bodies. The presidency ensures follow-up of policy decisions taken by the Council. It also represents the Union in common foreign and security policy matters, and is responsible for the implementation of CFSP decisions. On this basis, it expresses the position of the Union on these matters in international organisations and at international conferences.



↑ Ambassador Marcello Spatafora at the UN Security Council, representing the EU presidency, second half of 2003.
UN/DPI photo by Evan Schneider.

(*) The EU presidency calendar: Greece (first half 2003); Italy (second half 2003); Ireland (first half 2004); Netherlands (second half 2004); Luxembourg (first half 2005); and the United Kingdom (second half 2005); thereafter subject to enlargement and the new constitution for Europe.

The presidency is assisted in its tasks by the High Representative for the EU's common foreign and security policy, and by the General Secretariat of the Council under his responsibility.

The European Commission comprises 20 Commissioners until enlargement, including at least one from each Member State ⁽⁵⁾. It takes policy decisions collectively and has exclusive powers for initiating policy proposals across the whole spectrum of Community matters. It also implements Community legislation, and negotiates bilateral treaties and international commitments on behalf of the Community. The European Commission is fully associated in the Union's CFSP. In the UN, the Commission represents the European Community.

The European Parliament (EP) has wide powers in the decision-making process with regard to Community legislation, agreements and the budget. The presidency consults it on the main aspects and basic choices of the CFSP. And the EP follows EU external policies closely, in particular through its Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights and the CFSP. It expresses itself through non-binding resolutions on important international issues, many with UN aspects.



↑ Left to right: Latvian Ambassador Gints Jegermanis, former UK Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock, former Cypriot Ambassador Sotirios Zackheos and former Luxembourg Ambassador Hubert Wurth, some of the 25 EU Ambassadors (plus the European Commission and Council Secretariat) that now regularly attend EU coordination meetings, New York, 17 April 2003.
GANP/Dimitrios Panagos.



↑ A delegation of Members of the European Parliament came to the United Nations to voice their opinions just before the start of the Iraq conflict, March 2003. Left to right: Ulla Sandbaek (EDD, Denmark); Proinsias De Rossa (PSE, Ireland); Patricia McKenna (Green/EFA, Ireland); Pernille Frahm (GUE/NGL, Denmark).
UN/DPI photo by Evan Schneider.

During 2002–03, the 'Convention on the Future of Europe' completed its work to draft a new EU constitutional treaty, which is being debated in an EU Intergovernmental Conference. Once agreement has been reached and all EU Member States ratify the new Treaty, new provisions relating to institutions and external policies are expected to take effect as from 2006.

How the EU coordinates its work at the UN

All EU countries are members of the UN in their own right, and many have been since the UN's foundation in 1945 ⁽⁶⁾. The establishment of the EU's common foreign and security policy brought forward the need for EU Member States, the Council and the Commission to enhance the coordination of their actions in international organisations. The EU Treaty requires them to uphold common positions so that their collective weight can have more impact in the world.

Coordination now covers the six main committees of the General Assembly and its subordinate bodies, including ECOSOC and the subordinate functional commissions. More than 1 000 internal EU coordination meetings are conducted each year in both New York and Geneva to prepare and finalise EU positions.

The EU has also spoken with one voice in the follow-up of all the major conferences and summits held since the beginning of the 1990s.

As the EU's CFSP becomes a daily reality, the activities of its members on the UN Security Council (UNSC) increasingly take account of the EU dimen-

⁽⁵⁾ There will be one Commissioner for each of 25 Member States after enlargement and until the new constitution for Europe enters into force.

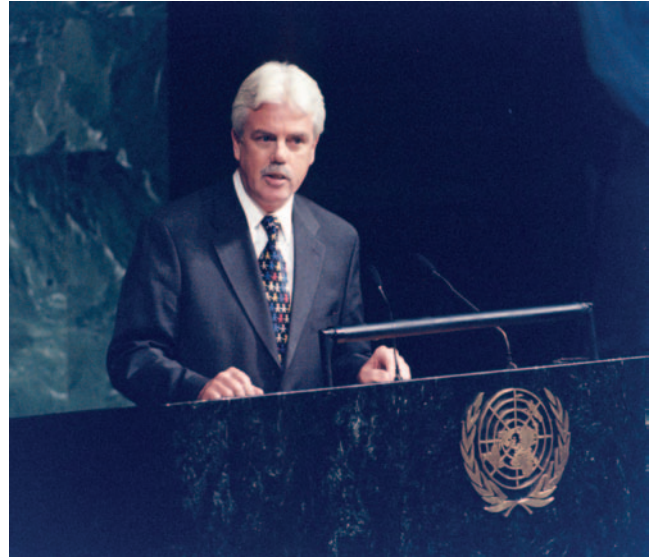
⁽⁶⁾ Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom: 1945; Sweden: 1946; Austria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain: 1955; and Germany: 1973. The European Community has also been a permanent observer at the UN since 1974. Among future members, Poland: 1945; Hungary: 1955; Cyprus: 1960; Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: 1991; Slovenia: 1992; and the Czech Republic and Slovakia: 1993.

sion on those global security issues where the EU has a political position. Article 19 of the European Union Treaty foresees that EU 'Member States which are also members of the UN Security Council will concert and keep other Member States fully informed. Member States which are permanent members of the Security Council will, in execution of their functions, ensure the defence of the positions and interests of the Union, without prejudice to their responsibilities under provisions of the UN Charter'. The Union's common viewpoint on such issues is made known publicly by joint statements delivered by the EU presidency in open meetings of the UNSC.

The role of the EU presidency is particularly important in this respect. It is responsible for day-to-day EU coordination and represents the Union in most areas of UN activity. It also represents the EU in discussions with other UN Member States, regional groups or organisations, and delivers démarches and statements on behalf of the Union.

The European Commission is actively involved at the UN, where it works with the EU presidency to represent EU views in various areas, especially development, environment and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the European Commission has specific responsibilities to speak for the European Community in areas such as trade, fisheries and agriculture.

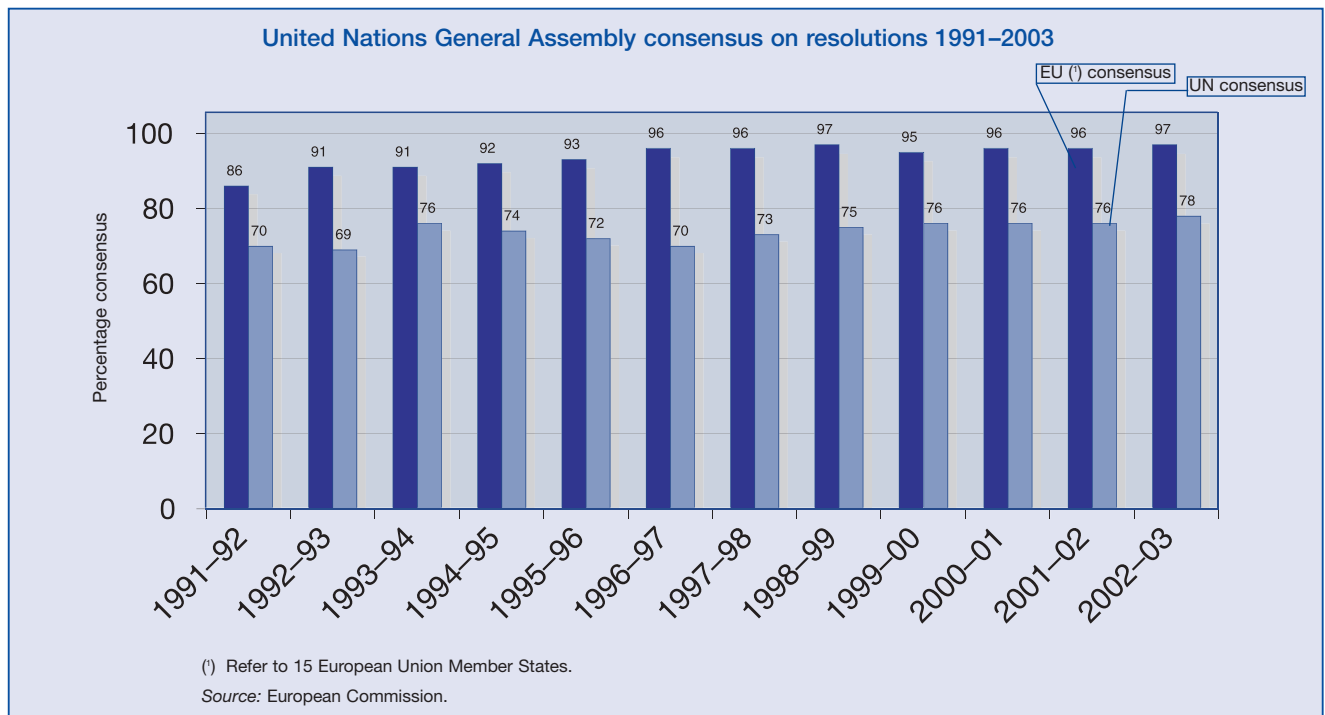
When the EU meets with non-EU countries or regional groupings or undertakes démarches, it often does so in the Troika format, a representative group composed of the presidency, the Council Secretariat, the European Commission and the incoming presidency.



↑ EC Ambassador John B. Richardson addresses the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children on behalf of the European Community, May 2002.
UN/DPI photo by Mark Garten.

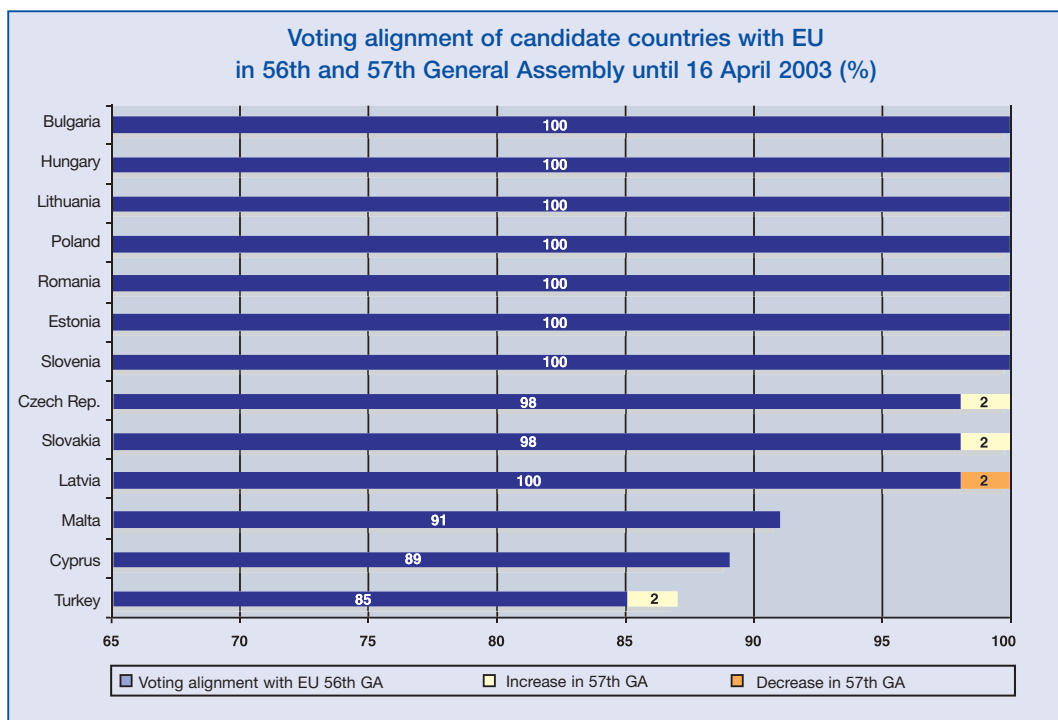
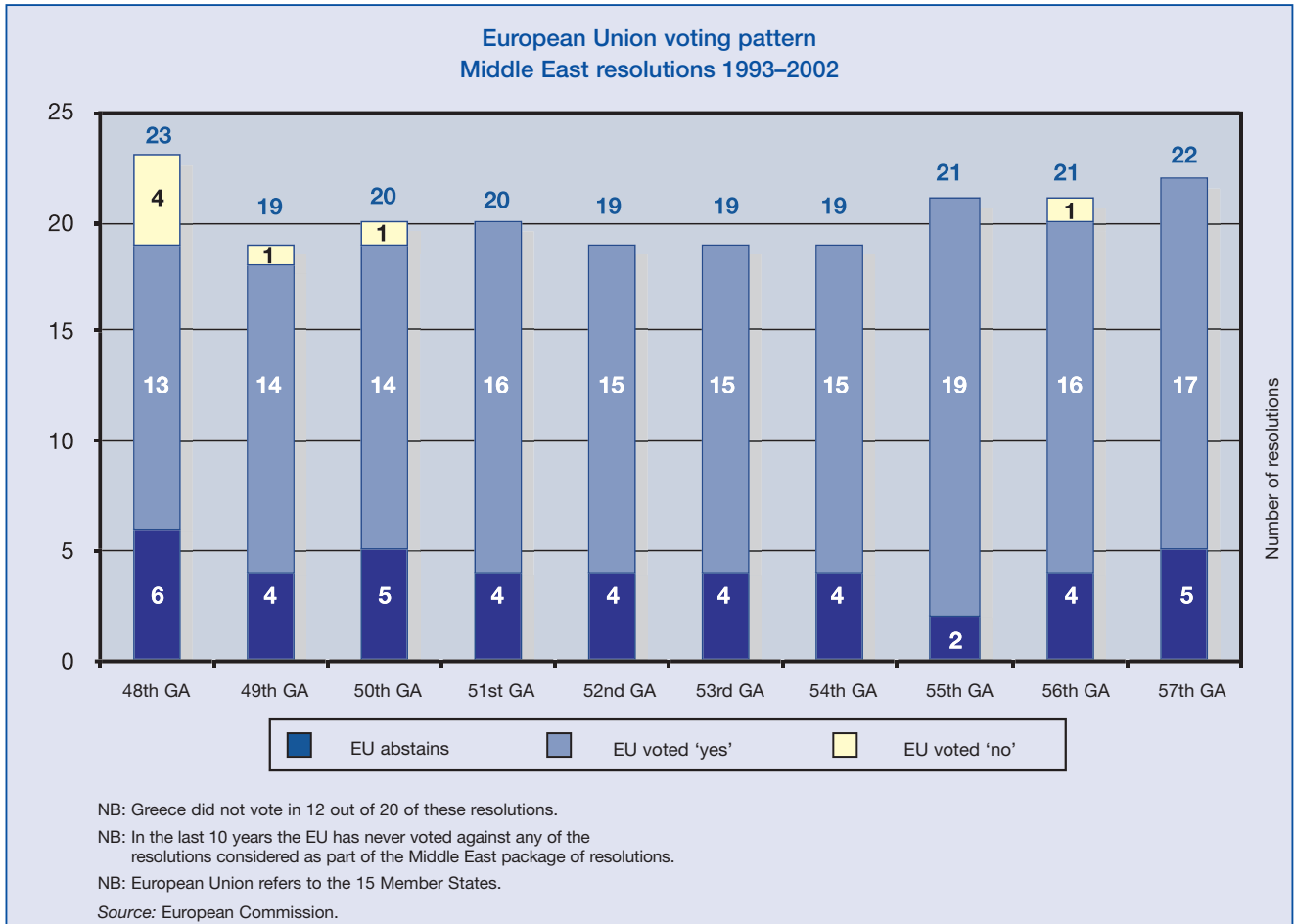
EU votes together at the UN General Assembly

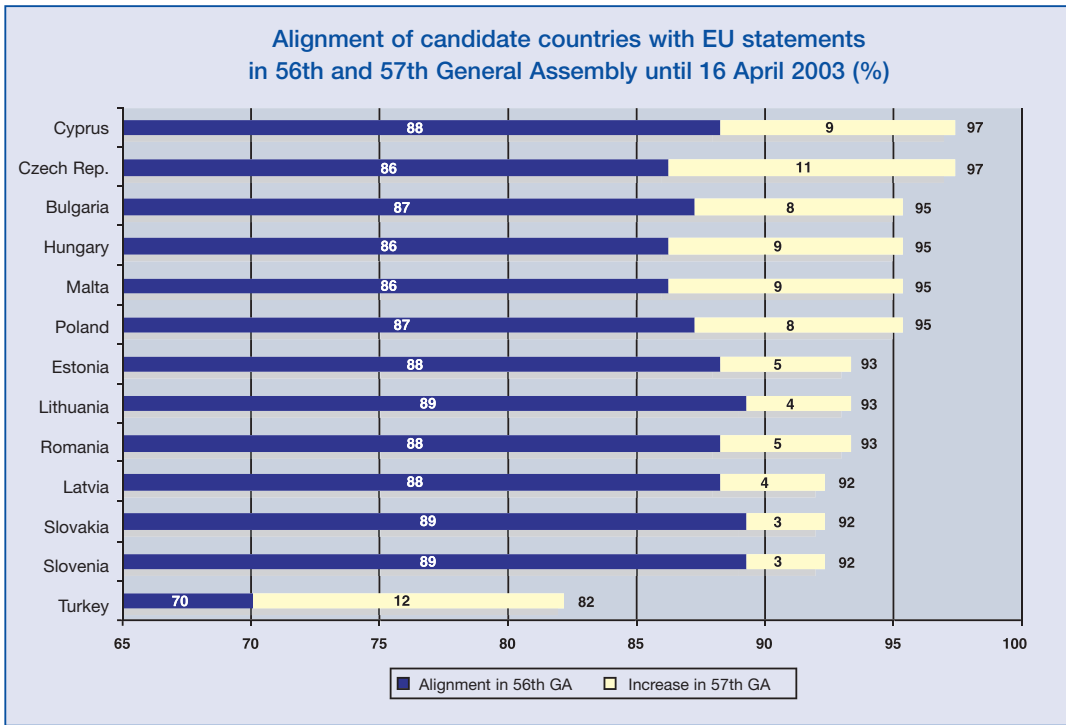
Through its CFSP, the EU speaks almost always with one voice at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). From globalisation and human rights, to development and disarmament, the EU aims for unanimity. And the results are clearly evidenced in EU cohesion, which has stood at around 95 % of all resolutions passed by the UNGA since the mid-1990s.



Of the 15 to 25 % of resolutions that are actually voted on at the UNGA each year, the EU votes unanimously on average four times out of five. Even on contentious issues like the Middle East, the EU has managed to achieve unanimity on virtually every occasion over the past decade.

The EU's enlargement is spurring greater cohesion between current and future members as well. In the UNGA, most EU candidate countries had already achieved 100 % alignment with the EU even before signing their Accession Treaties on 16 April 2003.





Now, both present and acceding States consistently uphold EU common positions. As a candidate country, Turkey is also making good progress in this regard. Furthermore, over the past few years, all candidate countries have associated themselves increasingly with EU statements made at the UN, along with

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (which are not expected to join the EU for now). This larger European convergence is set to increase further among the 25 current and future Member States that are now sitting together around the same table in all EU coordination meetings at the UN.

