

CES: 1

# European Economic and Social Committee



European Economic and Social Committee



# BULLETIN

# 8 '99

## Facts and figures - September 1999

### PRESIDENCY

President: Beatrice Rangoni Machiavelli  
(Italy - Various Interests)

Vice-presidents: Josly Piette  
(Belgium - Workers)

Aina Margareta Regnell  
(Sweden - Employers)

Secretary-General: Patrick Venturini

### 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: Anne-Marie Sigmund - Austria). 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.

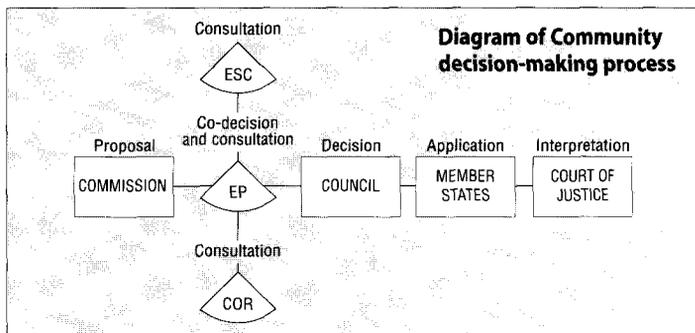
The ESC is the only socio-occupational advisory body that can be consulted by the EU Council of Ministers.

### 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 180 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 24 members (eight per group), including 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.

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 six sections:

- Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion - secretariat tel. 546 9366 (president: Umberto Burani - Group I - Italy)
- Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption - secretariat tel. 546 9598 (president: Klaus Schmitz - Group II - Germany)
- Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society - secretariat tel. 546 9611 (president: José Ignacio Gafo Fernández - Group I - Spain)
- Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship - secretariat tel. 546 9215 (president: Jan Olsson - Group III - Sweden)
- Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment - secretariat tel. 546 9687 (president: Etienne de Paul de Barchfontaine - Group III - Belgium)
- Section for External Relations - secretariat tel. 546 9537 (president: George Wright - Group II - United Kingdom)

#### 3. Study groups

Section opinions are drafted by study groups, varying in size from three to 15 members, including a rapporteur who may be assisted by as many as four outside experts.

#### 4. Other bodies

The ESC has the right to set up other ad hoc structures under its Rules of Procedure, known as sub-committees, for specific issues. It has also set up a permanent Single Market Observatory.

#### 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 delegations headed by the president or a vice-president. Some meetings involving the countries of central and eastern Europe have been institutionalized with the agreement of the Council, e.g. with the Committee's counterparts in Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland. There are also formal links with socio-economic interest groups in Turkey.

### PUBLICATIONS

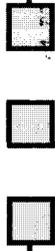
The ESC regularly distributes a number of publications, including its main opinions, a monthly newsletter entitled ESC INFO and its Annual Report.

### SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

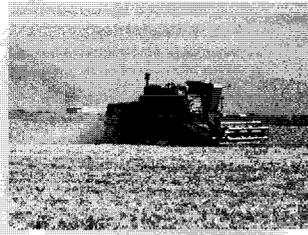
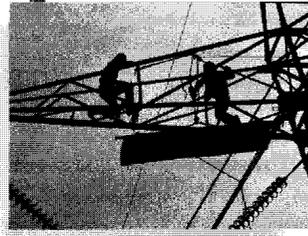
The Committee is serviced by a secretariat-general, headed by a secretary-general who reports to the president, representing the Bureau.

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 516, are mostly members of the ESC secretariat. The secretariat's annual budget is currently in the order of 27 million euros.

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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.*

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## I. 367<sup>th</sup> PLENARY SESSION - 20 and 21 OCTOBER 1999

The European Economic and Social Committee held its 367<sup>th</sup> plenary session in Brussels on 20 and 21 October 1999. The ESC president, **Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli**, took the chair.

The session was attended by **Mr Romano Prodi**, president of the European Commission.

**Mr Prodi** began his statement by congratulating Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli on a successful first year as ESC president. The range and breadth of the Committee's opinions was much appreciated by the Commission, and there was a need for dialogue between the Commission and the ESC in a number of areas, including employment.

Turning to the question of the enlargement of the European Union, Mr Prodi reminded Committee members of the enormous challenge that the venture represented. The EU was set to increase both its surface area and its population by approximately 30%, with an increase in GDP of around 8-9%. Enlargement was, however, at the very heart of the European enterprise. Although this would be the first democratic attempt to unite the peoples of Europe, it did not mean a move towards uniformity or the creation of a European super-state. On the contrary, the blossoming of local and regional autonomy was part and parcel of the process.

The forthcoming IGC would have to tackle such issues as the number of commissioners earmarked for each Member State, and qualified majority voting in the European Council. The right of veto was too great a temptation for the Member States, and it was not compatible with the development of the European institutions. Change was necessary; after all, the current rules had been designed for a Europe of six Member States. Furthermore, the European decision-making process as a whole needed to be speeded up, with prompter transposition of EU legislation at Member State level.

Procedures governing the consultation of the ESC by the Commission needed to be reviewed, together with the size of the Union's consultative assemblies. Mr Prodi concluded by recognizing that the ESC was not there to simply rubber stamp Commission initiatives, and - as Europe's diversity increased - the greater was the need for a body in which that diversity could be expressed.

\*

\* \*

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

**Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption**  
**Joao Pereira dos Santos, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9245**

**1. TYPE - APPROVAL - TWO OR THREE-WHEEL MOTOR VEHICLES**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *New consultation on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive amending Council Directive 92/61/EEC relating to the type-approval of two or three-wheel motor vehicles***

(COM(1999) 276 final - 99/0117 COD)

(CES 932/99 - 99/0117 COD)

Rapporteur: Paulo BARROS VALE (Portugal - Employers)

**Gist of the Commission proposal**

The draft directive sets out to introduce an EU type-approval procedure for two and three-wheel motor vehicles in order to ensure the effective operation of the single market in this sector.

With this aim in view, uniform provisions are to be introduced which will have to be observed if type-approval is to be granted for the relevant type of vehicle components and specifications.

Council Directive 92/61/EEC of 30 June 1992 lays down the procedure for Community type-approval of two or three-wheel motor vehicles, of components and of separate technical units produced in conformity with the technical requirements set out in the separate directives.

All the separate directives, provided for in the exhaustive list of characteristics, components and separate technical units to be regulated at Community level, have been adopted.

In order to ensure the smooth operation of the complete type-approval system, the Commission clarifies, in this draft directive, certain administrative provisions and supplements the provisions set

out in the annexes to Directive 92/61/EEC. In so doing the Commission follows the example set by Council Directive 70/156/EEC of 6 February 1970 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States on the type-approval of motor vehicles and their trailers, as last amended by European Parliament and Council Directive 98/91/EC.

**Gist of the opinion**

The Economic and Social Committee welcomes the proposal to improve the framework directive governing the type-approval of two or three-wheel motor vehicles. The aim is greater harmonisation of the whole system, which is to be achieved by aligning the requirements that have to be met.

The Committee also welcomes the Commission's decision to consult various relevant bodies and representatives of the sector when drawing up its proposal.

Given the specific nature of the sector and the differences, for example, between this sector and the automobile sector (in terms of resources and size), the Committee thinks that notwithstanding the need for harmonisation and clarification, the directive does not perhaps need to lay down such detailed and stringent requirements and be so inflexible with regard to the substitution of some components. The Committee therefore proposes that a mechanism be studied for assigning responsibility to the producer and/or the person empowered to sign certificates of conformity so that minor alterations to type-approved vehicles may be acceptable without the need to go through a new type-approval procedure. However, these alterations should not affect the safety of the vehicles or its structural parts.

The Committee also thinks that the number of vehicles constituting a small series should be increased from 200 to 300. This increase will enable producers to be more active on the market thanks

to the greater and more reliable feedback they receive, and will also make the sector more dynamic.

## **2. MEDICINAL PRODUCTS FOR HUMAN USE (codification)**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on the Community code relating to medicinal products for human use (codified version)**

(COM(1999) 315 final - 99/0134 COD)

(CES 933/99 - 99/0134 COD)

Rapporteur: Paolo BRAGHIN (Italy - Employers)

### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

As part of the "Citizen's Europe", the Commission attaches great importance to simplifying and clarifying Community law so as to make it clearer and more accessible to the ordinary citizen.

However, this aim cannot be achieved as long as numerous provisions that have been amended several times, often quite substantially, remain scattered, so that they must be sought partly in the original instrument, partly in later instruments.

The Commission has therefore instructed its departments that, as a minimum requirement, all legislative measures should be codified after no more than ten amendments. Under this procedure, the existing legal provisions are brought together under one roof. Apart from formal amendments made necessary by the codification process itself, the substance of the provisions remains unchanged.

Given that no changes of substance may be made to the instruments affected by legislative codification, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have agreed by interinstitutional agreement that an accelerated procedure may be used for the fast-track adoption of these instruments.

This particular codification proposal concerns medicinal products for human use and hence the following Council directives:

- 65/65/EEC of 26 January 1965 on medicinal products;
- 75/318/EEC of 20 May 1975 on the testing of proprietary medicinal products;
- 75/319/EEC of 20 May 1975 on proprietary medicinal products;
- 89/342/EEC of 3 May 1989 extending the scope of Directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC and laying down additional provisions for immunological medicinal products consisting of vaccines, toxins or serums and allergens;
- 89/343/EEC of 3 May 1989 extending the scope of Directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC and laying down additional provisions for radiopharmaceuticals;
- 89/381/EEC of 14 June 1989 extending the scope of Directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC and laying down special provisions for proprietary medicinal products derived from human blood or human plasma;
- 92/25/EEC of 31 March 1992 on the wholesale distribution of medicinal products;
- 92/26/EEC of 31 March 1992 concerning the classification for the supply of medicinal products;
- 92/27/EEC of 31 March 1992 on the labelling of medicinal products and on package leaflets;
- 92/28/EEC of 31 March 1992 on the advertising of medicinal products;
- 92/73/EEC of 22 September 1992 widening the scope of Directives 65/65/EEC and 75/319/EEC laying down additional provisions on homeopathic medicinal products.

### **Gist of the opinion**

The Economic and Social Committee warmly welcomes this codification effort, which constitutes an essential reference point for the relevant authorities of the Member States. The proposed codification, reflecting a need felt for years, was finally included in the Commission's 1998 work programme. The Committee hopes that the accelerated procedure, endorsed by the interinstitutional agreement of 20 December 1994, will make possible the rapid adoption of the codified legislation, so that the Directive can enter into force on 1 January 2000 as laid down in Article 131.

The codified text mostly retains the terminology used in the original directives and does not reflect developments which have occurred in the meantime, particularly as a result of the work of the

International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH), which seeks to define standards applicable in the EU and the rest of the world. The Committee suggests the addition of another annex in which the technical terms which should be replaced by those finally adopted by the ICH are indicated.

The various language versions do not always match, probably because of imperfect translation from the original stages of the document. The Committee suggests that the Commission could make use of the present codification exercise to amend the articles and take appropriate steps where they are inaccurately translated from the reference language.

In its specific comments the Committee lists all the discrepancies and mistakes in the various language versions.

Title IX tackles the subject of pharmacovigilance, a field in which debate is under way with a view to drawing up proposed amendments to Directive 75/319/EEC. The Committee hopes that these proposals will be put forward and discussed soon, in the interests of increasingly effective public health protection.

As shown in the final part of the Commission communication on the Community marketing authorisation procedures for medicinal products, there are still diverging interpretations by national administrations, a certain reluctance to trust scientific assessments from other Member States, and lengthy national administrative procedures - all factors which have prevented full use of the advantages of the new authorisation procedures. The Committee hopes that the Commission will take advantage of the overall reassessment of the registration system due in 2001 to introduce the necessary adjustments to the present texts, assisted in this by the considerable and welcome effort of codification currently in progress.

### **3. SERVICE OF JUDICIAL DOCUMENTS IN CIVIL OR COMMERCIAL MATTERS**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Proposal for a Council Directive on the service of judicial and extrajudicial document in civil or commercial matters***

(COM(1999) 219 final - 99/0102 CNS)

(CES 947/99 - 99/0102 CNS)

Rapporteur: Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER  
(Spain - Various Interests)

#### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

The European Union has set itself the objective of maintaining and developing the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, in which the free movement of persons is assured; to establish such an area the Community is to adopt, among others, the measures relating to judicial cooperation in civil matters needed for the sound operation of the internal market.

The Commission's draft directive is just such a measure and aims to improve and expedite the transmission of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil or commercial matters for service between the Member States. It should above all help to ensure that procedures run smoothly under the right conditions.

To date, the relevant procedures have been governed in particular by Article IV of the Protocol to the 1968 Brussels Convention on jurisdiction and the enforcement of judgements in civil and commercial matters and the 1965 Hague Convention on the service abroad of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil or commercial matters. In addition there are a number of bilateral and regional instruments. Consequently, uncertainty has gradually arisen as to which procedure should be used or takes precedence, leading to delays and causing mistakes and questionable choices to be made. To rectify this situation, in May 1997 the Convention on the service in the Member States of the European Union of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil or commercial matters was concluded. But as it could not be ratified before the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, it cannot be applied.

The Commission's proposal is largely based on the latter convention. It lays down the responsibilities of the relevant persons or agencies, the procedures and time-limits, practical means to be used and rules for the use of languages. The annex contains the appropriate forms. It also provides for the establishment of an advisory committee to assist the Commission with the implementing provisions.

It should be pointed out that the new Title IV of the EC Treaty, which applies to the matters covered by this draft directive, is not applicable in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, unless

these countries "opt in" in the manner provided for in the protocol appended to the EC Treaty. At the Council meeting (Justice and Home Affairs) on 12 March 1999, the United Kingdom and Ireland announced their intention of being fully associated with Community activities in relation to judicial cooperation in civil matters. It is now for them to embark in due course on the procedure provided for in the protocol. Accordingly the Commission proposal was drafted on the basis of the current situation.

#### **Gist of the opinion**

The Committee agrees with the Commission's proposal for a directive, as it supports the development of an area of freedom, security and justice in the European Union. This objective entails, among other things, the adoption of measures relating to judicial cooperation in civil matters needed for the sound operation of the internal market and the better administration of justice. The Committee believes that these measures will give a new impetus to citizens to strengthen their democratic traditions.

The Committee considers that adopting the proposal in the form of a directive is sufficiently warranted, but in the future this type of legal act should be adopted in the form of a regulation.

In the specific comments, the Committee focuses on:

- geographical scope of the directive;
- unknown domicile;
- improved and faster transmission of documents;
- legal classification of documents;
- use of new transmission media;
- principle of non-payment of costs;
- concept of "interested person".

The Committee advocates the establishment of a coordinated and consistent legal system throughout the Union and consequently calls upon the Commission, Council and European Parliament to:

- take full advantage of the new powers under Article 65 of the EC Treaty to draw up a body of its own civil law rules and to foster compatibility of civil procedures;
- devise appropriate means of ensuring that European and national level institutional ac-

tors, as well as civil society representatives, are involved in defining and implementing future measures;

- guarantee that European citizens are kept as well-informed as possible, and ensure that legal advice and aid services are established in all the institutions of the Union, particularly at local and regional level.

#### **4. SUPPLEMENTARY PENSIONS**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission - Towards a Single Market for Supplementary Pensions**

(COM(1999) 134 final)

(CES 950/99)

Rapporteur: Harry BYRNE (Ireland - Employers)

#### **Gist of Commission document**

The Member States bear responsibility for the organisation of their retirement systems. Generally speaking, these systems are based on three pillars: social security schemes, occupational schemes and personal pension plans. This communication is particularly concerned with pillar 2 occupational schemes, for which there is as yet no proper Community legal framework. Due regard being had to the application in this area of the subsidiarity principle, the Commission's role is one of proposing reforms that might enable such schemes to benefit from the freedoms of the single market and the new vistas opened up by the euro, thereby increasing their security and efficiency and participating in the development of EU capital markets.

With the Green Paper on supplementary pensions in the single market, the Commission launched a wide-ranging round of consultations on means of improving at Union level the functioning of supplementary pension schemes. The Commission has also drawn on the results of the talks which culminated in the Financial Services Action Plan, which devotes much space to the pensions issue.

Although opinions still differ on some points (e.g. investment rules) a broad consensus has been reached on the need to begin introducing a Community framework which might revolve around three main principles set down in the present

Communication: the laying-down of prudential rules for pension funds; the removal of obstacles to the free movement of workers; and co-ordination of Member States' tax systems.

Experience has shown that over-restrictive investment rules have considerably harmed the yields of pensions funds without any gains in security. This has resulted either in reduced benefits or in higher contributions to the detriment of labour costs. Moreover, these restrictions have blocked the opening and integration of capital markets in the Union. A more efficient capital market could contribute to strengthening economic growth and job creation in the Union, and thus indirectly to facilitating the financing of social welfare. The adoption of a directive creating minimum harmonized prudential rules for pension funds is hence suggested by the Communication.

Concerning the removal of obstacles to labour mobility, the EU already has rules which coordinate effectively, for migrant workers, schemes falling under the social security system. Such arrangements are still lacking in the case of supplementary pensions. The setting-up of a "Pensions Forum", bringing together the Member States, the two sides of industry and pension funds, might facilitate the emergence of a consensus on the difficult subjects of : identification of conditions for the acquisition of rights favourable to freedom of movement; convergence of national rules on the transfer of rights; and examination of the conditions for allowing funds to manage plans in various Member States.

National disparities in the tax treatment of life assurance and pension products are major obstacles to labour mobility and freedom to provide services in the Union. While ruling out at this stage any harmonisation attempt and taking care to safeguard the tax income of Member States, the Commission feels that an endeavour should be made to abolish national tax discrimination against products offered by institutions established in other Member States. On the basis of the work of the Taxation Policy Group, a legislative initiative which would cover the tax treatment of cross-border contributions paid by migrant workers to supplementary pension funds might be envisaged.

### **Gist of the Opinion**

The Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission has followed up quite quickly on the Green Paper discussions, and is generally supportive of the Communication's content. The Committee hopes that the incoming Commission will pick up rapidly the framework now set out in the Communication and that there will be no loss of momentum.

The Committee believes that the aim of pensions co-ordination and freedoms is fully in line with the expectations of European citizens in relation to the Single Market.

The Committee supports the view that a flexible approach should be taken to investment rules provided that these are counterbalanced by effective prudential rules so as to control risk, and that regular and independent actuarial assessments of liabilities are carried out.

The Committee also acknowledges the additional confidence that a guarantee system would provide for pension scheme members, and urges the Commission and the Member States to explore how this may be achieved.

The Committee supports the proposals to set up the Pensions Forum to examine barriers to the free movement of workers and the technical sub-group to assist the Taxation Policy Group. This seems the most practical way forward for dealing with the complex issues involved.

The Committee suggests that if supplementary pensions increase as a percentage of retirement income at Member State level, it will be increasingly important to provide a secure environment for efficient operation of supplementary funded schemes.

Finally, while fully supportive of the initiatives in relation to Supplementary Pensions the Committee requests that attention continues to be focused on the need to improve the sustainability of Pillar 1 schemes.

**Section for Transport, Energy Infrastructure and the Information Society**

Luigi Del Bino, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9353

**5. ELECTRICITY / RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
on the *Commission working document on Electricity from renewable energy sources and the internal electricity market*  
(SEC (1999) 470 final)

(CES 934/99)

Rapporteur: Peter MORGAN (United Kingdom - Employers)

**Gist of the Commission document**

**Introduction**

The objectives pursued by the Commission working document are to report the findings of the Commission following the investigations undertaken subsequent to the adoption of the report on harmonisation requirements for the internal market in electricity, and to suggest some possible conclusions and options for action as a consequence of these findings. A final decision on all these issues will be taken in the light of the reactions to the document.

The annexes to the working document contain information on the share of RES (renewable energy sources) electricity in all the EU Member States, prices paid for this electricity, support for R&D activities and details on the scope and content of the investigations undertaken by the Commission. It also reports on the consultation of interested parties such as the Energy Consultative Committee, the EWEA, the AEBIOM, the ESHA, the EPIA, EUROLECTRIC, EURE, Bundesverband Windenergie, representatives of individual companies from the RES sector and from traditional energies, Greenpeace, the IFIEC, members of national parliaments and MEPs involved in energy matters.

The main priorities of EU energy policy are security of energy supplies, competitiveness and environmental protection. By way of indication, the White Paper on RES sets a target of 12% for the

RES share of overall EU energy consumption by 2010. Today the overall RES contribution to the EU electricity market is still small, around 3% excluding large hydro (the only RES to have been exploited on a significant scale before 1990).

The electricity single market directive 96/92/EC provides only one explicit mechanism for the favourable treatment of electricity from renewable energy sources in Article 8(3). The Commission considers, however, that following liberalisation, it may become increasingly difficult to continue to base the support of renewables on this mechanism. Under a liberalised system, Member States will be under pressure to abandon such a mechanism for one whereby electricity consumers contribute equally towards the additional cost of supporting renewables.

**Current support schemes for RES electricity in the EU**

The document outlines the different support schemes throughout the EU Member States. The Commission itself supports research and development under the Framework Programme for Research and Development. The main form of state support are:

- subsidies for research and development;
- subsidies for capital investment or loans to investment;
- a fixed price that all renewable generators receive for the electricity generated, combined with an obligation on the system operator to purchase all such energy offered to it;
- a tendering system;
- green pricing schemes where consumers can voluntarily opt to pay a premium for renewable energy;
- standards/consent procedures in building codes and design guidelines with the objective of streamlining administrative planning barriers;
- support via the tax system.

The Commission document examines the advantages and disadvantages of direct support schemes presently existing in the EU or future possible al-

tain conditions, in Articles 73 (compatibility of aid with public service obligations), 86 (companies with exclusive or special rights) and 87 (state aids).

In previous opinions the Committee has already called for a specific reference to services of general interest in the Treaty along the lines of the definition proposed by the Committee. In its own-initiative opinion on public service obligations in the internal energy market, the Committee proposed the adoption of a "Public Services' Charter" to be incorporated in the Treaty as an appendix; this would have a valuable interpretative function. The opinion stresses the need to focus as far as possible on striking a balance between the competition rules and the fulfilment of public service obligations.

It would therefore be a good idea for the Committee to draw up this own-initiative opinion on services of general interest and public service obligations in the new context created by Article 16 of the Amsterdam Treaty, especially as regards the limits of free competition; this opinion should analyse and assess the causes that determine such limits in measures taken by the EU.

#### **Gist of the opinion**

The Committee considers that services of general economic interest will play a crucial role in promoting economic and social cohesion and territorial solidarity, establishing "shared values" which the EU should preserve and encourage; this means that people should always have access to such services or benefits irrespective of their social situation or place of residence.

With regard to the service-users, the aim should be to guarantee the right balance between liberalisation - which requires more competition - and appropriate measures based on the guidelines set out in the opinion.

With regard to the operators, account must be taken of the costs that enterprises must bear and the legislation with which they must comply.

At all events, there is a need to ensure that the economic and legal interests of consumers, who through their associations form part of "civil society", are taken into account in a more consistent and sustained fashion across the spectrum of EU policies.

The Committee considers that in a competitive system all the participants should contribute proportionally to the cost of the universal service.

The Committee considers that to maintain the European social model a balance should be found between services of general interest and the rules of the single market, free competition especially. It urges the Council, the European Parliament and Commission to include the citizens' right to equal access to the provision of these services in the Charter of Fundamental Rights which the Cologne European Council agreed to draw up.

The Committee also urges the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission to ensure, as far as possible, that these services continue to be provided after the conclusion of the next round of WTO negotiations.

**Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment**  
Sylvia Calamandrei, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9396

#### **8. FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE VACCINES**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
on the *Proposal for a Council Decision amending Decision 91/666/EEC establishing Community reserves of foot-and-mouth disease vaccines* (COM(1999) 290 final - 99/0121 CNS)

(CES 936/99 - 99/0121 CNS)

Rapporteur working alone: John DONNELLY  
(Ireland - Various Interests)

#### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

By Directive 85/511/EEC the Council introduced Community measures for the control of foot-and-mouth disease. These measures, while principally following a non-vaccination policy, provide for

emergency vaccination in cases the disease becomes extensive.

By Decision 91/666/EEC of 11 December 1991 the Council established the Community reserves of foot-and-mouth disease vaccines, and designated antigen banks to be situated at four different geographical sites.

Since the adoption of this decision two antigen banks designated for maintaining part of the Community reserve of antigen have relinquished their commitments to provide these services to the Community.

In future the need may arise to relocate, perhaps on short notice and in any case without undue delay, the antigen reserves to appropriate establishments within the Community.

The purpose of the present Commission proposal is to provide for the legal instruments to designate, as needs arise, additional premises for the storage of Community reserves of inactivated foot-and-mouth disease antigen by Commission Decision following Standing Veterinary Committee procedures.

#### **Gist of the opinion**

The Committee supports the Commission proposal.

### **9. CMO / FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCTS**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee** on the *Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Regulation (EC) No. 2201/96 on the common organisation of the markets in processed fruit and vegetable products*  
(COM(1999) 376 final - 99/0161 CNS)

(CES 942/99 - 99/0161 CNS)

Rapporteur-general: Christos FAKAS (Greece - Various Interests)

#### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

The proposal concerns the tomato sector and provides for an increase of the quota for Portugal. It puts into effect the conclusions of the Agriculture Council of 14 June 1999.

The annual quota for fresh tomatoes for each group of products is calculated on the basis of the average quantities produced in each Member State during the three marketing years preceding the marketing year for which the allocation is made (Art. 6 of Regulation (EC) No. 2201/96).

Because of the bad weather situation, production in 1997/1998 was very low in Portugal. This resulted in a decrease in the concentrates quota allocated to Portugal compared to the quota initially laid down by Regulation (EC) No. 2201/96. Therefore, for the two marketing years to come, 1999/2000 and 2000/2001, it is proposed that the overall quota of fresh tomatoes and the quantity for tomato concentrate be increased by an additional quantity.

#### **Gist of the opinion**

The Economic and Social Committee approves the Commission proposal.

### **10. AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES - AGENDA 2000 (Own-initiative Opinion)**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee** on the *Agri-environmental priorities for the multi-function agriculture of Agenda 2000*

(CES 952/99)

Rapporteur: Sergio COLOMBO (Italy - Workers)

#### **Reasons**

A serious policy for the environment and safeguarding the land can only be carried out by recognizing the central role of rural areas, which cover 80% of the EU's territory.

A consistent rural development initiative is the very foundation of the new "contract" between agriculture and civil society, which has been anticipated and defined by the ESC and is based on the multifunctionality of agriculture and its mission to respond to society's production, environmental and social needs.

Priority objectives here seem to be landscape protection, water conservation and management, the stabilization of hillsides, care of the undergrowth and guaranteeing that agricultural production respects the environment as much as possible.

In such an opinion the ESC could draw the Commission's attention to such matters and propose intervention methods and instruments.

### **Summary of opinion**

In this own-initiative opinion, the Committee welcomes current progress towards integrating environmental aspects into agriculture policy, as it has long argued for farming/environment compatibility, within a context of mutual understanding between farmers and the other sections of society, especially consumers.

The Committee also welcomes the Commission's initiatives, and in particular, the Communication on "Directions towards sustainable agriculture" (COM (1999) 22 final), the joint Eurostat, Agriculture DG and Environment DG report on "agriculture and environment", and the work in progress on agri-environmental indicators.

The opinion is built around three main themes:

- preserving the land for farming
- promoting high quality, speciality foods
- incentives needed to maintain land conservation work and boost production system efficiency

The Committee makes specific and practical proposals for agri-environmental initiatives which could help to forge a bond of solidarity between all sections of civil society in relation to agriculture.

The Committee believes it can play a major role in assessing the sustainability of the results of the CAP reform in terms of optimising the competitiveness of farms and production, particularly in the field of the new rural development pillar. In practical terms, the future of the sector must centre on steering through the current changes in market policy, with a view to achieving an integrated, multi-function and sustainable European model for farming.

## **11. EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL MODEL** *(Own-initiative Opinion)*

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
*on a policy to consolidate the European Agricultural Model*

(CES 953/99)

Rapporteur: Rudolf STRASSER (Austria - Various Interests)

### **Reasons**

Not only EU Agriculture Ministers but also EU Heads of State and Government unanimously endorse the need to defend the European agricultural model. As a corollary to their declaration of support, the politicians expect EU farmers to continue in future properly to fulfil the large number of tasks incumbent upon them. An appropriate political framework should be established in order to enable this expectation to be met.

### **Gist of the opinion**

The central aim of the opinion is the further development and broadening of the concept of the "European agricultural model". This concept has been supported several times in declarations of principle by the Council of agricultural ministers and also by the Heads of State or Government at the European Council in Luxembourg in December 1997.

The Committee defines a number of basic functions of this European agricultural model. These functions are economic, spatial, environmental and social.

First, it is pointed out that huge differences exist within European agriculture, especially in the structures of holdings.

At the same time European agriculture has to face ever more complex demands: The multi-functional role of agriculture goes far beyond food production and ranges from protection of the natural foundations of life and the preparation of an attractive man-made landscape to the provision of safe food. Consumers' expectations too regarding environmental and animal protection and the health aspects of food or leisure activities, to take just a few examples, are a lot greater.

On the other hand European agriculture has to face more and more competition on both domestic and world markets. The key issues here are, above all, eastern enlargement, the creation of free trade areas, customs concessions and, of course, further moves towards liberalisation at WTO talks. But processing industries, commerce and consumers

also expect competitive goods from European producers.

The Committee's concept of a European agricultural model contains a series of initiatives designed to bring together a series of what are currently highly contradictory objectives into a future-oriented strategy.

The key to this strategy is to make European products more competitive, and quality has a particularly important role to play here. There are proposals for improved consumer information (labelling and traceability, designations of origin, certificates of specific character), better framework conditions in the field of research and technology and internationally agreed quality, environment and animal-welfare standards.

But the Committee also feels that traditional instruments for managing agricultural markets (such as import or intervention regulations, export refunds) cannot be ruled out. It also expressly sup-

ports the principle of "linkage of direct payments" but calls for a lasting political guarantee and clear public justification for such payments.

Integrated rural development measures, the second pillar of the CAP, are of considerable importance. But there is criticism of the higher level of budget funding required in order to ensure the multi-functional nature of agriculture.

Another key focal point of rural development programmes must be the promotion of employment and the creation of additional opportunities for earning a living and supplementing income for farmers.

Finally, the Committee mentions the production of biomass as a further means of consolidating the European agricultural model. This can also be regarded as part of the multi-functional role of European agriculture, which can do much to protect the environment and promote employment.

**Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion**

*Arie Van De Graaf, Head of Division - ☎ (032-2) 546 9227*

## 12. OWN RESOURCES

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
on the *Proposal for a Council Decision on the system of the European Union's own resources*  
(COM(1999) 333 final - 99/0139 CNS)

(CES 937/99 - 99/0139 CNS)

Rapporteur: Vasco CAL (Portugal - Workers)

### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

The Commission proposal, which was issued in July 1999, is pursuant to the decisions taken at the Berlin European Council on 24 and 25 March 1999 regarding the financing of the European Union for the period 2000-2006.

The Council's main decisions regarding own resources were as follows:

- reduction of the maximum rate of call of the VAT resource from the current 1% to 0.75% in 2002 and 2003, and to 0.5% from 2004 onwards;
- increase in the percentage of "traditional own resources" retained by the Member States as collection costs (from 10% to 25%);
- technical adjustments to the correction of budgetary imbalances in favour of the United Kingdom (to take account of the results of the Berlin European Council decisions and the future costs of enlargement);
- change in the financing of the UK abatement to reduce the financing share of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden to 25% of the normal share;
- invitation to the Commission to review the operation of the own resources system by 1 January 2006. The review is to cover the effects of enlargement, the rebate granted to the UK and the rebate granted to the four Member States mentioned above in the financing of the UK re-

bate, and the question of creating new autonomous own resources for the EU.

#### **Gist of the opinion**

The Committee considered these issues in an own-initiative opinion of 24 March 1999 on *Financing the European Union*, which it drew up for the European Council of the same date.

As it is not yet possible realistically to determine the costs and timescales of enlargement, the opinion took the view that the whole issue of own resources, including the budgetary imbalances affecting some Member States, would have to be reviewed before 2006. The Committee therefore welcomes the European Council's request to the Commission to review the operation of the own resources system.

However, the basic issue raised in the earlier opinion is more far-reaching. Ad hoc positive measures are not enough to guarantee an "equitable, transparent, cost-effective and simple" own resources system. From 2005/2006 - the date of the first accessions - the new situation will require the introduction of a "*general regulating mechanism for establishing a framework which takes account of the future system of own resources. Such a mechanism would establish a direct link between national prosperity (expressed in terms of per capita GNP) and the budgetary balances of each Member State. The purpose should be to safeguard the overall level of own resources for enabling the European Union to maintain and extend its role.*"

The Committee considers that the report reviewing the operation of the own resources system and, in particular, the effects of enlargement on the financing of the budget (Article 9 of the proposed Council Decision), which the Commission has to submit by 1 January 2006, has to be preceded by a wide-ranging debate in all the institutions and in the Member States about the financial autonomy of the European Union and the availability of ample own resources to maintain and extend the role of the European Union. This wide-ranging debate will make it possible to obtain a broad consensus, which in turn will make it easier for the European Commission to present concrete proposals.

### **13. NINTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS (1997) (Own-initiative Opinion)**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Ninth annual report of the Structural Funds (1997)**  
(COM(1998) 562 final)

(CES 941/99)

Rapporteur: Vaso CAL (Portugal - Workers)

#### **Gist of the opinion**

While highlighting the usefulness of consulting it on the annual report, the Committee points out that it is difficult to gauge whether the Funds have been used effectively when the results have to be assessed against objectives which did not originally exist. The Committee also regrets that in many cases the social partners were not involved in the evaluation process, when they could have provided useful input to the mid-term review.

Human resource development was one of the topics which was subject to particular changes in the context of the review. Many programmes are designed on a horizontal basis and take a "top-down" approach, so they are not really tailored to local priorities. The territorial employment pacts were a positive step which sought to use a "bottom-up" approach, but their effects have been limited, partly because insufficient additional resources were allocated to them.

The Committee points out that in many cases, projects submitted by the social partners do not receive sufficient support, and are passed over for others which fizzle out when Community support ceases.

The Committee proposes that the next annual report (1999) should take as its general topic the participation of the socio-economic partners. During the preparatory stage for the next programming period, information should be gathered and examples of involvement of the socio-economic partners should be noted; mention should also be made of projects run by the social partners at local, regional, national or Community level.

As regards the lessons which the annual report provides for the next programming period, the Committee stresses the importance of the current Objective 4 (anticipation of industrial change), and the need to retain this perspective. The annual report says little about Objectives 3 and 4, and the experience gained by the social partners and the public authorities should be better publicised so that it can be used in the next programming period. In particular, measures to cushion the impact of the changes brought about by the information society and by the knowledge-based society in general are important not only for young people, but also for existing workers.

The Committee considers that efforts to pool the operation of the various funds should be stepped up in the next programming period. There should be more of a "bottom-up" approach, and the funds should be coordinated when coordination is most necessary (i.e. in the field) rather than when it is easiest (i.e. in the documents). Coordination of the European Social Fund with the other funds is particularly important because, at the end of the twentieth century, human skills are the key to the challenges of tomorrow's society.

#### **14. THE MACROECONOMIC DIMENSION OF EMPLOYMENT POLICY** (*Additional Opinion*)

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
*on The macroeconomic dimension of employment policy*

(CES 944/99)

Rapporteur: Vasco CAL (Portugal - Workers)

##### **Gist of the Commission document**

The Economic and Social Committee notes with satisfaction that the recommendation it made in its last opinion on the preparation of the *Broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and of the Community* is to be acted on this autumn, namely the launching of a macroeconomic dialogue involving the Council, the Commission, the European Central Bank and the social partners at European level, to improve coordination between wage trends, fiscal policy and monetary policy, in order to encourage growth and job creation. The Committee is prepared to assist

the main players in this macroeconomic dialogue by providing back-up, in accordance with the institutional role assigned to it by the Treaties.

This macroeconomic dialogue will pave the way for an approach integrating all policies affecting employment.

The Committee's concerns and observations on Community economic growth (which is not yet strong enough) and employment (which is still too high overall) remain unchanged.

The Committee is increasingly convinced that the stability and growth policy (reducing budget deficits, aiming for price stability and raising real salaries in line with productivity, while providing a sufficiently high return on investment to secure higher growth) is the only viable one for the Community.

The Committee is convinced that the European Union can draw on the economic, technological and skills-related resources necessary to equip it to combat external threats.

The Committee feels that the European Union must have a medium-term growth target of at least 3.5% in order to create enough jobs to reduce the current level of unemployment to 3 or 4%, over the next 10 years or so, and to raise the employment level to around 70%, as proposed by the Commission in the autumn of 1997 in its first draft *employment policy guidelines*.

Medium-term growth must be underpinned by a sustained increase in real investment (by about 7% per annum so as to move from the current 19% to 22-23% of GDP) in order to generate the jobs needed and to prevent the emergence of inflationary pressures as a result of a lack of productive capacity.

In a number of Member States, public investment has suffered as a result of those countries' efforts to meet the convergence criteria for entry to the third stage of EMU. The Committee would therefore urge that public spending be reorganised in order to provide more incentives for investment.

The recovery, still hesitant, should be encouraged by measures to stimulate investment and boost private consumer confidence.

In view of the challenges the information and learning society poses for Europe, companies' efforts to defend their competitive edge on increasingly globalised markets should be backed by more vigorous investment policies, especially in technology and skills.

The Committee would stress that the main driving force behind job creation is growth. The employment policy measures advocated in Luxembourg, as supplemented by the structural programme (services and capital markets) launched in Cardiff, should accompany the appropriate macroeconomic policy mix, embracing budgetary, monetary and incomes policy, in order to create a climate of confidence to stimulate consumption and investment and thus to boost employment in a durable way.

The new waves of economic concentration (cooperation, mergers and joint-ventures between major companies) may be necessary to sharpen the competitive edge of our industrial infrastructure.

The Committee calls for the continuation of the stability and growth policy for employment. The main players in the October macroeconomic dialogue, namely the governments and the Commission (budget and structural policies), the European Central Bank (monetary policy) and the social partners (wage and labour market policy), should continue to coordinate their efforts to build up consumer and investor confidence, and so stimulate demand, which remains the main locomotive for growth and job creation.

#### 15. URBAN DEVELOPMENT (*Own-initiative Opinion*)

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on *Sustainable urban development in the European Union: a framework for action***

(CES 951/99)

Rapporteur: Gianni VINAY (Italy - Employers)

##### **Gist of the opinion**

While welcoming the Commission document, the Committee would point to the restriction imposed by the fact that the communication is based on current aspects and issues, while the urban situa-

tion is subject to significant, sometimes radical, change.

The Committee supports the proposals made and would stress the need to focus special attention on questions such as immigration and the renovation of run-down urban areas. Among the actions proposed, greater emphasis should also be placed on participation and partnership, and further study of urban policy issues in the candidate countries should be undertaken. Lastly, the potential which URBAN has succeeded in developing must not be weakened, either operationally or financially.

In the Committee's view, the Communication from the Commission brings together a number of hopes, but also marks the start of a new process requiring resources (including uniform, inter-comparable indicators, analytical information on aspects that can reduce the effectiveness of the action engendered, taxation and advanced public transport policies) and regular checks on, for example, the impact of Community policies on urban life.

#### 16. IMPACT OF EMU / COHESION (*Own-initiative Opinion*)

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *Impact of implementing EMU on economic and social cohesion***

(CES 954/99)

Rapporteur: Thierry DOCK (Belgium - Workers)

##### **Gist of the opinion**

The arrival of the euro is a milestone in the European venture. Europe now has a valuable tool at its disposal. It is crucial that the dynamic generated by the single currency project be maintained, as the euro is not an end in itself. It must serve as a lever for further progress towards a stronger Europe, capable of responding to its citizens' fundamental aspirations.

Just a few months after the launch of the third phase of EMU, economic and social cohesion between the regions of the EU is still largely incomplete. While some progress has been made between rich and poor regions as far as wealth-creation is concerned, little success has been achieved on the employment front.

The Committee places much faith in the European Employment Pact, which was instigated by the German presidency. EMU will work for growth and employment if there is real coordination of the Luxembourg strategy (labour market policy measures), the Cardiff strategy (reform of the market in goods, services and capital) and the Cologne strategy (macroeconomic measures). Across-the-board participation - involving the social partners in particular - is vital to the success of this process.

The establishment of Economic and Monetary Union involves a number of upheavals, some of which have yet to surface. Monetary union offers new potential: increased competition, security for foreign investment, lower transaction costs and greater internal stability.

It also forces the participating countries to be more disciplined. This is particularly true of budget policy. The social partners have the onerous task of coordinating wage bargaining in such a way as to bolster demand without any risk of causing the economy to overheat and feeding inflation.

The Committee feels that one of the threats to cohesion in EMU is the appearance of an asymmetric shock in some regions of the EU. Both the individual Member States and the European institutions should prepare to deal with such a risk. The ways and means exist. The Committee insists that no time be wasted in preparing instruments to enable the EU to react as soon as such a shock occurs.

**Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship**  
Wolfgang Jungk, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9623

**17. PROTECTION OF WORKERS FROM RISKS RELATED TO CARCINOGENS AT WORK**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
on the *Proposal for a Council Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens at work (Sixth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16 (1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)*  
(COM(1999) 152 final - 99/0085 SYN)

(CES 938/99 - 99/0085 SYN)

Rapporteur: Thomas ETTY (Netherlands - Workers)

**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 the ordinary citizen, thus giving him new opportunities and the chance to make use of the specific rights it gives him.

This aim cannot be achieved so long as numerous provisions that have been amended several times, often quite substantially, remain scattered, so that they must be sought partly in the original instru-

ment and partly in later amending ones. Considerable research work, comparing many different instruments, is thus needed to identify the current rules.

For this reason a consolidation of rules that have frequently been amended is also essential if Community law is to be clear and transparent.

The new directive will supersede the various directives 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 fully agrees with the present proposal.

It agrees in general terms with the Commission that it is important to simplify and clarify Community law, without affecting the level of protection.

It notes that the purpose of the consolidation operation will not involve changes of substance to the present legislation.

It thinks that codification efforts should start where the need for creating transparency is most urgent.

In terms of the more general aspects of the codification process as regards occupational safety and health legislation:

- provisions most favourable to safety and health at work must apply;
- a discussion should be triggered in the relevant EU services and bodies whether and which exemptions are still justified;
- codification is important with regard to candidate Member States of the EU;
- all relevant resources of DG V should be kept at a level enabling them to fulfill their tasks adequately;
- DG V could explore the possibility of supplementary instruments and measures to promote better implementation of existing legislation.

## 18. INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote the integration of refugees**  
(COM(1998) 731 final - 98/0356 CNS)

(CES 939/99 - 98/0356 CNS)

Rapporteur: Soscha zu EULENBURG (Germany - Various Interests)

### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

The purpose of the proposed community action programme is to provide support for refugees to integrate into the host society. The programme is designed to supplement action taken by and within the Member States and to provide a transition between the pilot actions carried out in 1997 and 1998 and measures to promote social inclusion which are to be developed under Article 137 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. This is one of two complementary proposals, the other one relating to reception and voluntary repatriation of refugees.

The action programme will contribute to:

- the development of innovative, multi-dimensional integration measures;
- the creation and development of transnational cooperation on the issue;
- information, coordination, assessment and exchange of good practice and experience at European Union level;
- the stimulation of experiment and the identification of the best innovatory models of action in terms of contents and organisation;
- the analysis of the situation of refugees in the Member States.

The programme will strengthen an approach based on the principles of partnership, participation, transferability, and innovation. These principles will be translated into actions which respond to the various needs and priorities in the area of refugee integration.

An advisory committee of representatives of the Member States will be installed. It will be consulted on any important question relating to the implementation of the programme. Regular monitoring of the programme will be carried out by the Commission and an assessment report based on an external evaluation of the actions undertaken will be presented after the completion of the programme.

### **Gist of the opinion**

The Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote the integration of refugees broadly earns our support. It is particularly important to work towards a speedy adoption of the decision so that there are no breaks in assistance and to ensure that the relevant projects are pursued.

Against the background of this favourable opinion, the ESC would, however, make a few proposals for changes to the current document. For example, we take the view that refugee organisations and self-help groups active in project development and implementation should participate in the action programme. Equal opportunities must be promoted for applications from smaller organisations through involvement in networks.

As the integration of refugees is in many Member States achieved via programmes and initiatives of

non-governmental organisations, these should where possible be explicitly mentioned. Refugee self-help organisations should also be mentioned as relevant cooperation partners. The membership of the proposed advisory committee should ensure the involvement of representatives of NGOs and/or the social partners.

## 19. MATRIMONIAL MATTERS AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**  
on the *Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and in matters of parental responsibility for joint children* (COM(1999) 220 final - 99/0110 CNS)

(CES 940/99 - 99/0110 CNS)

Rapporteur: Paolo BRAGHIN (Italy - Employers)

### Gist of the Commission proposal

By Article 2 of the Treaty the Member States set themselves the objective of maintaining and developing the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice. The sound operation of the internal market creates a need to recognise and enforce judgments in matrimonial matters and in matters of parental responsibility, i.a. through measures relating to judicial cooperation in civil matters.

The purpose of the proposal is to uniformise the rules of private international law in the Member States relating to jurisdiction and to improve the recognition and enforcement of judgments in relation to dissolution of the marriage link. It replaces the so called Brussels II Convention which was adopted by the Council on 28 May 1998, but which had still not been ratified when the Amsterdam Treaty entered into force.

The Commission has incorporated the substance of the Convention in the proposal for a Regulation, but has omitted such provisions which would be incompatible with the nature of the proposed instrument and the new framework for judicial cooperation in civil matters post-Amsterdam.

The regulation seeks to:

- introduce uniform modern standards for jurisdiction on annulment, divorce and separation and to facilitate the rapid and automatic recognition among Member States of judgments on such matters given in the Member States;
- lay down rules of jurisdiction concerning parental responsibility over the children of both spouses on the occasion of such proceedings and therefore simplifying the formalities governing the rapid and automatic recognition and enforcement of the relevant judgments.

The new Title IV of the EC Treaty, which applies to matters covered by this proposal, is applicable in the United Kingdom and Ireland only if they exercise their "opt in" right provided by a Protocol annexed to the Treaties. In March this year the two countries announced their intention of being fully associated with Community activities in this context. Title IV is likewise not applicable in Denmark, but the country may waive its opt-out at any time. As yet it is uncertain whether Denmark will use this possibility.

The instrument is to be adopted by the procedure of Article 67 of the Treaty, which provides that, during a transitional period of five years, the Council is to act unanimously on a proposal from the Commission (or on the initiative of a Member State) and after consulting the European Parliament.

### Gist of the opinion

The act incorporating the convention adopted by the Council on 28 May 1998 builds on proposals and projects launched in 1994. Progress made by the European Union in the meantime ought to have warranted more ambitious proposals, both as regards the scope of application and a content better suited to achieving genuine harmonisation of the legal framework, at least as far as procedure is concerned.

To ensure that the European public is provided with a consistent degree of freedom, security and justice (Article 2 of the Treaty), enforcement procedures should be harmonised as soon as possible. The need to harmonise the law, with a view to speeding up legal proceedings, should be a key priority in European Union action.

The principle of protecting the weaker party should be heavily underlined, and it is thus hoped that the Regulation's provisions on parental responsibility will be extended to include children of previous marriages and adopted children. Since protecting the legal rights of children is the top priority, the Committee calls for common parameters to be defined for all the Member States with regard to the concept of parental authority and responsibility.

Concerning the different interpretation given in the Member States of the term "courts" the Committee would prefer uniformity for the legal bodies authorised and designed to deal with these sensitive matters, to ensure they are appropriately specialised and professional. In view of the sensitivity of the subject matter, the Committee also hopes a definite, regulatory time-frame for all stages of the proceedings will be written into the Regulation wherever possible, and that the responsible bodies will be made accountable.

## **20. EMPLOYMENT POLICY GUIDELINES 2000**

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the *proposal for guidelines for Member States' employment policies 2000***  
(COM(1999) 441 final)

(CES 943/99)

Rapporteur: Colin LUSTENHOUWER (Netherlands - Various Interests)

### **Gist of the Commission proposal**

The European Commission has adopted a Communication presenting its proposals for the Guidelines for Member States' employment policies in 2000. The present four-pillar structure of the employment guidelines - employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities - is retained as it has proved to be a good basis for the integrated, medium-term approach which is represented by the European Employment Strategy. The value of this approach has also been recently acknowledged outside the European Union (EU), namely in the G7 context.

For the sake of consistency and continuity of efforts and to take account of Member States' views,

changes to the employment guidelines 2000 were kept to a minimum. Therefore, instead of proposing new guidelines, the Commission proposes a limited number of adjustments in the following areas:

- making the preventive approach more concrete
- promoting access to the Internet and the acquisition of skills in information technologies at school
- stressing the need for social partners' involvement in modernising work organisation
- emphasising the role of public employment services in job creation at local level
- stressing the need to support active ageing and re-integration into the labour market.

The guidelines for 2000 draw on the draft joint employment report also adopted by the Commission, and in particular on its conclusions regarding the assessment and analysis of policies undertaken by the Member States in their national action plans. They make continuity an essential condition for ensuring that the Member States and social partners deliver fully on their commitment to the Luxembourg process and that further progress is made in exploiting the growth potential of the EU economy, to improve the employment rate and to curb unemployment.

### **Gist of the opinion**

The Committee is pleased that it can now state its views on this issue via a formal referral from the Council, as is now required following the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty. The Committee considers this as key recognition of its role in formulating a European employment policy.

The Committee recognises that these draft guidelines must, for the first time, be considered against the backdrop of the European employment pact adopted by the Cologne European Council. This pact directly links employment policy (Luxembourg) with the coordination of economic policy (Cologne process) and the strategy designed to boost capacity for innovation and to enhance the markets in goods, services and capital (Cardiff process).

In adopting this overall approach - the ultimate aim of which is a lasting cut in unemployment in the EU - the Council had broadly met the Committee's wishes in this field. In point of fact, the

Committee Opinion on the implementation of the employment policy guidelines for 1999 highlighted the need for a comprehensive, overall strategy of this kind. The Committee felt - and still feels - that such an overall approach must forge links between macroeconomic policy and other policy areas with an impact on employment.

Indeed, a pro-active labour market policy is often possible only as part of an adapted tax and social security system. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate convergence among the Member States in these key areas still makes it difficult for any European labour market policy to have maximum impact.

If we fail to increase labour force participation, the social and economic unacceptability of unemployment today could well undermine the very foundations of society in the future. In addition, the emphasis which the Commission guidelines (particularly guideline 4) currently put on the need to keep older people in the labour market for as long as possible would seem in the short term to be at odds with efforts to get more long-term unemployed young people into work. In policy terms, a balance will have to be struck which does not trigger an artificial conflict between younger and older people. A detailed discussion is thus needed on all issues surrounding work and working time in the course of a person's professional career (including questions of demotion, voluntary part-time retirement and sponsorship and mentoring arrangements) in conjunction with a more modern approach to work organisation.

The Committee would reiterate the importance it attaches to combating and preventing social exclusion; this is also reflected in guideline 9. The Committee has the strong impression that, in the Member States, specific action to translate this aspect of the guidelines into practice has remained very limited.

One of the key features of these draft guidelines is the emphasis on innovation. The Committee stresses that innovation must not be understood only in the strictly technical sense of the word. Innovation must also come into play in the context of social processes, wherever labour markets are

not operating as well as they should. This may mean a new division of responsibilities between the competent public authorities and the social partners, designed to involve the latter more closely in all measures taken, for instance, to combat unemployment. At local level in particular, "best practices" may be used to ensure the success of an innovative, modern, pro-active labour market policy.

The Committee feels that, across all pillars of employment policy, Member States should take every opportunity to develop the service sector in promising, knowledge-intensive markets. Furthermore, the service sector is marked by a great diversity of enterprises, including many that are extremely labour-intensive. Such enterprises are generally small and are found above all in the consumer sector (including retail and consumer craft industries). From an employment angle, therefore, it is essential to retain these companies and promote their continued prospects.

The Committee considers that for too long, inadequate attention has been paid to involving local players (particularly local-level social partners). The guidelines undoubtedly lean towards a certain top-down approach.

As the representative of civil society organisations and associations, the Committee speaks for many players within our society. As in the case in point, however, policy implementation takes place at local level. This is indeed where it has to happen - close to the people and working together with them. This is the only way to highlight the process of European integration and cooperation and to allow people to learn from each other's experiences. Only then can the top-down approach be supplemented by input from the bottom up which combines requirements, demands and also successes to make for better, more effective policy adjustments in the future.

The Committee would therefore issue a broad appeal to the Commission, the Member States, local authorities and the social partners to make the package of employment policy guidelines a reality at local level. The Committee provides a platform for exchanging local experiences of this kind.

**Section for External Relations, Trade and Development Policy**

Georgina Willems, Head of Division - ☎ (32-2) 546 9471

**21. THE EU'S NORTHERN DIMENSION INCLUDING RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA** (*Own-initiative Opinion*)

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the EU's Northern Dimension including relations with Russia**

(CES 945/99)

Rapporteur: Filip HAMRO-DROTZ (Finland - Employers)

**Reasons for drawing-up an Own-initiative Opinion on the Nordic Dimension including relations with Russia**

The Economic and Social Committee should contribute actively to the creation of a consistent and comprehensive EU policy towards Russia and the Baltic States: the European Union's "Northern Dimension" underlines the importance of reinforcing cooperation among Russia and the Baltic Sea region and the European Union.

The European Commission presented its interim report on a Northern Dimension for the policies of the EU at the Vienna Summit in December. The report was produced at the request of the last two European Councils - Luxembourg and Cardiff. The report seeks to keep the EU's attention turned to issues facing Northern Europe, and to its human and natural resources. Northern Dimension takes in the EU Member States of Sweden and Finland, the EEA members Norway and Iceland, the EU candidates of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and Russia - with which the Northern region is also the Union's only direct geographical link.

On the *Northern Dimension*, the European Council invited the Council to identify guidelines for actions in the relevant fields, and welcomed the Finnish initiative to arrange a conference on the topic during the second half of 1999.

As regards EU policy towards *Russia*, the Vienna European Council welcomed the efforts already made to refocus the Union's assistance to Russia,

and asked the Council to continue its work on a comprehensive EU policy by determining how EU priorities should be taken forward, and in what time-scale. Also the German EU Presidency has stated that Russia is one of its main priorities in the field of external policy.

For these reasons, it is important to give an own-initiative on the development of a concept on the Northern Dimension and the European Union's relations towards Russia and the Baltic States. Supporting the professional organizations in Russia to create a functioning civil society is a challenging task in which the Committee should contribute through its expertise and experience.

The role of the socio-economic organizations should be strengthened throughout the Baltic States and Russia. The Opinion should, among other things, shed light on:

- how to bolster the development of free, democratic and representative employer/employee organizations in the relevant candidate countries;
- how effective is social dialogue in the different countries bordering the Baltic Sea;
- to what extent do the social and economic partners take part in the dialogue with the political establishment.

**Gist of the opinion**

The significance of northern Europe for the European Union has grown since the enlargement of the EU in 1995. Over the last few years the development of relations between the EU and the Russian Federation has also become more important. The Economic and Social Committee is presenting this opinion because both the EU's northern dimension and its relations with Russia are among the EU's priorities and are being actively developed.

Appendix 1 of the opinion contains an overview of the situation concerning the EU's northern dimension, the development of the EU's relations with Russia, as well as other related activities. In the

course of work on its opinion, the Economic and Social Committee held a meeting in Moscow with representatives of Russian socio-economic organisations. The Committee has also carried out a survey in writing to obtain the views of organisations in Russia and the countries which have applied for EU membership. Appendix 2 contains a summary of their views and responses.

The opinion consists of six objectives, six recommendations and six proposals.

### **Proposals**

On the basis of the conclusions of the Cologne Summit, the EU should draw up an action plan for northern Europe on the basis of the northern dimension. The action plan should take account of the recommendations presented in this opinion. Both short- and long-term measures should be devised and agreement should be reached as soon as possible, preferably as early as the presidency conclusions of the Helsinki Summit of the European Council in December 1999.

The action plan must include an effective follow-up mechanism, in which implementation and responsibility are carefully defined. Administrative arrangements are necessary: the EU's relevant administrative units should coordinate their work and focus on the priorities of the action plan.

Feasibility studies need to be undertaken and care taken to ensure that investment is targeted at the main priorities.

The resources of the EU's support programmes (Tacis, Phare, Interreg, etc.) should be concentrated on implementing this action plan.

The EU should continue to develop its action plan on northern Europe through bilateral links with the association and EEA countries in the region as well as with Russia.

Efforts should be made to coordinate the work and objectives of the EU and other organisations providing support for northern Europe and Russia.

Within the context of the action programme, it must be ensured that civil society organisations can participate in development work, including the following:

- The involvement of socio-economic organisations in implementing the action plan on northern Europe through the consultation mechanisms - such as the consultative group - established for this purpose.
- Regular cooperation between EU and Russian socio-economic organisations should be developed as part of the implementation of the PCA agreement. Consideration should also be given here to the possibility of setting up an advisory panel, of which the ESC would be a member.
- The Europe Agreement articles on the establishment of a consultative committee for these organisations must be implemented without delay in those association countries which have not yet done so.
- Support should be given to developing multi-lateral cooperation between socio-economic organisations in the countries of the region as well as forging closer links between these organisations in Russia and the associated countries and the various relevant European cooperation bodies.

## **22. WTO MILLENNIUM ROUND** (*Own-initiative Opinion*)

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee** on "*Transparency and the participation of organised civil society in the WTO Millennium Round*"

(CES 946/99)

Rapporteur: Jan Jacob VAN DIJK (Netherlands - Workers)

### **Case for drawing up an own-initiative opinion on transparency and the participation of organised civil society in the WTO Millennium Round**

The preparation of the Millennium Round is now well under way. On 8 July 1999 the European Commission adopted a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on "The EU Approach to the WTO Millennium Round" (COM(1999) 331 final) in preparation for the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle on 30 November - 3 December 1999.

The Commission is favouring a global and ambitious trade agenda for this next round encompassing not only the mandated negotiations on agriculture and services but also setting up new rules in new areas of investment, competition, trade facilitation and environment.

In addition, the Council has also stressed the importance of transparency and dialogue with civil society. The Commission has already made detailed proposals in the WTO for greater transparency measures including making documents publicly available and making dispute settlement procedures more accessible to civil society. In addition to the Treaty obligations regarding the respective roles of the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, the Commission has organised several issue-oriented seminars with NGOs during 1999.

The European Parliament has organised also a series of hearings on the Millennium Round. As a result, the Parliament has made specific proposals in view of the preparation for the Millennium Round and for a thorough institutional reform of the common commercial policy at the next inter-governmental conference. The EP has demanded that Commission consultation of civil society be done on a regular basis and according to fixed procedures. The same information should be given to enterprises, unions, NGOs and citizens' organisations. The EP has also underlined that it was necessary to give proper attention to the opinions of the ESC, the social partners and the NGOs.

In this context there is a unique opportunity to position the Committee as a bridge between the European institutions and the European organised civil society in the field of trade policy and more specifically in the process of the WTO Millennium Round. The Committee could make some useful recommendations both on ways and means to increase transparency at the WTO level and on the organisation of the consultation of the organised civil society in trade policy and on the role the Committee could play in that matter. In addition, some thought could be given to the institutional reform as far as trade policy is concerned.

#### **Gist of the own initiative opinion**

The ESC regards the involvement of socio-economic organisations in WTO activities as very important. Any agreements reached can have far-reaching effects for certain sectors (e.g. the serv-

ices sector), for the continuation of the CAP, Community development policy (ACP), contacts with non-Community countries and compliance with international standards (labour, animal welfare and environment standards). They also affect employment, consumer interests and incomes.

The ESC intends in this opinion to indicate how the involvement of socio-economic organisations in the WTO negotiations can best be achieved. A distinction is made between different levels. Chapter two deals with the world level. How should the WTO secretariat ensure that socio-economic organisations are sufficiently informed and consulted? Chapter 3 deals with the national level. Decision-making within the WTO must be on the basis of consensus. Therefore it is important for economic and social interest groups and NGOs that their lobbying of national governments should be well organised. The EU, which has exclusive competence in relation to international trade, is in a special situation. An important task has, therefore, been assigned to the European level. Chapter 4 deals with this in more detail.

In order to ensure good relations between the WTO and the socio-economic organisations it is important for mutual trust to develop. To that end there should be a permanent flow of information between the two sides. In addition, this can contribute to a dialogue between the various socio-economic organisations. In order to promote this ongoing liaison, the WTO could consider setting up a permanent platform for socio-economic organisations. This should meet regularly, at least annually, and could provide the secretariat with advice on the various subjects on the (forthcoming) negotiating agenda and perhaps make practical recommendations with regard to implementation.

Decisions in the WTO are taken by the government representatives. There has to be a high degree of consensus on these decisions. It can therefore be assumed that an effective way for socio-economic organisations to set up a lobby is to approach the governments of the participating countries.

National socio-economic organisations must therefore direct their lobbying mainly towards national governments. Governments must give these organisations sufficient opportunity to express their opinions. Like the WTO they can set up a platform to include various socio-economic organisations. Their most important task could then be to

give the governments advice on the various subjects on the agenda of the WTO. It is important for governments to inform and consult socio-economic organisations in good time.

A special role is set aside for the Economic and Social Committee. It is the European-level representative of economic and social interest groups within the EU. It follows that the European Commission will involve the ESC and consult it on WTO matters, although the Treaty does not require it to do this. The Commission is, however, required to consult the ESC on international meetings concerning the services sector.

It is very important that the ESC monitor the negotiations on further trade liberalisation. As stated in point 1.4, agreements on international trade

have consequences for employment, incomes and consumer interests.

For this reason the ESC will set up a permanent study group which will monitor the negotiations and comment from time to time. It will also hold hearings at appropriate times, at which major European organisations will be invited to present their views on developments in international trade and the WTO. The ESC's opinions will take account of these hearings.

In order to be in a position to monitor the negotiations closely, the ESC wishes to be included in the EU delegation. Like the European Parliament, the ESC should be permanently represented on this delegation.

## II. FUTURE WORK

### *FOR INFORMATION*

- Recognition and enforcement of judgements in civil and commercial matters (INT-JAN)  
COM(1999) 348 final - 99/0154 CNS
- National emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants (NAT-DEC)  
COM(1999) 125 final - 99/0067 COD - 99/0068 COD
- Food additives other than colours and sweeteners (NAT-DEC)  
COM(1999) 329 final - 99/0158 COD
- Protection of the Community's forests against atmospheric pollution (NAT-DEC)  
COM(1999) 379 final - 99/0159 COD - 99/0160 COD
- Specific measures in respect of certain grain legumes (NAT-DEC)  
COM(1999) 428 final - 99/0182 CNS
- Minimum Community measures for the control of certain fish diseases (NAT-DEC)  
COM(1999) 437 final - 99/0191 CNS
- Prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering (ECO-JAN)  
COM(1999) 352 final - 99/0152 COD

### *FOR DECISION*

- Veterinary medicinal products (codified version) (NAT-DEC/JAN)  
COM(1999) 213 final - 99/0180 COD

### *IN ANTICIPATION*

- Health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine  
COM(1999) 456 final (NAT-DEC/JAN)
- LEADER Community Initiative (draft Communication) (NAT-DEC/JAN)  
COM(1999) 475 final

- System for the identification and registration of bovine animals/labelling of beef and beef products  
COM(1999) 487 final (NAT-FEB)
- URBAN Community Initiative (draft Communication) (ECO-DEC/JAN)  
COM(1999) 477 final
- INTERREG Community Initiative (draft Communication) (ECO-DEC/JAN)  
COM(1999) 479 final
- Cohesion Fund - Annual Report (1998) (ECO - To be decided)  
COM(1999) 483 final
- Principles of recording tax and social security contributions (ECO-JAN)  
COM(1999) 488 final
- EQUAL Community Initiative (draft Communication) (SOC-DEC/JAN)  
COM(1999) 476 final
- European Year of Languages 2001 (SOC-DEC)  
COM(1999) 485 final
- Protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents (SOC-JAN)  
COM(1999) 432 final - 99/0188 COD

#### ***OWN-INITIATIVE OPINIONS***

- Estonia (REX - 1<sup>st</sup> half 2000)
- Use of public and private transport in the urban and peri-urban environment (TEN-FEB/MAR)
- 2002: The CFP and the situation of fisheries in the EU (1<sup>st</sup> priority) (NAT-MAR/APR)
- Renewable resources: a contribution by rural areas to an active protection of the climate and to sustainable development (NAT- to be decided)
- Definition of a regulatory framework for using seasonal farm workers from third countries (NAT-to be decided)
- The role of rural women in the sustainable development of EU agriculture (NAT-to be decided)

#### ***ADDITIONAL OPINION***

- Vertical agreements (INT-DEC)

#### ***OTHER WORK***

- Report on the economic situation in Portugal (ECO-1<sup>st</sup> half 2000)

### **III. PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE**

#### **Activities of the ESC presidency**

On 1 October, Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli, ESC president, took part in a conference organized by the Italian region of Tuscany. She made a statement on the subject of the European model for society in external relations.

On 6 October, Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli met Commissioner Poul Nielsen. They discussed the consultative EU/ACP Joint Assembly. On 18 October, meanwhile, the ESC president held talks with Mrs Christa Randzio-Plath, chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, on the subject of future cooperation and joint hearings. Two days later Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli met Mrs Caroline Jackson, chairman of the EP Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy.

The ESC president also made the opening speech at the first Convention of Civil Society organized at European level, held at the Committee building on 15 and 16 October. "Society has changed since 1957," she told the participants. "New types of organization have come into being, such as socially-oriented non-governmental organizations," continued Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli. She argued that the ESC must now listen to what they had to say, if it wished to continue reflecting a true image of organized civil society. (For more on this event, see **Other News**, below.)

### **Activities of sections and members**

Mr Sklavounos was invited by Rädde Barnen/Swedish Save the Children to take part in a seminar held in Romania from 26-29 September. The subject of "child-friendly cities" was on the agenda.

On 27-29 September, Mr Piette, Committee vice-president, represented the ESC at a conference in Bilbao on Safety and Health and Employability, organized by the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work.

On 6-7 October, Ms Wahrolin participated in a conference on the subject of how older people and the disabled could live independently. The event was organized by the Finnish presidency of the EU and was held in Helsinki.

### **Other News**

#### *– First Convention of Civil Society organized at European level, 15-16 October*

This event brought together some 300 participants, representing the full range of economic and social categories: employers, workers, farmers, SMEs, the liberal professions, consumer and environmental protection organizations, family associations, socially-oriented NGOs, and minority and charitable organisations. The Convention was also attended by numerous representatives of the European institutions, national economic and social councils, and socio-economic organizations from countries and regions outside the EU, in particular the applicant countries.

The Convention set out to address two questions: (a) how to strengthen the role and contribution of civil society organizations in the construction of Europe; and (b) the role of the European ESC in this setting.

A clearer and more detailed view of what "civil society" really means emerged from the debates. The conclusions of the two days of discussions included the view that in order to strengthen cooperation between civil society and the EU institutions, the ESC could - in close liaison with the European Commission - act as a catalyst for a civil dialogue, supplementing the social dialogue.

Discussions also dealt with such matters as citizens' rights and ways in which civil society organizations could contribute directly and indirectly to improving competitiveness and increasing growth.

In his introductory address to the Convention, **Jacques Delors** welcomed the ESC's initiative, maintaining that the golden rule to achieve the goal of bringing the EU closer to its citizens was to "*listen, listen listen to what society says, interpret what it has said clearly and then [...] inform, inform, inform*". The ESC, as a sort of interactive institution, was well-placed to play this role.

**Mrs Loyola de Palacio**, vice-president of the Commission, voiced similar sentiments. She shared the initiative's aims which she felt demonstrated the Committee's willingness to respond to the demands of civil society and to be of even greater service to it. This was clearly shown by the openness the Committee had always displayed towards the applicant countries, by helping to set up joint consultative committees. These encouraged the creation and growth of associations, which were the basic building blocks of civil society, and also fostered dialogue and cooperation between the economic and social interest groups of the applicant countries.

She would speak up within the European Commission in support of the Committee playing a more significant role as a forum for dialogue with civil society. It would then be up to the ESC to decide on how to communicate the aspirations and needs of civil society organizations to the other European institutions.

Lastly, **Mrs Sinikka Mönkäre**, Finnish Minister for Labour - speaking on behalf of the Presidency-in-office of the Council of the European Union - expressed her confidence that the Committee would make a valuable contribution to the preparation of a Charter of fundamental rights. The process had been launched in Cologne, and had recently been confirmed in Tampere. It should ensure a Europe founded on political, social and participative democracy. The participation of the ESC was the ideal means of bringing the EU institutions closer to citizens.

#### **IV. RESIGNATION**

The ESC president announced the following resignations:

- **Mr Philip Noordwal** (Group I - NL), as from the year 2000. Mr Noordwal had been an ESC member since 17 September 1974. He was ESC vice-president between 1984 and 1986 and Group I president between 1986 and 1994.
- **Mrs Jeanette van der Hooft** (Group II - NL). She had been a Committee member since 27 April 1998.

#### **V. INFORMATION VISITS**

A total of 39 groups visited the ESC during the period between the September and October plenaries. Germany was the Member State which provided the largest number of visitors.

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**European Economic and Social Committee**

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