

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

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

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) operates in four-yearly terms. Every four years, after each replacement, it is convened by the oldest member no more than one month after the members of the Committee have been notified of their appointment by the Council.

The members of the Committee are divided into groups. They contribute to the organisation of the Committee's work by preparing their members for the meetings of the various bodies.

The Committee bodies, the composition of which takes into account both the population size of the Member States and the various categories of economic and social activity represented on the Committee, are the following: the Assembly, the Bureau, the President and the specialised sections.

In addition, the EESC can set up study groups, subcommittees, observatories and advisories.

From among its members, the Committee elects its President, its two Vice-Presidents and the members of the Bureau other than the Presidents of the groups and of the sections, for a term of two years.

In the same way as the Constitutional Treaty, the Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed in Lisbon on 13 December 2007 and not yet in force, stipulates that the members of the EESC should be appointed for five years instead of four years, thereby following the same pattern as the European Parliament and the Commission. Similarly, the Committee elects its President and its Bureau for a period of two and a half years.

Groups and categories

The Committee is composed of three groups of members, respectively representing employers, employees and other economic and social categories that make up organised civil society.

- Group I: Employers
- Group II: Employees
- Group III: Various Interests

Members may join one of the groups on a voluntary basis, but a member may only join one group at a time. However, it may happen that some advisers decline to belong to one of these groups. This is the case, for example, for some representatives of corporative trade union organisations.

Groups elect their Presidents and Vice-Presidents and participate in the preparation, organisation and coordination of the work of the Committee and of its bodies. They each have a secretariat.

The Secretariat-General gives EESC advisers who do not belong to any group the material and technical assistance necessary to the exercise of their duties.

Advisers belonging to different groups in the EESC can form cross-sectoral groups for categories representing the various economic and social interests in organised civil society.

Decision-making bodies

Plenary Assembly

The Assembly, composed of all the EESC members, meets during the various sessions. In theory, these

sessions take place during the last seven days of each month, in accordance with the calendar established by the Bureau. In general, there are nine sessions each year. Opinions of the Committee are adopted during a plenary session, on the basis of the opinions of the section or of the subcommittee responsible for their preparation.

Bureau

In 1958, the Bureau of the Committee was composed of 15 members, including a President and two Vice-Presidents. It was composed according to the population size of the Member States and the various categories of economic and social life represented on the Committee. Following the successive enlargements and in a European Union of 27 Member States, the EESC Bureau is currently made up of 39 members:

- a President and two Vice-Presidents;
- 27 members (one for each Member State);
- the three Presidents of the groups;
- the Presidents of the six specialised sections.

The President is chosen in rotation from amongst the members representing employers, employees and the other categories of economic and social activity. The Vice-Presidents are chosen from amongst the groups to which the President does not belong.

The Bureau is convened by its President, either automatically or at the request of ten of its members.

The Bureau has within it a 'budget group' charged with assisting it in the exercise of its prerogatives regarding financial and budgetary matters.

The main roles of the Bureau are:

- to be politically responsible for the general management of the Committee. It ensures that the activities of the Committee, of its bodies and of its staff comply with its institutional role;
- to organise and to coordinate the work of the Committee and of its bodies. It is responsible for the management of the human, budgetary and technical resources used in the carrying out of its duties. It has a role in the budgetary procedure and in the organisation of the secretariat;
- to interpret the Rules of Procedure and their implementing provisions upon request from a Member or from the Secretary-General;
- to consider the steps to be taken following an Opinion delivered by the Committee.

Presidency

The main roles of the President of the ESC, chosen from each of the three groups in rotation for a period of two years, are:

- to preside over the work of the Committee;
- to represent the Committee in its external relations;

— to give an account to the Committee of steps taken and progress achieved on its behalf between sessions.

In the event of absence, the President is replaced by the Vice-President belonging to the group which will hold the next Presidency.

In the same way as the Constitutional Treaty, the Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed in Lisbon on 13 December 2007 and not yet in force, stipulates that the EESC President should be appointed for two and a half years, instead of two years.

Bodies for preparatory work

Specialised sections

The EESC is composed of specialised sections (Article 261 of the EC Treaty and Article 169 of the EAEC Treaty).

The founding treaties originally provided for a section relating to agriculture (Article 47 of the EC Treaty), one relating to transport (Article 83 of the EC Treaty) and a third for questions relating to atomic energy (Convention on certain institutions common to the European Communities, Article 5(2)). The Treaty of Amsterdam repealed these provisions with the aim of giving the Committee autonomy to determine its own organisation. The Committee therefore determines the list and attributions of the specialised sections in its Rules of Procedure.

The EESC has six specialised sections:

- Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)
- The Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)
- Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)
- Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)
- Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)
- External Relations (REX).

Other sections can be formed by the plenary Assembly on a proposal from the Bureau in all areas covered by the Treaties. The specialised sections are formed by the Committee after each four-yearly replacement. When such renewals take place, the list and the responsibilities of the specialised sections can be re-examined. The number of members and the general composition of the sections are determined by the Committee on a proposal from the Bureau.

Every Committee member, with the exception of the President, must be a member of at least one specialised section. Save by way of derogation, no member may belong to more than two sections.

Section members are appointed by the Committee, according to their specific area of expertise, for a renewable period of two years.

The bureau of a section, elected for two years, comprises 12 members, including a President and three Vice-Presidents, one for each group.

The task of the sections is to draw up an opinion or an information report on the problems which have been referred to them. To deal with these questions, the sections may set up internal study groups or drafting groups, or appoint a single rapporteur.

Subcommittees and rapporteurs-general

The Committee may set up internal subcommittees whose role is to draw up draft opinions or information reports on general questions or on certain issues relating to the powers and responsibilities of several sections.

Observatories, audits, experts

The Committee may set up observatories wherever the nature, scale and complex character of the subject in hand requires particularly flexible working methods, procedures and instruments.

In 1994, the Committee set up a 'Single Market Observatory' (SMO), thus allowing it, with the support of the other Community institutions, to organise action designed to improve relations between European citizens and the European institutions.

If the importance of a question on a particular subject warrants it, the various bodies and working structures in the Committee may hear eminent persons from outside it.

Where this proves necessary for the preparation of particular projects, the President may appoint experts on his own initiative, or upon a proposal from the groups, the specialised sections or the rapporteurs.

Consultative Commissions

The Committee has the power to form Consultative Commissions composed of members of the ESC and of delegates from areas within organised civil society. Following the expiry of the ECSC Treaty in June 2002, the Committee created the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI). The CCMI is composed of 48 members of the EESC and 48 external delegates who come from social and occupational organisations in the coal and steel sectors. This make-up will gradually be extended to cover other sectors concerned with the problems of modernising the economy, and all related interests. Since the enlargement of the EU to include 27 Member States, and given the particularly relevant expertise that the CCMI is able to bring to the new Member States, the CCMI has included a high proportion of members and delegates from these countries.

The EESC is therefore in a position to formulate opinions in the framework of a structured dialogue between its members and the representatives of the sectors and interest groups concerned with industrial change, as it examines various issues both from the point of view of its social and economic partners and from that of environmental protection or sustainable development.

Dialogue with economic and social organisations in the Union and non-Member States

The EESC can maintain structured relationships with economic and social councils, similar institutions and organisations concerned with economic and social activity in the European Union and non-Member States. It can also appoint delegations to maintain relations with the various categories of economic and social activity in organised civil society in those States or associations of States outside the European Union.

In the case of candidate countries, such cooperation is exercised by a joint consultative committee or by contact groups.

Secretariat-General

The EESC is served by a Secretariat-General headed by a Secretary-General. He carries out his duties under the authority of the President representing the Bureau of the Committee and takes a solemn oath before the Bureau that he will perform his duties conscientiously and with absolute impartiality.

The Secretary-General plays no more than an advisory role at Bureau meetings, of which he takes the minutes. He ensures that decisions taken by the Assembly, the Bureau and the President are duly executed and submits a written report every three months to the President concerning administrative or organisational matters as well as staff issues.

With regard to the structure of the Secretariat-General, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions had a common organisational structure (COS), in application of Protocol No 16 annexed to the EC Treaty by the 1992 Treaty on European Union. The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam (Article 2.59) repealed this Protocol, conferring on the two Committees administrative autonomy and separate budgets. A cooperation agreement between the two bodies, approved by their respective Bureaux in April–May 1999, laid down a new form of cooperation, to be set up in the context of more general cooperation between the Community institutions and based on the autonomy of a certain number of departments (Finances, Financial Control, Staff Support Services — except for the medical and welfare departments — and the Staff Representation Secretariat) and the joint operation of the other departments of the former COS.

The Secretariat of the President

The President of the EESC has a private office.

The ECSC Consultative Committee

Like the EESC, the ECSC Consultative Committee was made up of three groups, composed respectively of representatives of producers, of workers and consumers, and of dealers in the coal and steel sectors.

The Consultative Committee also had a Plenary Assembly, a Bureau and a President. The Bureau was made up of a President, two Vice-Presidents and 12 other members. It was responsible for the organisation of the Committee's work and established the agenda for its sessions.

The Committee was able to set up subcommittees whose role was to prepare its work. There were three permanent subcommittees (Markets and Forward Studies, Labour Problems and Research Projects) and, for the 2000–2002 period, one ad hoc special subcommittee (Central and Eastern European Countries). Each subcommittee had its own bureau, made up of a minimum of three and a maximum of fifteen members. The subcommittees' bureaux were responsible for organising the work of the subcommittee.

In general, the acts of the Consultative Committee were drawn up by technical working parties before being submitted to the subcommittees and then to the plenary session.

The Consultative Committee had a secretariat headed by a secretary who was appointed by the European Commission in agreement with the Bureau of the Committee.

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