External Relations
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EU'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS

In recent years, the European Union has established formal relations with the majority of the world's countries and regions. At the same time, international relations have opened up to new actors, primarily from civil society, and the international agreements signed by the EU include arrangements on an almost systematic basis aiming to establish dialogue at civil society level. In its capacity as institutional representative of European organised civil society, the European Economic and Social Committee's role is therefore evolving. The protocol signed with the European Commission in 2005 takes this situation into account by assigning the EESC the task of supporting the EU's external activities by conducting a dialogue with the civil society organisations of the non-EU countries and geographical groupings with which the EU has formal relations.
Presentation of the Section for External Relations

The Section for External Relations comprises 130 members. It is led by a president, three vice-presidents and a 12-member bureau.

The principal areas of activity of the Section for External Relations include monitoring relations between the European Union and the countries and regions with which the EU has formal relations, and developing relations with civil society in these countries and regions. The Section is also active on trade and development issues.

The bulk of the Section’s work involves own-initiative opinions, but increasingly, exploratory opinions are drafted at the request of the European Union institutions. During the drafting process, the Section works closely with the European Union institutions, representatives of European civil society organisations which are not represented within the Section and representatives of civil society in third countries.

At the request of political authorities or on the basis of international treaties, close relations have been established with the economic and social partners and other civil society organisations of third countries. Eleven delegations have been set up within the Section to carry out this task. To this end, efforts are also made to coordinate with the other EESC sections. The aim is to discuss primarily economic and social issues and to promote a stronger civil society. Joint declarations are adopted and addressed to the political authorities.
The Section’s external activities in Europe – which are an integral part of the EU’s external policy and complement the activities of the other institutions - are organised on several fronts:

**The enlargement process**

The Section is currently involved in the enlargement process for Turkey and the Western Balkan countries pursuant to the various association treaties in force. Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs), comprising EESC members and representatives of the civil society of the countries concerned, have been set up and meet twice a year to discuss developments in the accession negotiations or the integration process and to adopt recommendations for the political authorities. The JCCs also play an important role in the dissemination of information on the EU among the citizens of the candidate and potential candidate countries.

*Contact: turkey@eesc.europa.eu*

**Eastern neighbours and relations with Russia**

The eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is monitored by the Eastern Neighbours Contact Group. The aim of this group is to develop close contacts with civil society organisations from Europe’s Eastern neighbours (Ukraine, Moldavia, Belarus and the Caucasian countries) and to facilitate their development. A number of opinions have been adopted on neighbouring countries, with particular emphasis on civil society involvement in the framing and implementing of the national action plans for the ENP. The Section has also drafted opinions on relations between the European Union and Russia and on the Northern Dimension. Furthermore, working relations have been established with the Russian Public Chamber on the basis of a memorandum of understanding. Cooperation has been initiated with the Ukrainian National Tripartite Economic and Social Council in the context of the negotiations of an Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine.

Lastly, at the request of the European Commission, the Section has drafted an opinion on the development of civil society networks in the Black Sea region, in the course of which a working relationship was developed with the International Labour Organisation.

*Contact: enp-rus@eesc.europa.eu*

Mr Filip Hamro-Drotz,
President of the External Relations Section,
and Mr Grigory Osovyy,
Deputy Co-Chairman of the NTSEC

Kiev 2-3 October 2008
The Western Balkans

The EESC has set up a contact group responsible for fostering its activities with the civil society organisations of the Western Balkans. A Western Balkan civil society forum has met every two years since 2006. It brings together civil society representatives from the region and from across the EU to discuss common issues. The participants adopt conclusions which are subsequently addressed to the political authorities of the EU and the region. The Section has also drafted opinions on most of the countries in that region and endeavours to establish or consolidate Economic and Social Councils in the countries concerned. Joint Consultative Committees will be set up on the basis of the stabilisation and association agreements signed with countries in the region.

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"We appreciate the active role played by the European Economic and Social Committee in advancing civil society in the Western Balkans and, in this context, the work carried out by the Committee’s Western Balkans Contact Group."

Ms Margot Wallström and Mr Olli Rehn
(letter dated 02/09/2008)

Relations with the European Free Trade Association-European Economic Area

Comprising representatives of the EFTA Consultative Committee from the EEA on the one hand and EESC members on the other, the EEA CC meets once a year.
The 1995 Ministerial Declaration of Barcelona called on the EESC to establish links with its counterparts and equivalent bodies in the Mediterranean. Firm in the belief that the participation of economic and social actors and other representatives of organised civil society is vital for the worldwide success of this policy, the Section and its Euromed Follow-up Committee is fully committed to this initiative.

The Section supports the organisation of the annual Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions. At these summits, recommendations are adopted and forwarded to the political authorities. EESC members represent the network of ESCs at the Euromed Ministerial Conference, before the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly (where the EESC has the status of observer) and the European Commission.

The Section has also drafted a number of opinions on the European neighbourhood policy in the region. In close coordination with its partners from the Southern countries, the Section focuses particularly on monitoring the involvement of civil society in framing and implementing the national action plans.

One of the Section’s key objectives is to contribute to the consolidation and setting-up of national economic and social councils in this region. Thus, in recent years, the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian councils have been set up and steps are taken to promote the establishment of such councils in Morocco and Egypt.

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The 2000 Cotonou Agreement renewed relations between the European Union and the 78 signatory countries. The agreement acknowledges the potentially vital role of non-State actors in the development process and empowers the EESC to organise consultation sessions and meetings with the ACP economic and social interest groups.

On this basis, the Section and its EU-ACP Follow-Up Committee have regular contacts with the civil society representatives of the ACP countries. These contacts principally take the form of:
- regional seminars
- general meetings held in Brussels every three years with representatives of all the ACP countries.

One of the Section’s objectives is to provide information on the new Cotonou Agreement and, through close cooperation with the ACP partners, to monitor its implementation and in particular the involvement of civil society. This activity is carried out in partnership with the European Commission.

In recent years, the Section, with its ACP partners, has also monitored negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The EESC has drawn up recommendations urging the integration of the social and environmental dimensions into these agreements and the establishment of follow-up mechanisms at civil society level. In this connection, initiatives have been taken to promote the setting-up of networks of ACP economic and social actors at regional level.

Based on the Cotonou Agreement, the Section also attends the meetings of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (where the EESC has the status of observer) and the annual meetings of the ACP-EC Council of Ministers.

The Section also drafts opinions on aspects of development in general at the request of the European Commission or on its own initiative. Lastly, at the European Commission’s request, it also makes contributions to the EU-Africa strategy by preparing opinions and supporting the work of the African Union’s Economic and Social Council.

Contact: acp-ue@eesc.europa.eu
The Section and Asia

In Asia, formal relations have been established with India and China. Opinions have also been adopted and contacts forged with other countries and regions: Japan, South Korea and ASEAN.

India

The Section has drawn up several opinions on EU-India relations and its members contribute to the framing and implementation of the EU-India Action Plan. Furthermore, at the request of the Indian and European political authorities, since 2001 the EESC has co-organised the EU-India civil society Round Table. Comprising an equal number of EESC members and Indian civil society representatives, the Round Table meets regularly and adopts recommendations for the EU-India Summit. In this way, it helps pave the way towards better mutual understanding between civil society on each side.

China

The Section has drawn up a number of opinions on relations with China. The EESC has also established relations with the Chinese Economic and Social Council (CESC), with which it has signed a joint declaration. The EU-China Summit of September 2006 acknowledged that exchanges and cooperation between the EESC and the CESC constituted a part of the EU-China relationship, and called for the establishment of a regular Round Table. This Round Table was set up and has met twice a year since then, forwarding its recommendations to the political authorities of the European Union and China.

Contact: asia-eu@eesc.europa.eu
The Section and Latin America

The Section has regular contacts with civil society representatives of the countries of Latin America.

The Section also adopts opinions on relations between the European Union and the various regions of the continent and on topics of major importance, such as social cohesion and regional integration.

At the request of the European Commission, since 1999 the Section has been organising meetings between the organised civil society of Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. At these meetings, recommendations are adopted which are then presented by the EESC president to the EU/Latin America and Caribbean Summits. Section members also attend the meetings of the Euro-Latin America Parliamentary Assembly (where the EESC has the status of observer).

The Section has developed formal relations with the Mercosur Consultative Forum, the Andean Community’s labour and business advisory councils and the Consultative Committee of the Central American Integration System. These relations have been enhanced by the joint monitoring of negotiations, by the EESC and its partners, of Association Agreements between the EU and these regions.

Finally, the Section has initiated dialogue with a number of bodies representing civil society at national level. Relations have been established with Mexican civil society and with the Brazilian Council for Economic and Social Development, with which an EU-Brazil Round Table will be started in 2009.

Contact: ue-alc@eesc.europa.eu

President Dimitriadis leading an EESC delegation to Brazil meets Brazilian President Mr Lula da Silva, in July 2007.
The Section and international trade

The Section has set up a permanent study group on international trade to monitor multilateral trade negotiations and voice the EESC’s position before each ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation. Section members also attend these conferences, as part of the delegation of the European Community, as civil society advisors.

Taking into account developments in the European Union’s trade policy, the Section, in close contact with its third-country partners, has undertaken to monitor trade negotiations between the European Union and a number of countries and regions.

Furthermore, the Section draws up opinions on the various aspects of the international economy and trade, and relations between the European Union and the USA and Canada.

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The Section and international organisations

Under the patronage of the EESC president, the Section maintains working relations with several international organisations, in particular, the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations’ ECOSOC and the World Trade Organisation.

Furthermore, the Section is involved in the work of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS) and is responsible for preparing the EESC’s specialist contributions to the meetings of this association.
The main opinions of the External Relations Section (2007-2008):

- EU-Brazil Relations (October 2008)
- EU-Africa Strategy (September 2008)
- EU-Ukraine relations: a new dynamic role for civil society (September 2008)
- The social dimension of relations with Southern Mediterranean partner countries (July 2008)
- EU-Serbia Relations (May 2008)
- EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Relations (May 2008)
- New trade agreements negotiations - The EESC position (April 2008)
- EU-Central America Relations (July 2007)
- The Challenges and Opportunities for the EU in the Context of Globalisation (May 2007)
- Migration and development: opportunities and challenges (December 2007)
- The EU’s relations with Moldova: what role for organized civil society? (December 2007)
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2008-2010

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### Follow-up Committees / Contact Groups / Joint Consultative Committees 2008-2010

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