

Address by Göke Frerichs (Luxembourg, 27 June 2002)

Caption: Address by Göke Frerichs, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), on the occasion of the formal session of the Consultative Committee of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 27 June 2002. Following the expiry of the ECSC Treaty, the work of the ECSC must be continued by the EESC.

Source: Europäische Kommission. CECA EKSF EGKS EKAX ECSC EHTY EKSG 1952-2002, 27.6.2002 Actas - Schlussacte - Actes - Atti. Luxemburg: Amt für amtliche Veröffentlichungen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, 2000. 85 S. ISBN 92-894-2073-1. "Ansprache von Göke Frerichs, Präsident des Europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialausschusses", p. 64-70.

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Address by Dr Göke Frerichs, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Mr President, Your Royal Highness, Madam President of the Council, Your Excellencies, Prime Minister, Ministers and Members of Parliament, Madam Vice-President de Palacio, Members of the ECSC Consultative Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen in attendance at this ceremonial gathering!

As the ‘younger brother’ of the Consultative Committee of the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic and Social Committee is proud to be continuing its great tradition of intensive participation by both sides of industry in the development of Europe. Although all the institutions of the three European Communities have merged during the course of development, the European Economic and Social Committee, which represents the various groups of economic and social life under the EEC and the Euratom treaties, and the Consultative Committee of the European Coal and Steel Community remained separate, existing side by side. This was in line with the specific role played by the Consultative Committee of the ECSC in the administration of the sector during the period of industrial change, especially since the instruments at its disposal were an indication that it enjoyed more than just an advisory role.

Jointly, albeit as separate institutions, the EESC and the Consultative Committee of the ECSC have made important contributions to the development of a Europe that is economically competitive and socially secure. The task undertaken by the EESC demonstrates that it performs its advisory function as changes take place in sectors of industry (e.g. motor vehicle manufacturing and shipbuilding), in energy provision, in the internal market, in structural assistance, in social policy and in sustainable development, while the Consultative Committee for the ECSC concerned itself with the corresponding areas in the coal and steel industry, in the associated industries and in trade. The development of the work of both committees has therefore been complementary to a very high degree.

The two committees also share a basic philosophy of the European Union, for, at the start of the European Coal and Steel Community, there was a unique, far-sighted and effective idea for the long term. This was to link European industrial policy (as an attempt to achieve economic and social equilibrium) with the grand objectives of guaranteeing peace in Europe. It was not by pure chance that the Preamble of the ECSC Treaty begins with the aim of safeguarding world peace and ending age-old rivalries in Europe and emphasises that ‘Europe can be built only through practical achievements which will first of all create real solidarity, and through the establishment of bases for economic development.’ The creation of this real solidarity was only possible thanks to the exemplary cooperation between operators in the economic and social fields, which benefited workers and increased the ability of businesses to compete.

This meant that the ECSC Treaty has been used to create more than just a Community for Coal and Steel. In the coal and steel regions, the idea of Europe was and still is always closely linked with the working and living conditions of the employees and with the future of the enterprises involved. This applies to industrial restructuring, to the social dialogue and also to other important areas. Here I can cite as an example the pioneering role of the ECSC in the creation of common standards of safety at work, the joint research into sustainable and environmentally acceptable development in the energy sector — and finally the regional structural assistance for the coalfields.

As the result of a very practical social dialogue, which also included the associated sectors — as consumers of the coal and steel products — people were shown a way to come to terms with fundamental industrial change, while account was still taken of economic and social considerations. This is something that is essentially at the heart of the European social model and, indeed, of the European model itself.

We urgently need these experiences to assist us in managing industrial change in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which are shortly to become members of the European Union. We also need them in order to advance the reconciliation of conflicting interests on a global level in such a way that the European model is not only secured for us in Europe but also sets a precedent in the global context.

It is, therefore, a stroke of good fortune that, at the instigation of the European Commission and in

agreement with the European Parliament and the Council, the work of the Consultative Committee of the ECSC may be continued as part of the EESC after the expiry of the ECSC Treaty so that its great experience, acquired over many years, may be applied to the challenges of the new situation. For this purpose we shall — as agreed — set up a Consultative Commission on Industrial Change, involving the participation of a considerable number of delegates from among the members of the Consultative Committee of the ECSC as well as the members of the EESC.

The remit of this Consultative Commission will cover:

— all the areas of the coal and steel industry and its production and consumption channels, where Community measures will also continue to be taken;

— management of the industrial changes in all the economic sectors and their effects (especially in the area of employment, of measures taken under social and structural policies and also under policies on subsidies and competition, of industrial change, of technological research and development, of environmental policy and sustainable development, and of energy and trade policy);

— the special requirements of the enlargement of the EU and the successful shaping of industrial change in the acceding countries.

The Consultative Commission is to draw up opinions for the legislative and executive bodies of the European Union. We very much hope that the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission will also use this new instrument to request optional and exploratory opinions. The Consultative Commission is also to have the capacity to act under the right of initiative of the EESC and to be given the opportunity to elucidate specific problems by means of factual reports and hearings and to hold conferences in order to reach a wider public more effectively.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

we may look back on the European Coal and Steel Community, and on the important experiences that we have undergone during the 50 years of its existence, in order to create something new: a new form of structured dialogue and a comprehensive treatment of the problems of industrial change. The European Economic and Social Committee will take up this fascinating challenge with great pleasure and great commitment.

The ECSC Treaty laid the foundation stone for a Europe that safeguards peace, leads to the reconciliation of economic and social interests and allows all its citizens to play a democratic part. We intend to tackle the future of Europe for the coming generations in the same spirit that inspired the founding fathers of the European Coal and Steel Community.

Thank you.