

## Treaty of Amsterdam

Came into force 1 May 1999

### Summary

This is not a landmark treaty. There are few new provisions of importance. The Parliament continues to increase its powers in decision making; for the first time there is legislation on external borders, asylum and immigration; and sustainable development is introduced to policies on environmental protection.



### Reforms to governance

The Secretary-General of the Council is given the new role of High Representative for EU foreign policy. The responsibilities consist of the formulation and implementation of CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) and dialogue with third countries.

The President of the Commission with authority granted by the Parliament will play an active role in choosing members of the Commission by common accord with Member States.

Parliament gets a stronger role in the legislative process as most legislation apart from agriculture goes through the co-decision procedure. The legislative procedures are reduced and simplified. (Pages 44 and 45 of the treaty set out in detail the co-decision procedure and the role of the three institutions.)

In the event of a breach by a Member State of any of the principles on which the EU was founded, namely liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, suspension of voting rights in the Council may follow.

The role of Court of Auditors will be enhanced. Its powers to combat fraud will be increased by its having access to the accounts of external bodies including the European Investment Bank, that manage community funds.

The Court will also cooperate closely with national audit bodies.

### Common Foreign and Security Policy

With the appointment of a High Representative, the EU's role under the CFSP for peace keeping, humanitarian relief and peace keeping will be strengthened. The projection of EU values, namely democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, will be a main objective of foreign policy.

Decision making will normally be by unanimity in the Council but Qualified Majority Voting may be used where member states abstain if national policy may be affected. Parliament will be consulted on matters with military or defence implications.

The CFSP will not prejudice the security and defence policies of Member States, including those who are members of NATO.

## Safety of citizens

With the intention of making the Union an area of freedom, security and safety for its citizens, inter governmental cooperation in police and criminal justice will be intensified.

Member states, with the aid of Europol, will co-operate to combat terrorism, people trafficking, offences against children, illicit drug and arms trafficking, corruption and fraud. Arrangements to facilitate extradition among member states will be put in place.

## Closer co-operation among member states

The concept of variable speed integration is introduced. As a last resort where joint action among all member states is not possible, a number of member states may work in close cooperation on particular policies and projects, provided that these further the objectives of the EU and have no impact on the *acquis communautaire*. Non-participating members may not impede these initiatives.

## Dealing with persons from third countries

The EU will adopt measures relating to the granting of asylum in accordance with the Geneva Convention of July 28, 1951, and the Protocol of January 31, 1967 relating to the status of refugees.

Criteria will be set for determining which member state is responsible for considering applications for asylum. Minimum standards will be set for the reception of asylum seekers and for granting and withdrawing refugee status. Policies are to be set for dealing with illegal immigrants.

Member states may have their own policies in these areas subject to compatibility with the Treaty and international agreements.

For the full text of the Treaty see

<http://www.eurotreaties.com/amsterdamtreaty.pdf>

For summaries of the main provisions see

[http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/institutional\\_affairs/treaties/amsterdam\\_treaty/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/amsterdam_treaty/index_en.htm)