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Sense-Making Processes in the Council of Ministers: From the ECSC to the European Constitution

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References
1. Introductory Remarks

The European Council
is the key legislative institution of the EU,
is the main formal point for the representation of national interests in the EU policy process,
is the EC’s main decision-making institution,
has a central executive function and
is the principal meeting place of the national governments.

The Council acts in its capacity as legislator when it adopts, on the basis of the relevant provisions of the Treaties, legally binding standards in or for Member States by means of regulations, directives, framework decisions or decisions. Internal measures, administrative or budgetary acts, acts concerning interinstitutional or international relations and non-binding acts such as conclusions, recommendations or resolutions are not regarded as legislative acts. As regards definitive legislative acts adopted by the Council, the summaries contain, where appropriate, the result of the votes and the statements for the minutes by the Council, the Commission or the Member States.

2. Historical Development

The European integration process according to the supranational approach started with the European Steel and Coal Community in 1950 when the then French Foreign minister Robert Schuman made his famous proposal of uniting the coal and steel market in Europe. In order to foster German reconstruction and reindustrialisation, France sought for a framework of planned production and distribution in its own coal and steel industry. To secure these aims, the Member States delegated certain competencies to a new supranational body – the High Authority, the predecessor of the Commission. Of course, besides the High Authority, a Special Council of Ministers was set up to make the general decisions. This Special Council of Ministers was introduced because of the pressure on the Benelux-countries to defend their national interest in the face of the dominance of France, Germany and Italy. Because the composition of this Council was one minister from each country, the ECSC-Council provided an intergovernmental balance to the supranationalist inclinations of the High Authority. For Schuman and his aide Jean Monnet, decision-making could only be efficient by delegating the responsibility for generating political ideas and for the day-to-day management of policy to a supranational body. This combination of intergovernmental decision-making and policy initiation and management by a supranational executive became the model for future treaties.