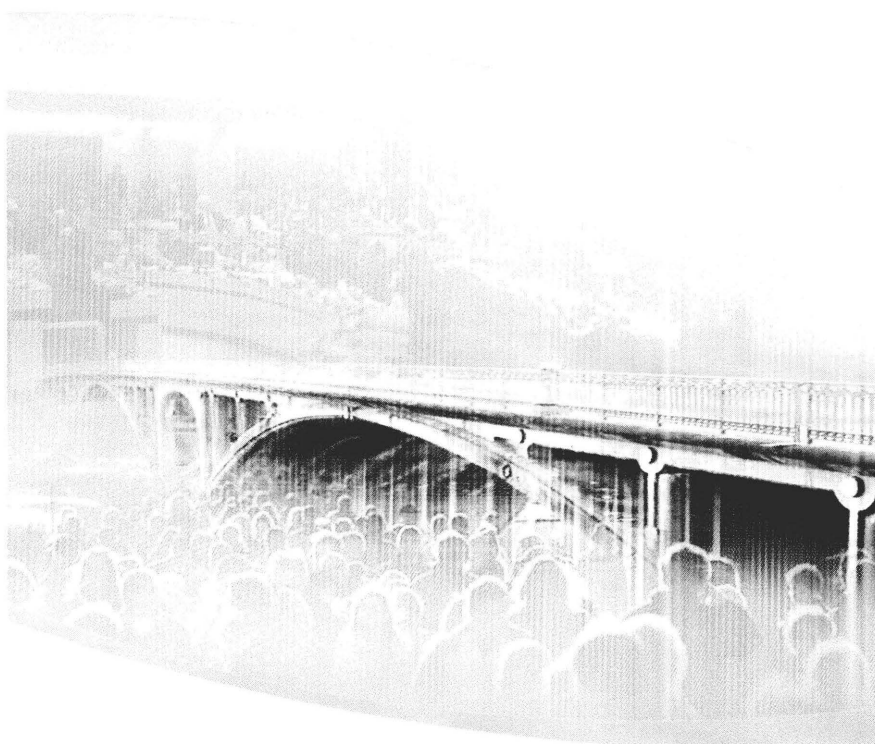




European Economic and Social Committee

The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society



The EESC:
a bridge between
Europe and organised
civil society


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Mr Roger Briesch, president of the European Economic and Social Committee

The European Economic and Social Committee is organised civil society's European-level institutional forum for consultation, representation, information and expression, enabling representatives of Member States' economic, social and civic organisations to play an integral part in the process of shaping policy and decisions at Community level. The main tasks of this consultative body, set up by the Rome Treaties in 1957, is to advise the EU Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. It is mandatory for the Committee to be consulted on those issues stipulated in the Treaties and in all cases where the institutions deem it appropriate. The Committee is also increasingly being asked to draw up exploratory opinions before proposals are adopted or policy decisions are taken. It can also issue opinions and draw up information reports on its own initiative.

The Committee's consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the Community decision-making process. With views occasionally being diametrically opposed, the Committee's discussions often require real negotiations involving not only the usual social partners, i.e. Employers (Group I) and Employees (Group II) but also, and this is the distinguishing feature of the EESC, all the other socio-occupational interests represented (Group III — Various Interests). This expertise, these discussions and negotiations and the search for convergence may improve the quality and credibility of the Community decision-making process, inasmuch as they make it more comprehensible and acceptable for Europe's citizens and increase the transparency which is so vital for democracy.

RB : 

● Preliminary remark

In accordance with the Treaties, the European Economic and Social Committee is appointed for terms of four years. The current term runs from October 2002 to September 2006. All decisions relating to the EESC's internal organisation — election of the president, the two vice-presidents, the members of the bureau and the group and section presidents — are valid for a period of two years. The list of internal appointments in this brochure covers the period from October 2002 to September 2004.

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The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society

Created by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body of the European Union. The Nice Treaty, signed in February 2001, states that *'the European Economic and Social Committee (consists) of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society'*.

In fact, the EESC has a distinctive place in the Community's decision-making process. Between the Community's 'civil service' (the European Commission), the European Parliament and the Council, it is an assembly of representatives of the various spheres of economic and social activity and a valuable forum for representing and informing civil society organisations and expressing their views. The members of the Committee play an integral part in the process of policy formation and decision-making within the Community.

With the general interest in mind, the dynamic consensus which Committee opinions usually reflect is the result of an amalgamation of initial positions which are often different, and at times contradictory. This process, and the continual quest for compromise, bring together representatives of employers' organisations, including public-sector corporations (Group I), employees (Group II), but also — and this is the distinguishing feature of the EESC — other sections of organised civil society (Group III). Consulting the Committee enables the Community's decision-making bodies to gain a better idea of (a) the impact Commission proposals are likely to have on those most directly concerned, and (b) what changes may be necessary to enlist wider support.

In addition to this mandatory consultative function laid down by the Treaty, the Committee also makes known its views on subjects of which the institutions may have taken insufficient or no account, by means of own-initiative opinions or information reports. Frequently, the Commission decides to publish new proposals as a result of matters highlighted by the Committee in this way or the analysis or suggestions it makes.

As part of the drive to step up this interinstitutional cooperation, in September 2001 a cooperation agreement was signed with the Commission. A particular feature of this agreement is that it provides for the Commission to consult the Committee on certain issues on an exploratory basis before even beginning to draw up its own proposal, allowing the Committee to play a useful consultative role at an earlier stage in the decision-making process.

The Committee's expertise, its discussions and negotiations and the search for convergence all serve to improve the quality and credibility of the Community decision-making process, making it more comprehensible and acceptable for Europe's citizens and increasing the transparency which is so vital for democracy. In this way the concept of political democracy is complemented by the concept of representative democracy in which the European Union's economic and social players have a say.

The challenges the European Union faces today give the Committee a growing importance and added value in the Community institutional set-up. The issues at stake mean that all citizens, and first and foremost those who drive the European economy, must play their part.

As a forum both for dialogue and for consultation, the European Economic and Social Committee continues to play a dual role, improving democratic expression in the European integration process and bringing the European Union closer to its citizens. In so doing, it contributes to the development of a European consciousness and acts as a true bridge between the Union and civil society organisations across Europe.

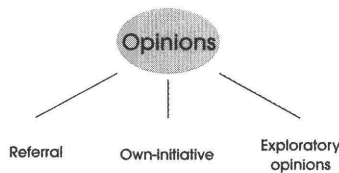
Tasks, structures and operation

Tasks and means of action

Three essential missions are assigned to the EESC:

- *to advise* the three major institutions (EP, Council and Commission);
- *to enable civil society organisations in the Union to make a greater contribution and commitment* to the European project, and give more tangible expression to a Europe that is close to its citizens;
- *to strengthen the role of civil society organisations in non-EU countries* (or groups of countries) and, to this end, to promote structured dialogue with their representatives, as well as the creation of similar structures ('structured dialogue') in such areas as the CEECs, Turkey and the Euromed, ACP and Mercosur countries.

To carry out its missions, the EESC's main path of action is the possibility of issuing three types of opinions:



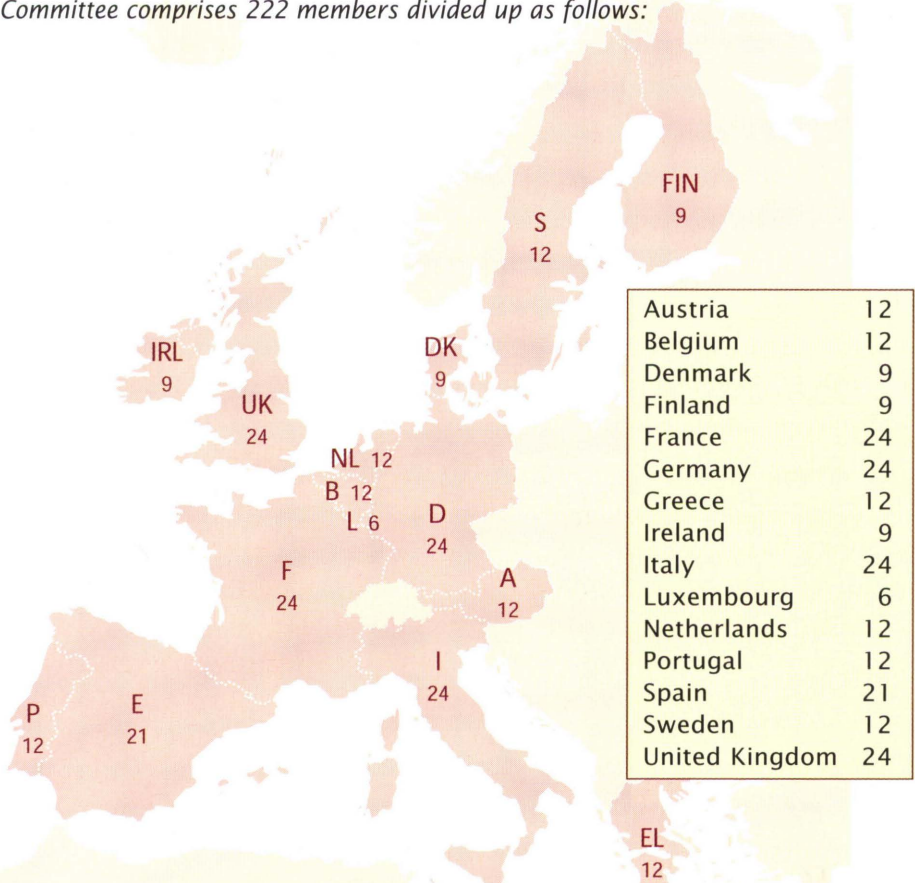
- *opinions in response to a referral* from the Commission, the Council or the European Parliament;
- *own-initiative opinions*, which enable it to express its views on any matter it thinks fit;
- *exploratory opinions* in which, at the request of the European Commission, it is instructed to reflect and make suggestions on a given subject, which may later lead to a proposal from the Commission.

The Committee can also instruct one of its sections to draw up an information paper to consider a question of general interest or of topical relevance. Finally, at the suggestion of one of the groups, it can issue resolutions on any matter falling within its terms of reference.

Members

The Treaty of Nice states that *'the Committee shall consist of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society, and in particular representatives of producers, farmers, carriers, workers, dealers, craftsmen, professional occupations, consumers and the general interest'*.

The Committee comprises 222 members divided up as follows:



Members are proposed by the governments of the Member States and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a four-year term. This term is renewable.

Committee members only come to Brussels for working meetings, since they carry out their professional activities in their own countries.



Mr Roger Briesch, president of the European Economic and Social Committee

The presidency and bureau

The Committee elects its president and its bureau for a two-year term.

The president chairs meetings of the bureau and is responsible for relations with the European institutions and for representing the EESC. He is regularly received in an official capacity by the Heads of State or Government of the Member States.

The bureau has 24 members, eight from each group. Its basic task is to organise the EESC's work.

The members of the bureau for the period October 2002–September 2004 are:

President: - Roger Briesch (*Gr. II — F*)

Vice-presidents: - Göke Frerichs (*Gr. I — D*)
- Leif Nielsen (*Gr. III — DK*)

Members:

- Paulo Jorge Andrade (*Gr. I — P*)
- Wilfried Beirnaert (*Gr. I — B*)
- Peter Boldt (*Gr. II — FIN*)
- Marjolijn Bulk (*Gr. II — NL*)
- Ann Davison (*Gr. III — UK*)
- Dimitrios Dimitriadis (*Gr. I — EL*)
- Ernst Erik Ehnmark (*Gr. II — S*)
- José Maria Espuny Moyano (*Gr. I — E*)
- David Feickert (*Gr. II — UK*)
- Alexander Michael Graf von Schwerin (*Gr. II — D*)
- Bernardo Hernandez Bataller (*Gr. III — E*)
- Paul Junck (*Gr. I — L*)
- Seppo Ilmari Kallio (*Gr. III — FIN*)
- Henri Malosse (*Gr. I — F*)
- Jan Erik Anders Olsson (*Gr. III — S*)
- Giacomo Regaldo (*Gr. I — I*)
- Lutz Ribbe (*Gr. III — D*)
- Mario Sepi (*Gr. II — I*)
- Victor Hugo Sequeira (*Gr. II — P*)
- Anne-Marie Sigmund (*Gr. III — A*)
- Jillian van Turnhout (*Gr. III — IRL*)

Secretary-general: - Patrick Venturini

The budget group



The bureau has set up a budget group made up of nine of its members to help it take financial and budgetary decisions. The president of this group is Mr Bernardo Hernandez Bataller (*GR III — E*).

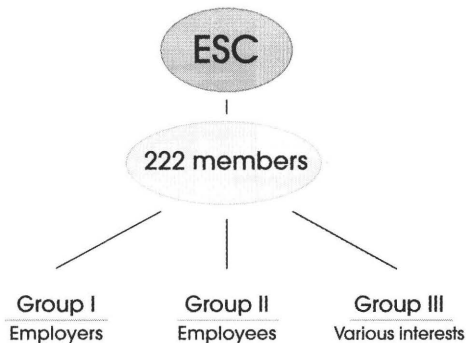
The communication group

The bureau has set up a communication group made up of nine of its members to help it implement the strategic communication plan adopted for the period 2001–04. The president of this group is Mrs Jillian Van Turnhout (*Gr. III — IRL*).



The groups

The rules of procedure state that the members of the Committee shall set up three groups representing employers, employees and the other economic and social categories. It is up to the members to choose which group they wish to join. The role and the working procedures of the groups are also determined by the rules of procedure.



The Employers' Group (Group I)



- President:* - Giacomo Regaldo (I) *photo*
- Vice-presidents:* - Manuel Cavaleiro Brandão (P)
- Filip Hamro-Drotz (FIN)
- Renate Hornung-Draus (D)
- Jose Isaias Rodriguez Garcia Caro (E)
- Bruno Vever (F).

'The members of the Employers' Group (Group I) come from private and public sectors of industry, small businesses, chambers of commerce, wholesale and retail trade, banking and insurance, transport and agriculture.

Regular exchanges of information take place between Group I and UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe), CEEP (European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation), Eurochambers (Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and Eurocommerce (retail, wholesale and international trade representation), as well as on an ad hoc basis with the numerous sectoral industry organisations at European level.

The group is strengthening its relations with employers' organisations in the countries on the road to accession and the other candidate countries.

Group I policy in general reflects the opinion of European industrial federations in supporting the development of a European Union of free market economies with freedom of trade and movement within the internal market, in the belief that this is the best road to growth, competitiveness and employment.

Economic and monetary union is also seen as essential for the construction of Europe as a major economic force and the healthy development of world trade.

The Employers' Group is convinced that the European Economic and Social Committee, with its tripartite structure, has a unique role as adviser to the European institutions and as a forum in which the citizens of the Union can participate in the consultative process, through their representative organisations. Its ability to achieve a consensus between all socio-occupational groupings on the feasibility or otherwise of Union policies should be seen as a model for European society.'

The Employees' Group (Group II)



- President:* - Mario Sepi (I)
- Vice-presidents:* - Heinz Putzhammer (D)
- Josly Piette (B)
- Maria Candelas Sanchez Miguel (E)

'The vast majority of the members of the Employees Group (Group II), which represents all categories of employees — from manual to executive — have a background in the national trade union organisations which are part of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Some members belong to trade unions which are affiliated to the European Management Confederation (CEC), two are not affiliated to any European organisation.

The Employees Group has always aimed to contribute to improving the living and working conditions of those it represents, promoting civil and human progress for all citizens of the European Union, and putting into effect its full commitment to the employees and people of other continents.

It is in this spirit that the group — which is firmly committed to strengthening the European Union — works unstintingly to advance and extend the areas of freedom and democracy, mutual support and social cohesion. These are essential to ensuring that citizens can have a real say — through and with the organisations which represent them — in the choices which affect them, thus bringing European issues and Europe closer to home.

In addition to the institutional consultative work attributed to it by the Treaties, the Employees Group — in cooperation with the other two groups at the EESC — is actively involved in implementing policies at grassroots level. It is particularly vocal and active in regard to the integration of the countries applying for accession, and the Euromed partnership. But it also addresses aspects of cooperation with other continents, by developing and supporting the establishment of organisations which are representative of civil society (employees, employers, various interests), and building on this to support the creation of economic and social councils or similar bodies which guarantee genuine representation for organised civil society.

This work is crucial if people and citizens are to have any real say in the decisions which affect them, within the framework of EU policies in these countries and continents.

The external aspect of our work is fundamental, particularly with respect to globalisation and the WTO negotiations on which we always have to take a stance.

Whilst trade unionists are mutually supportive by nature and act accordingly, it should be remembered that the practical solidarity which Europe must demonstrate towards non-EU countries is also in its own interest.

Indeed, in order to guarantee, adapt and improve the asset we have agreed to call the 'European social model', other countries and other continents need to commit themselves to a market economy, accompanied by advanced social, cultural and democratic values, an economy and a society founded on social and human rights.

Convinced that the significant progress in terms of employment, training, living and working conditions, and freedom — both within and beyond our borders — hinge on a substantial strengthening of the European Union, the Employees Group will work unstintingly towards this goal.'

The Various Interests' Group (Group III)

President: - Anne-Marie Sigmund (A)
Vice-presidents: - Carlos Ribeiro (P)
- Staffan Nilsson (S)



'The composition of the European Economic and Social Committee reflects the changing face of European society. The presence of the Various Interests Group, alongside the Employers' Group and the Employees' Group, ensures that the Committee is able to give full voice to the concerns of the various social, occupational, economic and cultural organisations that make up civil society.

The unique feature which forges Group III's identity is the wide range of categories represented within its ranks: its members are drawn from farmers' organisations, small businesses, the crafts sector, the professions, cooperatives and non-profit associations, consumer organisations, environmental organisations, associations representing the family, voluntary associations, persons with disabilities, the scientific and academic community and non-governmental organisations.

These diverse groupings are bound together by their sense of duty towards the large proportion of the EU population whose interests they represent. This sense of duty has always inspired the group to call for social and economic players to be effectively involved in shaping EU decisions. The shared goal of the group is to achieve real economic and social democracy in the EU.'

The sections

The Committee has six sections, which deal with the main areas covered by the Treaties, namely:



H. Malosse

Section for *Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and social cohesion* (ECO)

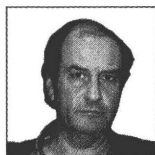
- President: H. Malosse — *Group I (F)*

Section for *the Single Market, Production and Consumption* (INT)

- President: V. H. Sequeira — *Group II (P)*



V.H. Sequeira



A.M. Graf
von Schwerin

Section for *Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society* (TEN)

- President: A. M. Graf von Schwerin — *Group II (D)*

Section for *Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship* (SOC)

- President: J. E. A. Olsson — *Group III (S)*



J.E.A. Olsson



J.M. Espuny
Moyano

Section for *Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment* (NAT)

- President: J. M. Espuny Moyano — *Group I (E)*

Section for *External Relations* (REX)

- President: A. Davison — *Group III (UK)*



A. Davison

Moreover, the European Economic and Social Committee has set up an *Enlargement Steering Committee*, chaired by the president of the Section for External Relations.

The sections generally set up study groups to prepare their opinions. A study group is normally made up of members of the relevant section and includes a rapporteur, who is usually assisted by four experts.

The Committee can also set up temporary ad-hoc *subcommittees* for certain special topics and for subjects falling within the terms of reference of two or more sections. The subcommittees operate in much the same way as sections. Their task is confined to examining a particular problem by a given deadline.

The Single Market Observatory (SMO)

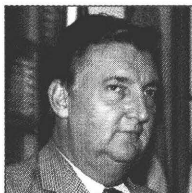
In 1994 the Single Market Observatory (SMO) was set up at the ESC at the request of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission. Its aim is to monitor the operation of the single market at grassroots level, identify any shortcomings and suggest improvements.

In order to carry out this task properly, the SMO set up an interactive information network bringing together all the data provided by EESC members, their organisations and single market 'users': *PRISM* ('*progress report on initiatives in the single market*'). http://www.esc.eu.int/omu_smo/prism/

The Committee holds regular hearings in Brussels or in the Member States, as well as in the associated countries and the applicant countries, on both general and specific topics, to consult those who have to cope on a daily basis with the problems that still exist within the single market.

There are 21 members of the Single Market Observatory. It is chaired by Mr Bruno Veveř.

The Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCIC)



Following expiry of the ECSC Treaty in July 2002 and on a proposal by the European Commission, the Committee was asked to assume the responsibilities of the ECSC's Consultative Committee. To this end, the EESC set up a Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCIC) composed of EESC members and, initially, delegates representing the coal and steel

sectors. This composition will be gradually extended to include other sectors affected by problems caused by the modernisation of the economy, and to all the interested parties concerned. Hence the CCIC's remit is not limited to the coal and steel sectors alone, but also takes account of all aspects of industrial change.

The CCIC is chaired by Mr J. Piette — *Group II (B)*.

The plenary session

The full Committee adopts its opinions at the plenary session on the basis of section opinions and forwards them to the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. Opinions are adopted by a simple majority of the votes cast. The Committee's opinions are published in the Official Journal of the European Communities and can also be obtained on the Internet (<http://www.esc.eu.int>) or by writing to the secretariat (fax (32-2) 546 98 22, email: elisabeth.wolff@esc.eu.int).

The Committee's opinions, regardless of whether the legal basis for them is mandatory referral or optional consultation, are a necessary legal component for the Council's final decision.



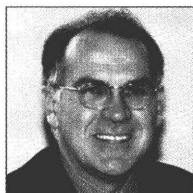
Standard procedure for drawing up EESC opinions:

The standard procedure for drawing up EESC opinions is as follows:

1. Requests for opinions are forwarded to the EESC president, usually by the Council but sometimes by the Commission.
2. The EESC bureau decides which section is to be responsible for the Committee's preparatory work.
3. The section sets up a study group (on average nine members) and appoints a rapporteur, who is assisted by experts (usually four).
4. On the basis of the study group's work, the section adopts an opinion by a simple majority and forwards it to the EESC president.
5. After considering the section's opinion, the Committee adopts its opinion by a simple majority.
6. This opinion is sent to the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament and is published in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

The process for drawing up own-initiative opinions of the Committee is the same, except for point 1.

The general secretariat



The Committee is serviced by a secretariat headed by a secretary-general, who carries out his duties under the authority of the president representing the Committee's bureau.

Mr Patrick Venturini has been secretary-general since October 1998. In December 2002 his five-year term was renewed for the period 2003–08.

Two big events will shortly mark the life of the EESC and its secretariat.

- *Enlargement*

In 1993 the Copenhagen European Council launched an ambitious process aimed at overcoming the aftermath of the conflicts and divisions within Europe. This process crossed a historic threshold in this same city — and under a Danish EU presidency — at the European Council of December 2002 when the conclusion of the accession negotiations with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia paved the way for the entry of these States into the EU as full members on 1 May 2004.

This success is a testimony to the common will of the peoples of Europe to join together in a Union that has become a locomotive for peace, democracy and prosperity. The EESC welcomes this prospect, to which it has been committed right from day one. The accession of these 10 countries in 2004 in accordance with the Nice Treaty will mean the arrival of 95 new members for the Committee and the recruitment of officials from the new Member States. The EESC is now taking the steps necessary to welcome the new members properly and ensure that the institution operates efficiently, in particular by making sure that proper arrangements are in place for handling the influx of new languages.

- *New EESC HQ*

Another major event in the EESC's history that will occur in 2004 will be a move to a new headquarters located close to the big three EU institutions (EP, Council and Commission).

The EESC: spreading the European message

The broadening of international relations to cover relations between societies as well as between governments is widely accepted in the European Union and in many countries throughout the world. These 'new players' in international relations, in particular the representatives of civil society organisations, are therefore called upon to play a growing role in tandem with those traditionally involved in international relations.

Alongside the EU Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament, the Committee therefore provides an additional, unique contribution to the EU's international relations.

The Committee's role is not confined to issuing opinions and recommendations to the other EU institutions, as it also operates directly in third countries by developing dialogue with representatives of their socio-occupational organisations and seeking to develop consultative structures and to strengthen civil society in these countries.

Through its support for civil dialogue, the EESC has earned itself the role of bridge between the citizens of these countries and the EU institutions, and helps to perpetuate and consolidate a model of pluralist and participatory democracy in its partner countries.

• Enlargement

The EESC has been a strong supporter of enlarging the European Union to the central and eastern European countries ever since the major political changes of the late 1980s opened up new possibilities in the region. It has also consistently encouraged closer relations with the other candidates, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey.

The EESC has produced a serious body of thoughtful, thoroughly researched opinions on the applicant countries and on the main challenges of the enlargement negotiations: internal market, environment, economic criteria, social impact, agriculture, pre-accession aid and regional cooperation.

The EESC has set up 10 Joint Consultative Committees (JCC) — with Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey — that provide for a channelling of expertise from socio-occupational organisations in the EU and the applicant countries into the working of the Europe agreements and into the successful conclusions of the enlargement exercise itself. The EESC is thus operating with the very levels of society which have the greatest responsibility — and perhaps the most arduous task — in ensuring that enlargement actually works.

The EESC plays a strong role in the building of similar institutions in the applicant countries. Apart from addressing the technicalities of accession, it is just as important for the public, in the applicant countries and in the present EU Member States, to be able to identify with the enlarged Union. Therefore, the Committee does everything possible to promote the establishment of economic and social councils and similar institutions, thereby strengthening the structures for social dialogue and civil dialogue.

The rhythm of work is increasing as the enlargement process advances, the aim being to progressively involve civil society organisations in the candidate States in the work of the EESC. The Committee has also set up a steering committee, chaired by the president of the REX section, Mrs Ann Davison, to develop and coordinate its work on enlargement.

The EESC places particular emphasis on regional cooperation between applicant countries.

• The northern dimension

The EESC has addressed issues within the geographical scope of the Baltic Sea area and the concept of the northern dimension in a number of opinions, highlighting the need for the EU to develop an action programme for northern Europe, which would involve civil society organisations in northern Europe much more closely than up to now. In liaison with the Swedish EU presidency, the Committee organised a multilateral meeting in Umeå on 5 and 6 February 2001, where its REX section debated with invited representatives from relevant organisations in Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Russia.

The EEA Consultative Committee (EEA-CC) is a body which consists of nine EESC members and an equal number of members from the EFTA Consultative Committee. The ultimate purpose of the EEA-CC is to give advice to the ministers of the EU and

of the EFTA/EEA States (i.e. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) who form the EEA Council. The reports produced by the EEA-CC have dealt with a wide range of issues, for example, the free movement of workers, corporate social responsibility and governance, enlargement and the future of the EEA. The single market has been a core issue in the work of the EEA-CC. Swiss representatives participate in the work as observers.

• South-eastern Europe

The Committee participates actively in the promotion of the social dialogue and civil society in this region. It chairs a steering committee charged with the monitoring of the implementation of the action plan adopted at the conference on 'Civil society, democratisation, participation and the stability pact for south-eastern Europe'. On the basis of the results achieved when the action plan was implemented, the EESC is continuing its activity in the region.

• The African, Caribbean and Pacific States

For more than 20 years the Committee, under the auspices of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly, has been organising annual meetings of the representatives of ACP and EU economic and social interest groups. The Committee's role has been amplified by the partnership agreement between the ACP States and the EU and its Member States, signed in June 2000, which commissions the Committee to organise the consultation sessions and meetings of ACP and EU economic and social interest groups.

In order to monitor the implementation of the partnership agreement and discuss economic and social issues with the ACP representatives, the EESC organised a third regional seminar in Santo Domingo, in May 2001, and a fourth in Nairobi in February 2002. In addition, the 23rd meeting of ACP and EU economic and social interest groups was held in Brussels in December 2002.

The EESC also attends meetings of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, which are held twice a year, and has been invited to address the ACP-EU Council of Ministers.

• The Euro-Mediterranean partnership

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona in November 1995 commissioned the Committee to strengthen links with economic and social players in the 27 countries involved and thus to become a prime mover in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Since 1995, annual summits of economic and social councils and similar institutions have been held in Madrid, Paris, Casablanca, Lisbon, Antalya, Naples and Athens.

The EESC chairs the steering committee for cooperation projects and speaks its mind on major issues of interest to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Committee activity, as part of the Barcelona Process, will focus on the emergence and consolidation of civil society organisations in the Mediterranean partner countries, as well as promoting the concepts of consultation and cooperation among the social partners and other representatives of civil society organisations. In preparation for the Euro-Mediterranean summit of economic and social councils and similar institutions in 2003, the Committee is drafting an information report on the involvement of organised civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

• Latin America and Mercosur

The focus of the Committee's relations with Latin America is the development of civil dialogue between the two regions and cooperation with Latin American consultative institutions such as the Mercosur advisory body, the Foro Consultivo Económico y Social (FCES), the Andean Community and Central American consultative committees and the Chilean Social Dialogue Council.

In this connection, the EESC has organised meetings with civil society organisations (Rio de Janeiro 1999, Madrid 2000) in parallel with summits of EU, Latin American and Caribbean Heads of State and Government.

The EESC is occupied, in particular, in developing the social dimension in addition to economic relations and it has drawn up an EU–Mercosur cooperation programme which will be operational in 2003. With the agreement of its partners, the EESC is proposing to extend its programmes to the continent of Latin America. These

programmes should include training for socio-occupational players and sharing experiences in fields such as labour law, health and safety, vocational training and promotion of social dialogue.

• India

At the request of the European Commission, the EESC is representing European civil society at the EU–India round table, whose aim is to promote dialogue at civil society level and thereby add a new dimension to relations between the EU and India. The Committee's recommendations are an important input for decision-makers within the Indian Government and the European institutions. The round table meets twice a year alternatively in a country of the European Union and in India.

• International trade

The EESC is fully involved in the consultations between the European Commission's Trade DG and civil society organisations. An EESC delegation attended the Seattle and Doha Conferences as advisors with the EU delegation.

In addition, following a request from the Commission, the EESC has drawn up an opinion on human rights in the workplace. In this connection it organised hearings with representatives of civil society in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, and a major conference in Brussels in December 2002.

The EESC's 'structured dialogue'

APPLICANT COUNTRIES

- Joint Consultative Committees:
 - EU/Bulgaria
 - EU/Czech Republic
 - EU/Estonia
 - EU/Hungary
 - EU/Lithuania
 - EU/Poland
 - EU/Romania
 - EU/Slovakia
 - EU/Slovenia
 - EU/Turkey

- EESC conferences with the applicant countries, including Cyprus, Malta and Turkey

- Opinions and bilateral contacts with:
 - Bulgaria
 - Cyprus
 - Czech Republic
 - Estonia
 - Hungary
 - Latvia
 - Lithuania
 - Malta
 - Poland
 - Romania
 - Slovakia
 - Slovenia
 - Turkey

ACP Cotonou Agreement

- General meetings in Brussels

- Regional seminars

- ACP-EU follow-up committee

- Participation in ACP-EU Council of Ministers

- Participation in the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

EUROMED PARTNERSHIP (EU + 12 Mediterranean States)

- Annual summits of economic and social councils and similar institutions
 - Madrid (1995)
 - Paris (1996)
 - Casablanca (1997)
 - Lisbon (1998)
 - Antalya (1999)
 - Naples (2000)
 - Athens (2002)

- Euromed follow-up committee

- Specialist working parties

LATIN AMERICA

Mercosur

Meetings with Latin American / Caribbean–EU organised civil society

- Rio de Janeiro (1999)
- Madrid (2002)

Mercosur–Chile

- Cooperation with the Mercosur Foro Consultivo Económico y Social (FCES) and the Chilean Social Dialogue Council
- Programme to strengthen the social dimension of Mercosur

Andean Community

- Relations with the Business Advisory Council and the Labour Advisory Council

Central America — Mexico

- Relations with the SICA advisory council and socio-professional organisations

Linked information networks

OTHER COUNTRIES OR AREAS

■ EEA Consultative Committee

■ Participation in the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (Aicesis)

■ USA

Bilateral contacts and opinions on the transatlantic dialogue

■ Canada

Opinion on relations with the EU and seminars

■ Asia

→ EU–India round table
Regular (once or twice a year) between the Indian and EU civil society

→ China

Dialogue and contacts with the Chinese Social and Economic Council and opinions on relations between the EU and China

■ South-east Europe

Steering the action plan on developing social and civil dialogue

■ Russia

Opinion on the EU–Russia strategic partnership. Contacts with the country's economic and social actors



Roger Briesch talking to the Plenary Assembly of the European Economic and Social Committee.

During the term of this assembly, decisions will be taken which will determine the future shape of the European Union, as well as the position of each of its institutions within its political set-up.

The president's programme

Extracts of the speech by Roger Briesch to the Plenary Assembly of the European Economic and Social Committee, (on the occasion of his election to the presidency) 24 October 2002

The European Economic and Social Committee, like the world in which it is expected to fulfil its brief, is in a process of upheaval. The European Union is being transformed, widening its geographical area and deepening the political and institutional set-up within which our Committee carries out its duties. The expectations of the men and women we aim to serve is changing with the gradual growth of our transnational community, which is still a union of States, of course, but which is moving ever closer to becoming a union of citizens.

• The European model of society and the role of the Committee

During the term of this assembly, decisions will be taken which will determine the future shape of the European Union, as well as the position of each of its institutions within its political set-up

It is vital that, when this happens, the Committee's role is clearly reaffirmed and recognised as an institutional forum for consultation, representation, information and expression enabling the representatives of civil society organisations (economic, social and civic) to play an integral part in the process of shaping policy and decisions at the Community level.

With this in mind, it is imperative that the European Economic and Social Committee itself articulates and vigorously defends its interests regarding its status, function and role, that is to say, the institutional position of our Committee in relation to the legislative and executive institutions of the Union, as well as its mandate and remit, its rights and instruments.

- **In so doing, we must continue to observe the tenets of the previous presidency, while at the same time showing a readiness for innovation.**

The European Union I would like to see serving the citizens, is built on ideals and values: peace, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, solidarity and subsidiarity, justice and cohesion, the social market economy, the respective roles of the State and of social and economic players.

Economic and social cohesion is an essential factor in forming a European identity, especially considering the substantial effort required to integrate the candidate countries. It implies an adequate redistribution of resources which would not result from endless bargaining between States.

These various elements combine to form what is rightly called the European social model. It is enshrined in the Treaties establishing the European Union in the form of general objectives, particularly the achievement of a high level of employment and sustainable development by promoting social dialogue, which is first and foremost the task of the social partners.

The history of our countries shows that the establishment of social models is only partly attributable to public authorities and legislation; the contribution of the social partners and relations between and with civil society organisations have played a crucial role. Their creativity, their capacity for compromise and their ability to influence society should be given an appropriate voice at the European level.

Thanks to its broad and varied membership and its work, the European Economic and Social Committee is an essential element in the European model of society. It fosters dialogue between all the stakeholders in society by taking account of the concerns and aspirations of the citizens who are closest to the grass roots, articulating and publicising them through its opinions and, in a more practical way, through the work it does on the ground at all levels and in all countries.

Our Committee draws its legitimacy from the fact that its members, who are selected on the basis of their particular responsibilities and experience, come from representative organisations or groupings in the Member States to play a constructive role in the process of shaping European-level opinion in general. The added value of the Committee resides in the fact that this process involves all the players in civil society, including other organisations in addition to the social partners.

That is why the Committee is the obvious choice as a forum for 'civil dialogue', that is the representative of organised civil society, which also comprises organisations representing a wide range of other social, economic, cultural and civic interests, in addition to associations of employers and trade unions.

New prospects for partnership must be explored and new synergies created so as to improve the balance of power in relation to the European authorities, enabling us to be more effective in our dealings with them. The Committee's capacity to influence governments and international organisations must also be boosted. Such is the profile of the European Economic and Social Committee that we have to defend in the European Convention, in which we have an active presence in the shape of three observer-members and three observer-alternates.

• The European Convention

In addition to the work in progress on the powers of the EU, a more appropriate application of subsidiarity, better economic and social governance, legal personality etc., we must also specify and reaffirm the kind of Europe we wish to see.

I advocate a constitutional treaty, or even a constitution, which will represent a quantum leap in the democratic legitimacy of the EU, and a federal set-up for its institutional apparatus.

I am also in favour of a cohesive Union able to make decisions and take clear positions, which means extending qualified majority voting.

I would like to see economic and social governance going hand-in-hand with a simplification of the instruments of economic governance.

At the same time, the EU must play a more prominent role in the world to foster peace, freedom, democracy and respect for human rights by promoting the emergence of a new economic order aimed at wiping out poverty and destitution.

On this point, we regard it as essential that the Charter of Fundamental Rights be incorporated into the new constitution. This is all the more necessary because these rights are an integral part of the European identity.

The Convention must come up with a kind of institutional architecture — with strong democratic legitimacy and clearly defined powers and responsibilities — which is best able to ensure that these rights are respected, by developing a competitive economy, building a harmonious society with less inequality and encouraging the active involvement of citizens in working for the common good.

• A democratic and federal Union

While all subscribing to the basic values currently upheld by the charter and in future to be enshrined in the EU constitution, the countries of Europe have different traditions, cultures and histories. This diversity is an asset for Europe. The Union must preserve it and ensure that the new institutional architecture allows for the maintenance not only of traditions and specific characteristics, but also of diverse cultural systems.

The Community method, characterised by a balance between cultural diversity and political unity allowing the European social model to develop, must remain the basis of the Union's future institutional architecture.

Indeed, experience has taught us that every time the Community method is applied, satisfactory results are achieved, while we are frequently disappointed by the mediocre and ineffective results obtained with the intergovernmental method.

The fact is that the interest of the Union is neither the sum of the interests of the Member States, nor their lowest common denominator. It cannot therefore be decided in negotiations where every participant has a right of veto.

Ultimately, only a democratic and federal structure will enable us to tackle urgent political and practical problems with any prospect of success, while at the same time giving substance to EU citizenship. Only a democratic and federal architecture, which respects the principles of dialogue, participation and solidarity, can reflect the intrinsic nature of the European Union, namely a continuous striving to achieve unity in diversity.

• Other priorities

At the same time we should:

- optimise our role as a consultative body to the large institutions (Parliament, Council of Ministers and Commission), thereby reinforcing the EESC's proper status in their eyes;
- concentrate our activities in the areas where the added value of our contribution is most substantial, without disregarding other, future tasks. We must therefore set ourselves clear priorities which we wish to keep to;
- improve the representativeness and credibility of the EESC as the institutional representative of civil society, including organisations not represented within the Committee, by implementing the decisions already taken and by continuing work to broaden our church;
- develop an active and systematic communication and information policy to enhance the profile and impact of our work;
- devote particular attention as of now to welcoming future members (and officials) from the new EU Member States;
- continue to strengthen the resources and internal structures of the Committee and the Members' Statute.

**In addition to realising our aspirations to serve the general interest,
we must build hope, be committed to implementing it and
act to make it a reality.**

**To act as a bridge, a link, to express expectations and aspirations,
in concrete and credible terms to be sure, but with a dose of sensitivity,
heart and passion, in short providing content, meaning and soul.**

General information

- **The EESC: linking the EU institutions and social and economic players from organised civil society**

Social and economic organisations such as the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Eurochambers), the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP), Eurocommerce, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community (Coface), the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC) and the Committee of Agricultural Organisations in the European Union (COPA) meet regularly at the Committee and take part in the conferences and hearings it organises. National and European experts from these organisations contribute to the consultations which serve as a basis both for the drafting of opinions and the assimilation of grassroots experience.

Relations between Committee members and the national economic and social organisations to which they belong ensure a broad flow of information on the initiatives and activities of the EESC and the EU and do much to enhance opinion-forming in the organisations themselves.

Thus, the Committee draws on a wide information and communication network with national and European socio-occupational organisations. This fosters understanding of European policies and encourages organised civil society involvement in the decision-making process.

On 15 and 16 October 1999, against this backdrop, the Committee launched, under its auspices, the first convention of civil society organised at European level. The convention had two aims:

- to spell out the potential role and contribution of the full spectrum of civil society players in the building of Europe and to consider how to promote greater involvement of civil society representatives in the European venture;
- to define the role the European Economic and Social Committee can play as an institutional intermediary in the decision-making process, with a view to establishing a more participatory society.

A second conference was held on 4 and 5 November 2001 on governance and organised civil society, which enabled participants:

- to reflect on ways of ensuring an effective involvement of organised civil society and the visibility of the contribution of economic and social actors to the governance of the European Union; and
- to work out the details of the institutional framework for a more inclusive, more participative and therefore more democratic society, in accordance with the ambitions of the White Paper on European governance presented by the Commission in July 2001.

• The EESC and the European Convention

The EESC is also a committed player in the debate on the future of Europe and plays its full part within the European Convention that has been asked to define a new institutional architecture for the Union and, in accordance with the declaration that it adopted in September 2001, contribute to throwing open the debate within civil society as widely as possible.

In accordance with the Laeken Declaration on the future of the European Union, adopted by the European Council in December 2001, three representatives of the EESC take an active part in the European Convention as observers. These three observers are Mrs Sigmund, president of the Various Interests Group, Mr Briesch and Mr Frerichs, the EESC president and vice-president respectively.

The EESC is also developing several types of structured dialogue, or even of cooperation, with organised civil society, and particularly with national civil society organisations that provide EESC members, economic and social councils or similar institutions in the Member States, civil society organisations in the candidate States and European organised civil society networks.

In this way the EESC, in cooperation with the Convention, is organising periodic information and dialogue meetings between its members and European civil society organisations and networks. This dialogue will continue throughout the work of the Convention.

• Cooperation between economic and social councils

The Committee maintains ongoing contacts with economic and social councils throughout the EU. The aim is to boost structured dialogue between the various economic and social players in society and promote grassroots involvement in the European venture. These contacts are based on the shared conviction that economic and social policy with a direct impact on people's lives (jobs, social rights and social dialogue, the knowledge-based society, the introduction of the euro and economic convergence) requires closer cooperation between consultative bodies at both national and European level. With this in mind, conferences on these issues are staged jointly in the country holding the EU presidency (2000: Lisbon, Paris; 2001: Stockholm, Brussels; 2002: Madrid, Copenhagen).

Moreover, the presidents and secretaries-general of Member States' economic and social councils and the EESC meet regularly at the invitation of one of the national councils (in 2000, the Netherlands economic and social council; in 2001, the economic council of Finland; in 2002, the National Economic and Social Council of Ireland).

The EESC backs fresh moves by civil society organisations, the social partners and governments to set up economic and social councils, especially in candidate countries for EU membership that do not yet have them.

The EESC is also a member of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS), which was set up in 1999. Nearly 50 countries are currently members of this body, which aims to boost organised civil society's influence on globalisation.



• Welcome to the EESC

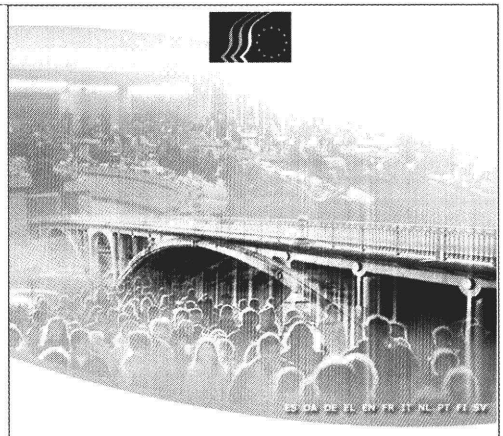
The European Economic and Social Committee is open to the public on written request and each year welcomes several thousand visitors, mainly members of civil society organisations and students.

(Fax: Vera Parr (32-2) 546 98 22).

• The EESC web site

The European Economic and Social Committee has a web site:

<http://www.esc.eu.int>.



• Publications and reference material

EESC opinions are published in the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC). The EESC distributes a monthly newsletter called *EESC info*, a summary note of the EESC's work which appears nine times a year, after each plenary session, and a twice-yearly memo setting out the Committee's work priorities for each Union presidency.

All these documents, including the opinions, are available in the 11 Community languages on the web site (<http://www.esc.eu.int>) and can be obtained free of charge from the secretariat (fax (32-2) 546 98 22, e-mail: elisabeth.wolff@esc.eu.int).

Finally, the EESC publishes brochures on specific topics in collaboration with the Publications Office of the European Communities and, every two years, a report on its own activities. These booklets are on the EESC web site and can be obtained free of charge by e-mailing an order to: publications@esc.eu.int.

Recent Committee work

• Main EESC own-initiative opinions in 2001 and 2002

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment

- Common fisheries policy
- Situation of nature and nature conservation in Europe
- European forestry sector/enlargement
- Young farmers and the new economy
- The future of the CAP
- New impetus for a plan for plant protein crops in the Community

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion

- Broad economic policy guidelines for the Member States and the Community for 2002
- World economic changes: new economic challenges for the European Union
- Preparations for the introduction of the euro
- Direct company taxation
- The impact of enlargement on the EMU
- Second cohesion report
- The future of cohesion policy in the context of enlargement and the learning society
- The outermost regions of the EU

Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship

- Voluntary activities in Europe
- Immigration, integration and the role of organised civil society
- A new impetus for European youth (White Paper)

- Illegal immigration
- Open coordination method for immigration policy
- Integration of disabled people in society
- Social indicators
- The European dimension of education: its nature, content and prospects
- Wage discrimination between men and women
- Social services in the context of services of general interest
- Memorandum on lifelong learning

Section for External Relations

- Reinvigorating the transatlantic partnership and dialogue
- Human rights in the workplace
- Coping with globalisation — the only option for the most vulnerable
- Euro-Mediterranean partnership
- 4th WTO Ministerial Conference
- EU relations with Latin America and the Caribbean
- EU–Russia strategic partnership
- ACP–EU partnership agreement.

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption

- Research needs for a safe and sustainable energy supply
- European company statute for SMEs
- Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament
- An internal market strategy for services
- Simplification — INT/104
- Household over-indebtedness in the European Union
- Exhaustion of registered trademark rights
- Effects of e-commerce on the single market
- Freedom of movement for workers in the single market
- The craft sector and SMEs in Europe

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society

- European programme of satellite navigation (Galileo)
- Impact on competitiveness created by differentials in vehicle duty and licensing taxation in the Member States of the EU
- Transport/enlargement
- A programme for child protection on the Internet
- The future of the trans-European inland waterway network
- Extending the trans-European networks to the islands of Europe
- Implementation of the structured social dialogue in the pan-European transport corridors
- Services of general interest

• Main publications (booklets, brochures and folders) 2001–2002

Role and operation of the EESC

- The EESC: A bridge between Europe and organised civil society
- 10 questions about the ESC
- Activities of the EESC 2000-2002 — Report by the president, Göke Frerichs
- EESC rules of procedure

General issues

- The role played by economic and social actors in the construction of Europe
- World Summit on Sustainable Development — the Committee's view
- *Solidarność*

Internal market

- Entrepreneurs in Europe: The European Charter for Small Enterprises. The multiannual programme for enterprise, and entrepreneurship
- Where is the single market as the euro is launched?: 10 strong points and 10 challenges
- The craft sector and SMEs in Europe

Economic and social affairs

- New knowledge, new jobs
- The euro and the European Economic and Social Committee

Social affairs and citizenship

- Immigration, asylum and social integration

Agriculture and the environment

- Towards a 6th EU environmental action programme: the views of the EESC
- Sustainable development
- Pointers for sustainable agriculture
- The common fisheries policy

Transport and information

- Trans-European networks and islands

External relations and enlargement

- Activities of the EESC in the ACP regions
- The role and activities of the European Economic and Social Committee in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership
- EU–India round table
- The EESC and the northern dimension — Showing initiative
- The EESC and ACP organised civil society

The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society

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