


Operation of the European Economic and Social Committee and the ECSC Consultative Committee

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The operation of the European Economic and Social Committee and the ECSC Consultative Committee

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is convened by its President in order to draw up opinions as requested by the Council, the Commission or the European Parliament. On receipt of a request for an opinion, the President, together with the Bureau, arranges the work of the Committee, taking account, as far as possible, of the time limit within which the opinion is to be delivered.

The EESC may also be convened, on a proposal from its Bureau and with the agreement of the majority of its members, to deliver opinions on its own initiative regarding all questions relating to the European Union, European Union policies and their possible development.

On a proposal from the Bureau, the EESC may decide to draw up an information report in order to consider any question relating to European Union policies and their possible development.

On a proposal from a specialised section, a group or a third of its members, the Committee may agree resolutions on topical issues.

Procedures

The work of the specialised sections

In order to draw up an opinion or an information report, the Bureau decides which specialised section is to be responsible for the preparatory work. If the subject comes unequivocally within the competence of a specialised section, this decision is taken by the President, who then informs the Bureau.

The specialised section may hold joint meetings with a Committee of the European Parliament or of the Committee of the Regions, or with another specialised section of the EESC. If the specialised section so requests, or if the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) wishes to comment on an opinion, the CCMI may be authorised by the Bureau to issue a supplementary opinion.

The section's sitting is valid only when more than half of its full members are present or represented. If the sitting is not quorate, the President closes the meeting and, during the same day, calls a new sitting which will be valid regardless of the number of members present or represented.

Once the preparatory work, which generally takes place within a study group, is finished, the section draws up an opinion on the basis of a draft opinion prepared by the rapporteur, and if need be by the co-rapporteur. The opinion of the section, with the attached documentation, is forwarded by the President of the section to the President of the Committee and is submitted to the Committee by its bureau as soon as is possible.

When the President, in agreement with the Bureau or the Assembly, believes that the rules concerning the procedure for drawing up an opinion have not been respected, or further studies prove necessary, he may ask the specialised section to examine the matter anew.

The work of the plenary sessions

EESC sittings are valid only when more than half of its members are present or represented. If a quorum is not reached, the President closes the sitting and, during the same session, calls a new sitting during which the Committee's decisions are valid, irrespective of the number of members present or represented.

The President opens the sitting, leads the debates and ensures compliance with the Rules of Procedure. He is assisted by the Vice-Presidents.

The Committee deliberates on the basis of the work of the specialised section responsible for reporting to the Assembly. Where a text has been adopted unopposed in the specialised section, the Bureau may propose to

the Assembly that a vote be taken without debate. If there are no objections from the advisers, this is then implemented.

After the debate, the Committee proceeds to a paragraph-by-paragraph consideration of the opinion. It is then adopted on the basis of the text drawn up by the section and any amendments accepted. If the opinion is rejected, the President of the Committee, with the agreement of the Assembly, may refer the opinion back to the relevant section for a further review, or it may name a general rapporteur who presents a new draft opinion.

The opinions adopted by the Committee, the opinions of the specialised sections and the minutes of the plenary session are forwarded to the Council, to the Commission and to Parliament. The opinions adopted by the Committee may also be forwarded to any other institution or body concerned.

Voting methods

A valid vote must be 'for', 'against' or 'abstention'. The texts and decisions of the EESC and its bodies are adopted, unless otherwise agreed, by the majority of votes cast either 'for' or 'against'.

Votes are taken by open ballot, by roll call or by secret ballot.

As a general rule, the President of the Committee, or the President of the section, does not take part in the vote. However, should there be an equal number of votes for and against, he has the casting vote.

Urgency procedure and written procedure

Urgency procedure may be applied if the President finds that, owing to a deadline imposed on the Committee for the submission of its opinion, such procedure is necessary to enable the opinion to be adopted in good time.

In cases of urgency at Committee level, the President may, without consulting the Bureau beforehand, take all requisite steps to enable the EESC to carry out its work. The steps taken by the President must be submitted to the Committee for ratification at the following session.

Where the urgency results from a deadline imposed on a specialised section, the President of that section may, with the agreement of the President of the Committee and in consultation with the specialised section bureau, organise the work otherwise than as provided in the Rules of Procedure. The measures taken by the President of the specialised section are submitted to the specialised section for ratification at the following meeting.

Public relations

The EESC publishes its opinions in the Official Journal of the European Union in accordance with arrangements laid down by the Council and the Commission after consultation with the Bureau of the Committee.

The Committee ensures the transparency of its decisions in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty on European Union.

The plenary sessions of the Committee and meetings of the specialised sections are open to the public. Certain debates that do not concern consultative work may be declared confidential. All other meetings are closed to the public.

ECSC Consultative Committee

The Consultative Committee was convened by its President following a request from the Commission or

from a majority of the Committee's members.

The Bureau of the Committee established the agenda at least three weeks in advance of the session of the Plenary Assembly. The sessions were prepared by the President, together with the other members of the Bureau. It was the duty of the Bureau to decide if initial consideration of the issue by a subcommittee was necessary and, should this be the case, whether the question fell within the remit of an existing permanent subcommittee or of a special subcommittee.

In general, the acts of the Consultative Committee were drawn up by technical working parties before being considered by a subcommittee, and they were then adopted during a plenary session. This meant, in practice, that there was a three-stage procedure.

The subcommittees' bureaux appointed the rapporteurs to the Plenary Assembly and, if necessary, drafting committees who were to assist them.

The results of the subcommittee's work were forwarded by the bureau of the subcommittee to the Bureau of the Committee for the information of the Plenary Assembly. They might take the form of a report by the subcommittee or of a draft report, opinion or resolution.

Deliberations of the Committee were valid only when more than half of its members were present at the plenary session. The rapporteur for the subcommittee responsible for the initial consideration of the item on the agenda gave a summary of the debates of the subcommittee and outlined the document that it had drawn up. The Committee then proceeded to a general debate on this document.

Votes were held either by a show of hands, by sitting or standing vote, or by roll call. Opinions and resolutions gave a summary of only those texts that had been put to the vote and adopted unanimously or by the majority of votes cast.

The reports, opinions and resolutions of the Committee were forwarded to the President of the European Commission and the President of the Council of the European Union. They could be published in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

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