The main tasks of the Permanent Study Group include:

- monitoring the WTO multilateral negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda
- monitoring EU’s bilateral trade negotiations with countries and regions that the EU is conducting
- addressing international trade issues.

Participating in WTO Ministerial Conferences and the WTO Public Forum

The EESC has been represented in all WTO Ministerial Meetings (Seattle, Doha, Cancun, Hong Kong) as part of the EU delegation. The EESC delegation is closely involved in daily monitoring of progress achieved in negotiations, playing an active role in negotiations, evaluating the social and economic elements of agreements, and maintaining regular contacts with civil society representatives.

Opinions related to the WTO Ministerial Conferences

The EESC adopts opinions before each WTO Ministerial Conference. Since the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999, the EESC has adopted opinions before Doha (2001), Cancun (2003) and Hong Kong (2005) Ministerial Conferences.

The objective is to follow up on the multilateral negotiations and to ensure that the EESC position on specific issues such as market access, agriculture, services, special & differential treatment, WTO rules, trade and environment are taken into account.

In the opinions adopted, the EESC has stressed its strong commitment to the multilateral trade system and has, among other concerns, taken a position on trade and development aspects and in particular the concerns of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The EESC has also been calling for further strengthening of the WTO’s democratic nature and transparency.

Participating in the European Commission meetings with civil society on trade issues

The European Commission’s Directorate- General for Trade (DG Trade) holds regular meetings with civil society organizations on trade issues, including the follow-up to the WTO DDA negotiations. Depending on the agenda, the European Commission’s Directorate- General for Trade, senior Commission officials, and trade negotiators, take part in these meetings. The EESC plays an active role in this civil society dialogue.

The EESC is also actively involved in the DG Trade special Civil Society Contact Group. The Contact Group functions as a facilitator and sounding board for exchanges between the DG Trade and EU civil society.

Monitoring the EU’s Bilateral Trade Negotiations with Countries and Regions

The EESC’s objective in the EU’s bilateral trade negotiations with countries and regions is to ensure stronger civil society participation both during and after the negotiations. This includes implementation and monitoring of commitments undertaken in agreements.

The EESC has been actively involved in monitoring EU’s bilateral trade relations with countries and regions, including those with:
- African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries (ACP)
- Latin America
- Asia
- Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euromed)
- Western Balkans
- African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries

Following the requests by the former EU Trade Commissioner, Pascal Lamy, the EESC has been actively engaged in monitoring the negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and the ACP. Moreover, the EESC is currently involved in the establishment of the CARIFORUM-EC Civil Society Consultative Committee which would provide a consultative role for civil society organisations within the institutional set-up of the agreements.

Joint declarations with all these bodies have been issued along the different negotiation processes either asking for the social, labour and environmental issues to be taken into account in the agreements, or proposing the creation of joint civil society bodies that would provide a consultative role for civil society organisations within the institutional set-up of the agreements.

In the case of Central America, the EU and the Andean Consultative Committee, the Labour and Employers Advisory Committees of the Andean Community, and the Mercosur Economic and Social Consultative Forum.

The EESC carries these monitoring activities together with its civil society institutional counterparts, namely the Central American Consultative Committee, the Labour and Employers Advisory Committees of the Andean Community, and the Mercosur Economic and Social Consultative Forum.

Joint declarations with all these bodies have been issued along the different negotiation processes either asking for the social, labour and environmental issues to be taken into account in the agreements, or proposing the creation of joint civil society bodies that would provide a consultative role for civil society organisations within the institutional set-up of the agreements.

In the case of Central America, the EU and the Andean Consultative Committee, the Labour and Employers Advisory Committees of the Andean Community, and the Mercosur Economic and Social Consultative Forum.

The EESC has also been represented in the following negotiations on a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) with China in 2007.

The EESC is following the EU-India FTA negotiations and the EU-China PCA negotiations through its EU-India FTA and EU-China FTA Working Groups respectively. The issue of trade and investment was on the agenda of one EU-India Round Table and two EU-China Round Tables in 2008, and will again be on the agenda of EU-India Round Table in autumn 2009.

The EESC also organizes conferences in Brussels, with the participation of delegates from all ACP countries. One such conference took place in March 2008, preceding final declarations concentrated largely on the EPA negotiations.

Latin America

The EESC has regularly followed the negotiations of a new generation of bilateral agreements (AA) between the EU and Central America, the EU and the Andean Community (both launched in 2006) and the EU and Mercosur.

The three agreements will include a free trade chapter.

In the same way, the EESC follows up the existing AAs with Mexico and Chile which also contain a free trade chapter.

The EESC also organises conferences in Brussels, with the participation of delegates from all ACP countries. One such conference took place in March 2008, preceding final declarations concentrated largely on the EPA negotiations.
Therefore, negotiations on the liberalisation of services and investment as well as on deepening the liberalisation of agricultural and processed agricultural and fisheries products remain ongoing.

The EESC discusses the state of play of the negotiations on FTAs with its southern Mediterranean partner countries on a regular basis.

**Western Balkans**

During the 2nd Western Balkans Civil Society Forum organised in June 2008 in Ljubljana, the participants discussed the role of civil society organisations in the monitoring of the implementation of the new Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Among the various recommendations adopted, one could underline the proposal to establish a consultative committee that would allow civil society organisations of the region to monitor the implementation of the CEFTA and its economic, environmental and social impact. The EESC will take steps to ensure the follow-up of this proposal.

**EESC opinions addressing International Trade Issues**

In recent years, the EESC has adopted the following opinions related to international trade:

- **The Challenges and Opportunities for the EU in the Context of Globalization** (May 2007). This opinion was based on a request by the German Presidency of the Council in 2006. In this opinion, the EESC advocates a common EU strategy to address the challenges and opportunities of globalization. The EESC also stresses the need to fully involve the social partners and the various stakeholders representing organized civil society in tackling these challenges.

- **New trade agreements negotiations - The EESC position** (April 2008). This opinion constitutes the EESC’s contribution to the debate initiated by the European Commission’s Communication: «Global Europe: A stronger partnership to deliver market access for European exporters» from April 2007. In this opinion, the EESC reiterates its overall commitment to multilateral trade liberalisation. Bilateral agreements must be seen as compatible with and eventually strengthening multilateralism. The EESC underlines its fundamental objective to maintain and develop, as a full partner of the European Commission, a significant level of co-operation and responsiveness with European civil society. The EESC supports the aim to ensure increasing levels of monitoring and transparency in negotiations and to extend and develop its involvement with civil society in other countries and regions of the world involved in current and future trade negotiations.