

European policy coordination of the German federal government

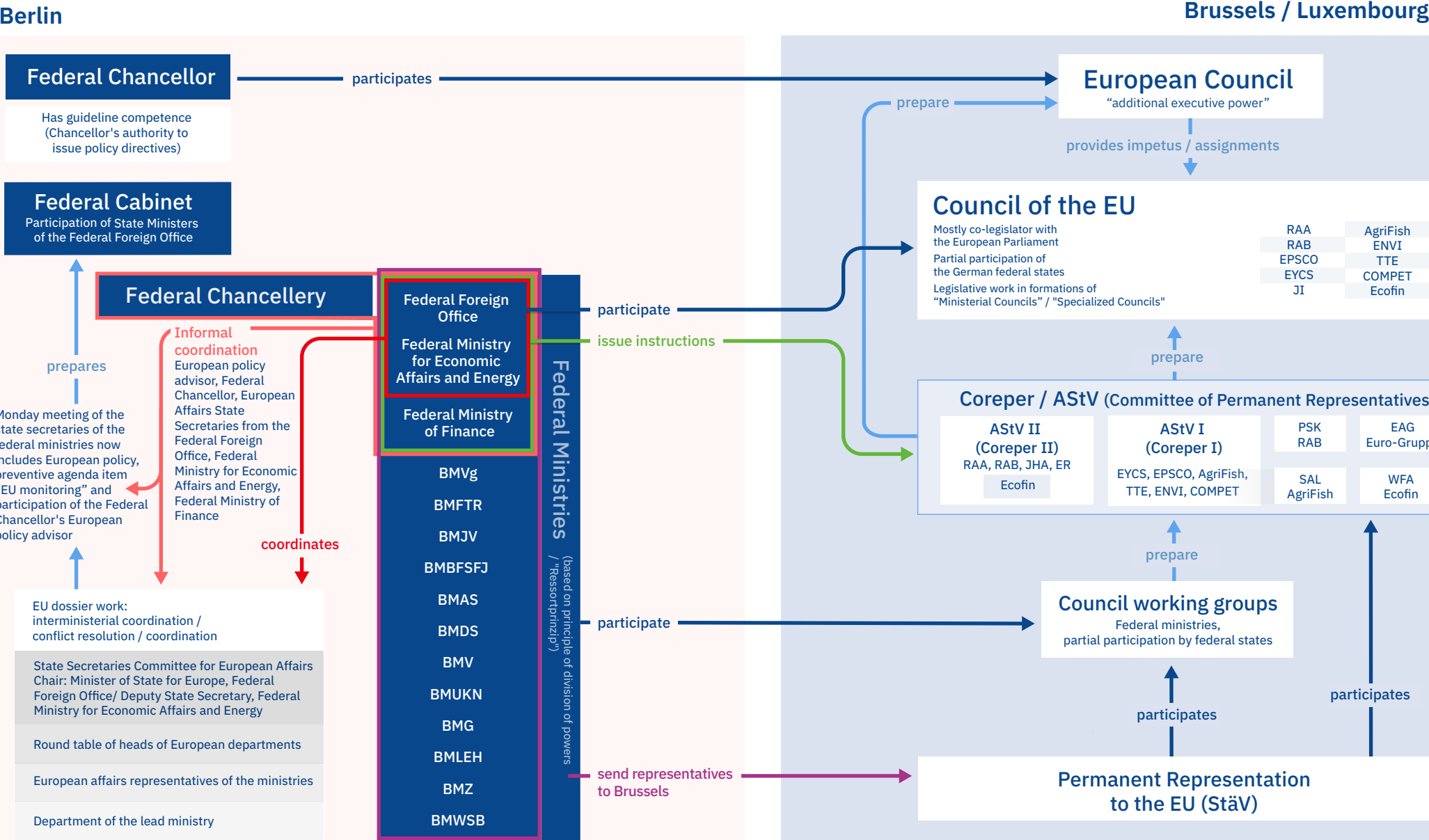
#EBDGrafik



Effective European policy coordination of the German federal government requires early positioning, consistent coordination and clear strategies within the EU. In order for Germany to act reliably and proactively, an improved coordination of European policy is necessary. The current federal government promises improvement.



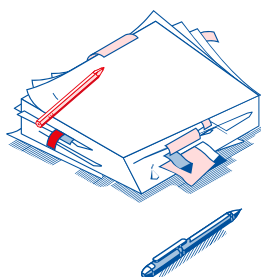
European policy coordination of the German federal government in 2025



Key actors

Federal Chancellor, Federal Cabinet Highest conflict resolution authority, Chancellor's authority to issue policy guidelines (Friedrich Merz)
Advisor to the Federal Chancellor Head of the Europe Division (Michael Clauß) – strategic direction, conflict resolution, participation in formal and informal coordination meetings, European Council
Federal Foreign Office Coordinating ministry for European affairs (Unit EU-K), issues instructions for Coreper II (with exceptions), State Minister for Europe chairs the EU State Secretary Committee, heads the Permanent Representation to the EU (Stäv), departmental responsibility
BMWE Coordinating ministry for European affairs (Unit EA-1), State Secretary of BMWE is deputy chair of the EU State Secretary Committee, deputy head of the Permanent Representation to the EU, issues instructions for Coreper I, for trade and cohesion funds, departmental responsibility
BMF Issues instructions for Ecofin/Eurogroup, departmental responsibility
BMI, BMBFSFJ, BMLEH, BMJV, and other specialist ministries Subject-specific responsibilities for Council formations, lead responsibility for EU dossiers
Permanent Representation to the EU (Stäv) Liaison with EU institutions, implementation of instructions in Coreper I/II, coalition-building with partner states on site, contact with the European Commission and European Parliament, strategic advisory role for Berlin
Federal States/Bundesrat Participation in EU projects relating to the states, especially for Council configurations, specifically in areas of shared competence

Key terms



Council configurations: Specialist councils within the Council of the EU, organized by area of expertise (e.g., Ecofin, AgriFish, ENVI) – each consisting of national ministers from the relevant departments.

Comitology: Procedures in which committees composed of representatives from EU member states advise or monitor the European Commission in the exercise of legally delegated implementing powers in order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of EU law.

Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER): Serves as a link between national governments and the work of the Council; prepares meetings of the Council of Ministers and coordinates with the European Commission.

German Vote: Germany abstains in the Council if no agreement can be reached between federal ministries. This can significantly weaken Germany's political influence and negotiating position.

Monday Meeting of State Secretaries of the Federal Ministries: Chaired by the Minister for the Chancellery, Thorsten Frei, the meetings prepare Cabinet sessions and now also include a European policy agenda item called EU Monitoring. In addition to the Chancellor's European policy adviser, representatives from several ministries participate: the Federal Foreign Office (AA) represented by Kotsch, the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF) by Böhning, and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) by Steffen.

Instructions: Substantive positions on EU dossiers are coordinated through interministerial EU coordination processes and then forwarded to the Permanent Representatives Committee for the COREPER meetings. Responsibility lies with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) for COREPER I, while for COREPER II it is shared between the Federal Foreign Office, the BMWi (for trade and cohesion policy), and the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF) for financial issues.

State Secretaries' Committee for European Affairs: The monthly coordination format at the highest civil servant level, chaired by the State Minister for Europe (Federal Foreign Office), aims to identify and clarify interdepartmental conflicts in EU dossier work at an early stage. Informal coordination is led by the Federal Chancellor's European Policy Advisor (Clauß) together with State Secretaries von Geyr (Federal Foreign Office, AA), Steffen (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, BMWi), and Schwamberger (Federal Ministry of Finance, BMF).

Meeting of European Department Heads (EU-AL): This format brings together the European department heads of the federal ministries to discuss politically relevant and potentially conflict-prone dossiers, with the aim of raising awareness and resolving differences between departments at an early stage. Informal coordination is led by the Head of Division 52 in the Federal Chancellery (Funke), together with Wolfrum from the Federal Foreign Office (AA), Szech-Koundourous from the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), and Hermes from the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF).

Principle of Departmental responsibility: Constitutional organizational principle (Art. 65 German Basic Law (GG)), under which each ministry works independently within its own area of responsibility. In European policy, this means that specialized ministries develop their own positions on EU dossiers, which can complicate coherence and consensus-building across government.

History of the German European policy coordination

Adaptation of German European Policy to Growing Challenges of European Integration

1951-1958 Limited foreign policy sovereignty within the framework of Western integration. The Federal Foreign Office was only re-established in 1955; the Chancellery shaped early European policy (Adenauer served as both Federal Chancellor and Foreign Minister). The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs (BMWi) took the lead in economic and sectoral policy.	1968 Customs union: further economic integration, focus on implementation policy.	1993 Three-pillar structure of the EU; new responsibilities for the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, and Defense. Establishment of the Europe Department within the Federal Foreign Office.	1998-2005: Changing coalition dynamics; the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF) takes over coordination from the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs (BMWi), with a focus on pan-European economic policy steering. In 2005, the responsibility shifts back to the BMWi; the Federal Foreign Office retains responsibility for COREPER II.
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1962 Organizational decree by Adenauer: Division of responsibilities — BMWi responsible for internal market and sectoral policy, Federal Foreign Office responsible for integration policy. The Chancellery retained a central coordinating role in foreign, defense, and economic policy.	1980s: Single European Act (1986/87) – start of the parliamentarization process and development of the internal market. Institutionalized division of labor: COREPER I (BMWi) and COREPER II (AA). Chancellors Schmidt and Kohl set key integration policy priorities.	2009 Treaty of Lisbon: Strengthens the role of the European Council; the Federal Chancellery gains influence over the general political objectives and priorities of the EU. Communitization of internal affairs and Schengen.
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EU Organs of the Member States

European Council ("EU Summit"): Defines EU policy guidelines; no legislative power; conclusions are not binding but serve as the starting point for EU policy and law.

Council of the EU ("Council formations" / "Council of Ministers"): Adopts decisions in the respective policy areas (Council configurations); legislation with the European Parliament and additionally with the European Commission in informal trilogues.



Legal Basis

Basic Law (Grundgesetz, GG): Article 23 GG (integration into the EU) and Article 65 GG (Principle of Departmental responsibility, chancellor's authority to set general policy guidelines, cabinet principle) form the constitutional framework for EU-related policymaking.

Law on Cooperation between the Federal Government and the States in Matters Concerning the EU (EUZBLG)

Law on Cooperation between the Federal Government and the German Bundestag in EU Matters (EUZBBG)

Organizational Decree of the Federal Government: Defines responsibilities and approval rights of individual ministries.

Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Ministries (GGO): Establishes procedures for interministerial coordination and mandatory involvement (e.g. Federal Foreign Office for fundamental EU matters, Federal Ministry of Finance for financial issues).

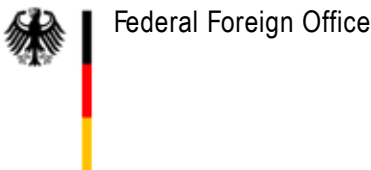
Coalition Agreement: Sets out political guidelines, such as unified government positions toward EU partners and the weekly discussion of European policy initiatives in the EU Monitoring round of State Secretaries, chaired by the Head of the Chancellery. (See p. 142f.)

Important for the European Movement Germany

Effectively and transparently representing German interests in Brussels for a strong and capable Europe

- Early positioning, no reactive “early warning”
- Coalition building, with the help of public diplomacy
- Compact directives
- Binding conflict resolution mechanisms
- Involve the Permanent Representation in Brussels and German embassies in EU member states
- Structured expert dialogue and persuasion with the Bundestag, federal states, municipalities and interest groups
- Consistent communication – clear messages, proactive media relations and public diplomacy
- Honest evaluation

Supported by:



on the basis of a decision by the German Bundestag