Chapter Seven

The Council of Ministers – Organizational Structure, Processes and Culture

The Council of Ministers is the central political organ of the EU and primary channel of influence for Member States. The most important task of the Council of Ministers is to make political decisions and adopt legislation based on proposals from the Commission.

Furthermore, the Council of Ministers was mandated by the Treaty on the European Union to make the decisions necessary for the adoption and implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy following the overall guidelines of the European Council. The Council of Ministers moreover coordinates the activities of Member States and adopts measures in the area of Justice and Home Affairs.

The Council of Ministers is made up of representatives of the governments of Member States that meet to defend their national interests in the EU. The Ministers act on the basis of instructions from their governments and are responsible to their national parliaments. The Council of Ministers has a number of subordinated administrative units who meet under its auspices, while the Council

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The Council of Ministers may be summoned in different configurations depending on the issues at hand and include both the ministerial level as well as the assisting organizational structure of committees, working groups, secretariats, etc. (see e.g. figure 7.1. page 165).
of Ministers itself acts within the constraints of the overall strategic decisions of the European Council. In section 7.1., the overall structural framework for the work of the Council of Ministers is analysed. Section 7.2. focuses on the organizational processes of the Council of Ministers and chapter 7.3. on the organizational culture.

This chapter first briefly outlines the main features of the evolution of the Council of Ministers (section 7.1.1.) and provides a more thorough analysis of the Council of Ministers’ current build-up (section 7.1.2.). The Presidency of the Council of Ministers is furthermore analysed (section 7.1.3.) and the Council of Ministers’ mode of operation is discussed (section 7.1.4.) as well as the position of the Council of Ministers (section 7.1.5.).

In the areas where the Council of Ministers make decisions, they contribute to the formal democratic legitimacy of the EU, as the decisions of the Council are made by politicians who are elected by the people. However, the internal organization of the Council of Ministers and its placement in relation to other EU institutions in the decision-making process influence the efficiency and societal legitimacy of the decisions. In section 7.2., the internal organizational and decision-making processes of the Council of Ministers is presented in order to evaluate their organization and legitimacy.

Initially, the general characteristics of the Council of Ministers as an organ of decision-making are presented (section 7.2.1.). Afterwards, descriptions on roles in the decision-making process of the secretariat of the Council of Ministers (7.2.2.), Coreper (7.2.3.) and the working groups (7.2.4.) follow. In the following section the internal organization processes encompassing the various organs of the Council of Ministers are described in an overall perspective (section 7.2.5.). Finally, negotiation and decision-making procedures between the Member States and the Council of Ministers are analysed (section 7.2.6.).

Analysing the organizational culture of the Council of Ministers entails focusing on, for example, how organizational actors perceive and construct the world, applicable informal rules and the degree of openness toward the surroundings.

In section 7.3.1., the autonomy on the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in relation to the Member States is analysed, whereas section 7.3.2. is concerned with the degree of openness in connection with the sessions in the Council of Ministers. Section 7.3.3. outlines the possibilities for public access to Council documents, section 7.3.4. focuses on esprit de corps in the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, and 7.3.5. analyses the degree of esprit de corps shared by the officials of the Permanent Representations.