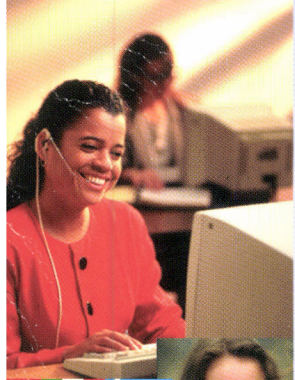
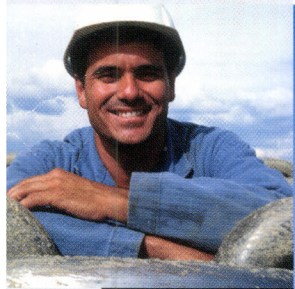




BULLETIN

Economic and Social Committee

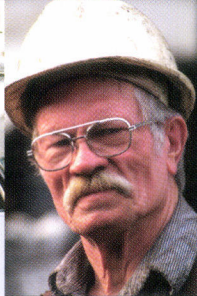
European Communities



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Facts and figures - November 1997

Presidency

President: Tom Jenkins
(United Kingdom - Workers)

Vice-presidents: Giacomo Regaldo
(Italy - Employers)

Johannes Jaschick
(Germany - Various Interests)

Secretary-General: Adriano Graziosi

Origins

The ESC was set up by the 1957 Rome Treaties in order to involve economic and social interest groups in the establishment of the common market and to provide institutional machinery for briefing the European Commission and the Council of Ministers on European Union issues.

The Single European Act (1986), the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) have reinforced the ESC's role.

Membership

The 222 members of the ESC are drawn from economic and social interest groups in Europe. Members are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a renewable 4-year term of office. They belong to one of three groups: Employers (Group I - president: Manuel Eugénio Cavaleiro Brandão - Portugal), Workers (Group II - president: Roger Briesch - France), Various Interests (Group III - president: Beatrice Rangoni Machiavelli - Italy). Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom have 24 members each, Spain has 21, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria and Sweden 12, Denmark, Ireland and Finland 9 and Luxembourg 6.

The members' mandate

The task of members is to issue opinions on matters referred to the ESC by the Commission and the Council, as well as the European Parliament pursuant to the Amsterdam Treaty.

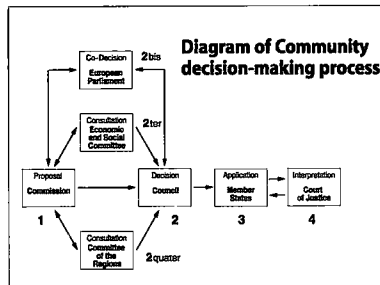
The ESC is the only socio-occupational advisory body that can be consulted by the EU Council of Ministers.

Advisory role

Consultation of the ESC by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases; in others it is optional. The ESC may, however, also adopt opinions on its own initiative. The Single European Act (17.2.86), the Maastricht Treaty (7.2.92) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (signed on 2.10.97) extended the range of issues which must be referred to the Committee: regional policy, environmental policy, employment policy, broad guidelines for economic policies, combating social exclusion, etc. The ESC produces 170 advisory documents and opinions a year (of which 15% are issued on its own initiative). All opinions are forwarded to the Community's decision-making bodies and then published in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

Information and integration role

Over the last few years the ESC has stepped up its role in the European Union and has transcended the straightforward duties flowing from the treaties. It acts as a forum for the single market and has hosted, with the support of other EU bodies, a series of events aimed at bringing the EU closer to the people.



Internal organization

1. Presidency and Bureau

Every two years the ESC elects a Bureau made up of 36 members (12 per group), and a president and two vice-presidents chosen from each of the three groups in rotation.

The president is responsible for the orderly conduct of the Committee's business. He is assisted by the vice-presidents, who deputize for him in the event of his absence.

The president represents the ESC in relations with outside bodies.

Joint briefs (relations with EFTA, CEEC, AMU, ACP countries, Latin American and other third countries, and the Citizens' Europe) fall within the remit of the ESC Bureau and the president.

The Bureau's main task is to organize and coordinate the work of the ESC's various bodies and to lay down policy guidelines for this work.

2. Sections

The Committee has nine sections:

- Economic, Financial and Monetary Questions
secretariat tel. 546.92.86
(president: Göke Frerichs
Group I - Germany)
- External Relations, Trade and Development
Policy - secretariat tel. 546.93.27
(president: Thomas Etty
Group II - Netherlands)
- Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs
secretariat tel. 546.95.12
(president: John F. Carroll
Group II - Ireland)
- Protection of the Environment, Public Health
and Consumer Affairs
secretariat tel. 546.94.06
(president: Manuel Ataíde Ferreira
Group III - Portugal)
- Agriculture and Fisheries
secretariat tel. 546.96.87
(president: Pere Margalef i Masià
Group III - Spain)
- Regional Development and Town and Country
Planning
secretariat tel. 546.96.11
(president: Robert Moreland
Group III - United Kingdom)
- Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services
secretariat tel. 546.95.98
(president: John Little
Group I - United Kingdom)
- Transport and Communications
secretariat tel. 546.93.60
(president: Elke Eulen
Group II - Germany)
- Energy, Nuclear Questions and Research
secretariat tel. 546.98.19
(president: José Ignacio Gafo-Fernandez
Group I - Spain)

3. Study groups

Section opinions are drafted by study groups. These usually have 12 members, including a rapporteur who may be assisted by experts (normally four).

4. Sub-committees

The ESC has the right to set up temporary sub-committees, for specific issues. These sub-committees operate on the same lines as the sections.

5. Plenary session

As a rule, the full Committee meets in plenary session ten times a year. At the plenary sessions, opinions are adopted on the basis of section opinions by a simple majority. They are forwarded to the institutions and published in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

External Relations

1. Relations with economic and social councils

The ESC maintains regular links with regional and national economic and social councils throughout the European Union. These links mainly involve exchanges of information and joint discussions every year on specific issues.

The ESC also liaises worldwide with other economic and social councils at the "International Meetings" held every two years.

2. Relations with economic and social interest groups in third countries

The ESC has links with economic and social interest groups in a number of non-member countries and groups of countries, including Mediterranean countries, the ACP countries, central and eastern Europe, Latin America and EFTA. For this purpose the ESC sets up 15-30 member delegations headed by the president or a vice-president. It is expected that some meetings involving the countries of central and eastern Europe will be institutionalized under the Europe Agreements, as is currently the case with Hungary and Turkey.

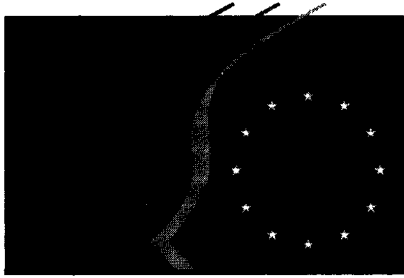
Publications

The ESC regularly distributes a number of publications, including its main opinions in brochure format, a monthly newsletter entitled ESC INFO and its Annual Report.

Secretariat-General

The Committee is serviced by a secretariat-general, headed by a secretary-general who reports to the president, representing the Bureau.

135 staff work exclusively for the Economic and Social Committee. Since 1 January 1995, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have shared a common core of departments whose staff, numbering 519, are mostly members of the ESC secretariat.



BULLETIN

Economic and Social Committee

European Communities

98

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This Bulletin reports on the activities of the Economic and Social Committee, a European consultative assembly. It is published after plenary sessions in French, English and German. Versions in the eleven official languages of the European Union are available on the ESC Internet site (<http://www.esc.eu.int>).

The complete texts of ESC opinions are available:

- *in the Official Journal of the European Communities,*
- *on the CELEX database,*
- *at the ESC Internet site,*
- *on written request from the ESC General Secretariat.*

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

DIRECTORATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS
Specialized Department for Information and Visits
rue Ravenstein, 2 - B-1000 Brussels

Tel: (32.2) 546.90.11
Fax: (32.2) 546.98.22

Telex: 25 983
Telegram: ECOSEUR

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A NEW LOGO FOR THE ESC



To mark the 40th anniversary of the Economic and Social Committee, a new logo, in use from January 1998, has recently been designed: the logo is framed by a blue rectangle inside which the gold stars represent the European Community area.

The three groups of the Committee are depicted by human profiles in an effort to highlight the human and social identity shared by them. The three profiles, with fading colours to reflect the varying shades of opinion and the quest for consensus among the groups, all look towards a common vision of the European Union.

*

* *

I. 351st PLENARY SESSION OF 28 and 29 JANUARY 1998

The 351st plenary session of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Community was held in Brussels on 28 and 29 January 1998. The president, Mr Tom Jenkins, was in the chair.

The session was attended by Lord Whitty, minister responsible for questions relating to the British presidency, on behalf of the presidency-in-office of the Council. Lord Whitty presented the British presidency's work programme. He said he was highly aware of the importance of pluralist civil society as represented by the Economic and Social Committee, which provided it with a platform. He also supported its role as Single Market Observatory and as a link with the Citizens' Europe.

While the British Council presidency's work programme covered all aspects of Community policy, three priorities clearly stood out: boosting employment at European level by removing the final obstacles to the single market; the fight against organized crime, especially by helping Europol to combat drugs and arms trafficking, and abuse of high technology; environmental protection, in particular by reducing vehicle emissions - a concrete result of this political commitment would be the holding of the first combined environment and transport Council.

In addition to the completion of a more effective single market, the first priority - jobs - covered complementary aspects such as training, flexibility, the spirit of enterprise and equality of opportunities, particularly with regard to disabled citizens. The next priority - tackling crime - involved cooperation between European police forces, but also resolute action against racism and

xenophobia. Article 6a of the Amsterdam Treaty provided a new legal basis in this regard. The environment constituted the third priority, the aim being to integrate environmental requirements into all areas of EU activity, holding the Union up as a model.

Beyond forging ahead with the preparatory work for the introduction of the euro - even though the United Kingdom had clearly signalled that it would not be among the first wave of Member States to adopt the single currency - the aim of the British presidency was to show that Europe was working on behalf of its citizens, while the great issues it was tackling - the economy and employment, organized crime and the environment - were challenges which should be taken up at European level. In addition to these priorities, the British presidency also wished to prepare the European Union for the next century, moving towards enlargement in order, at last, to overcome the division of Europe, which had been a historical aberration. In this respect, the British presidency intended to ensure that the negotiations with the six countries identified at the Luxembourg summit got off to a good start as soon as possible. Moreover, relations with Turkey had to be based on dialogue with the political forces in the country, which were looking to Europe.

Turning to the reforms proposed by the Agenda 2000 programme, the British presidency would be faced with the arduous task of pursuing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and making the necessary decisions to make the Structural Funds fairer. Enlargement would not be possible without institutional reform.

In the sphere of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), the British presidency would strive for a coherent approach and rapid action by Member States in international agreement. Progress needed to be made on the elimination of anti-personnel mines and affirming the EU's authority on human rights questions. The pursuit of peaceful solutions in Bosnia and the Middle East, bilateral relations between the EU and the United States, the second Europe-Asia summit and the drafting of a new Lomé convention would be other priority areas for action.

In the course of the session, the Committee adopted the following opinions:

Section for Protection of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Affairs
Silvia Calamandrei, Principal Administrator - ☎ (32-2) 546 9657

1. GOOD CLINICAL PRACTICE

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action relating to the implementation of good clinical practice in the conduct of clinical trials on medicinal products for human use

(COM(97) 369 final - COD 97/0197)

(CES 99/98 - COD 97/0197)

Rapporteur: Sergio COLOMBO (Italy - Workers)

Gist of the Commission proposal

Medicinal products must have a marketing authorization prior to being placed on the market in the European Community. Criteria for access have been clearly set out and rely on clinical trials in human subjects. The standards for the conduct of clinical trials have been developed progressively both within the European Union and internationally, and have been codified in the EU guideline on Good Clinical Practice (GCP)¹ since 1990. With the globalization of the pharmaceutical industry, the international harmonization of the standards was also undertaken.

Since January 1997, the internationally harmonized GCP is now incorporated into clinical practice within the Community by virtue of its inclusion in the "rules governing medicinal

products"². Because such guidelines are not binding, a supportive legislative framework is required. This is to be achieved using two approaches: firstly, by the present proposal for a Council Directive reinforcing existing practice and harmonizing procedures for the commencement of clinical trials; secondly, with a delegation of power to the Commission to adopt a Directive containing detailed principles and guidelines on GCP.

The proposed Directive - based on Article 100a - deals with clinical trials including multi-centre trials on human subjects, and aims mainly at ensuring a high level of protection for those subjects in trials for new medicinal products and harmonizing the Member States' requirements in order to avoid duplication of effort. It includes measures for:

- protection of trial subjects,
- drawing-up of an opinion by an Ethics Committee,
- procedure for the commencement of a clinical trial,
- exchange of information,
- manufacture, import and labelling of investigational medicinal products,
- compliance,
- clinical safety reporting.

Gist of the opinion

In its own-initiative opinion on the free movement of medicines in the European Union³, the Committee emphasized the importance of having a pharmaceutical sector which draws its strength from the existence of a competitive, highly innovative industry within the EU.

¹ GCP is an international and scientific quality standard for designing, conducting and reporting trials that involve the participation of human subjects. Compliance with this standard provides public assurance that the rights, safety and well-being of trial subjects are protected, consistent with the principles that have their origin in the Declaration of Helsinki (1964), and that the clinical trial data are credible.

² Published by the Commission in accordance with the annex to Directive 75/318/EEC on analytical, pharmacological and clinical standards and protocols in respect of the testing of medicinal products as amended.

³ OJ No. C 97 of 1.4.1996.

The opinion pointed out that the availability of innovative, safe and effective medicines plays an important role in protecting public health and extending average life expectancy.

Trials on human subjects are essential for assessing whether new products are effective and safe. Such trials must be conducted according to scientific and ethical principles, while at the same time avoiding pointless and expensive studies which cover no new ground.

In assessing the proposal, the Committee feels it desirable to seek to strike a balance between the need to:

- simplify red tape;
- respect the deadlines for commencement of the clinical trial;

and the need to

- provide the utmost guarantees for trial subjects;
- coordinate findings so that the efficacy and safety of a new medicinal product can be rigorously assessed.

Article 1(3) of the proposal states that "the principles and guidelines of Good Clinical Practice shall be adopted in the form of a directive". The Committee sees this as a positive step forward, as it means that these principles and guidelines will be binding in all Member States. The proposal will approximate the national legislative provisions adopted recently in various Member States. Failure to harmonize these provisions would result in existing discrepancies remaining unaltered.

The Committee endorses the approximation of provisions, on condition that this does not in practice create further bureaucratic or administrative obstacles but promotes high-quality pharmacological research in the EU.

The Committee understands and endorses the cautious way in which the Commission intends to proceed towards the aim of a single procedure for the commencement of clinical trials, valid throughout the EU.

However, the Committee thinks that forms of cooperation should be encouraged for the purpose of gradually moving towards a single EU procedure. Use should be made here of the

scientific skills and knowhow available at the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA), especially as regards "orphan" medicinal products and gene and cell therapy.

In order to boost cooperation, it is essential that an EU database be provided as part of EudraNet (a telematic network linking the relevant national authorities, the EMA and the Commission). This would be used to coordinate and circulate information between the Member States involved in a multi-centre international trial, with an access key to guarantee the utmost confidentiality and the safeguarding of industrial protection.

The goal must be a clear and simple legal framework which allows trials to be launched simultaneously in different countries. This presupposes respect for the deadlines laid down for the favourable opinion from the ethics committees and for the acceptance of any requests from the relevant authorities for modifications (these authorities have 30 days to notify their opinion to the sponsor). It is also essential that persons undergoing trials are guaranteed the best possible risks-benefits ratio.

To this end, the Commission must obtain greater guarantees regarding the participation of third countries in multi-centre trials. The sponsor should be asked to ascertain that third countries involved in trials on a particular medicinal product are familiar with the Community guidelines and are therefore able to apply them properly.

2. PRODUCT LIABILITY/PRIMARY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive amending Council Directive 85/374/EEC of 25 July 1985 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning liability for defective products
(COM(97) 478 final - 97/0244 COD)

(CES 115/98 - 97/0244 COD)

Rapporteur: Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALER
(Spain - Various Interests)

Gist of the Commission document

The proposal for a directive, which is based on Article 100a of the EC Treaty, seeks to amend Directive 85/374/EEC on liability for defective products so that it will in future apply also to primary agricultural products. This will then mean that the liability provision set out in the directive will cover all products in the whole of the internal market. Under the directive currently in force, unlike products which have undergone initial processing, primary agricultural products are subject to an exemption clause. By way of derogation from the general rule, Member States are already entitled to introduce national laws stipulating that agricultural producers shall be liable for defective primary products. To date Greece, Luxembourg, Sweden and Finland have availed themselves of this possibility.

In submitting the proposal under review the Commission has acted on a request from the European Parliament which had pressed for the present amendment in connection with the work of the provisional committee of enquiry on BSE.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee welcomes the Commission's proposal for a directive, which is consistent with its repeated calls in several earlier opinions, for primary agricultural products and game to be included within the scope of Directive 85/374/EEC.

The Committee expects adoption of the proposal to lead to a higher level of health and consumer protection and to put an end to distortions of competition.

The Committee is also of the view that, following the adoption of this proposal, there ought to be an overall examination of the operation of Directive 85/374/EEC by means of a green paper.

3. AMENDMENT OF THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY REGULATION

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) No. ... of ... amending Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1210/90 of 7 May 1990 on the establishment of the European Environment Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network*
(COM(97) 489 final - 97/0256 CNS)

(CES 100/98 - 97/0256 CNS)

Rapporteur working alone: María Candelas SÁNCHEZ MIGUEL (Spain - Workers)

Gist of the Commission proposal

This proposal forms part of a package of amendments to the basic regulations of certain decentralized Community agencies, with particular reference to:

- these agencies' power to grant discharge;
- treatment of their resources in relation to Community own resources;
- exercise of financial control by the Commission's Financial Controller.

The ESC is consulted solely on the proposal relating to the European Environment Agency, under Article 130s of the Treaty (the other amendments are based on Article 235).

Gist of the opinion

The ESC welcomes the proposal, as it considers that any measure which further improves the current system and enables budgetary controls to be objective will help the proper functioning of Community bodies.

Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services
Joao Pereira dos Santos, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9245

4. THE CONSUMERS IN THE INSURANCE MARKET (SMO) (Own-initiative)

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on "The Consumers in the insurance market" (Single Market Observatory)

(CES 116/98)

Rapporteur: Manuel ATAÍDE FERREIRA
(Portugal - Various Interests)

Background

The purpose of this own-initiative opinion of the Single Market Observatory is to examine whether the single market works for the consumers in the field of insurance. With the widespread liberalization of services the insurance market is open for the insurance companies to work in a pan-European manner, but the question is whether this right also exists for the consumers.

The functioning of a true single market in insurances may be hampered by such factors as:

- different legal structures to deal with different types of insurance occasions;
- the invocation of the concept of *general interest* by Member States, permitting the proper application of national law;
- lack of transparency, making it impossible for the consumer to find the optimum insurer, and
- fiscal differences and differences in systems of sanction between Member States.

Two hearings with representatives of consumers, the insurance industry, government, trade unions etc. were held, one in Lisbon on 27 June and one in London on 2 September 1997 and a questionnaire has been sent out to a large number of organizations and persons. The headings of this questionnaire were the following:

I. What kind of insurance is of direct interest to consumers?

- II. Before taking out insurance
- III. When taking out insurance
- IV. Validity of the contract
- V. Breaking the contract
- VI. Special cases

Gist of the opinion

The own-initiative opinion considers the right conditions and proposes and recommends appropriate measures for the shaping of the single market so as to achieve the early, effective removal of the main distortions of competition and increase consumer confidence in the reliability and quality of goods and services.

It draws the following conclusions:

- it shows support for a number of ongoing Commission initiatives;
- it calls on the Commission to begin work on a number of new issues, such as defining minimum requirements to protect the general good, harmonizing tax arrangements, codification of existing legislation, creating an observatory to deal with complaints at Community level, the applicability of the Rome Convention to insurance, etc.;
- it proposes certain measures to the Commission and the Member States, such as arbitration measures, improved pre-contract information, reviewing existing legislation etc.;
- it prompts trade organizations from the insurance sector and consumer organizations to engage in dialogue and concentrate their efforts on regulating their working practices in accordance with codes of good conduct and finding the best solutions for settling disputes of court;
- it urges the Commission to draw up a draft directive, defining Community-level common minimum requirements for insurance contracts;
- it urges the Commission to continue its efforts to create a Community-wide systematic inventory and public register of unfair general terms in insurance contracts, and

- it presses the Member States to set up systems for the condemnation and amendment of unfair terms in insurance contracts.

5. EUROPEAN SPACE INDUSTRY

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the European Union and space: fostering applications, markets and industrial competitiveness*

(COM(96) 617 final)

(CES 101/98)

Rapporteur: Mario SEPI (Italy - Workers)

Gist of the Commission document

The European Union cannot be indifferent about space developments, which contribute both to the industrial competitiveness of Europe and to improving the quality of life of its citizens.

The Commission's 1988 Communication on space⁴ established the principle of a Union involvement in Europe's space activity and stressed that its role had to be complementary to that of the European Space Agency (ESA).

Since the presentation of the last Communication ("The European Union and Space: challenges, opportunities and new actions") of 23 September 1992⁵, the overall international scenario has greatly evolved and important new events have occurred, requiring an update of the Commission's position in the space field:

- the information society is emerging, with the concomitant technological developments;
- the markets for space applications are developing fast, especially in the areas of telecommunications, navigation, and earth observation; simultaneously, competition on the markets for satellites and launch services is becoming increasingly intense and global;

- the restructuring process within the European industry has made some progress, but USA competitors have evolved towards greatly increased concentration;

- the ESA Ministerial Council of Toulouse in 1995 has taken important decisions, in the field of launchers and space infrastructure, which will affect the funding of application programmes;

- at European Union level, the development and demonstration of space applications have received increasing attention in the 4th Framework Programme for Research and Technology Development and Demonstration (1994-1998)⁶ as well as in the implementation of a number of the Union's policies;

- the Commission, as part of its continued dialogue with the industry, has convened a high-level group of industrialists to help define actions intended to promote a dynamic and competitive space industry in Europe.

This communication highlights the urgent need for action in order to establish an appropriate environment for the development of applications of space techniques and to improve the competitiveness of European industry at world level.

Proposals in the above fields will be made by the Commission within the current and future RDT Framework Programmes with the key goal of consolidating the European satellite-based infrastructure; certain activities could necessitate the use of other forms of Community support according to the particular modalities concerned; concrete measures will be taken by the Commission.

All these initiatives should be coordinated with those of Member States and of the European Space Agency in order to obtain, within European Union rules, the maximum degree of flexibility and synergy at European level; the Commission, together with the European Space Agency and

⁴ COM(88) 417 final

⁵ COM(92) 360 final

⁶ OJ No. L 126, 18.05.1994

other organizations concerned, will take the necessary steps to this end; the Commission will continue to rely on the advice of the Space Advisory Group (SAG) and other advisory groups and to maintain regular dialogue with industrialists and users.

The Committee welcomes the conclusions of the Council of Ministers of 23 September 1997, in which the Member States express their willingness to cooperate, and entrust the Community with the task of stimulating this cooperation.

It should be pointed out that demand - except in some sectors - is still basically from the public sector, with funding coming largely from the public coffers. Community policies on competition, public procurement and deregulation of services must take this into account.

The ESC wishes to point out that the space industry has a substantial impact on the European economy as a whole: it boosts competitiveness, encourages new ventures and provides greater development potential. Advancement of the space industry is thus of strategic value. All instruments and procedures must focus on this objective. If progress is not forthcoming, there could be a case for implementing the Amsterdam Treaty's "reinforced cooperation" procedures in this sector.

In the international negotiations on the allocation of radio frequencies and ITU standards, or on the rules for competition and market share, the EU needs a common position and a sole negotiator if it is to have sufficient political clout with its negotiating partners.

In intervening in downstream space activity applications, the Commission does not sufficiently emphasize launch applications, which remain the main catalyst for the industry. The ESC calls for incentive and coordination activities to be deployed in this sector too, in order to guarantee Europe the requisite autonomy with regard to space launching systems.

The Commission has not sufficiently highlighted one of the fundamental problems for the future of this industry, i.e. the relationship between R&D and industrial and commercial spin-offs. This would require either a downstream expansion of the ESA's remit (currently non-market-oriented), the creation of an EU Authority, or at least a liaison body to harness potential synergies.

The creation of an association of space industries should be encouraged, along the lines of that for the defence industry, in order to align the differing stands of national industries and move towards an increasingly united industrial policy.

The Commission should pay more attention to the vital importance of continuous training for the human resources needed to develop this sector. It is essential to promote training and technological know-how campaigns, both for users and for SMEs.

As thorough a review as possible of current European R&D is needed so that the Commission and the relevant national agencies can, by common consent, cut down on any superfluous elements and identify non-profitable sectors more easily, and so that research can translate rapidly into industrial applications.

It is essential that R&D streamlining should be backed by timely, efficient mechanisms for funding by European central bodies in the application stages too, (e.g. project funding), in order to stimulate private investment in particular.

In view of Europe's considerable commitment to the International Space Station, and the lack of any specific European regulatory practice governing commercial rights for "proprietary" technologies which are applied and/or developed in space, it is essential to make such provision within the framework of Patents and Licences. Eventually, common international standards will have to be determined, to regulate specific aspects of the WTO TRIPS negotiations.

6. EUROPEAN AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European aerospace industry: meeting the global challenge* (COM(97) 466 final)

(CES 102/98)

Rapporteur: Mario SEPI (Italy - Workers)

Gist of the Commission document

The world aerospace industry is undergoing dramatic changes. Momentous recent events such as the merger of Boeing and McDonnell Douglas and the proposed merger of Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman have been driven by a recognition that the structure of the industry will only allow for a small number of world-class prime contractors to sustain competitiveness and commercial success through the integration of capabilities in a broad range of inter-related aerospace disciplines.

In terms of large civil aircraft the Airbus share of the market grew steadily throughout the 1980s, as its aircraft range increased, but has remained essentially stable since 1989 and its share of the backlog stood at around 30% in 1996. Since the acquisition of McDonnell Douglas by Boeing, the European aerospace industry faces one dominant competitor with around 70% of the total order backlog.

While the market for civil aerospace products is clearly a world-wide market, military aerospace markets are constrained by differing national defence and procurement regulations. In terms of value 15-20% of fighter aircraft contracts awarded between 1992 and 1996 went to European producers while nearly 80% went to US producers.

In the world civil helicopter market the European share decreased throughout the 1980s but has stabilized in the 1990s and in 1996 stood at around 28% (unit deliveries of EU-design origin helicopters), whilst in the military helicopter market the European share has been constantly decreasing, particularly after the end of the cold war and now stands at around 8% of the world market.

In regional aircraft (jet and turboprop), where the number of manufacturers is far greater but has been diminishing over the years, European companies held a majority share of the market for a long time (over 70% in 1994). More recently, however, rapidly increasing competition from Canadian, Brazilian and Asian producers combined with the collapse of Fokker and the sale of Dornier to Fairchild has resulted in a dramatic reduction in European market share whilst the Canadian industry now holds 40% of the regional jet market.

The position of the European industry in the world space markets varies between a market share of 5% or less in some categories of ground equipment, 20-25% in the satellite manufacturing sector and more than 50% in space launch services as a result of the Ariane programme, albeit only in markets which are effectively open to competition.

In the civil aeroengine market the level of cooperation between US and European companies is greater than within Europe. However, intra-European cooperation is the norm for military aeroengines such as Eurojet. Because of these levels of EU-US cooperation it is difficult to compare market shares. However, the turnover of the two largest US aeroengine producers is roughly double that of the two major EU producers.

The equipment sector is growing in importance and complexity (it represents an ever greater part of an aerospace system's value and 30% of the total employment in the aerospace sector), but without successful European platforms its long-term future would be compromised.

Sustaining growth and competitiveness against increasingly intense world competition will not be achieved by a single factor nor in a single Member State.

Over and above superior performance by individual firms, Europe will need to provide the context in which these firms can flourish in the massive collaborative endeavours which constitute modern aerospace products and the myriad of systems and supporting services which they need.

The Commission communication sets out to assess the situation of the European aerospace industry as a whole, focusing on a range of possible scenarios for its future development.

The Council is therefore invited to support the thrust of the communication and to recognize the urgency of restructuring the European aerospace industry. The Council and the Member States are also invited to support the required Community actions and to take the other appropriate initiatives needed to facilitate and encourage this process of restructuring.

Gist of the opinion

The ESC welcomes this document, and considers that the national industries are not generally

capable, on their own, of standing up to world competition.

The Commission's communication overlooks the need to back up industrial projects with vigorous action on uniform and Europe-wide vocational training. The structural funds should support a wide range of training activities for both young people who are to enter the aeronautics industry and retraining for those already employed in it.

Harmonization, on a European scale, of the level of aeronautical engineering degree courses will be equally important: "thematic networks" might be useful here, as they have been in other sectors.

Given the prospect of enlargement, the problems and opportunities which may arise from the accession of new (eastern European) countries must also be addressed.

The need for unified industrial structures emerges clearly from the Commission document, and from the American and Airbus experiences. Introduction of the European Company Statute is thus of great importance to the sector, despite the problems involved.

In order to inject flexibility into the system and boost employment, preference should be given to developing a network of small and medium-sized European businesses, which would trigger decentralization of a significant share of production and provide a technological spin-off for other sectors.

The harnessing of relevant synergies, inter alia through universities and research centres, could be decisive here.

The EU institutions and the individual Member States must give vigorous backing to the establishment of a European air safety authority and of an integrated air traffic control system.

Special attention should be focused on environmental policy action, particularly regarding airports and their surrounding areas, by developing technologies capable of cutting air and noise pollution.

The resources thus far available to specific RTD programmes will need to be expanded: in particular, this should be implemented under the Fifth framework programme. Technology transfer

from the military to the civil sector and vice versa, supporting research on dual-use products, will be a decisive factor in this respect.

Moreover, in order to support recently restructured European industries, the European Union should envisage funding joint programmes such as an integrated supervision/monitoring system (on an interdisciplinary sea-land-air-space basis) for safety in Europe as a whole, a military/civilian air transport system (FLA), or a satellite navigation system.

Taking the three sectors as a whole (defence, space and aeronautics), the ESC believes that the EU must adopt instruments for funding and for adjusting public expenditure at European level. This will require a quantum jump in the EU political integration process.

It is essential to secure a more efficient opening up of public procurement, so that the European aerospace industry can take advantage of new outlets.

The Committee warmly welcomes the December 1997 declaration committing the European Airbus industries to present a coherent reorganization plan by the end of April 1998.

7. ELECTRONIC MEANS OF PAYMENT

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Communication of the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Monetary Institute and the Economic and Social Committee: Boosting customers' confidence in electronic means of payment in the single market* (COM(97) 353 final)

(CES 103/98)

Rapporteur: Umberto BURANI (Italy - Employers)

Gist of the Commission proposal

The electronic payments Communication builds upon the Commission's Communications concerning electronic commerce and "Financial Services: enhancing consumer confidence". It outlines a broader integrated approach, with a view to developing sound, user-friendly, efficient and secure electronic payment systems to the benefit of all parties.

By the end of the next decade, a significant share of retail commerce is expected on the Internet. The more that goods and services are offered by electronic means or at a distance, the more competitive pressure will mount on providers to offer means of payment in an increasingly easy, safe and efficient way.

The Commission Recommendation of 1988 laid down minimum standards which should govern the relationship between the issuer and the holder of a payment card or other payment device. A review of the 1988 Recommendation is now timely.

The new Commission Recommendation concerns transactions effected by electronic payment instruments, setting out the main standards to apply to the relationship between issuer and holder. The instruments it covers are the following:

- "bank-account-access" products: instruments that provide for remote access to accounts held at financial institutions, typically banks. This category includes home-banking and phone-banking applications, as well as payment cards;
- "electronic-money" products: instruments on which electronic value is stored, whether as magnetic stripe or micro-circuit cards or computer memories (e-money or cyber-money products).

The purpose is to boost confidence in electronic payment instruments, by ensuring that:

- customers have available to them clear information, both before a transaction (contractual terms) and thereafter (statement);
- there is a fair apportionment of responsibilities between issuer and holder of an electronic payment instrument, so as to place the burden on the party closest to resolving the problem;
- customers have access to simple and effective means of redress.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee takes the view that the classification of innovative products proposed by the Commission ("bank-account-access" and

"electronic money"), while important for the purposes of regulation, is inadequate in that it does not specify in which of the two categories prepaid bank issue cards should be placed. These allow *remote access to a bank account*, even if such access is limited to the value-storage stage: in that respect, they would belong to the category of *"bank-account-access products"*. However, these cards do not allow any further access to the account when being used.

On access to the account, the ESC would point out that only once, with reference to the classification, does the Commission document refer to "accounts held at financial institutions". Each time the subject is referred to subsequently, and in the recommendation itself, the reference is simply to an "account" which is not further specified. Since the collection of deposits, and hence the opening of accounts, is limited to properly authorized financial institutions, clarification is needed as to whether the omission is deliberate or whether "accounts" is always meant to refer to those opened with financial institutions. The clarification is essential for understanding whether, when the document refers to cards which allow access to the account, it means cards issued by banks, or cards which may be issued by non-banking institutions as well. Given that it is, at least for the moment, illegal for the latter to raise funds, the ESC holds to the first of the two interpretations.

The Committee endorses the approach of extending the 1988 recommendation to reloadable electronic money products which may be linked with the account: in practice, at least up to now, bank-type prepaid cards. The recommendation's scope therefore excludes single-use and non-reloadable prepaid cards such as telephone cards, motorway toll cards etc.

Such cards are very popular with consumers; their features are low unit value, which makes loss or theft a financially tolerable event, anonymity in use, transferability (no PIN required), and low cost, made possible by the use of off-line devices. Even when possible disadvantages (e.g. demagnetization of the strip) or certain abuses (e.g. date of expiry of the card and non-reimbursability) are taken into account, the Commission clearly considers that the practicality of the instrument and the low values involved mean that no regulation is required.

The ESC accepts this approach, but calls upon the European and national authorities and consumers' organizations to take care to ensure that any disadvantages and abuses are eliminated on a case-by-case basis. It calls upon the Commission to monitor the development of the market, deciding in good time whether or not to intervene with regulatory provisions.

In its detailed examination of the recommendation drawn up by the Commission, the Committee criticizes certain inadequacies - lack of clarity in defining the scope, inconsistency in terms and content, omission or exclusion of cards which do not give access to a bank account, etc.

With a view to consumer protection, the Committee proposes that a maximum limit (ECU 150) be laid down for the value which can be loaded onto a prepaid card.

As it has repeatedly done before, the Committee stresses the need to combat not only falsification and fraud but above all organized crime.

The ESC feels the need to draw the Commission's attention to the fact that nowhere in the communication or the recommendation is it explained whether the previous Recommendation 88/590/EEC remains valid for non-electronic payment instruments, which are never mentioned in the document under consideration.

Finally, the ESC notes that the recommendation is based on classifications: electronic payment instruments, remote access instruments, electronic money instruments. The existing products are sometimes difficult to classify, but their differing characteristics require such - and so many - *distinctions, exemptions and inclusions* that a common regulation would be difficult to consult. The ESC wonders whether it would not be desirable to give greater cohesion and clarity to the whole matter, taking account of the specific nature of each type of instrument and drawing up separate rules for each of them. Given that each product has a name, it would be better to use it to identify it: the rules would thereby gain in clarity, to the advantage *especially of the consumer*, for whom technical terminology has very little meaning

Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning
Patrick Fève, Principal Administrator - ☎ (32-2) 546 9616

8. TOWARDS AN URBAN AGENDA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee
on the *Communication: Towards an urban agenda in the European Union*
(COM(97) 197 final)

(CES 117/98)

Rapporteur: Gianni VINAY (Italy - Workers)
Co-rapporteur: Eugène MULLER (Luxembourg - Various Interests)

Gist of the Commission document

The communication examines possibilities for improving urban development and for increasing the effectiveness of existing Community intervention in urban areas. The intention is not to develop Europe-wide urban policies for matters which are best dealt with at a local or regional

scale. However, since it is clear that cities in the EU face a number of common problems, there are also opportunities at the European scale to share and facilitate potential solutions. This would not require additional powers for the EU. Much can be achieved through a more focused approach using existing instruments at national and Community level and improving cooperation and coordination at all levels.

The communication has four parts. The first part sets out the key challenges which affect all cities to a greater or lesser degree. It looks at the continuing urbanization of European society, unemployment and social exclusion, the imbalances in the European urban system, the urban environment, fragmentation of power and integration of urban society.

The second part takes stock of existing EU policies which have a direct or indirect impact on cities. It identifies four types of policy: policies for

promoting competitiveness and employment; economic and social cohesion policy; policies for integrating cities into the trans-European networks; and policies for promoting sustainable development and the quality of life in cities.

Recognizing the locomotive role which cities play in regional, national and European economic development, the third part offers the following pointers for future action: the need for an urban perspective in EU policies; the role which services of public interest play in urban development; the contribution of the Structural Funds; and the importance of exchanges of experience between cities.

The fourth and final part considers ways of following up the communication. The Commission seeks to engage in a wider debate on urban issues, and present its findings at an urban forum to be held in 1998.

Gist of the opinion

Firstly, the Committee feels that some priorities for the urban agenda - relating to competitiveness and employment, economic and social cohesion and sustainable development - should be spelt out in more explicit terms than is done in the Commission communication.

Conservation and management of the urban cultural heritage should be paramount. This is the first "policy option" highlighted by the Noordwijk draft of the ESDP, and it is also of great symbolic importance. The historic and artistic heritage of Europe's cities is part of our global heritage, as well as being an important economic resource which needs to be safeguarded and properly exploited. It follows that there must be a serious commitment to the regeneration, restoration and conservation of the centres of major historic cities and of smaller towns with a strong cultural identity that must be preserved and strengthened.

Secondly, sustainable and integrated development also presupposes a commitment to improving outer suburbs. In the large metropolitan areas in particular, this could provide an opportunity for multi-centred development. This would help to relieve pressure on inner cities, and would give a precise role and socio-economic identity to neighbourhoods which are currently in decline.

The problem of how to enhance the quality of city life should also be tackled by boosting new telecommunication and transport technologies to link cities with the rest of their metropolitan area.

The Committee stresses the need to pay careful attention to the problems faced by cities in remote regions, which are at a disadvantage in terms of overall competitiveness. This problem should be recognized, and redistribution policies adopted to encourage cohesion and regional integration.

The role which cities are able to play in the new global economy will depend partly on the ability of the individual administrations to organize strategies for development, provision of infrastructure and services in a competitive manner. At all events, coordination policies will be needed in order to ensure that the pursuit of economic excellence does not prejudice the objectives of social equity and quality of life. Competitiveness should help to find practical solutions to a number of pressing social problems such as youth unemployment and the integration of immigrants and the socially excluded.

Special attention should be paid to the structural problem posed by the situation and role of the elderly, whose numbers are set to grow in the next few years throughout the EU.

In conclusion, a new "sense of citizenship" must be forged, based on participation and social solidarity.

All possible steps must be taken to encourage the dissemination of good practices. The urban audit planned by the Commission can be an excellent exercise and should be repeated periodically.

The Committee reiterates how important it is to take account of the urban dimension when framing Community policies, in particular as regards competitiveness, employment, social cohesion and sustainable development.

The Committee also thinks that the local authorities should be given the powers needed to devise and implement development programmes.

The Commission communication undoubtedly represents a quantum jump in the approach to urban issues, as it views them as a key yardstick for future Community policies. This commitment would be strengthened if, following the success of the Noordwijk meeting, Council meetings on

urban policies could be formally included in the annual schedule, so that the work becomes a fully structured part of the Council programme.

Urban policy - with due respect for the subsidiarity principle - can provide an important interface for Community strategies on economic development and employment, infrastructure and networks, environment protection, exclusion and crime.

The Committee would again stress the urgent need to tackle the social and economic roots of the most acute problems in urban areas by reshaping urban development mechanisms and the machinery for gaining access to the opportunities offered by the system as a whole.

The Committee draws attention to the need to use integrated, finely targeted methods when conducting urban development schemes. It also stresses the need to involve local communities in the choice of objectives, and to use partnership arrangements when pursuing these objectives.

Conserving the specific cultural features of each city is also important. This heritage must be respected and upgraded in order to reaffirm city identity and its residents' sense of belonging, as well as to strengthen their involvement in city life.

Turning to the resources to be allocated to cities, the Committee emphasizes the important role of the Structural Funds and appreciates the Commission's intention to use them for urban problems. It would however urge the Commission to target the funds more precisely to urban development goals, and not to neglect the experience gained during the Urban initiative.

Lastly, the Committee hopes that the measures envisaged in the Commission communication and the decisions taken at the forum to be held in 1998 will effectively strengthen the locomotive role that cities play in the EU's economic, social and cultural development.

Section for Transport and Communications
Luigi Del Bino, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9353

9. COMPETITION/AIR TRANSPORT

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Regulation (EEC) No. 3975/87 laying down the procedure for the application of the rules on competition to undertakings in the air transport sector and the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the application of Article 85(3) of the Treaty to certain categories of agreements and concerted practices in the sector of air transport between the Community and third countries (COM(97) 218 final - 97/0137 CNS - 97/0138 CNS)

(CES 113/98 - 97/0137 CNS - 97/0138 CNS)

Rapporteur: Joël DECAILLON (France - Workers)

Gist of the Commission document

The two draft proposals for regulations in this document, which replace the corresponding

proposals submitted to the Council in 1989⁷, are designed to enable the Commission to apply Community competition rules to air transport on Community-third country routes in order to end the legal uncertainty in the area and to reflect the liberalization of the Community aviation market.

The purpose of the first proposal is to widen the scope of Regulation (EEC) No. 3975/87 to include air transport between the Community and third countries. It would modify Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3975/87 in two ways:

- deletion of Article 1(2), which limits the scope to air transport between Community airports. The Commission stresses that Community competition law would apply only if there is an effect on trade between Member States;
- addition of an article providing for consultations and, where necessary,

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OJ No. C 112 of 7.5.90, p. 17

negotiations under Council directives in the event of a conflict between Community competition law and laws, regulations or administrative provisions of third countries or the provisions of air service agreements between Member States and third countries.

The second regulation that is proposed to the Council would empower the Commission to grant block exemptions to airline agreements, decisions and concerted practices in respect of international air transport between the Community and third countries and concerned with joint planning, the coordination of capacity and schedules, revenue sharing, the holding of consultations on tariffs for passengers with accompanying baggage insofar as they are essential to interlining, the joint operation of a service on a new or less busy route, and slot allocation at airports.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee welcomes this initiative by the Commission to provide itself with the means necessary to fulfil its task of supervising the rules of competition in the same way as it does in other sectors. The Committee considers the capacity to carry out effective and uniform European-level checks on infringements of competition to be most important as it is only at this level that any influence can be brought to bear in the context of expanding world trade.

In line with its earlier opinions, the Committee repeats its call for the application of the rules of competition to be accompanied by social demands. The Committee emphasizes the need to look into questions such as restricting flying time and taking account of safety and quality criteria in air transport, with particular reference to applying minimum training and qualification standards.

The Committee reiterates its various proposals on making provision for consultation on socio-economic repercussions, so that the social implications of commercial agreements are taken into account.

In order to encourage development in the regions and remote islands, and although reference is made to this in the Amsterdam Treaty, the Committee would welcome the Commission building upon the concept of public interest service in the air transport sector, in accordance with the third package rules, if appropriate under the new

Article 7d of the Amsterdam Treaty and its interaction with the existing regulations.

Lastly, the Committee favours extending the scope of Directive 3975/87 to all links with third countries as proposed and accompanying this extension of the remit to apply competition rules by correspondingly authorizing the Commission to grant block exemptions for these links, as part of a coherent European Union external policy in this field. Consequently, in the context of future developments, the Commission could receive from the Council a mandate to negotiate on these same links with third countries, in accordance with terms duly defined on the basis of consultations between the Commission, the Member States and the air transport industry.

10. TRANS-EUROPEAN RAIL FREIGHT FREEWAYS

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Trans-European Rail Freight Freeways* (COM(97) 242 final)

(CES 104/98)

Rapporteur: Lars Olof KRITZ (Sweden - Employers)

Gist of the Commission document

In preparation for the Commission's White Paper in 1996⁸, Transport Commissioner, Neil Kinnock, asked a group of experts to offer advice on the future of the railways in Europe. In their report⁹ the group first proposed the idea of creating a number of "Trans-European Rail Freight Freeways" to tackle the specific problems of cross-border rail freight. When the Commission subsequently published its railway white paper it launched the idea as a practical first step to revitalizing freight transport by rail.

⁸ A strategy for revitalizing the Community's railways, COM(96) 421 final - Opinion CES 459/97

⁹ The Future of Rail in Europe.

This communication is the next step in the process, incorporating a short-term proposal to set up trans-European rail freight "freeways" with open access for all operators and simplified procedures for the use of railway infrastructure.

Establishing the freight freeways is voluntary and responsibility lies with the national bodies charged with managing the railways. However, the freeways must, of course, be compatible with European legislation. The Commission considers the following criteria to be important:

- A freeway is defined as being open for fair, equal and non-discriminatory access to all train operators licensed in the Union.
- The criteria for licensing train operators to operate on a freeway should follow the same principles as laid down in existing EU legislation.
- Freeways should, subject to national regulations, be open to cabotage as well as international traffic.
- Freight terminals on a freeway will be open for fair, equal and non-discriminatory access to all train, road haulage and waterway operators as appropriate.

The freeway will be run by infrastructure managers from the national railway companies through a "One-stop shop" (OSS). The OSS will identify and allocate capacity on the relevant freeway, monitor and control performance, establish the charging system on behalf of the individual infrastructure managers and deal with complaints. It will exist both as a classic office and as an Internet website.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee welcomes the Commission communication, which it deems to be an important step towards revitalizing European railways.

As freeways are a voluntary venture, the Committee underlines that their success ultimately depends on: the willingness of Member States and of national infrastructure managers to cooperate, the ability of railway undertakings to be responsive to the needs of the customers and the readiness of

Member States to give railway undertakings the necessary managerial freedom.

Against this background, the Committee would make the following points:

- Member States who have not yet transposed Directives 91/440, 95/18 and 95/19 into national legislation should do so immediately. The success of freeways must not be jeopardized by failure to provide a legal framework at Member State level. Ultimately, the Commission must take legal action against those Member States that have not yet transposed these directives into national law;
- transport users need convincing that rail can provide the service they require in terms of price, reliability and speed;
- the key role of terminals for successful development of rail freight transport on freeways has been underemphasized by the Commission, and particularly the problem of open access, as there are different forms of ownership of terminals;
- successful development of the freeways should at least halt the decline in employment, as the aim of the freeways project is to make rail freight more competitive, in order to put more freight on rail;
- the Commission should give top priority to completing its current study on common charging principles. Infrastructure charges must be non-discriminatory, cost-related and transparent. The high level of infrastructure charges on some routes may prevent some railway undertakings from competing successfully with other modes of transport.

Freeway operations involve cooperative agreements between infrastructure managers, and might include cooperation between railway undertakings. The Committee believes that a clear distinction should be drawn between agreements required for the establishment of an OSS (which should not fall under the prohibition of Article 85(1) of the EC Treaty) and agreements between railway undertakings. Whether or not the latter type of agreement will prevent, restrict or distort competition within the common market has to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

11. CRS CODE OF CONDUCT

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2299/89 on a code of conduct for computerized reservation systems (CRSs)

(COM(97) 246 final - 97/0148 SYN)

(CES 105/98 - 97/0148 SYN)

Rapporteur: Robert J. MORELAND (United Kingdom - Various Interests)

Gist of the Commission document

The first EU code of conduct¹⁰ for CRSs (computerized reservation systems) was adopted by the Council on 24 July 1989, and addressed the main problem areas affecting the CRS market that had been identified at that time.

The code was subsequently amended by Regulation 3089/93 which was adopted by the Council on 29 October 1993¹¹.

The amendments were necessary to clarify existing provisions and to reflect developments in the industry that had occurred since the original regulation was adopted.

The present document, which was prepared pursuant to Article 23 of Regulation 3089/93, contains a report on the application of the regulation and a proposal for amending the code drawn up in the light of the experience acquired since the adoption of the amended code in 1993; the aim is that the code should be able to respond to developments in the sector in the coming years, especially as regards the basis on which CRSs charge for their services together with the rapid developments taking place in distribution methods e.g. electronic ticketing and the Internet.

Gist of the opinion

On the whole, the Committee welcomes the Commission's proposed amendments to the code of conduct for the use of CRSs. However, on a number of detailed, but important points the

Committee believes additional changes are required. In particular :

- the Commission should produce regular reports on the operation of the CRS code and provide further information about how it intends to ensure that travel agents meet the requirements of the code in order to safeguard the interests of consumers;
- it should monitor the effectiveness of the new rules dealing with unnecessary bookings, in cooperation with airline and travel agency representatives;
- the code should specify precisely the obligations of all the parties involved in the display of rail services in order to avoid argument and delay;
- in order to remove the incentive to create unnecessary passive bookings, productivity pricing schemes should be operated on a "tickets issued" rather than a "bookings made" basis;
- CRSs should have no discretion in how code share flights are displayed;
- the code should give greater prominence to ensuring that a would-be passenger has full information about which airline will actually operate a service, which aircraft will be used, etc.;
- the development of the Internet in relation to booking services should be watched carefully, with a view to making proposals to avoid abuse;
- the current rules specifying the order in which flights are displayed in CRSs should be maintained.

12. DISTINGUISHING SIGN OF MOTOR VEHICLES

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the recognition in intra-Community traffic of the distinguishing sign of the Member States in which motor vehicles and their trailers are registered
(COM(97) 366 final - 97/0199SYN)

(CES 106/98 - 97/0199 SYN)

Rapporteur working alone: Gabriel GARCÍA ALONSO (Spain - Employers)

¹⁰ OJ No. C 56 of 06.03.1989, page 32

¹¹ OJ No. C 108 of 19.04.1993, page 16

Gist of Commission document

Community law lays down a set of provisions enabling motor vehicles (and their trailers) to be used freely throughout the Community. However other provisions, coming under the Vienna Convention on road traffic¹² still apply in some Member States¹³.

The proposal seeks to ensure that those Member States which under Article 37 of the Vienna Convention require vehicles registered in another Member State to display distinguishing registration sign when being driven in their territory, also recognize distinguishing signs which meet the provisions laid down in the annex to this regulation.

The proposal does not affect the rights and obligations arising out of the Vienna Convention for non-member states that are contracting parties to it. All vehicles driven in the territory of a non-member state that is a contracting party to the convention therefore remain subject to the obligation to display the distinguishing sign in accordance with Annex 3 to the convention.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee wholeheartedly supports the Commission proposal insofar as it assists road traffic and the free movement of persons within the Community and, by the same token, facilitates the completion of the single market.

13. STATISTICAL RETURNS/CARRIAGE OF GOODS BY ROAD

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Draft Council Regulation (EC) on statistical returns in respect of carriage of goods by road

(COM(97) 443 final - 97/0233 CNS)

(CES 107/98 - 97/0233 CNS)

Rapporteur: Daniel DE NORRE (Belgium - Employers)

Gist of the Commission document

In its White Paper of December 1992 on the future development of the common transport policy¹⁴, the Commission stresses that it is essential that indispensable information on the functioning of the transport market be available.

The statistical data on the carriage of goods by road currently compiled by the Member States pursuant to Directives 78/546/EEC¹⁵ and 89/462/EEC¹⁶ are incomplete in that they concern only the carriage of goods by road vehicles registered in the European Union and the only types of carriage covered are those authorized at the time these directives were adopted.

This text is therefore intended to cover all transport by vehicles registered in the European Union, linking the vehicle journeys made for that transport and ensuring that regional data are systematically available for national and intra-Community transport. It will thus ensure the availability of the information, hitherto lacking, necessary for the framing, monitoring, controlling and evaluation of the common policy.

12 Convention on road traffic, adopted in Vienna in November 1968, including the amendments which came into effect on 3 September 1993. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

13 Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden are contracting parties to this convention. Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom have signed but not ratified this convention. The European Community is not a contracting party.

14 COM(92) 424 final

15 OJ No. C 181 of 31 July 1978, page 27.

16 OJ No. C 134 of 24 May 1988, page 7.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee approves the Commission's decision to replace the existing directives with a regulation which will be directly applicable in all Member States, and recommends that

- the objective of the regulation should be to improve the reliability in time and space of the data collected and their comparability with the data for other transport modes;
- attempts to achieve this objective should be based on a "functional" intermodal approach to goods transport;
- the data which road haulage firms are asked to provide should be limited to the data which are necessary and apposite for attaining the objective set.

As regards the specific aspects of the Commission proposal, the Committee

- would draw attention to certain drawbacks linked to the decision to compile Community statistics on motor vehicles,
- would ask that care be taken to align the definitions used on the ones already applied, especially in the directives harmonizing vehicle weights and dimensions,
- considers it inappropriate to exclude "exceptional convoys" and vehicles used for "public services".

Finally, the Committee would like the relevant socio-economic interest groups in each Member State to be closely involved in the consultations on how to implement the regulation.

Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs
Alan Hick, Head of Division ad interim - ☎ (32-2) 546 9302

14. REACTIONS TO THE WHITE PAPER - TOWARDS THE LEARNING SOCIETY

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Communication from the Commission - Review of reactions to the White Paper "Teaching and learning: towards the learning society"* (COM(97) 256 final)

(CES 114/98)

Rapporteur: Christoforos KORYFIDIS (Greece - Workers)

Gist of the Commission proposal

The European Commission asked the Community institutions, the Member States, the social partners, employers' federations, universities and research institutes and NGOs to examine the White Paper "*Teaching and learning: towards the learning society*".

The reactions, opinions and comments the Commission thus gathered dovetail with one of the

central conclusions drawn from the European Year of Lifelong Learning, viz. that people in Europe are increasingly aware of the need to build on their knowledge and their occupational skills throughout life. They are conscious of how crucial this is both as regards getting into employment and as regards integrating into social life and being active citizens.

The Commission has sought to give the political contribution of the White Paper, in which education and training provide the key to a blueprint for society, substance and convince as wide a public as possible of the need to bring about a knowledge-based society in the interests of a Europe which is thus more competitive, and more fully aware of itself and its values.

The purpose of the communication is to distil the main policy signals from the discussions of the past 18 months. The Commission takes this opportunity to stress the quality and depth of the reactions which have already contributed to informing and adjusting its present action and to preparing the future. There have been significant contributions from the Community institutions,

particularly the Council with its conclusions of 6 May 1996, and the European Parliament. The reactions have, moreover, made it possible to launch experiments which are reported on in the communication.

The Council feels that the cultural and formative aspects of education and training should be highlighted, while the European Parliament asks that the social, affective, moral and spiritual aspects be taken into account.

Everyone acknowledges the need to improve convergence between general and vocational education, and to give vocational training in general a higher standing.

There is virtual unanimity on the primary role of the Member States and the need to abide by the principle of subsidiarity when it comes to the content and organization of education and vocational training systems. Yet at the same time regrets are expressed that these systems have not been analyzed in sufficient detail.

The Commission's intention is to conduct this current experimental phase and carry out a painstaking evaluation which will be produced in 1998.

Gist of the Opinion

The ESC welcomes the fact that:

- the Commission has presented a communication reviewing and providing information on the White Paper and the measures ensuing from it, something which it has not generally done and for which it deserves particular credit;
- the results of the discussions confirm the general, and many of the specific, points and positions expressed in its opinion.

At the same time, the ESC:

- feels that not enough time has elapsed since the communication on the White Paper was presented for final conclusions to be drawn;
- but continues to insist on the need to open up the dialogue to ever broader sections of society - at all times under the Commission's

responsibility and with practical measures being taken by groups who have already been made aware of these issues.

The Committee agrees with the Commission's view, expressed in the document, that the main themes and aims of the White Paper were confirmed during the discussion. It agrees with the economic dimensions and effects of the links between education, training and employment, and with the need for equal status for the purely educational, affective, moral, spiritual and cultural dimension of education and training when drawing up syllabi and programmes.

The Committee would again stress the risks inherent in the transition to a new world where there will be unlimited access to knowledge, unimaginably fast dissemination of information and completely different conditions and means of communication.

The emergence and growth of new and deeper divisions, both within societies and internationally, between information haves and have-nots is the most likely outcome unless efforts are immediately stepped up to involve, if possible, all Europeans in every aspect of change.

This is also the reason why the ESC places such emphasis on the need for policies to be formulated immediately to prevent the marginalization of large sections of the population, in particular of high-risk groups which for various reasons do not have access to new technologies and thus to new knowledge.

These preventive policies include developing the concept of lifelong learning in practice and in its widest possible sense, ensuring that all European citizens have the opportunity to use and benefit from new information and communication technologies, and, in general, creating an environment in which the learning society can be actively achieved, step by step, by the citizens.

It also feels that the Commission and the other EU institutions should become the driving force in instituting and completing the processes that will lead to the creation of a learning society in the European Union.

As regards securing the resources needed to develop programmes leading to the learning society, the ESC would emphasize the following:

It believes that expressing the political will to fund and develop programmes leading to a learning society represents the most important policy option currently facing the European Union, Member States and regional authorities.

15. PROMOTING APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING IN EUROPE

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission on promoting apprenticeship training in Europe (COM(97) 300 final)

(CES 110/98)

Rapporteur: Gérard DANTIN (France - Workers)

Co-rapporteur: José Isaiás RODRÍGUEZ GARCÍA CARO (Spain - Employers)

Gist of the Commission communication

In the light of the findings of a number of recent research projects and reports, and as a follow-up to its White Paper "Teaching and learning: towards the learning society", which it adopted in November 1995, the Commission seeks to contribute to the development of high-quality apprenticeships in the European Union. Accordingly, it has drawn up five recommendations:

- *extending and developing apprenticeships*: the aim is to develop new forms of apprenticeship, particularly in growth sectors and emerging job categories.

In order to do this, Member States should continue to provide financial incentives for industry to increase the number of apprenticeship places. For its part, the Commission intends to undertake a qualitative survey throughout Europe into the role of companies in apprenticeships, identifying good practice and significant innovations;

- *enhancing the quality of training*: a successful apprenticeship must strike the right balance between theoretical and practical training, as well as between the needs of the company and those of the individual. This can only be done

if there is close co-operation between educational establishments and companies, and between teaching and training staff. Member States will have to modify their programmes so as to provide links between initial and continuing training. For its part, the Commission will more strongly emphasize, in the Leonardo da Vinci programme for vocational training, higher quality apprenticeships by means of exchanges for teachers/tutors and other significant figures in companies and educational establishments;

- *encouraging mobility for apprentices*: differences in the status of apprentices from one Member State to another are an obstacle to cross-border mobility and the recognition of training courses undertaken in another Member State. However, competitive companies have a growing need for a multi-skilled workforce able to exploit the ever-greater opportunities offered by the single market and the globalization of the economy. The Commission is currently preparing a draft document to serve as the basis for a common reference framework to encourage apprenticeships in Europe. When reviewing the Leonardo da Vinci action programme, the Commission will particularly emphasize a mobility programme for apprentices along the lines of the Socrates/Erasmus programmes. In addition, the Commission and the Member States must also stimulate the scope for mobility through a system for the collection, coordination and provision of information about options for transnational training courses, particularly as part of the EURES system (the Commission system for information on employment and training);
- *involving the social partners*: the social partners have a crucial role to play in the development and enhancement of apprenticeships. The Commission and the Member States have to establish networks of pilot projects to encourage apprenticeships in growth sectors and innovative fields, giving the social partners responsibility for running these. Moreover, the social dialogue should involve much more extensive debate about apprenticeship, focusing particularly on training in newly-emerging sectors to ensure that sufficient apprenticeship posts are available;

- **adopting genuine apprenticeship strategies:** care must be taken to ensure that differences between national apprenticeship programmes do not hamper the search for joint approaches to shared problems. Together with the Member States, the Commission could draw up regular reports on apprenticeships in the EU. The Commission is also considering the creation of a sampling system with regard to apprenticeships. This would stimulate a debate leading towards the formulation of new strategies for apprenticeships within the Union.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee welcomes the Florence European Council's initiative.

The Committee endorses the Commission communication, subject to a number of comments and suggestions. The Committee notes with interest the innovative aspect of the communication which rightly highlights the positive role which apprenticeship training can play in contributing to young people's integration into employment.

However, the Committee puts forward the following main comments and suggestions:

A specific action should be carried out for firms on the quantitative development of apprenticeship training. This depends ultimately on the will and/or capacity of firms to increase the number of apprenticeship training places.

The Commission and the Member States should initiate information and awareness campaigns for young people, parents, teachers, careers advice centres and the social partners in order to improve the image of apprenticeship training. To this end the role of CEDEFOP should be reinforced.

Practical workplace training needs to be continuous. In particular it must be ensured that apprentices are not assigned to menial tasks unrelated to the training which they are supposed to be receiving.

The development of apprenticeship training and its extension to other vocations can be fully achieved only if this is not an end in itself. Apprenticeship training should open the way to further studies, in particular offering ways of transferring to higher or university education, whilst taking account of

the vocational training systems of the various Member States.

Emphasis should be placed on the essential links between:

- the apprentice and his family on the one hand, and the apprentice's supervisor and teacher on the other;
- the workplace supervisor (whose status should be spelt out, and role defined, knowledge required for the job and ways of preparing for it, and rights and his obligations) and the teacher.

The European Union should encourage the shared responsibility of the social partners (employers and workers) for the operation of apprenticeship training, e.g. on training bodies.

The Committee would like to see a quality survey launched. This should set out reference values or minimum criteria with a view to identifying the essential features of a European apprenticeship training model. It would also be useful to measure the impact of apprenticeship training on labour market integration and employment.

16. PROMOTING THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Communication from the Commission promoting the role of voluntary organizations and foundations in Europe*
(COM(97) 241 final)

(CES 118/98)

Rapporteur: Jan OLSSON (Sweden - Various Interests)

Gist of the Commission proposal

This communication concerns one sector of the social economy in the European Community - that of voluntary organizations and foundations.

The aim of the document is to illustrate the growing importance of the sector within the European Union, to show what problems and

challenges these organizations are facing and to open up a dialogue on the basis of a set of ideas, in order to favour their development at European and national level, to improve their capacity to meet future needs and maximize their contribution to European integration.

The Commission proposes that the Member States examine attentively the following areas:

- acquiring a much deeper knowledge and understanding of the sector at all levels
- the relationship ("partnership") between public authorities and the sector
- the law governing voluntary organizations and foundations
- the fiscal basis and competition rules on which the sector operates
- how the continued financial health of the sector is to be secured
- training
- information society developments
- better access to programs co-financed by the Structural Funds.

In addition, the Commission proposes the following at European Community level:

The Commission will maintain and further develop a continuous exchange of information and points of view by establishing systematic and regular dialogue and consultation with the sector.

The Commission will consider proposing a year of voluntary organizations and European citizenship.

The European Parliament has proposed that studies be made on the expansion of the social economy in the European Community, in particular the establishment of an observatory to follow developments in this sector in the single market. The Commission considers that for voluntary organizations and foundations, this task could be undertaken within the European observatory for SMEs.

The Commission will give an impetus to promoting better access to European training programmes which officials of voluntary organizations wishing to expand into Europe could use.

The Commission could help organizations such as foundations to explore the possibility of them

setting up a special fund in order to facilitate the transnational work of voluntary organizations.

Gist of the opinion

The Economic and Social Committee, which represents European citizens' organizations, welcomes the long-awaited Communication and appreciates the Commission's positive approach to voluntary organizations and foundations.

The Committee feels the Communication should be followed up with concrete measures.

In the run-up to the IGC, voluntary organizations had high hopes of an explicit reference to the sector's role being enshrined in the Treaty. The Committee regrets this did not happen, as it would have provided political recognition¹⁷ for the activities of the voluntary sector. The sector is, however, affected by the declarations adopted in Amsterdam on voluntary service activities¹⁷ and sport¹⁸.

The new Treaty introduced the transparency principle with regard to citizen access to EU official documents. The Committee would emphasize the role of the voluntary sector in enabling citizens to take full advantage of this right, and hopes for a speedy practical application of the transparency principle.

The Communication shows clearly that voluntary organizations and foundations are needed to implement EU policies in most areas.

The Committee therefore believes it is vital that the various EU institutions and other bodies should cooperate with and support voluntary organizations and foundations.

¹⁷ No. 38 The Conference recognizes the important contribution made by voluntary service activities to developing social solidarity. The Community will encourage the European dimension of voluntary organizations with particular emphasis on the exchange of information and experiences as well as on the participation of the young and the elderly in voluntary work.

¹⁸ No. 29 The Conference emphasizes the social significance of sport, in particular its role in forging identity and bringing people together. The Conference therefore calls on the bodies of the European Union to listen to sports associations when important questions affecting sport are at issue. In this connection, special consideration should be given to the particular characteristics of amateur sport.

In the run-up to EU enlargement, the Committee would call on the Commission to ensure that accession negotiations take account of the situation of voluntary organizations and foundations in the applicant countries, both in terms of legislation and other opportunities for full participation in European cooperation.

Given the lack of information on the sector, the Committee believes it is essential to carry out regular surveys in order to be able to assess the development of voluntary organizations and foundations in all EU countries.

The Committee would particularly emphasize the importance of voluntary organizations in bolstering democracy in Europe. They provide individuals with an outlet for their ideas, and an opportunity to work towards the goals they believe in; they can carry out meaningful tasks and find a place in society; they can make themselves heard, and influence and achieve change.

In the Committee's view the subsidiarity principle should continue to be applied to legislation governing voluntary organizations and foundations. At the same time, the Committee would call on the Member States to review their regulations, to remove any obstacles to the variety and development of such bodies.

The Committee believes that voluntary organizations and foundations would benefit from increased cooperation at national level, in order to be able to speak with one voice on common, sector-specific issues.

NOTA BENE :

At its December Plenary Session the ESC adopted an opinion on the Communication from the Commission: *Modernizing and improving social protection in the European Union* (CES 1397/97). The rapporteur was Ada MADDOCKS (United Kingdom - Workers) and the co-rapporteur was Pierre CHEVALIER (France - Various Interests).

It should be noted that following the recorded vote on the opinion as a whole, the Employers' Group issued the following statement:

"The Employers' Group believes that the Committee's opinion fails to recognize the problems inherent in current social protection

regimes and understates the necessity for modernization and improvement.

The group fully supports the concept of effective social protection for all our citizens as a key factor in economic performance but equally affirms that strong economic performance is essential to affordable social protection regimes.

Current problems in many Member States may be summarized as follows: -

- 1. Social benefit systems have grown piecemeal and are geared to out-dated living standards and employment patterns.*
- 2. A dependency culture has been created as not enough is done to help long-term recipients to break out of their situation.*
- 3. Member States are concerned about spiraling costs in the face of their efforts to control budget deficits.*
- 4. The old-age dependency ratio (65+ as % of 15-64) is estimated to double by the time those starting work today come to retire.*

The group welcomes the Commission's analysis. It generally supports the proposals for action and hopes that they will be of help to Member States in their efforts to overcome the problems. In particular the group believes that the following aspects should be the subject of detailed consideration:

- the benefit structure and the relationship of benefits to one another;*
- the targetting of benefits to those in greatest need;*
- helping long-term recipients to equip themselves for employment;*
- the interface between tax and benefits for the lower paid with better incentives to accept employment;*
- encouraging individual responsibility;*
- a gradual move towards long-term funding of at least a portion of retirements benefits;*
- an increasing partnership between public and private provision.*

Finally the group applauds the efforts which the Commission is making to remove remaining obstacles to free movement in the field of social protection".

Section for Agriculture and Fisheries
Francisco Vallejo, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9396

17. IMPACT OF MIDDLEMEN ON FOOD PRICES

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Role of middlemen - from production to consumption - in the setting of food prices

(CES 108/98)

Rapporteur: Adalbert KIENLE (Germany - Employers)

Reasons

This is a matter on which no Community institution has yet produced an opinion, but which is an important subject of discussion for farmers and consumers.

A Committee opinion on this subject could greatly assist the Commission and Council in that it could be referred to when the annual common agricultural prices and proposed changes to the CAP are drawn up.

Gist of the opinion

The opinion looks at the many ways in which food retailers influence price formation as middlemen between producers and consumers. Because of the great complexity of the subject the opinion concentrates mainly on fresh farm products, particularly fruit and vegetables. The powerful trend towards concentration in retailing is identified as one of the main factors having a long-term effect on price formation. Agriculture on the other hand has traditionally been dominated by small production units, which generally exert relatively little influence on prices, although structural changes are taking place here too (e.g. producer organizations). This concentration process is not however comparable with that taking place in the retail sector. The shift in purchasing behaviour in favour of supermarkets and discount stores, for which many reasons can be identified, is in marked contrast to the shopping preferences expressed by consumers. Markets are

highly regarded on account of their friendliness, their fresh products and high quality standards.

Concentration in retailing also strongly influences the upstream stages. Functions of (also rapidly changing) supplier services (shorter sales channels, logistics, packaging) are gaining considerably in importance. Various examples make it clear that progressive concentration is having a lasting influence on product ranges (regional ranges are increasingly disappearing from shelves). It appears that over the longer term producers' share of the consumer price is falling. The many and varied aspects of this subject discussed in the opinion give rise to a series of proposals, ranging from the need for policies to contain concentration within sensible limits, via clear labelling of foodstuffs showing origin, to the provision of market information and increased consumer information.

18. FINANCING OF THE CAP (Consolidated version)

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the financing of the common agricultural policy (consolidated version)

(COM(97) 607 final - 97/0317 CNS)

(CES 111/98 - 97/0317 CNS)

Rapporteur-General: Dario MENGOZZI (Italy - Various Interests)

Gist of the Commission proposal

In the context of a people's Europe, the Commission attaches great importance to simplifying and clarifying Community law so as to make it clearer and more accessible to ordinary people, thus giving them new opportunities and the chance to make use of the specific rights it gives them. For this reason, a consolidation of rules that have frequently been amended is also essential if Community law is to be clear and transparent.

On 1 April 1987, the Commission therefore decided to instruct its staff that all legislative measures should be consolidated after no more than ten amendments, stressing that this was a minimum requirement and that they should endeavour to consolidate at even shorter intervals the texts for which they were responsible, to ensure that the Community rules were clear and readily understandable.

The purpose of the present proposal is to undertake official codification of this type. The new regulation will supersede the various regulations incorporated in it; their content is fully preserved, and they are brought together with only such formal amendments as are required by the codification exercise itself.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee approves the proposal.

Section for External Relations, Trade and Development Policy
Georgina Willems, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9471

19. THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee
on the *Commission's Communication on: The Information Society and Development: The Role of the European Union*
(COM(97) 351 final)

(CES 112/98)

Rapporteur: Sture Erik LINDMARK (Sweden - Employers)

Gist of the Commission document

The Communication of the Commission presents a number of guidelines and mechanisms to encourage the participation of developing countries in the information society (IS), not only as consumers but also in an active role.

The G7 Conference on the IS held in Brussels in February 1995 expressed concern about the need to avoid further widening the gap separating the industrial countries from the developing countries.

The Conference on the IS and development organized in Midrand in May 1996 focused on the specific needs of the developing countries and highlighted the potential of the new technologies. It provided a forum for joint reflection on the common rules required, the areas of cooperation towards building the global IS, and the priorities

for development. Egypt has undertaken to organize the follow-up to this Conference.

As emphasized at the Conference of Midrand, the IS mobilizes revolutionary technologies that profoundly alter the organization of work, education and society at large. It entails a reduction of time and space constraints and presents new tools enabling the developing countries to make some great leaps forward in technology by economizing on the intermediary stages which the industrialized countries have gone through. However, countries that isolate themselves from international trade networks and investment flows and from networks of scientific and cultural creativity, would risk being marginalized. In some countries there is the further risk of a two-speed society emerging, with only part of the population having access to new networks, services and equipment and capable of using them with ease.

The benefits of the IS for the developing countries depend however on the level of their communication and information infrastructure and the development capacity offered by their economic and regulatory systems.

There has been increasing awareness in the Community of the strategic character of the integration of the developing countries in the IS. However, this calls for a strategy in which account is taken of this dimension when evaluating cooperation projects and programmes so as to ensure the coherence of all the instruments of

cooperation for optimum effectiveness. To implement these guidelines there is no need to provide additional loans. Rather, the IS dimension should be systematically incorporated in the existing programmes, rechanneling the funds in particular where this dimension may be advantageous. Promoting the establishment of an economic and regulatory framework remains a first priority target, mobilizing local and international capital to ensure access for the developing countries to ICT for their benefit. The second target is to put technology at the service of development.

In Community activities account will be taken of the priorities of the partners. Often, they will not modify the objectives of cooperation but, rather, strive to serve them more efficiently in the light of each country's specific economic situation.

Following the Midrand Conference, three objectives have been attained:

- the start of a dialogue between developed and developing countries;
- the start of a process that should lead to a vision of the global IS shared between the social sectors concerned by development;
- the drawing-up of common principles and cooperative action to meet the challenges of the IS.

The gap between the industrialized countries and the less advanced countries could widen as a result of the current changes; this situation calls for specific action. The European Commission proposes to take up a position that is strongly conducive to the development of the IS in the developing countries and to include this dimension in its general cooperation policy with the developing countries.

The actions proposed involve the existing cooperation mechanisms. These activities will be managed under regional action plans which will ensure the coherence of Community action and synergy with action by the Member States, and provide a basis for concertation with international organizations.

The EU can play an active role as a bridge between the industrialized countries and the developing countries, contribute to translating into practice the participation of the developing countries in the emerging IS and shape it in such a way that each one of them can participate in it.

Gist of the opinion

The Committee shares the Commission's view that the new information technologies profoundly alter the organization of work, education and society at large. They present a panoply of new tools with exceptional capacities, enabling the developing countries to make some great leaps forward in technology by cutting out certain stages in development through which the industrialized countries have gone.

If the developing countries are to be able to exploit these possibilities, very high levels of investment will need to be made in the telecommunications infrastructure of many of these countries; such investment cannot be borne by the public sector alone. The developing countries must be convinced of the need for a set of rules offering security and easy access to markets to mobilize the private sector to participate in these new costly and risky investments. In order to enable the necessary investments to be made, it is of the utmost importance in this context that developing countries eliminate any remaining barriers or limits to foreign ownership.

For the mutual benefit of both the developing countries and EU countries, the Commission should focus on the dual challenge of bringing the developing countries into the information society and promoting participation by European industry in this development.

The Committee takes the view that joining the information society should bring particular benefits in the developing countries to: small and medium-sized enterprises; women, who frequently have little access to information in developing countries; the health sector, as a result of the development of "telemedicine"; research; the independent press; and, especially, the educational system.

The information society dimension should, with the agreement of the partner countries, be systematically incorporated in the existing development programmes, re-channelling the funds made available. In order to account for the

characteristics of the developing countries, the particular specific features of each major region and the nature of the dialogue the Community conducts with each one of them.

Section for Economic, Financial and Monetary Questions
Arie Van de Graaf, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9227

20. STRUCTURAL BUSINESS STATISTICS

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) amending Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 58/97 concerning structural business statistics (COM(97) 411 final - 97/0232 CNS)

(CES 109/98 - 97/0232 CNS)

Rapporteur: Kenneth WALKER (United Kingdom - Employers)

Gist of the Commission document

The general purpose of the regulation is to require Member States to provide Eurostat with comparable and harmonized statistical data relating to the structure, activity, competitiveness and performance of businesses in the insurance sector at European level.

The Commission has three objectives:

Firstly, to establish a common framework for the collection, transmission and evaluation of Community statistics on the structure, activity and performance of the insurance services industry.

Secondly, to continue the strengthening of the development of the Community statistical system by incorporating into the production of insurance statistics the Community statistical tools.

Thirdly, to provide flexibility to allow minor changes, notably to the list of indicators to be collected in the future.

Gist of the opinion

The efficient monitoring of the insurance sector will require the existence of accurate, reliable, regular, timely, harmonized and comparable statistical data. It therefore supports in principle the Commission's present proposals.

However, the collection, compilation and transmission of this data imposes a double burden; firstly, on the enterprises which have to provide the raw data relating to their own activities and, secondly, on the national administrative authorities within each Member State, which are responsible for aggregating the data provided and transmitting it to Eurostat.

The ESC therefore shares the concerns that have been expressed that these burdens should not be unnecessarily increased.

The ESC approves the Commission's proposal for a regulation, with some reservations, but considers that it should be made the subject of a SLIM initiative project in order to determine whether the benefits are commensurate with the additional costs being imposed on enterprises and governmental administrations.

II. FUTURE WORK

INFORMATION

- Limit values for sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead in ambient air (**ENV-MARCH**)
COM(97) 500 final - 97/0266 (SYN)
- The marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations (18th amendment)
COM(97) 738 final - 98/0005 (COD) (**ENV-MARCH**)
- Environment and employment - building a sustainable Europe (Communication) (**ENV-MAY**)
COM(97) 592 final
- Tyres for motor vehicles and their trailers (**IND-MAY**)
COM(97) 680 final - 97/0348 (COD)
- The protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services (**IND-APRIL**)
COM(97) 570 final - 97/0329 (CNS)
- Approximating the legal arrangements for the protection of inventions by utility model (**IND-TO BE DECIDED**)
COM(97) 691 final - 97/0356 (COD)
- Action plan - safe use of the Internet (**IND-MAY**)
COM(97) 582 final - 97/0337 CNS
- Sea ports and maritime infrastructure (green paper) (**TRA-JULY**)
COM(97) 678 final
- Rules for the participation of undertakings, research centres and universities and for the dissemination of research results (**ENERG-APRIL**)
COM(97) 587 final/2 - 97/0309 (SYN) - 97/0310 (CNS)
- Renewable sources of energy (white paper) (**ENERG-APRIL**)
COM(97) 599 final
- Strategy to promote combined heat and power generation (Communication) (**ENERG-MARCH**)
COM(97) 514 final
- Action plan to promote innovation: Innovation in the service of growth and employment (Communication) (**ENERG-MAY**)
COM(97) 736 final
- Social security for salaried workers - extension to nationals of third countries (**SOC-MARCH**)
COM(97) 561 final - 97/0320 (CNS)
- Recognition of professional qualifications concerning the professions of nurse responsible for general care, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, etc. (**SOC-APRIL**)
COM(97) 638 final - 97/0345 (COD)

- Safeguarding the supplementary pension rights of employed and self-employed persons
(COM(97) 486 final - 97/0265 (CNS) (SOC-MARCH))
- Veterinary checks in intra-Community trade with a view to the completion of the internal market
COM(97) 643 final - 97/0334 (COD) (AGR-MARCH)
- Quota system for the production of potato starch (AGR-FEB)
COM(97) 576-final - 97/0300 CNS
- The future of the market in fisheries products (Communication) (AGR-MAY)
COM(97) 719 final
- The marketing of propagating material of ornamental plants (AGR-MARCH)
COM(97) 708 final - 97/0367 (CNS)
- Reform - COM in bananas (AGR-APRIL)
COM(98) 4 final - 98/0013 CNS

IN ANTICIPATION

- Ban on marketing counterfeit and pirated goods (IND-MAY)
COM(98) 25 final
- Financial assistance for job-creating SMEs (IND-APRIL)
COM(98) 26 final
- Tax treatment of tourist vehicles transferred definitively to another Member State (IND-MAY)
COM(98) 30 final
- Intervention mechanism to remove certain barriers to trade (subject to confirmation) (IND-MARCH)
- Problems of combating fraud in a market without frontiers (Single Market Observatory) (subject to confirmation) (IND-TO BE DECIDED)
- European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (subject to confirmation) (REG-TO BE DECIDED)
- Compensation for refused embarkation in scheduled air transport (TRA-MAY)
COM(98) 41 final
- Amendments to the statutes of the Joint European Torus (JET)
COM(98) 13 final (ENERG-APRIL)
- Criteria and arrangements - EU structural assistance in the fisheries and aquaculture sector
COM(97) 723 final - 97/0008 CNS (AGR-FEB)
- Reform - COM in tobacco (Agenda 2000) (AGR-APRIL)
COM(98) 19 final
- Farm prices 1998/1999 (AGR-APRIL)
- Reform - COM in cereals, oilseeds and protein crops (arable crops) (Agenda 2000) (AGR-JULY)

- Reform - COM in beef (Agenda 2000) (AGR-JULY)
- Reform - COM in milk (Agenda 2000) (AGR-JULY)
- Reform - COM in olive oil (Agenda 2000) (AGR-APRIL)
- Reform - COM in wine sector (Agenda 2000) (AGR-MAY)
- Ceilings - direct income support (Agenda 2000) (AGR-SEPT)
- Inclusion of rural initiatives into the CAP (Agenda 2000) (AGR-SEPT)
- EU statistical programme (1998-2002) (ECOFIN-TO BE DECIDED)
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OWN-INITIATIVE WORK

- Resistance to antibiotics - threat to public health (ENV-JULY/SEPT)
- Impact on the single market of the introduction of the euro (Single Market Observatory) (IND-SEPT)
- Impact of the enlargement of the Union on the single market (Single Market Observatory) (IND-SEPT)
- Ways and means of strengthening the networks for the provision of information on and exploitation of
- Community R&TD programmes (1st priority) (ENERG-JULY)
- Rational use of energy in the EU and the applicant states (2nd priority) (ENERG-JULY)
- A new CAP for the development of the EU's rural areas (AGR-1st HALF)
- Promotion of local speciality agricultural products as a development instrument under the new CAP (AGR-1st HALF)
- The Czech Republic in the context of enlargement and the reinforcement of the pre-accession strategy (EXT-SEPT)
- Slovakia in the context of the reinforcement of the pre-accession strategy (EXT-SEPT)
- EC instruments for investment support in third countries (EXT-JULY)
- WTO (World Trade Organization) (EXT-JULY)
- EU-Chile relations (EXT - TO BE DECIDED)
- Employment policy and the role of economic and social organizations in the third stage of EMU (ECOFIN-TO BE DECIDED)
- Impact of the progressive introduction of EMU on the single market (ECOFIN-JULY)
- Europe as an economic unit - a political challenge (ECOFIN-TO BE DECIDED)

OTHER WORK

- Report on the economic situation in Finland (as part of the economic situation work) (ECOFIN-JULY)
- 4th Euro-Mediterranean Summit of economic and social councils (information report) (EXT-MAY)

III. PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Activities of the president

Mr Jenkins meet a delegation from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee in Brussels on 20 January 1998.

On 21 January 1998, Mr Jenkins opened the TACIS hearing.

Mr Jenkins held the following meetings in Brussels:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 8 January 1998 | Mr Dominique Boucher, delegate-general of the European Institute of Social Protection |
| 20 January 1998 | Delegation from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee |
| 29 January 1998 | Algerian TV: interview on the subject of civil society in the Barcelona process. |

Activities of sections and members

Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services

- **Oslo, 12 December 1997**
EFTA Consultative Committee meeting

Mr Vever (Group I) represented the Committee.
- **Brussels, 23 January 1998, at the Committee building**
ESC hearing on the European textile industry

In conjunction with its work on an opinion on the Commission's recent Communication on the Plan of action to increase the competitiveness of the European textile and clothing industry, the ESC held a hearing for the parties concerned.

The rapporteur for the Committee's opinion, Mr Henri Malosse (France, Employers' Group), heard the views of companies and their professional organizations on the Commission's plan of action for the textiles and clothing sector, which is one of the most important European industrial sectors.

Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning

• **Brussels, 20 January 1998**

On 20 January Mr Richard Caborn, UK minister responsible for regions, urban regeneration and planning, and president-in-office of the Council of Ministers for regional policy and spatial planning, attended a meeting of the Committee's Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning. Mr Caborn's statement and the ensuing discussion provided an overview of current regional policy issues, and of the action that the presidency intends to carry out between now and the informal meeting of the Council of Ministers in Glasgow on 8-9 June. The section discussed the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the reform of the Structural Funds and urban policy, before adopting an opinion entitled "Towards an urban agenda in the European Union".

• **Paris, 23 January 1998**

Meeting on "Services of general economic interest: assessment and outlook", organized by "Europe et Société"

Mr Sepi (Group I), member of the Subcommittee on services of general interest in Europe, represented the Committee.

Section for Protection of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Affairs

• **Strasbourg, 13 January 1998**

Meeting of the "Intergroupe Produits pharmaceutiques" on national law and the harmonization of the pharmaceutical sector

Mr Colombo (Group II), a standing member of the Intergroupe, represented the Committee.

Section for External Relations, Trade and Development Policy

• **Brussels, 20 and 21 January 1998**

Chinese delegation at the ESC

A delegation from the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a key partner in the dialogue between the EU and China (as recognized by the ESC in its March 1997 opinion), visited the Committee.

The dialogue had, until now, mainly taken place with the Chinese Mission to the European Union. In October 1996, however, an ESC delegation chaired by Mr Briesch visited China at the invitation of the CPPCC in order to gather information and strengthen contacts between civil societies in the EU and China.

Following this visit, a proposal was made to increase the flow of information between the EU and China with the aim of improving mutual understanding and to continue the dialogue with the CPPCC, which takes part in the international meetings of economic and social councils.

The Chinese delegation's visit was a contribution to this.

During the visit, Mr Frerichs, the rapporteur, and Mr Pompen, the study group president, presented the Committee's work on the opinion on relations between the EU and China.

- **Brussels, 21 January 1998**
Hearing on the Tacis programme

On Wednesday 21 January the ESC held a hearing attended by representatives of socio-economic interest groups from the main recipient countries of the Tacis programme (the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine).

The hearing was held in connection with the drafting of an opinion on Tacis - Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Mongolia. It gave the Committee the chance to forge direct contacts with the socio-occupational organizations of countries with a strategic importance to the EU, as underscored in Agenda 2000.

It should also be noted that in its opinion on EU relations with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the ESC had advocated establishing contact with socio-economic interest groups in these countries.

Other activities

- *Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum*

On 12-14 December 1997, an ESC delegation attended the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum organized in Naples by the Fondazione Laboratoria Mediterraneo, where the 11th session concentrated on the role of the economic and social interest groups.

- *Relations with Latin America*

An ESC delegation, consisting of the Committee president, Mr Jenkins, vice-presidents Mr Jaschick and Mr Regaldo, group presidents Mr Cavaleiro Brandão and Mr Briesch and Agriculture Section president Mr Margalef i Masià (standing in for the Group III president), met from 15-17 December 1997 with the representatives of the FCES of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay). To mark this first official visit, both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding on institutional cooperation between the Economic and Social Consultative Forum (FCES) of Mercosur and the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities (CES-CE).

The Memorandum of Understanding provides for a regular exchange of information and experience, possible joint projects and studies, technical assistance and familiarization visits. It was agreed that a working meeting should be held once a year when the joint work programme would be drawn up.

It is worth pointing out that the Memorandum refers to the interregional framework agreement between the EU and Mercosur, especially Title V on institutional cooperation.

Among the measures proposed, as a first step towards the implementation of the Memorandum, are:

- exchange of opinions and other documents;
- dissemination of information via the Internet;
- familiarization visits to Brussels for FCES officials;
- studies on themes of fundamental importance to both parties;
- joint discussion of the content of the agreement between the European Union and Mercosur, possibly focusing on the issue of employment policy.

On 16 December 1997 the ESC and Uruguayan delegations jointly held an exchange of views with the President of the Oriental Republic, Dr Julio María Sanguinetti, and members of the government. Both sides found these talks useful.

While the summit of Mercosur heads of state was taking place, Mr Jenkins met with the vice-president of the Commission, Mr Marin, and briefed him on these discussions which were in accord with the EU's political intention of stepping up interregional cooperation with Mercosur.

Mr Jenkins invited the FCES to participate in a conference which the Committee is planning to hold in Lisbon on 18 June 1998 in conjunction with the World Expo. This conference will focus on the various social models in Europe and Latin America.

Following their stay in Montevideo the delegation paid an official visit to Chile on 18 and 19 December, at the invitation of the government. They held talks with the ministers for foreign affairs, economic affairs, planning, labour and social affairs, agriculture, and women's issues and met with representatives of the most important economic and social organizations.

This visit was of particular interest as it followed directly after Chile's announcement at the Mercosur summit that it wished to join the institutional structure of Mercosur.

• *Fifth meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee*

The EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), an associate body made up of eighteen representatives of Turkish economic and social interest groups and an equal number of members of the economic and Social Committee, held its fifth meeting in Brussels on 21 January 1998 under the joint chairmanship of Mr Hüsamettin Kavi, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Istanbul Chamber of Industry, and Mr Roger Briesch, president of the ESC workers' Group.

The JCC discussed EU-Turkey relations and the outlook in the wake of the Luxembourg Summit decisions, following statements by Mr Özüllker, Turkey's Permanent Representative to the European Union, and Mr Van der Linden of the European Commission.

The JCC noted that the Luxembourg European Council confirmed the eligibility of Turkey to become a member of the European Union. The JCC, however, called on the EU authorities to push through initiatives and funding to provide concrete proof of the fact that Turkey was receiving the same consideration and treatment as other applicant countries, and that the same criteria applied.

The European Council's decision regarding political and economic conditions in Turkey reaffirmed the JCC's resolve to work - as representatives of civil society - towards closer relations between the EU and Turkey. The JCC recommended that the strategy which had to be framed "to prepare Turkey for accession", in accordance with the conclusions of the Luxembourg Summit, should build on existing cooperation and promote further political, economic and social reform in Turkey.

To this end, the associative bodies were invited to consult the JCC, which promised its full cooperation in helping to frame a successful Turkish pre-accession strategy. Following discussions of the potential consequences of the Luxembourg Summit, the JCC had decided to draw up - as a matter of urgency - a document to suggest ways of promoting dialogue between Turkish and EU civil society. The report would look at the current state of EU-Turkey relations and put forward proposals from the economic and social partners in the EU and Turkey.

The JCC also called on the budgetary authorities to release - as soon as possible - appropriations for financial cooperation, and for Community programmes (Leonardo, Socrates and Youth for Europe).

The JCC had adopted a resolution on Agricultural products in the EU-Turkey customs union (rapporteurs: Mr Yücel for the Turkish side and Mr Pricolo for the ESC).

The JCC discussed a draft resolution on the social impact of the customs union (rapporteurs: Mr Meral for the Turkish side and Mr Koryfidis for the ESC). It was decided to put adoption of this revised draft on the agenda of the next meeting, to be held in Ankara on 18 and 19 June 1998.

• *ESC Bureau meeting in Cardiff*

The ESC Bureau met in Cardiff on 13 January. The city is to hold the forthcoming European Council meeting in June.

Bureau members and ESC group and section presidents visited current projects that are benefitting from Community financial assistance both in the city of Cardiff itself and in the Cardiff Bay area.

The ESC delegation met the Secretary of State for Wales, Mr Ron Davies, the leader of Cardiff County Council, Mr Russell Goodway, and representatives of the economic and social interest groups.

• *The euro, a currency for Europe*

As part of the Information Programme for the European Citizen (PRINCE), the Economic and Social Committee (ESC) is organizing, in conjunction with the European Commission and the European Parliament, a series of seminars on the theme "The Euro, a currency for Europe". The aim is to train up people who will be able, in their turn, to play a role in informing and catalyzing opinion within their respective associations.

Seminar in Florence (Italy), 16 January 1998

The programme for the seminar, which was opened by Mrs Maria Irace, head of the CISL's training department, included:

- a presentation on the impact of the single currency on economic and social life; three ESC members relayed the viewpoints views of each of the Committee's groups (Employers, Workers and Various Interests);
- a workshop for trade union training officials on informing and preparing trade unions for the arrival of the euro, led by Mr Francesco Gui, member of Groupeuro (a network of conference speakers on EMU speaking at the invitation of the Commission) and Mr Francesco Chittolina, of DG X's Trade union and social affairs information unit;
- a statement by Mrs Maria Irace on the euro and trade unions - training programmes and prospects within CISL.

Each theme was followed by a general discussion. The next seminars were to be held in Madrid (10 February) and London (2 March 1998).

ESC information stands at public events of European interest

- 12 and 13 December 1997, Luxembourg, European Council of Heads of State and Government.

IV. RESIGNATION

During the 351st Plenary Session, President Jenkins announced the resignation of Mrs H.C.H. van den Burg (Workers' Group, Netherlands). She had been a Committee member since 26 June 1993.

V. INFORMATION VISITS

The following information visits were made to the Economic and Social Committee during the period covered by the present bulletin:

ELSA - mixed

HIEPSO - Belgium

Universiteit Gent - mixed

Lycée Duplex de Landrecies - France

UWE Bristol - United Kingdom

Lycée A. Schweitzer - France

Austin College - United States of America

Fareham College - United Kingdom

Associação dos Jovens Agricultores de Portugal - Portugal

Regional Council of Yorkshire and Humberside - United Kingdom
