

The ESC: a Bridge between Europe and Civil Society

European Economic and Social Committee



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***The ESC:
a Bridge between
Europe and Civil Society***



*The President of the European Parliament, Mr. José María GIL-ROBLES
and the President of the Economic and Social Committee
Mrs. Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI*

“Our strength lies in our role as representatives of civil society, in the breadth of our mission, in the experience and skills of our members who are an integral part of economic and social life, and in the quality of our opinions. This strength will enable us to contribute with renewed enthusiasm to a most ambitious and exciting project: building a united Europe.”

Preliminary remark

In accordance with the Treaties the Economic and Social Committee is appointed for terms of four years. The current term runs from October 1998 to September 2002. All decisions relating to the ESC's internal organization - 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 1998 to September 2000.

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THE ESC: A BRIDGE BETWEEN EUROPE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The European Economic and Social Committee is a forum representing the various categories of economic and social life within the institutional framework established by the Treaties. It is a consultative body set up by the Rome Treaty in 1957.

The ESC has a distinctive place in the Community's decision-making process. Intermediate between the Community's "executive", the Parliament and the Council, it provides a forum for all those who play an active role in the economy and society.

In 1986 the Single Act consolidated the ESC's role in the closer cooperation set up between EU institutions for devising and implementing common policies in furtherance of European Union.

The Maastricht Treaty (1992) reinforced this trend by putting the Committee on a similar footing to the other institutions, notably in terms of its Rules of Procedure, budget, consolidation of the right of initiative and appointment of officials in its Secretariat-General.

The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) broadens the Committee's scope considerably, particularly in the area of social affairs; in addition it is now possible for the European Parliament to consult the Committee.

In the vast majority of cases the Committee reaches a consensus in formulating its opinions, despite the fact that initial positions often diverge considerably. ESC opinions are valuable on several counts. They help the decision-making bodies to ascertain (a) what impact Commission proposals are likely to have on those most directly concerned, and (b) what amendments may be necessary to enlist wider support. Furthermore, the departments of the Commission and the European Parliament have to tackle a wide range of specific issues and the Committee can often provide valuable technical expertise. Last but not least, the Committee's own-initiative opinions and the information reports produced by its sections are of particular importance since they cover subjects neglected or ignored by other institutions, and frequently prompt the Commission to table proposals.

*The Committee's consultative role enables its members, and hence the organizations 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 traditional social partners (Groups I and II) but also, and this is the distinguishing feature of the ESC, all the other socio-occupational interests represented (Group III). These discussions and negotiations and the search for convergence are bound to improve the quality and credibility of the Community decision-making process, for they make it more comprehensible and*

acceptable for Europe's citizens and increase the transparency which is so vital for democracy. In this way the concept of political democracy is complemented by the concept of economic democracy in which the European Union's economic and social players have a say.

In addition to its increased scope for action, current developments have been a factor in the Committee's enhanced importance. The Community has decided not only to abolish its internal borders and create a single economic and social area but also to establish an authentic political union. A venture with such high stakes requires the participation of all its citizens, and first and foremost those responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the EU economy.

As a debating and consultative chamber, the ESC strengthens the democratic credentials of the process of building European Union, including the promotion of relations between the EU and socio-economic groupings in third countries. In so doing it helps to promote a genuine identification with Europe.

All these factors go to prove that, within the European institutional set-up, the ESC fulfils a specific role: **it is the prime forum in which the organizations of civil society in the European Union can have their views represented and discussed.**

Europe currently faces some major challenges: completion of the single market, entry into the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union, reform of the structural policies and the common agricultural policy, finalization of the medium-term financial framework, preparation of the fifth enlargement and formulation of a political project. Moreover, in 1999 the European Parliament and the Commission will undergo restructuring that will have a decisive impact on their future. In these circumstances Europe has more need than ever before for an active and influential Economic and Social Committee that draws it closer to its citizens. The Committee therefore has a rosy future ahead of it! As a body representing socio-occupational organizations, a meeting place, a source of expertise, a forum in which the organizations of European civil society can air their views, **the Committee is a bridge between Europe and its citizens.** In this capacity it is irreplaceable.

However, all the European institutions are currently asking themselves what their role is. They are questioning their operating procedures and their organizational set-ups. The ESC must do the same if it wants to find its true place.

That is why it is essential to continue the work begun during previous terms of office. The ESC's latest renewal, the recent organizational reforms and the new powers conferred by the Amsterdam Treaty provide a good opportunity to do this.

TASKS, STRUCTURES AND OPERATION

Tasks and Means of Action

The ESC has three main tasks:

- **a consultative role** vis-à-vis the three large institutions (EP, Council, Commission);
- **enabling the organizations of civil society to be more closely involved in and to make a greater contribution to the European enterprise**; embodying and promoting a Europe which is close to its citizens;
- **strengthening the role of civil society in non-Community countries** (or groups of countries) by promoting dialogue with their representatives and creating similar structures (structured dialogue) in the CEEC, Turkey, the Euromed countries, the ACP, Mercosur etc.

In pursuit of these tasks, the ESC can issue three types of opinion:

- **opinions on matters referred** by the Commission, the Council and, in future, the European Parliament under the Amsterdam Treaty;
- **own-initiative opinions**, which enable the Committee to express its views whenever it deems it appropriate;
- **exploratory opinions** in cases where the Commission and the European Parliament have asked it to consider a matter and make specific suggestions which might ultimately lead to a proposal for EU rules.

The Committee can also instruct one of its sections to draw up an **information report** with a view to exploring a topic of general or current interest.

Members

The Committee consists of “representatives of the various categories of economic and social activity, in particular representatives of producers, farmers, carriers, workers, dealers, craftsmen, professional occupations and representatives of the general public” (consumers, environmentalists, families, associations, etc.)

The Committee has **222 members**:

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Austria | 12 | Italy | 24 |
| Belgium | 12 | Luxembourg | 6 |
| Denmark | 9 | Portugal | 12 |
| Finland | 9 | Spain | 21 |
| France | 24 | Sweden | 12 |
| Germany | 24 | The Netherlands | 12 |
| Greece | 12 | United Kingdom | 24 |
| Ireland | 9 | | |

The members are proposed by the Member States’ governments and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a term of four years. They may be reappointed.

Committee members live and work in their home countries and only come to Brussels for Committee meetings.



Mrs Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI, President of the European Economic and Social Committee

➤ Presidency and Bureau

The Committee elects its President and its Bureau from among its members for a term of two years.

The President handles relations with the European institutions and the external representation of the ESC. He is regularly received in his official capacity by the heads of state or government of the Member States.

The Bureau has twenty-four members, eight from each group. Its basic task is to organize the ESC's work.

The Bureau for the period October 1998-September 2000 is as follows:

President: **Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI** (Italy - Group III)

Vice-Presidents: **Aina Margareta REGNELL** (Sweden - Group I)
Josly PIETTE (Belgium - Group II)

Members :

ATAÍDE FERREIRA Manuel (Gr III - P)
BRIESCH Roger (Gr II - F)
BURANI Umberto (Gr I - I)
CAVALEIRO BRANDÃO Manuel (Gr I - P)
EWERT Joseph (Gr III - L)
FRERICHS Göke (Gr I - D)
GAFO FERNÁNDEZ José Ignacio (Gr I - E)
GIRON Daniel (Gr III - F)
HAMRO-DROTZ Filip (Gr I - FIN)
JENKINS Tom (Gr II - UK)
KORYFIDIS Christoforos (Gr II - GR)

NOORDWAL Philip H. (Gr I - NL)
OLSSON Jan Erik Anders (Gr III - S)
PARIZA CASTAÑOS Luis Miguel (Gr II - E)
de PAUL de BARCHIFONTAINE Etienne (Gr III - B)
SCHMITZ Klaus (Gr III - D)
SCULLY Cornelius (Gr III - IRL)
SIGMUND Anne-Marie (Gr III - A)
SVENNINGSEN John (Gr II - DK)
VOGLER Heinz (Gr II - A)
WALKER Kenneth (Gr I - UK)

Secretary-General: **Patrick VENTURINI**

➤ The Three Groups

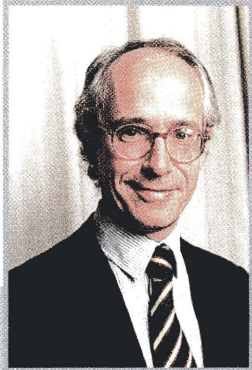
The Committee's Rules of Procedure allow members to form groups representing employers, workers and other categories of economic and social activity. The role and working procedures of these groups are laid down by the Committee's Bureau.

Three groups have been established *:

* one member does not belong to a group.

THE EMPLOYERS' GROUP

(GROUP I)



President:

Manuel Eugénio CAVALEIRO BRANDÃO (Portugal)

Vice-Presidents:

Roy DONOVAN (Ireland)

Renate HORNUNG-DRAUS (Germany)

John LITTLE (United Kingdom)

Jorge STECHER NAVARRA (Spain)

Bruno VEVER (France)

The Employers' Group (Group I) has members 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), EUROCHAMBRES (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 organizations at European level.

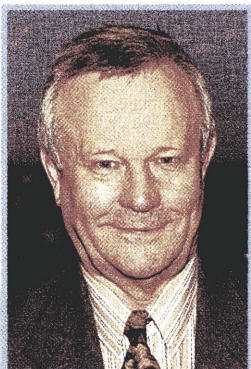
Group I policy in general reflects the opinion of European industrial federations in supporting the development of a European Union of free market economies with freedom of trade and movement within the internal market, in the belief that this is the best road to growth, competitiveness and employment.

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 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 of Union policies should be seen as a model for European society.

THE WORKERS' GROUP

(GROUP II)



President:

Roger BRIESCH (France)

Vice-Presidents:

Gianni VINAY (Italy)

Michael GEUENICH (Germany)

The vast majority of members of the Workers' Group at the Economic and Social Committee come from national trade unions which belong to the European Trade Union Confederation. Others are from unions which are members of the European Management Confederation (CEC).

The group has a policymaking role, discussing the opinions on the Committee's plenary session agendas so as to ensure that the interests of EU workers and the EU public in general are served. When discussing these opinions, the group takes account of the various interests represented on the Committee but also does not lose sight of the following objectives:

- the fight against unemployment (the new Treaty has a chapter on employment);
- the improvement of living and working conditions (worker information and consultation, inter alia);
- the protection of fundamental freedoms, relations with third countries and world peace;
- the repercussions of economic globalization and the jeopardizing of the EU's social achievements;
- the establishment and impact of the single market and the euro.

It is only by strengthening the Union that it will be possible to meet the challenges of globalization and therefore safeguard and strengthen the social model to which Group II is particularly attached.

The Workers' Group feels that by providing daily proof that it is possible to have economic development in a market economy framework with a social conscience, Europe is acting as a showcase, and it must be given the necessary strength to resist any other model which might challenge it.

VARIOUS INTERESTS GROUP

(GROUP III)



President:

Anne-Marie SIGMUND (Austria)

Vice-Presidents:

Dario MENGOZZI (Italy)

Staffan NILSSON (Sweden)

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

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

These diverse groupings are bound together by their sense of duty towards the large proportion of the EU population whose interests they represent. Since Group III's foundation, this sense of duty has led it to ask for its organizations 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:

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion

President: U. BURANI – Group I – Italy

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption

President: K. SCHMITZ – Group II – Germany

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society

President: J. GAFO FERNÁNDEZ – Group I – Spain

Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship

President: J. OLSSON – Group III – Sweden

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment

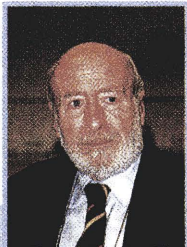
President: E. de PAUL de BARCHIFONTAINE – Group III – Belgium

Section for External Relations

President: T. JENKINS – Group II – United Kingdom

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 assisted as a general rule by four experts.

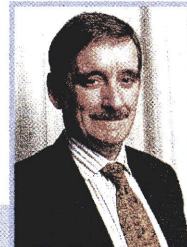
The Committee can also set up subcommittees for certain special topics and for subjects falling within the terms of reference of two or more sections. These temporary ad-hoc subcommittees operate in much the same way as sections. Their task is confined to examining a particular problem by a given deadline.



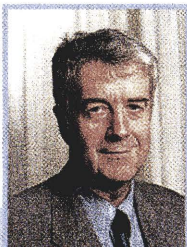
U. BURANI



K. SCHMITZ



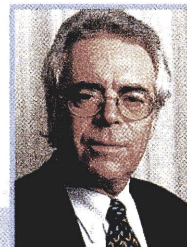
J. GAFO FERNÁNDEZ



J. OLSSON



E. de PAUL
de BARCHIFONTAINE



T. JENKINS

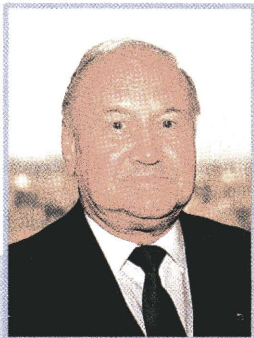
➤ The Budget Group

The Committee's Rules of Procedure state that the Bureau shall set up a Budget Group, drawn from among its members, to assist it in making decisions when exercising its budgetary and financial powers.

The Budget Group has six members, appointed on proposals from the groups, and has a two-year term of office.

The Budget Group's financial and budgetary duties include advising the president, the Bureau and the Committee and exercising control over the various services.

Members of the Budget Group:



President : **Göke FRERICHS** (Gr I - D)

Members : **Manuel ATAÍDE FERREIRA** (GR III - P)

Daniel GIRON (GR III - F)

John SVENNINGSEN (GR II - DK)

Heinz VOGLER (GR II - A)

Kenneth WALKER (GR I - UK)

➤ The Single Market Observatory

In 1994 the Single Market Observatory (SMO) was set up at the ESC at the request of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament to monitor the progress of the single market. It holds regular hearings in Brussels or in the Member States, on both general and specific topics, with those who have to cope on a daily basis with the problems that still exist within the single market.

The ESC's Single Market Observatory intends to pay particular attention to the impact of the euro on the operation of the single market. It invites all players in the economic and social sector to support this activity by providing direct evidence of their experience, especially by using the ESC's Internet site, which is permanently available to them: [http:// www.ces.eu.int](http://www.ces.eu.int) – e-mail: smo@ces.be.

There are twenty-one members of the ESC's Single Market Observatory.

➤ 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 via the Internet (<http://www.esc.eu.int>) or by writing to the secretariat (fax: 32.2.546.98.22 – e-mail: elisabeth.wolff@ces.be).

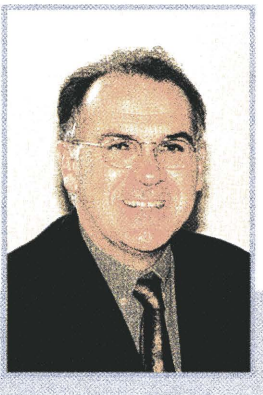
➤ Standard procedure for drawing up Committee opinions

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

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

- ➊ Requests for opinions are forwarded to the President of the Committee, usually from the Council but sometimes from the Commission.
- ➋ The Committee Bureau decides which section is to be responsible for the Committee's preparatory work.
- ➌ The section sets up a study group (on average nine strong) and appoints a rapporteur, who is assisted by experts (usually four).
- ➍ On the basis of the study group's work, the section adopts an opinion by a simple majority.
- ➎ After considering the section's opinion, the Committee adopts its opinion by a simple majority.
- ➏ This opinion is sent to the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament.

➤ The Secretariat-General



Patrick VENTURINI

The Committee is serviced by a Secretariat-General, headed by a Secretary-General who carries out his duties under the authority of the President representing the Bureau. Mr Patrick VENTURINI has been Secretary-General since October 1998.

In addition, the ESC shares a common organizational structure with the Committee of the Regions. That structure comes under the joint authority of the Secretaries-General of the ESC and the COR.

THE ESC: SPREADING THE EUROPEAN MESSAGE

The European decision-making bodies have long appreciated the role which the Committee can play in the process of creating a democratic framework in the countries with which the European Union maintains special links; that is why they have not only encouraged its activities in this area but have also given it specific tasks. In the framework of the dialogue which it maintains with economic and social circles in non-EU countries, the ESC helps to promote closer relations between those countries and the EU.

☉ Central and Eastern Europe

The Committee has encouraged the setting-up of joint consultative committees made up of ESC members and their counterparts in the associated states. Most association agreements now make provision for the Association Council to set up such bodies.

Thus the EU-Hungary Association Council formally adopted, in the context of the Europe Agreement, a decision setting up a joint consultative committee with the aim of promoting dialogue and cooperation between economic and social interest groups in the European Community and Hungary.

The EU-Bulgaria Association Council also decided to set up a joint consultative committee in September 1998.

Steps are also being taken to set up joint consultative committees with Poland and Romania.

☉ The European Economic Area

Since 1975 an ESC delegation has been participating in regular meetings with the EFTA Consultative Committee, in order to discuss economic and social matters of common interest and arrive at joint positions. This informal cooperation fell within the framework of the Consultative Committee of the newly created European Economic Area (EEA).

☉ The African, Caribbean and Pacific States

For more than twenty years the ESC, under the auspices of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly, has been organizing annual meetings of the representatives of ACP and EU economic and social interest groups.

In 1998 the ACP-EU follow-up committee adopted a new arrangement for meetings involving a meeting in Brussels every two years and the organization of regional seminars between each meeting.

The ESC also attends meetings of the Joint Assembly, which are held twice a year.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

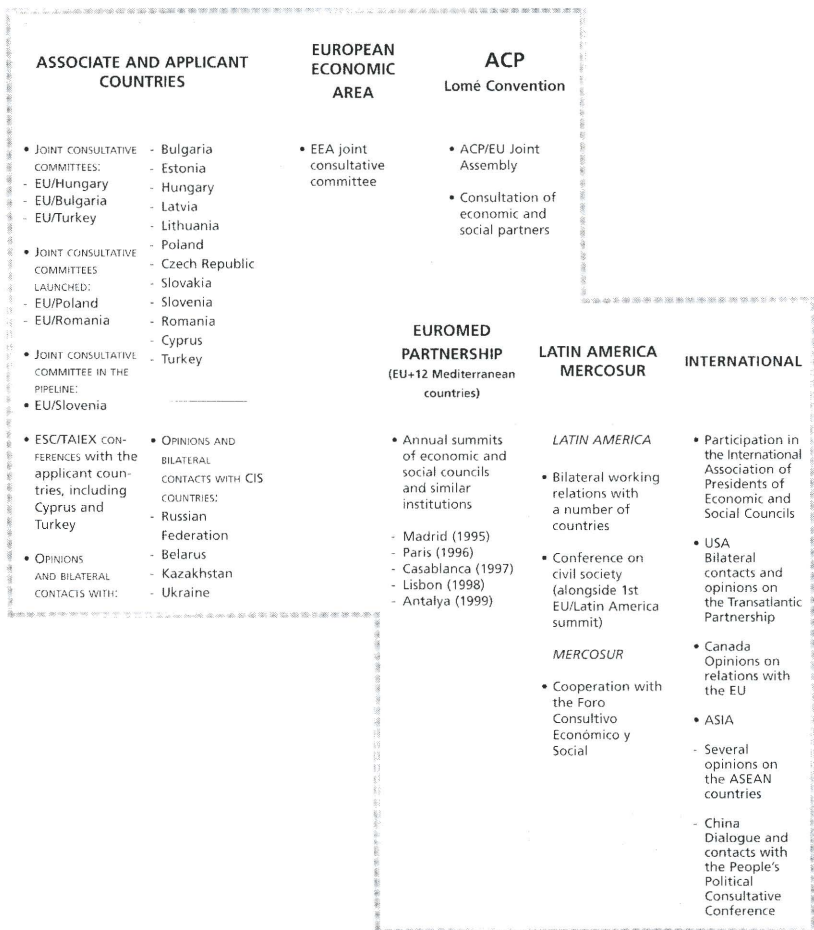
The Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona in November 1995 commissioned the ESC to strengthen links with economic and social players in the 27 countries involved and thus to become a prime mover in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Since 1995 annual summits of economic and social councils and similar institutions have been held, in Madrid, Paris, Casablanca and Lisbon. The next one will be held in Turkey in 1999.

Latin America and Mercosur

The ESC has working relations with a number of Latin American countries and in particular with the Foro Consultivo Económico y Social (Economic and Social Consultative Forum), a Mercosur advisory body modelled on the European ESC. A memorandum of understanding on institutional cooperation between the Forum and the ESC was signed in December 1997.

The ESC's "structured dialogue"



GENERAL INFORMATION

Relations with socio-economic organizations

The ESC maintains links with many organizations at EU level, such as: the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Eurochambres), the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP); EUROCOMMERCE, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Confederation of Family Organizations in the European Community (COFACE), the European Consumers' Organization (ECO), the Committee of Agricultural Organizations in the European Community (COPA) etc., which meet regularly at the ESC and take part in the discussions which culminate in opinions.

Committee members are the people chiefly responsible for liaising with the socio-occupational organizations from which they come.

Relations with other economic and social councils

The ESC maintains close relations with national and regional economic and social councils and similar institutions in the Member States.

Over the years, bilateral and multilateral relations have been established which take the form of mutual information, regular meetings and ever-closer cooperation on specific or general points.

The ESC is also an associate member of the International Association of Presidents of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions, founded in 1989. More than 40 countries are currently members of this Association.

The ESC: focal point of civil society



ESC plenary session

In 1993 the ESC embarked on a process of bringing the EU institutions closer to European citizens with the "Citizens' Europe" programme. This involves organizing a series of debates in

the Member States between senior EU officials and representatives of economic and social life in Europe.

For several years the ESC, in liaison with the other EU institutions, has been organizing **fact-finding visits**. Several thousand people visit the Committee's premises in Brussels every year.

The ESC also hosts **many meetings** in Brussels: regular Committee meetings, conferences and colloquia organized by the various players in civil society, such as employers' organizations, trade unions, the services sector, associations, NGOs etc.

The Association of Former Members of the Economic and Social Committee has been in existence since 1983. Its main aim is to help promote European ideals and disseminate knowledge about the role of the Economic and Social Committee.

Publications - Miscellaneous documentation

ESC **opinions** are published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. They may also be obtained via the Internet (<http://www.esc.eu.int>) or by writing to the secretariat (fax: 32.2.546.98.22 – E-mail: elisabeth.wolff@ces.be).

In conjunction with the Publications Office, the ESC publishes an **annual report**, which generally comes out in May.

The annual report can be obtained in all the languages of the European Union from official sales points in the Member States and several non-member states.

The Committee also publishes a **bulletin** which comes out nine times a year. The bulletin covers the work of each plenary session and contains, among other things, summaries of the major Commission proposals and Committee opinions on those proposals. The bulletin also provides information about current and future referrals. Printed versions are available in English, French and German and electronic versions are available in all eleven EU languages on the Internet (<http://www.esc.eu.int>).

CES-Info is a monthly information bulletin published in eleven languages by the press division. It provides information on the ESC's ongoing consultative activities. It is available free of charge on request (fax: 32.2.546.98.22 – E-mail: claude.laval@ces.be).

The Committee also regularly publishes its main opinions in brochure form (see section on Recent Work and Future Direction). These brochures may be obtained by writing to the Directorate for Public Relations (fax: 32.2.546.98.22 – E-mail: elisabeth.wolff@ces.be).

Internet site

The Economic and Social Committee has an Internet site (<http://www.esc.eu.int>).

RECENT WORK AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Work programme of the President of the European Economic and Social Committee 1999–2000

At the plenary session held on 2 and 3 December 1998, Mrs Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI presented the work programme which she intended to carry through during her term of office as president. Her presentation may be summed up as follows:

Organizations of civil society

European integration cannot be achieved without the active, responsible participation of Europe's citizens and the Economic and Social Committee must become the forum of civil society as represented and experienced in our countries. To participate more actively in our society's debates is a priority and a challenge which the Committee can and must take up.

The term "civil society" is used with increasing frequency. But it is one of these vague, all-purpose expressions. It is therefore necessary to suitably redefine relations between the political-administrative institutions of the European Union and those who are outside these institutions, i.e. civil society. The Economic and Social Committee has good reason to believe it expresses the needs of the organizations of civil society, in that it comprises representatives of the socio-economic and occupational organizations.

The "Val Duchesse" social dialogue is all the more essential given the serious unemployment problem affecting so many millions of our fellow citizens. But precisely because we feel that all economic and social players should have the chance to take part in the dialogue, precisely because we are aware of the responsibility conferred on us as representatives of European citizens through the socio-occupational bodies to which they belong, we think it is important that the Commission addresses the need for a civil dialogue with the NGOs to be set up alongside the social dialogue.

The economic, social and professional organizations, the associations and the trade unions represented on the Committee are the sustaining pillars of civil society in Europe. The Economic and Social Committee embodies the most authentic values of the "European model" which are based above all on measures agreed between the parties concerned.

It is therefore essential for the Economic and Social Committee to have a greater role in the decision-making process.

In the autumn of 1999 a **civil society convention** will be held. This will be preceded by meetings between the various economic and social interest groups involved, to establish the role played by civil society as a whole and the contribution it can make to the development of Europe, by strengthening economic and social cohesion.

Youth

There is no doubt that the quality of any civilization will be judged by the way in which it looks after its older and younger members.

We must react against our societies' tendency to accept lifestyles which have a negative impact on youth - urban insecurity, drugs, the media, pornography, education, unemployment, family disintegration. We must stress the vital need, in the interests of sustaining the European social

model, of reflecting this in all our policies. The Economic and Social Committee, in conjunction with the rotating Council presidencies and the Committee of the Regions, will do its utmost to develop its idea of establishing a network of model towns/cities for the quality of life they offer to children and young people (child-friendly cities network).

Solidarity between generations

Solidarity between generations and the role of older people in Europe, their basic rights and their contribution to society, have been highlighted by the Committee, especially in 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. We shall continue to encourage activities in this area and projects which stimulate “joint ventures” and integration between generations.

Equal dignity for all citizens

One of the great principles on which the European Union is based is that of equal dignity.

It is in this context that the European Union has placed the principle of equality between men and women.

In 1982, there were 11 female ESC members, and now there are 40. Progress has certainly been made, but much still remains to be done to ensure that equality of opportunity is achieved at every level.

Equal opportunities and equal treatment for women and men at the work place must remain high on our agenda.

Social exclusion and the costs of poverty

Exclusion increasingly affects the fabric of European society, accentuating its divisions and destroying solidarity. In order to maintain solidarity between the active and non-active population, between the sick and the healthy, between the employed and the unemployed, it is necessary to create a society to which the values of citizenship are fundamental. The Committee has already expressed its views and has prompted Eurostat to set up a Task Force which will at long last provide us with homogeneous data and in-depth studies on poverty and exclusion.

The role of the market and the instrument of the euro

The Committee will closely monitor the introduction of Economic and Monetary Union. A standing study group on EMU will be established.

The Commission’s presentation of the “broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and of the Community” (Art. 103 of the Treaty), will give the socio-occupational organizations represented on the Committee the chance to see whether such guidelines can contribute to a policy mix enabling a stable monetary policy to be achieved, together with a budget and employment policy which boosts growth while respecting the convergence criteria, and a coherent and responsible wage policy.

The employment challenge

The creation of new jobs, especially for the young, for women and for the long-term unemployed, continues to be an absolute priority in all Member States and is the top priority for European civil society as a whole.

The Amsterdam Treaty, whose employment-related aspects are already being implemented, grants the ESC a key position with regard to the drawing-up of “broad guidelines on employment policy”.

Investing in the quality of life

The European democratic model, in which freedom and the guarantee of rights and duties successfully cohabit, draws strength from the new citizenship rights and stands up to the challenges posed by the new frontiers of technical and scientific progress, which call for new rules. We shall act to boost interest and to spark debate on these subjects, calling on experts and those representing various interests to help us in the open search for adequate solutions.

The consumer as protagonist

On this the eve of the 21st century, European citizens are demanding that consumer policy be increasingly wide-ranging in view of the recognition of consumer rights in the marketplace. This means that consumers, businesses and institutions must interact as fully-fledged social partners on an equal footing.

On 15 March every year the Committee will hold a European Consumers' Day, in parallel with World Consumer Rights' Day.

The focus is on consumer responsibilities as well as on rights, and on the growing need for consumer information and education.

External relations

It is precisely because the Committee represents civil society that it can make an important contribution to the European Union's external relations. It is not just a matter of playing our role of cooperation and consultation in the various fields of the EU's external relations - from the CEEC to the ACP countries, from Euromed to Mercosur - but of making a very important specific contribution to the progress of those countries which look to the European Union as a point of reference and a source of hope.

Interinstitutional relations

The Committee intends to revitalize and strengthen to the utmost its relations with the other European institutions - the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, and especially the European Parliament, in respect of which the Treaty of Amsterdam has granted us a consultative role.

The Committee welcomes the interest the European Parliament is showing in future consultations with the Economic and Social Committee, as laid down in the Amsterdam Treaty.

The Parliament's work has produced texts which advocated both flexible consultation and the highlighting of opinions, either by attaching them to the report by the EP committee concerned, or even by asking Parliament to pledge to take the Committee opinion into consideration. It goes without saying that the new co-decision procedure acts as a framework for the scope of the new provisions and should enable the Committee to contribute to Parliament's work in a focused, specific way.

More generally, the new procedures should lead to greater collaboration - already the practice in many cases - between the rapporteurs of the European Parliament and those of the European Economic and Social Committee.

Since the Committee consists of representatives of the major socio-occupational categories at national level, its contribution to the European Parliament's work is likely to give added value to the latter's stance.

The Treaties confer upon the Committee the task of providing the Council and the Commission with opinions on almost all issues covered by European legislation.

In order, therefore, to gain maximum benefit from such consultations, more meetings should

be held, at least for the more important opinions, between the Committee rapporteurs and the presidents of the corresponding working parties in the Council. We have noticed, in fact, that by merely inserting - sometimes belatedly - Committee opinions into the files prepared for the various councils, our comments and proposals do not always receive the attention they deserve.

The organization of Committee work by means of study groups that can also avail themselves of experts from the various socio-economic categories present in our institution, is both original and valid. The proof of this is that over 60% of our proposals are adopted in the final text of regulations and directives which the Commission subsequently submits to the Council for approval.

*The full text of the President's work programme can be obtained from the ESC
Press and Media Division (fax :32.2.546.97.64) or on the Internet
(<http://www.esc.eu.int>).*

Main opinions drawn up by the Committee on its own initiative in 1997 and 1998

- Cooperation with charitable associations as economic and social partners in the field of social welfare
- The agricultural aspects of the Commission's Communication on Agenda 2000
- Relations between the EU and the countries bordering the Baltic Sea
- Enlargement of the European Union
- The single market and protection of the environment: coherence or conflict
- Action plan for transit in Europe - a new customs policy
- Seasonal labour and migration in rural areas: stocktaking and outlook
- Impact on SMEs of the steady, widespread reduction in funds allocated to RTD in the EU (at Community and national level)
- The role of the socio-economic partners in the various frontier regions and in the *Interreg* programmes
- Sustainable development in building and housing in Europe
- Social policy and economic performance
- The olive and olive oil sector (including economic, cultural, regional, social and environmental aspects)
- Development aid, good governance and the role of the socio-economic interest groups
- Environmental agreements
- Forestry in the European Union: present situation, problems and potential for developing forestry policy
- The European Union and the external dimension of human rights policy
- SMEs – cross-border business relations
- Craft industries and small and medium-sized enterprises
- Relations between the EU and China
- Employment, competitiveness and economic globalization
- Stocktaking of the first three years of the CAP reform
- Creating a new dynamic in EU-ASEAN relations
- Exploitation of children and sex tourism
- EC instruments for investment support in third countries
- Europe as an economic entity – a political challenge
- Promotion of local speciality agricultural products as a development instrument under the new CAP
- Genetically modified organisms in agriculture
- Costs of poverty and social exclusion in Europe
- Ways and means of strengthening the networks for the provision of information on and exploitation of applied RTD programmes in Europe
- Freedom to set up a business in the single market
- Reinforcing the pre-accession strategy
- Preventing new barriers from arising in the single market

- Management of fish stocks in the Mediterranean
- Consumers in the insurance market
- Role of middlemen - from production to consumption - in the setting of food prices

➤ **Main own-initiative work planned for 1999**

- European tourism policy
- Regional initiatives
- Cross-border initiatives
- Implementation of a structured social dialogue in pan-European transport corridors
- Priority agri-environmental objectives in the multifunctional agriculture proposed by Agenda 2000
- Financing the EU
- Implementation of the Employment Guidelines for 1999
- Debt relief in combating poverty in LDCs
- Social economy and the single market
- Combating tax evasion in the single market
- The role of the European Union for a pharmaceuticals policy that meets citizen's needs
- Pluralism and concentration in the media
- A policy to consolidate the European agricultural model
- Fiscal policy: harmonization and coordination in the economic and monetary union
- Impact of implementing EMU on economic and social cohesion
- Towards a citizen's Treaty
- Poland on the road to accession
- The Nordic Dimension including relations with Russia
- The economic and social situation and the role of the socio-occupational organizations in Cyprus

➤ **Main publications 1997–1998**

- Forum of the Future of European Society
- Future of ACP–EU Relations – Position of the Economic and Social Interest Groups
- Relations between the EU and the countries of the Baltic Sea
- Relations between the EU and the central and eastern European countries - Volumes II and III
- Education and Training – The Transfer of Knowledge
- Towards and EU Consumer Protection Policy
- SMEs and Craft Industries in the European Union
- Annual Report 1997
- Citizens' Europe
 - Vienna (Business and Society in an enlarged Europe)
 - Helsinki (Advantages of the Single Market and Baltic Sea Cooperation)

- Stirling (The ESC and Scotland : Focus on Citizens)
- Luxembourg (ESC and the Euro-Region – Debate)
- The Single Market and the Protection of the Environment
- The Euro: How the Socio-Occupational Groups View It
- The ESC – 1958–1998 (40 Years of Socio-Occupational Dialogue)
- Maritime Affairs
- Consumers in the Insurance Market
- The ESC – What is its Role ? (leaflet)
- Antibiotic Resistance
- ESC Meeting at the Expo in Lisbon (18 June 1998) – The Structural Funds

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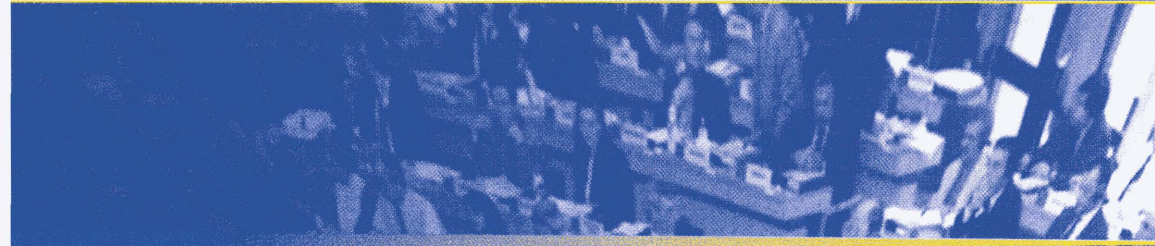
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