The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society

European Economic and Social Committee
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1. Introduction
– a message from the President

Time to find effective responses

In this "constitutional" moment for Europe, it is critical that we focus on a major project to re-launch the advisory role of the EESC. We need to renew our role of mediation and compromise in helping the EU’s executive and legislative bodies respond effectively to the necessities and concerns of Europe's citizens in a situation of increasing social unease.

Our role is a delicate one, since the difficult political situation and the historic times through which we are going require root-and-branch modernisation of the European institutional and political context. Too often, the Union has been incapable of providing responses to the expectations and problems of our society. This fosters insecurity and worries which often translate into inward-looking behaviour and protectionist tendencies in the economy and often xenophobia at the social level.

We will focus on three priorities: carrying out the ratification and implementation of the Lisbon Treaty; consolidating the European social model; and relaunching the Lisbon Strategy.

The Lisbon Treaty involves us directly, because it introduces the question of participatory democracy, which must be translated into legislation. In the European institutional context, the EESC will promote the debate in civil society, in collaboration with the national economic and social councils. The Treaty includes the Charter of Rights which brings together the fundamental rights of people in the European Union, for the first time accompanied by corresponding responsibilities. We must now insist on their application, on the rejection of discrimination and on their role as a guide for responding to the problems of immigration.

The European Social Model is an integral part of the European narrative since 1957 when the founding fathers drafted the Treaty of Rome: it must be at the heart of the EESC’s responsibilities to contribute to reaching full and better employment and protecting the environment. This is also the core message of my presidency for rights and solidarity to guide globalisation.
Implementation of the **Lisbon Strategy** requires the active involvement of civil society stakeholders, and the EESC – with its interactive network of the national economic and social councils and similar organisations – therefore provides an important contribution for economic and social progress in the Member States.

These priorities call for a considerable effort by the EESC and an increasing commitment from its members. It is important that all of us, both members and officials, should be aware of this role and project it to the outside world with humility, along with an awareness of the dignity of our work and our mission.

Communication must be at the heart of what we do if we want to have an impact on civil society and public opinion. This is essential if we are to promote the consultation and organisation of civil society.

Our institutional perspective also includes our relations with economic and social councils of the Member States and similar institutions.

Working together, all of us can be more effective both in our advisory role, and also through our analysis and monitoring of the tangible impact of European decisions on the social situation in our countries.

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Mario Sepi

*President of the European Economic and Social Committee, 2008-2010*
2. What is the European Economic and Social Committee?

The European Economic and Social Committee is an EU consultative body consisting of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society.

It was set up in 1957, when the European Union’s founders signed the Rome Treaties. Their aim was to involve different economic and social interest groups in the development of the common market, and to enable the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to consult more widely on EU policies. The first plenary meeting of the Committee took place in Brussels, in May 1958.

Fifty years later, in May 2008, the EESC marked a half-century of work with a programme of celebrations, debates, and cultural events, placing the emphasis on involving the next generation of young Europeans in the EU project.


2.1 A unique role: what makes the EESC special?

People must be at the heart of a successful Europe, and the European Economic and Social Committee sets out to guarantee that the voices of all the different groups and interests in society are heard and considered at the very highest levels of EU decision-making.

The members of the Committee are selected from many walks of life, and nominated by national governments meeting in the Council. Therefore, they reflect a wide range of experience, and maintain day-to-day contact with their fellow citizens in different countries and sectors of the economy and society. They understand people’s practical wishes and concerns.

The EESC has a distinctive place in the European Union’s decision-making process, as a consultative body which is an intermediary between the “executive” (the Commission), and “legislature” (the European Parliament and the Council).
It is a unique forum for representing and informing civil society organisations and expressing their views.

Bringing consensus

The Committee members play an integral part in the process of policy formation and the preparation of decisions at EU level. Representing the general interest, the Committee delivers opinions to the EU institutions, seeking to achieve a positive consensus between positions which are often different, and at times contradictory. This process, and the continual quest for compromise, involves representatives of public- and private-sector employers’ organisations, employees, and also – and this is the distinguishing feature of the EESC – other sections of organised civil society, such as farmers, the liberal professions, consumers, environmental protection, the combating of poverty and exclusion, young people, families, older people, women, people with disabilities, etc.

Consulting the Committee enables the EU’s decision-making bodies to gain a better idea of both the impact Commission proposals are likely to have on those most directly concerned, and what changes may be necessary to garner wider public support.
The Treaties require the EESC to be consulted on proposals in many fields of EU action. In addition, the Committee also makes known its views on subjects of which the institutions may have taken insufficient or no account, by means of own-initiative opinions or information reports.

**Boosting transparency**

The Committee’s expertise, its discussions and negotiations, the identification of differences in opinion and the search for convergence all serve to improve the quality and credibility of the EU’s decision-making process, making it more comprehensible and acceptable for Europe’s citizens and increasing the transparency which is so vital for democracy. In this way, the concept of representative democracy is complemented by the concept of participatory democracy in which the EU’s economic, social and civic players have a real say.

The challenges the EU faces today give the Committee a growing importance and added value in the Union’s institutional set-up. The issues at stake mean that all citizens, and first and foremost those who are in close contact with the economic and social reality of their countries and are the driving force behind European society, must be involved.
As an institutional forum both for dialogue and for consultation, the Committee continues to play a dual role, strengthening democratic voices in the European integration process and bringing the EU closer to its citizens. In so doing, it contributes to strengthening the Union's democratic legitimacy and the development of a European consciousness and acts as a real bridge between the Union and civil society across Europe.

Building links

European and national civil society organisations, including socio-economic organisations – employers and trade unions – meet regularly at the EESC and participate actively in conferences and hearings organised by the Committee. Their European or national experts help to enrich the debates when opinions are drawn up, through their knowledge and experience in the field.

Relations between Committee members and the national civil society organisations to which they belong ensure a broad flow of information on the initiatives and activities of the EESC and the European Union generally. They do much to increase awareness of the realities of the EU and enhance opinion-forming in the organisations themselves.

The Committee is also keen to be a better and more effective portal and listening post for organised civil society. This desire for openness and interchange is expressed through numerous initiatives – seminars, hearings, conferences and forums – involving civil society organisations, including European ones, which are not, or are only indirectly, represented at the Committee. The EESC also set up a Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks.

Through these initiatives, some of which are conducted at the request of the EU institutions, in particular the Commission, the EESC is better able to reflect the diversity of organised civil society and its development. It also promotes a broader structured dialogue between organised civil society and the EU institutions, and between civil society organisations themselves.

2.2 What is its mission?

There are three key elements to the EESC’s mission:

- Advising the Commission, the Council and the Parliament on policy proposals, making use of the special expertise and practical experience of its members, and thereby contributing to the EU decision-making process;
Enabling civil society organisations in the Union to be more involved and therefore more committed to the European venture, at both national and European level, and to help bring Europe closer to its citizens; and

Strengthening the role of civil society organisations in non-EU countries or blocs (or groups of countries) where it has ongoing relations, developing a structured dialogue between civil society organisations, especially the social partners, and promoting consultative models along similar lines to the EESC.

2.3 How does it take action?

When the Treaties require the Council or the Commission to consult the Committee on a particular proposal, consultation of the EESC is mandatory. In other cases it is optional. The EESC may also adopt opinions on its own initiative.

The Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) extended the range of issues which must be referred to the Committee, in particular the new policies (regional and environment policy). The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) further broadened the range of compulsory consultation and allowed the European Parliament to consult the EESC formally for the first time.

The EESC can:

- Issue opinions on questions that are referred to it by the Commission, the Council or the Parliament;
- Issue own-initiative opinions, expressing its views on any matter it thinks fit; and
- Issue exploratory opinions when the Commission, the Parliament or even Union Presidencies ask it to reflect and make suggestions on a given subject. These suggestions may later lead to a proposal from the Commission.

The Committee may also decide to prepare an information report examining any question relevant to EU policies. Finally, following a proposal from a section, a group or a third of its members, it may agree resolutions on topical issues.

Under EU law, in taking its final decisions, the Council must consider the Committee’s opinions, whether mandatory or optional.

As part of efforts to improve liaison between EU institutions, the Commission and the EESC signed a co-operation agreement in November 2005 identifying key areas where the Committee has particular expertise and can offer significant added value to EU measures: the Lisbon Strategy, sustainable development, structural change, impact analyses of European legislation and the EU’s external relations.
To boost co-operation at EU level, the EESC and European civil society organisations and networks set up a Liaison Group in September 2004. The Group is a forum for political dialogue, and sets out to:

- Guarantee a coordinated EESC approach to European civil society organisations and networks; and
- Follow up joint initiatives.

This initiative helps the EESC to raise the profile and influence of organised civil society at European level, and to consolidate its role as the institutional representative of organised civil society and spokesperson for its concerns, expectations and aspirations.

### 2.4 Co-operating with counterparts in the Member States

The Committee has regular contact with economic and social councils in the EU Member States in order to reinforce structured dialogue between all the players in organised civil society, and to promote grass-roots involvement in building Europe. The EESC and its national counterparts share the conviction that economic and social policies which have a direct impact on people's lives (such as jobs, social rights and social dialogue, the knowledge-based society, public services and the Lisbon Strategy) demand closer co-operation between consultative bodies at both national and European level.
With this aim in mind, conferences have been jointly organised in the countries holding the EU presidency. Moreover, the presidents and secretaries-general of economic and social councils and the EESC meet regularly, with national councils taking turns to host. These meetings allow discussion of key questions on the EU political agenda: for example, in 2006 and 2008 joint reports were presented to the Spring European Council. These reports focused on the implementation of the Lisbon process in all Member States and were transmitted to EU heads of state and government.

The EESC backs moves by organisations, the social partners, other civil society organisations and governments to set up economic and social councils, especially in Member States and candidate countries which do not yet have them. Similar support is provided to governments outside the EU in order to set up not only economic and social councils but also round tables for facilitating civil dialogue, such as the EU-India Round Table.

Finally, the EESC is a member of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS), set up in 1999, with almost 50 full and affiliated member countries. This association aims to boost organised civil society’s influence in the context of globalisation.
The EESC makes a difference

A report on the impact of the EESC’s work between 2002 and 2006 confirmed that the Committee adds an important and constructive dimension to the EU decision-making process, and is a valuable support to organised civil society across the Member States.

Two types of opinions are especially effective in bringing home to policy-makers the views of the EESC:

- Own-initiative opinions often raise awareness among decision-makers, particularly in the Commission, about topics that may have been overlooked, and lay the groundwork for timely responses.

- Exploratory opinions drawn up at the request of other institutions, in advance of the Commission drafting its own proposals, allow all the various interests represented in civil society to put forward their demands and concerns. They also enable the EESC to uncover areas where action is needed at EU level.

The impact of EESC opinions goes well beyond the scope of Commission proposals, and the EESC is increasingly viewed as a “pool of expertise”, in touch with key issues and the attitudes of ordinary citizens.

On the basis of quarterly reports of the European Commission 81% of EESC opinions have had an impact on legislative or executive work of this Institution in 2005.


Want to know more about our activities?

http://www.eesc.europa.eu
3. Who is on the EESC?

The Treaty states that “the Committee shall consist of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society, and in particular representatives of producers, farmers, carriers, workers, dealers, craftsmen, professional occupations, consumers and the general interest”.

The EESC now has 344 members, nominated by national governments for a renewable four-year term and drawn from across Europe’s different economic and social interest groups. The breakdown by country is:

Belgium .............. 12  
Bulgaria .............. 12  
Czech Republic ....... 12  
Denmark .............. 9  
Germany .............. 24  
Estonia ............... 7  
Greece ............... 12  
Spain ................. 21  
France ............... 24  
Ireland ................ 9  
Italy .................. 24  
Cyprus ................ 6  
Latvia ................ 7  
Lithuania ............. 9  
Luxembourg .......... 6  
Hungary .............. 12  
Malta ................. 5  
Netherlands .......... 12  
Austria .............. 12  
Poland ............... 21  
Portugal ............. 12  
Romania ............. 15  
Slovenia ............. 7  
Slovakia ............. 9  
Finland .............. 9  
Sweden .............. 12  
United Kingdom ..... 24
3.1 The Groups

Under its Rules of Procedure, the Committee is divided into three groups, representing employers, employees and the other organised economic and social participants in civil society. Each group has its own secretariat. EESC members themselves choose which group they wish to join. (Occasionally members choose not to belong to any group.)

The Employers Group (Group I)

*President: Henri Malosse (FR)*

The members of the Employers Group (Group I) come from private and public industrial sectors, small businesses, chambers of commerce, the wholesale and retail trades, banking and insurance, transport and agriculture.

Group I keeps in regular contact with BUSINESSEUROPE (Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederations of Europe), CEEP (European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation), EUROCHAMBRES (Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry), and EUROCOMMERCE (Retail, Wholesale and International Trade Representation), as well as on an ad hoc basis with the numerous sectoral industry organisations at European level.

Group I policy in general reflects the opinion of industrial federations in supporting the development of an EU of free-market economies with freedom of trade and movement within the internal market, in the belief that this is the best road to growth, competitiveness and employment. The Group takes the view that the EESC and its tripartite structure offers a unique way of achieving consensus on EU policies and serves as a model for wider European society.

The Employees Group (Group II)

*President: Georgios Dassis (GR)*

The Employees’ Group (Group II) comprises representatives from national trade unions, confederations and sectoral federations. Its members represent over 80 trade
union organisations – the vast majority of them affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) or its sectoral federations. Some members also come from the European Management Confederation.

Although European social structures are a model for much of the world, there are still too many people suffering hardship or excluded from society because of poverty, discrimination, lack of education, or other disadvantages.

Group II’s key priority has always been to improve the living and working conditions of workers in Europe and the well-being of all EU citizens, as well as of workers and their families in other continents. It is firmly committed to the enlargement and strengthening of the EU, as an area of prosperity, freedom and democracy, mutual support, solidarity and social cohesion, and aims to ensure that workers can play a real part in European policy-making.

The Various Interests Group (Group III)

President: Staffan Nilsson (SE)

The composition of the EESC reflects the changing face of European society. The presence of the Various Interests Group, alongside the Employers and Employees Groups, ensures that the Committee hears the voices and concerns of the full range of social, occupational, economic and cultural organisations that make up civil society.

What gives Group III its unique identity is the diversity of people within its ranks: its members are drawn from farmers’ organisations, small businesses, the crafts and professions, co-operatives and non-profit associations, consumer and environmental groups, NGOs and associations representing families, disabled people, and the scientific and academic community, for example.

They are bound together by their sense of responsibility towards EU citizens whose interests they represent. Their standpoint is that in order to pursue these interests effectively, all social and economic players must be involved in shaping European Union decisions. The shared goal of the group is to achieve real economic and social democracy in the EU.
4. How does the EESC work?

4.1 The Presidency and the Bureau

The Committee elects a president and two vice-presidents every two years, whose role is to lead the EESC and represent it in meetings with EU institutions, national governments, international organisations and organised civil society bodies from across Europe and the world.

*President: Mario Sepi (IT, Group II)*

*Vice-presidents: Irini Ivoni Pari (GR, Group I) – Seppo Kallio (FI, Group III)*

The EESC’s Bureau, with 39 members, organises the EESC’s work. As well as the president (who chairs the Bureau) and the two vice-presidents, it is made up of the presidents of the three groups (Employers, Employees and Various Interests) and the six sections, plus one member from each Member State, directly elected by the Plenary Assembly.

The two vice-presidents chair the Committee’s Communication and Budget Groups.

4.2 The Plenary Assembly

The full Committee meets in plenary session nine times a year. This is where it adopts opinions by simple majority, before forwarding them to the Council, the Commission and the Parliament.

On average, the EESC delivers 170 advisory documents and opinions a year (of which about 15% are on its own initiative).
4.3 The Sections

The Committee has six sections: these prepare opinions for plenary and each of the six deals with specific policy areas covered by the EU Treaties. For each opinion, the section concerned generally sets up a study group assisted by experts, and appoints a rapporteur.

When issues are relevant to more than one of its sections, the EESC may set up a temporary sub-committee. Sub-committees operate in much the same way as sections, but their task is confined to examining a particular problem by a given deadline.

In addition, a number of “observatories” have been set up, to follow major issues over the long term.

**Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)**

*President: Krzysztof Pater (PL, Group III)*

The ECO Section’s remit covers the financial perspectives, own resources and the EU budget and statistical questions. It deals with problems relating to tax harmonisation, as well as issues concerning the financial markets and their integration.
In the field of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and coordination of economic policy in particular, the ECO section has set up a permanent group to monitor the EU’s broad economic policy guidelines and other issues relating to economic governance, including the Lisbon Strategy. In the field of economic, social and territorial cohesion, the ECO Section oversees regional and structural policy and cohesion policy. Finally, the ECO section is also responsible for issues relating to spatial planning, urban policy and metropolitan areas.

**Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)**

*President: Bryan Cassidy (UK, Group I)*

The INT Section's remit covers industrial policy (both general and sectoral), market policies, competition policy, services (including banking, commerce, insurance and tourism, but excluding services of general interest, such as the distribution of water and electricity and postal services), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the social economy (co-operatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations), the professions, company law, research, intellectual property, consumer protection and the customs union. It also organises the annual European Consumer Day.
European Consumer Day

European Consumer Day takes place in March every year, with activities throughout the Member States. They include conferences, exhibitions, celebrity-backed information events, consumer debates, on-line quizzes, school presentations, “mobile info centres”, and many other activities to get the message out that consumers should “Know their Rights and Use their Rights”.

Pressing for stronger consumers’ rights across Europe is an important priority for the Committee, and to this end it works with other EU institutions such as the Commission and Parliament. On 8 October 2008, following consultation with the EESC and other bodies, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive on Consumer Rights, designed to achieve a high level of consumer protection throughout the EU while safeguarding the competitiveness of enterprises.

Proposal for a Directive on Consumer Rights:

The Single Market Observatory (SMO)

President: Jorge Pegado Liz (PT, Group III)

The SMO operates under the auspices of the INT section. Set up in 1994, its task is to monitor the operation of the single market at grass-roots level, identify any shortcomings and suggest improvements. It runs a database dedicated to European self- and co-regulation initiatives, which the EESC developed in close co-operation with the Secretariat-General of the European Commission (http://eesc.europa.eu/self-and-coregulation/index.asp). This database is currently the only one-stop shop on European self- and co-regulation initiatives available on the web.
Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

President: János Tóth (HU, Group III)

The TEN Section’s work covers all modes of transport, major trans-European infrastructure networks, energy, the information society, services of general interest and the EU’s audio-visual policy. It organises an increasing number of hearings on key issues and, in 2005, the TEN Section also set up a permanent study group on services of general interest (SGI) and a permanent study group on Pan-European transport corridors.

The Section has issued numerous own-initiative and exploratory opinions particularly in the field of energy including renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, fossil fuels and nuclear energy.
Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

President: Leila Kurki (FI, Group II)

The SOC Section covers works on a broad range of policies including employment, working conditions, education and training, social and citizens’ rights, social inclusion, gender equality, free movement, immigration and integration, and public health. It covers the work of several EP Parliamentary Committees and Commission Directorates-General, giving a comprehensive input into the social dimension of the EU. The European Social Model has been at the heart of recent SOC Section work, accompanied by lively consultations at grass-roots level and delivery of resulting EESC opinions at Ministerial level. This was particularly the case for the EESC proposal on a New European Social Action Programme which is a key reference text. The SOC Section has a rich portfolio of specific opinions advancing the social model agenda, including issues such as employment guidelines, youth employment, training and life-long learning, corporate social responsibility, flexicurity, modernising labour law, promoting decent work for all, productivity and quality of work, health and safety at work, posting of workers, equal opportunities and the gender pay gap, older workers, opportunities for the disabled, social security and social inclusion, reconciling work and family life, inter-generational solidarity, demographic change, the elderly and long-term care, the rights of the child, patients’ rights, combating discrimination, inter-cultural dialogue, integration of minorities, immigration and integration.
The Labour Market Observatory (LMO)

President: Josly Piette (BE, Group II)

The SOC Labour Market Observatory (LMO) has been set up recently in order to identify and analyse labour market trends and challenges, bringing added value to the work of the SOC Section and the Committee. In particular, it

• analyses examples of best practices;
• organises hearings with institutional, socio-professional stakeholders, civil society organisations and academia;
• produces pro-active investigating reports or studies on selected topics.

The LMO has conducted in-depth consultations and debates on the situation of older workers, women’s access to the labour market, the employment situation of people with a disability, and the question of growth, quality of working life and sustainable productivity.
Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)

**President: Hans-Joachim Wilms (DE, Group II)**

The main areas of the NAT Section’s activity cover the common agricultural policy and its reform, rural development, food safety, the common fisheries policy and its reform, forestry, and protection of the environment in a broad sense. Most of the proposed legislation in these fields involves mandatory consultation of the EESC. In drawing up its opinions, the Section organises hearings and holds meetings within and outside Brussels. It also issues own-initiative opinions and exploratory opinions on significant policy issues, and holds broad consultations on highly topical issues such as, for example, wine reform, the role of forests, or the global food challenge.

The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)

**President: Stéphane Buffetaut (FR, Group I)**

The SDO operates under the auspices of the NAT Section. Set up in October 2006, it aims to boost civil society input in sustainable development policy. It helps the Committee to find dynamic compromises that marry environmental, social and economic interests.

Backning Sustainable Development

*Environmental factors and combating climate change are taking an ever-higher priority in EU decision-making. The EESC has an important role in identifying practical solutions in these fields.*

*In 2005, the Committee organised a consultative forum on sustainable development and issued an exploratory opinion “Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy”, which formed a sound basis for a review of the EU’s approach.*

*The European Council recognised the value of the EESC’s input and in June 2006 called on it to “play an active role in creating ownership inter alia through acting as a catalyst to stimulate debate at EU level”.*

*The Sustainable Development Observatory was set up to support the EESC’s broad-ranging work in this field. In the 2006-2010 period, the Committee is continuing to build up its expertise so as to establish itself as a credible and authoritative actor on behalf of civil society in the sustainable development debate. It has prepared several opinions on key sustainability issues, for instance on the International Climate Change Negotiations and on the Biennial Progress Report on the EU’s Sustainable Development Strategy.*
Section for External Relations (REX)

President: Filip Hamro-Drotz (FI, Group I)

The main areas of activity of the REX Section are enlargement, relations with third countries, in particular their civil society organisations, as well as international trade and development. The REX Section mainly draws up own-initiative opinions but it is also, to an increasing extent, drafting exploratory opinions following requests from EU institutions. In drawing up these opinions, the Section works closely with representatives of both European Union civil society organisations not represented within the Section and civil society organisations in non-EU states.

Joint Consultative Committees (JICs) have been set up with countries covered by an association agreement and with European Economic Area (EEA) states, whilst contact groups have been established for Western Balkan states and the EU Eastern Neighbours. Follow-up committees work together with their counterparts in the fields of relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states and Latin America and within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Round tables have been established with China and India.
The Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)

President: Joost van Iersel (NL, Group I)

Building on the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Consultative Committee’s 50 years of experience in the field of dialogue, the CCMI has a wider remit covering all industrial sectors. It is the only body of its kind in the European institutions. The CCMI’s task is to look to the future, by means of anticipation, prevention and analysis. It sets out to build a constructive common strategy for managing industrial change, balancing the need for a socially acceptable approach with maintaining European industry’s competitive advantage.

The Lisbon Strategy Observatory (LSO)

President: Staffan Nilsson (SE, Group III)

Ever since the European Council launched the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EESC has regarded it as a priority, and its members have valued the opportunity to submit their opinions to the institutions, notably at the relaunch of the Strategy in 2005. The Commission has formally requested the Committee’s input to the annual monitoring exercise which it undertakes, and the Observatory, made up of equal numbers of members of the EESC’s three groups, has been set up to help gather the views of stakeholders across Europe.
4.4 The Budget, Quaestors' and Communication Groups

The EESC has three groups responsible for specific administrative tasks:

**The Budget Group** is appointed by the Bureau to help with financial and budgetary decisions.

**The Communication Group** is appointed by the Bureau to guide and monitor the Committee's communication strategy. Good communication is fundamental to the EESC's role, and to winning the support of EU citizens for the process of building a strong and united Europe. The Committee works closely with the other EU institutions to meet the common challenge of successful communication.

**The Quaestors' Group** is appointed by the plenary assembly to monitor and ensure the proper implementation of the members' statute.
Standard procedure for drawing up EESC opinions

EESC opinions are generally drawn up as follows:

1. Requests for opinions are made to the EESC President, usually by the Council or the Commission, but sometimes by the Parliament.

2. The EESC Bureau decides which section is to be responsible for the Committee’s preparatory work.

3. The section sets up a study group (on average nine members) and appoints a rapporteur who is assisted by experts (maximum of four).

4. On the basis of the study group’s work, the section adopts its opinion by a simple majority and forwards it to the Committee President.

5. After considering the section’s text, the Committee adopts its opinion in plenary by a simple majority.

6. This opinion is sent to the Council, the Commission and the Parliament, and is also published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The process for drawing up own-initiative opinions of the Committee is the same, but the plenary assembly, on a proposal from the bureau, must give authorisation in advance before the section concerned starts its work.

4.5 The Secretariat-General

Secretary-General Martin Westlake heads the EESC’s secretariat which is based in the Committee’s headquarters at the heart of Brussels’ European quarter.

5. Looking outwards

The impact of globalisation and the growing importance of international relations between the EU and the rest of the world have heightened the need for the parallel development of relations between societies. The ‘new players’ in international relations, in particular the representatives of civil society organisations, are called upon to play an increasingly important role in tandem with those traditionally involved in cross-border issues.

Alongside the EU Council, the Commission and the Parliament, the Committee therefore makes a unique contribution to the Union’s foreign policy by championing the “civil society” dimension.

The Committee’s role is not confined to issuing opinions and recommendations to the other EU institutions. It also operates directly, at the request of political authorities or on the basis of international treaties, in third countries by developing dialogue with representatives of civil society organisations and contributing to the establishment of consultative structures. The EESC thus acts as a bridge between the citizens of these countries and Europe and helps to consolidate a model of pluralist and participatory democracy in its partner countries.

The EESC co-operates with civil society in many different areas, including candidate countries for EU membership and potential candidates in the Western Balkans, Eastern European neighbours (including Russia), the European Economic Area (EEA), Mediterranean countries, African, Caribbean and Pacific states (ACP), Latin America, India and China.
6. Get in touch!

6.1 Where to find us

The EESC’s headquarters are located at 99 rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels, Belgium, close to the other EU institutions (the Parliament, Commission and Council).

1 Headquarters of the European Economic and Social Committee
   Rue Belliard 99

2 Headquarters of the European Parliament
   Rue Wiertz 43

3 Headquarters of the Council of the European Union
   Rue de la Loi 175

4 Headquarters of the European Commission
   Rue de la Loi 200

5 Headquarters of the Committee of the Regions
   Rue Belliard 101
6.2 Visits: welcome to the EESC!

Every year, the EESC opens its doors to visitors from all over the European Union’s 27 Member States, many of them members of civil society organisations or associations, or students specialising in European affairs. We are particularly pleased to meet visitors from the EU’s newer Member States.

To organise a visit, contact: visitesCESE@eesc.europa.eu, tel.: +32 25468182. Requests should be sent at least three weeks in advance with an indication of the language and date of the presentation as well as the number of participants. Unless otherwise stated (e.g. groups requiring a specialised speaker), our interactive presentations, including an exchange of views, will deal with the structure and the activities of the EESC and its role in the decision-making process of the European Union. The presentation lasts between one and two hours.

For more information, you can consult:

6.3 The website

The European Economic and Social Committee’s website is a crucial communications tool:
http://www.eesc.europa.eu

6.4 Publications and reference material

The Committee’s opinions are published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The EESC distributes a monthly newsletter called EESC Info, a summary note of the EESC’s work which appears nine times a year after each plenary session, and a twice-yearly memo setting out the Committee's work priorities for each Union presidency.

All these documents, including the opinions, are available on the website:
http://www.eesc.europa.eu
Main publications

Role and operation of the EESC

- Vademecum 2008-2010
- The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society
- The EESC in 10 Points
- President’s Report Dimitris Dimitriadis 2006-2008
- Welcome to Your Committee
- Rules of Procedure
- The Impact of the European Economic and Social Committee
- The priorities of the EESC during the (...) Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- History book, Fifty years of participatory democracy

Organised civil society

- A Better Partnership for a Better Development
- How to organise a Stakeholders Forum
- CESlink – Online Cooperation between Economic and Social Councils

Single Market, Production and Consumption

- The contribution of the EESC to the EU consumer policy
- The Committee on the Reform of the Structural Funds and the Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion Policy 2007-2013
- Improving the EU regulatory framework – upstream and downstream of the legislative process

Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship

- Immigration: the role of civil society in integration
- European Citizens’ Forum – Conclusions: Towards a Europe of Solidarity – Youth, Intergenerational Solidarity and Tomorrow’s Europe
- The European Social Model
- Towards a new European Social Action Programme

External relations

- The EESC and the Mediterranean
- Study on Organised civil society in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, including their relations with the European Neighbourhood Policy
- Leaflet on the EESC External Relations activities
• Leaflets on the EESC activities in Euromed, Latin America, ACP, Western Balkans, Eastern Neighbours, Asia, Trade, Turkey

Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society

• TEN Section: Transport
• TEN Section: Energy
• TEN Section: Infrastructure
• TEN Section: Information Society
• TEN Section: Activities in the field of services of general interest and infrastructure
• TEN Section: Recent Achievements
• Europe’s Energy Transformation
• What Energy Policy for Europe? Key points of recent EESC opinions
• Conference – Public services: The role of civil dialogue in provision of quality economic and social services

Industrial Change

• Relocation – Challenges and opportunities
• The Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)
• The Future of the Textile, Clothing and Footwear sectors in Europe

Communicating Europe

• Living Europe
• WhatNEXT Forever Young

Lisbon Strategy

• 58 Concrete Measures to ensure the success of the Lisbon Strategy
• Implementation of the Lisbon Strategy: Summary Report for the European Council (23 and 24 March 2006)
• Renewed Lisbon Strategy 2008-2010: The role of organised civil society (Summary report to the European Council 13 and 14 March 2008)

Sustainable development

• SDO – Sustainable Development Observatory

Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment

• NAT – Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
• The EESC and the framework directive review: New Challenges in Water Policy
Presentation of the European Economic and Social Committee, a European Union consultative body composed of representatives of organised civil society. This brochure describes the Committee’s role, activities and impact.