The European Economic and Social Committee: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society

Established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) consists of representatives of organisations of employers, of the employed, and of other parties representative of civil society in the Member States, notably in socioeconomic, civic, professional and cultural areas. The EESC is a consultative body of the European Union. The role that the European treaties confer on the EESC enables economic, social and civic players in the Member States to take part in the EU’s policy-framing and decision-making processes. With views occasionally being diametrically opposed, the EESC’s discussions often imply real negotiations involving not only the representatives of employers (Group I) and employees (Group II), but also – and this is the distinguishing feature of the EESC – all the other components of organised civil society represented (Group III). As a forum for dialogue and consultation, and for bringing together differing views, the EESC helps to make the European integration process more democratic and more transparent, while also bringing the European Union closer to the general public. In this way, participatory democracy enriches parliamentary democracy, the foundation of political democracy – by enabling players from civil society to make their views heard. The EESC, in other words, plays a distinct role of its own in consolidating the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU, in partnership with other European institutions. In so doing it helps to promote a genuine identification with Europe. Furthermore, the EESC contributes to the promotion and development of the dialogue with and between civil society organisations, as well as the establishment of structures for consultation beyond the borders of the European Union as part of the EU’s external policy.
The Presidency of the Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union brings together ministerial representatives of the governments of the EU Member States, meeting in various formations according to the policy area under discussion. The Council’s legislative and political decisions are prepared by a large number of specialised working parties and are fed upwards through the Permanent Representatives Committee to the Council itself. Member State governments in turn chair the Council’s various meetings and represent the Council vis-à-vis the EU’s other institutions and the European Union vis-à-vis the larger world. These presidencies of the Council of the European Union traditionally establish a set of broad political priorities and a work programme.

The Republic of Hungary holds the presidency for the first half of 2011. Its priorities can be found at http://www.eutrio.hu/

This publication sets out some of the major activities of the European Economic and Social Committee during the period of the Hungarian presidency from January to June 2011.
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Introduction by EESC President Staffan Nilsson

I welcome and support the first time ever Hungarian EU presidency! With the Lisbon Treaty having gone into effect not long ago, and in the middle of national budgets’ crisis and global challenges, Hungary will play a leading role among EU member states between January and July 2011.

Change has become a constant nowadays. Particularly in times of change, we need to take Europeans with us, in all political commitments. Engaging people for a sustainable Europe is my political commitment to ensure maximum civic engagement in Europe’s efforts to foster environmental, economic and social sustainability. I hope the Hungarian EU presidency will encourage and promote an ongoing dialogue with civil society organisations involved in economic, social, civic and cultural life.

The European Commission has asked the EESC to play an active role in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. During the Hungarian presidency, EESC will focus on the role and priorities of cohesion policies in the framework of the EU 2020 strategy, for example on supporting research, innovation and competitiveness policies, and better financial market regulation.

The EESC will make a constructive contribution to the discussion of the budget for the forthcoming multi-annual financial framework, in order to get deficit and debt onto a more sustainable path. This will take a lot of time and energy both for the Member States and for civil society, but it is needed. Equally important is to work on the labour potential of our economies, with a smart fiscal strategy. EESC will also explore tax policy and its possible revision.

I believe employment and green economic growth are based on entrepreneurship. Incentives and regulatory simplification are needed to make people more willing to start and run businesses. Social economy enterprises could put the EU in a position to lead global sustainable development in the long run. The EESC will continue to work on governance and partnership in regional cohesion.

We will go on fighting the poverty and exclusion that are afflicting already vulnerable groups. To this end, the EESC urges the Hungarian presidency and the EU institutions to take concrete action to promote the empowerment and integration of Roma citizens and other marginalised communities in Europe.

Sustainability and growth are two key areas of my work programme. With its Sustainable Development Observatory acting as coordinator, the EESC will develop a position in preparation for the UN follow-up conference on the global strategy, Rio+20, to be held in 2012.

The Committee will continue its work on the revision of the common agricultural policy, the common fisheries policy, and the 7th Environmental Action Programme, and will further develop its work in fields of major concern both at European and global level, including water policy and food security.

Consumer rights are an important aspect of a healthy market economy, and this is a subject that has long been of interest to the EESC and where its efforts have been successful. The Committee will continue to hold European consumer days with the Commission and the presidency-in-office of the Council. Our opinions will look at the social dimension of the internal market, especially when it is related to freedom, security and justice for people.

Most of us represent voluntary sector organisations. My presidency will support the “European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship” with meaningful activities, and will cooperate with the Hungarian presidency and the EU institutions on events and other initiatives relating to volunteering.

The European Economic and Social Committee is there to advise and support the Hungarian EU presidency, based on the grassroots experience of its members and on its long-standing tradition of cooperation with EU presidencies.

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At President Nilsson’s insistence, mindful of his slogan “Engaging people for a sustainable Europe”, and under the scrutiny of the EESC’s Communication Group, chaired by vice-president Anna-Maria Darmanin, the European Economic and Social Committee will continue to pursue its role as a committed player in the EU communication context during the Hungarian EU presidency.

• The EESC will pay special attention to globalisation, including the challenges of growth and jobs (Europe 2020 strategy), immigration, climate change and energy, the key words being “dialogue and participation”, “sustainability and growth” and “solidarity and development”. Particular attention will be paid to young people.

• During the European year of Volunteering, the Committee will support the interinstitutional communication priorities linked to:
  – driving economic recovery and mobilising new sources of growth;
  – promoting climate action and sustainable energy;
  – and making the Lisbon Treaty work for Europeans (citizens);
  – as well as improving relations with national Economic and Social Councils and organised civil society, improving the service to EESC members.

• It will work to help boost the communication partnership with the other European institutions, in line with its latest opinion on “Communicating Europe in Partnership” and its “Communication Strategy for 2010–2015”. With the President’s work programme, the EESC will continue to present the proposals of civil society to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

• In the same interinstitutional context, the EESC will actively participate in communication efforts on the new reform treaty (the Lisbon Treaty – Article 11), thereby strengthening the principle of participatory democracy.

• The EESC will continue to implement the recommendations contained in its opinion on the Commission Communication “Communicating Europe in Partnership”, and the vision set out in its 2008 opinion "Reconciling the national and European dimensions of communicating Europe".

• Finally, the EESC will seek to implement the addendum on communication appended to the November 2005 European Commission-EESC Protocol of Cooperation, signed in May 2007. That addendum emphasises decentralised cooperation and synergies with the European Commission in the area of communication. Communication contact points for the new mandate will be identified and will continue to engage in local events.
The Lisbon Treaty, participatory democracy and civil dialogue

The achievements of the Lisbon Treaty represent progress towards a more democratic, cohesive, transparent, efficient and open Union that is more respectful of the values underpinning the European social model and is more able to promote those values globally and to take its place on the international stage. The Committee anticipates that all the provisions of this treaty will soon be fully operational, and that the European Union will thus have the proper tools to implement new policies and successfully address the many challenges it faces, which are of deep concern to Europe’s citizens, namely the economic and financial crisis, employment, the fight against poverty and social exclusion, climate change and above all the future of the European social model.

In this context, civil society involvement in the process of framing EU policies and decisions is a key instrument not just for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the European institutions and EU action, but also for encouraging the growth of a shared understanding of what Europe is for and where it is going, and ensuring that Europe’s citizens play their part fully in building Europe.

Through its provisions enshrining participatory democracy and introducing a citizens’ right of initiative, the Lisbon Treaty creates significant potential for European democracy to develop. Participatory democracy and active citizenship are fundamental principles upon which the success of European Union policies – and hence the Union’s very future – depend.

It is essential to implement a real strategy of listening and dialogue that allows Europe’s citizens to say what precisely they expect from EU policies and how they envisage their common future. However, this calls for a real and long-term commitment from all the EU institutions, in accordance with the Lisbon Treaty.

For its part, and in keeping with the tasks assigned to it by the European treaties, the Committee is determined to pursue its initiatives, in close cooperation with the EU institutions and all other civil society players, with a view to contributing on the one hand to creating a real European public space of dialogue and debate and on the other to giving new impetus to the European project based on a forward-looking vision of Europe’s future for its citizens. The Committee intends to make its networks and infrastructure available to all the EU institutions by way of constructive support for dialogue with civil society and the organisations representing it.

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Europe 2020 – A European strategy for smart, green and inclusive growth

The new Europe 2020 strategy and the unprecedented challenge which the crisis presents give rise to the need for in-depth cooperation by civil society at large. The EESC believes that civil society organisations must be a driver of the Europe 2020 Strategy and has set up a horizontal “Europe 2020 Steering Committee” which associates more closely national ESCs with the practical implementation and evaluation of structural reforms to be carried out in the context of the new strategy.

The Steering Committee is drawing up its work programme guided by the “priorities” (smart, sustainable and inclusive growth) and the “flagship initiatives” as defined under the EU 2020 Strategy. Its main focus will be on the exchange of good practices, benchmarking and networking in the different thematic areas, as requested by the European Commission. Civil society representatives will also work on actions that various stakeholders could take in drawing up and supporting implementation of the reforms in the Member States, including global challenges, governance and communication aspects.

Based on successful past experiences and the positive response to the reports drafted for the European Council jointly with the national ESCs and other partner organisations, it is clear that organised civil society needs to become an integral part of the new governance structure of the Europe 2020. Being part of the European Semester of policy coordination will help organised civil society to work consistently towards reaching a Europe-wide consensus on the Europe 2020 reforms.

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2. Letter of Mr José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission on the Governance, tools and policy cycle of Europe 2020, 17 September 2010 (rm00018a).
Economic crisis: governance and policies

In order to cope with the possible threats to the existence of the common currency stemming from the sovereign debt crisis, the Commission has put forward a comprehensive and coherent package of proposed reforms to strengthen existing tools and extend them for coordinating economic and fiscal policy in the EU. This package represents a major effort to reinforce economic governance in the EU. The EESC will conclude its work on an own-initiative opinion putting forward further proposals on enhancing economic governance in the EU and examine the legislative proposals put forward by the Commission. Further initiatives may be launched by the European Commission in 2011 and the EESC will follow these priority issues closely.

The section will draw up an exploratory opinion at the request of the Hungarian presidency of the EU Council on: “Smart fiscal policy consolidation strategies. Challenges of identifying growth drivers for Europe. How to exploit fully the labour potential of our economies in parallel with the pressing need for fiscal adjustments.”

Budget: financial perspectives

Following Commission proposals on the revision of the financial perspectives for the period after 2013, the Committee will prepare an opinion on this key dossier for the future of the European Union. The EESC has already made proposals in an own-initiative opinion, but will revisit and update them in this context.

Taxation

After the economic and financial crises there is an ongoing debate on how tax policy can be revised and restructured in order to contribute more effectively to budget consolidation and public investment needs. The issues of the contribution of the financial sector to the cost of the crises (financial transaction tax/financial activity tax/bank levy) and measures to prevent future crisis are still on the agenda (the EESC has adopted an own-initiative opinion on a financial transaction tax). The following important topics will be of particular interest for the EESC:

– The long-standing issues of double taxation (especially inheritance taxes) and the harmonisation of the corporate tax base (Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base - CCCTB) are being addressed by the Commission.

– The green paper on the review of the VAT system is expected and comprises a major revision of the actual system including increased harmonisation and cooperation.

– The revision of the energy taxation directive will be presented later this year.

– Additional initiatives are envisaged relating to good governance in tax matters (administrative cooperation, mutual assistance, anti-fraud measures, etc.).

The EESC will also give an opinion on the “Citizen’s First” taxation policy initiative expected at the end of 2010.

Financial markets

As a consequence of the financial crisis, the Commission has been intensively working to complete a comprehensive financial reform to address short-termism, poor risk management and a lack of responsibility of certain actors in the financial sector, and to correct the underlying weaknesses in the supervisory and regulatory framework.

This led to the recent creation of the European System of Financial Supervision, which will consist of a new European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB) and three new European Supervisory...
Authorities (ESAs) for the financial services sector. In the near future the Commission plans to make further legislative proposals in order to progressively transfer powers to the newly created entities.

Economic, social and territorial cohesion

Under the Hungarian presidency, the future EU macro-regional strategy for the Danube basin will be discussed at Council level with a view to it being adopted as soon as possible in the course of 2011. In autumn 2010, the Committee in its opinion "The European Union strategy for the Danube region" (doc. 1168-2010), elaborated by Mr Barabás (Rapporteur – HU – Gr. III) and Mr Manoliu (Co-rapporteur – RO – Gr. I), provided detailed input for the public consultation organised by the European Commission to elaborate the future Danube Strategy. In 2011, the Committee will respond again to the Commission’s formal proposals which were presented at the end of 2010.

The section will draw up an exploratory opinion at the request of the Hungarian presidency of the EU Council on "The role and priorities of cohesion policy in the EU 2020 strategy".

The European Commission intends to adopt its 5th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion in November 2010. This report will seek to define territorial cohesion for the Union, reflect on the allocation of funding throughout the Union, and look into ways for improving the management of programmes. The 5th Cohesion report comes at a time when the European Commission is preparing its new financial perspectives. As a result of these various factors, the Committee’s opinion will be even more consequential for the discussions on the further evolution of the Union’s cohesion policy than otherwise would be the case. It will also serve as input for the Cohesion Forum to be organised by the European Commission under the Hungarian presidency in February 2011.

The Committee has addressed in detail the issue of Governance and partnership in regional cohesion, the relevant opinion having been adopted under the Belgian presidency. This work is also relevant to the discussion of EU cohesion policy in 2014-2020. The Committee will continue its efforts during the Hungarian presidency to strengthen the involvement of partners in drawing up and implementing projects co-financed through the Structural Funds, thus helping to improve their effectiveness and impact.

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Single Market, Production and Consumption – Single Market Observatory

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Competitiveness of European enterprises and support to SME
The success of European industry is of central importance to the economic and social welfare of European citizens. SMEs play an important role within Europe’s industrial capital. Its potential needs to be developed by improving access to finance and implementing the Small Business Act. The EESC will be involved in the Midterm Review of the SBAE scheduled for 2011.

Research and innovation
Research and Innovation are essential to the development of EU enterprises and to respond to the societal challenges. The European Union possesses an extraordinary potential for innovation and should take advantage of it. The Flagship Initiative on the Innovation Union will be an essential element of the political discussion and the EESC will play an active role in this discussion through its Opinion and a number of related activities to be developed with civil society organizations.

Financial services
The presidency intends to work on introducing better regulation and supervision of financial markets. The EESC considers that a safer, sounder, more transparent and more responsible financial system, working for the economy and society as a whole and able to finance the real economy, is a precondition for sustainable growth and intends to contribute to the public debate on this area.

Single market
The economic crisis has underlined how crucial the Single Market is for the success of the European project. The Single Market is indeed the cornerstone of Europe’s integration and sustainable growth. The section, and, in particular its Single Market Observatory (SMO) will certainly play a key role with its Opinion on the Single Market Act (SMA).

Consumers’ rights
Consumers’ rights are amongst the Section’s priorities. The INT Section organizes every year, since 1999, the European Consumer Day in close cooperation with the European Commission and the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council. This year’s event takes place in Budapest in March 2011. The Hungarian Presidency acknowledges the importance of the Section’s work in this area by requesting an exploratory Opinion on Consumer cross border possibilities within the Single Market.

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Single Market Observatory (SMO)
The Single Market Observatory (SMO) was set up by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in 1994 with the support of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. Its objective is to be a “pressure group” made up of representatives of EU civil society organisations to identify shortcomings in the Single Market, propose solutions and help the legislator fine-tune its proposals. The SMO has 33 members assisted by a secretariat within the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT).

The SMO will maintain its focus on Smart Regulation issues. This will also include cooperation with various platforms such as the European University Institute (EUI), the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the European Policy Centre (EPC). The SMO database on European self- and co-regulation, which involves close cooperation with the European Commission, will also feed into external activities (e.g. the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law, HiiL, and the Bertelsmann Foundation). The SMO will finalise its opinion on the Commission’s communication on Smart Regulation in the first half of 2011.

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http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.observatories
At the request of the Hungarian presidency, the SOC section is to draw up two exploratory opinions, one on "The role of family policy in relation to demographic change", the other on "Societal empowerment and integration of Roma citizens in Europe". A coordination body will monitor and organise events within the framework of the European Year of Volunteering (2011). At the request of the European Commission, the SOC section will draw up two exploratory opinions on the future of the European Social Fund after 2013 and on gender-aware structural change in research institutions. Other opinions under preparation concern demographic trends and the labour market, intra-corporate transfer and seasonal employment for third-country nationals and the EU’s counter-terrorism policy. The SOC will co-organise the fifth meeting of the European Integration Forum, with political input from the standing study group on Immigration and Integration. The SOC section will also adopt an opinion on "Youth on the move", one of the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives. A sub-committee made up of SOC and INT section members will finalise an own-initiative opinion on innovative workplaces.

During the 2010-2013 term of office the SOC section will in particular focus on the following issues:

**Better functioning labour markets**
1. A good and productive working life
2. The potential of young people
3. Development of the internal market and free movement of labour

**Management of the social crisis**
4. Social security systems and the social impact of the crisis
5. Giving every child the best start in life
6. Healthy and active living

**Europe for all**
7. Proactive integration and immigration
8. Enhancing rights and opportunities
9. Active citizenship and volunteering

**Labour Market Observatory**
Since it was set up in 2007, the Labour Market Observatory has carried out extensive work on a wide range of labour market issues and will continue to do so in 2011, on the basis of the SOC section’s strategic priorities.

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During the Hungarian EU presidency in the first half of 2011, the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment will work in its usual fields of activity. Certain topics – such as the revision of the Common Agriculture Policy, climate change and the 7th Environmental Action Programme – will be particularly visible.

**Agriculture**

The main focus of the Hungarian presidency will be the common agricultural policy after 2013; the Commission issued a communication on 18 November 2010. Following the EESC’s own-initiative opinion on this topic adopted in March 2010, which was widely praised as a meaningful contribution to kick-start the reform process, the Committee will continue its work and present the view of organised civil society on the communication. As part of the ongoing work a public hearing on the future of the CAP will be organised on 2 February.

The EESC will also concentrate on the imbalances existing in the food chain and in particular on how to give value to primary producers’ work through the sale of their products.

Food security will be another relevant issue, and an international conference on the topic will be organised by the EESC jointly with the FAO in the second half of 2011.

**Fisheries**

The ongoing review of the common fisheries policy will continue during the first half of 2011: the Commission plans to finalise the impact assessment in early 2011 and the EESC will continue to make the voice of civil society heard in all relevant forums and work on defining the instruments to build sustainable European fishing.

**Environment**

At the request of the Hungarian presidency, an exploratory opinion will be given on the integration of water policy with the other European policies (regional, agricultural, etc.). The Section will also prepare opinions on the new post-2010 EU biodiversity policy and strategy as well as on the mid-term review of the LIFE+ Regulation. Further support will be given to the promotion of the 7th Environmental Action Program (7th EAP).

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The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) is working on several issues that will be of relevance to the Hungarian presidency. After having taken part of the Cancún UN climate conference in December 2010, it will probably draft an opinion on the continuation of the negotiations post-Cancún and pre-South Africa. It will also prepare for the 2012 World Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio, for which the SDO will bear overall responsibility for handling and coordinating the EESC’s work. Climate change and international climate negotiations will continue to be an important matter of analysis, taking into particular account the Commission communication "Mainstreaming Climate Adaptation and Mitigation in EU policies and climate proofing of financial instruments".

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The Hungarian presidency will be marked by substantial legislative efforts relating to the three main policy topics of the TEN section, that directly support the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy: (1) the Energy Strategy 2011-20; (2) the White Paper on the future of transport; and (3) the proposal for policy actions resulting from the EU Digital Agenda. One exploratory opinion on "Energy Supply: which neighbourhood policy to secure the EU energy supply?" will be adopted during the Hungarian presidency. This opinion will serve as concrete input to the preparation of an event in Budapest at the end of the presidency. The TEN Section will actively contribute to a drafting of an opinion on "the promotion of renewable energy as a co-development factor in the Mediterranean region". The EESC is set to become involved in and to promote the debate on the creation of a European Energy Community (EEC) in cooperation with Notre Europe. The main meeting in the transport field will be a major conference on "The viewpoint of European civil society on the Transport White Paper". The EESC will examine in great detail the content of the new Single Market Act and in particular of its consequences for Services of General Interest (SGI). Building on the EESC’s very popular "European Cycling Lexicon", the TEN section will launch the "European Sustainable Construction Glossary" during the Sustainable Energy Week in April 2011.

For more information about the work of this section, please consult our website:
The CCMI will make its expertise and experience available to the Hungarian presidency and support it in its main spheres of interest. The CCMI will continue to discuss the proposals for realising the objectives of the EU2020 strategy and try to predict the changes involved in switching to a competitive, socially responsible and environmentally sustainable economic system, while taking the current context of economic uncertainty into account.

Specifically, the CCMI will complete the opinion requested by the Hungarian presidency on the effects of the financial and economic crisis on the distribution of labour force among the productive sectors, with a special regard to SMEs. The impact of the crisis exit strategies on the quality of jobs will also be analysed.

The Consultative Commission on Industrial Change will also focus on industrial policy and some specific aspects as its external dimension or the bias in participation of third country state-owned enterprises in EU public procurement markets. It will also look at the current situation and outlook in a number of sectors affected by the economic crisis like the agricultural machinery, construction and handling equipments.

The CCMI will continue its programme of events to publicise the most effective methods used by the Member States to mitigate and pre-empt the effects of industrial change. Similarly, particular attention will be paid to analysing the regional impact of global industrial change and to the transition models promoted by various European regions.

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Europe in the World

The enlargement process: a meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) will take place in Turkey in April 2011. A meeting of the EU-Croatia JCC will also take place in Zagreb at the beginning of 2011, and the fourth meeting of the EU-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Civil Society JCC will be held in Skopje in February 2011. At regional level, the Western Balkans Contact Group will continue to develop contacts and promote cooperation with Western Balkans civil society organisations. The contact group will focus on rural development and employment, in order to prepare the next Western Balkans civil society forum. The Hungarian presidency will be invited to attend these meetings. The EESC will start the procedure for establishing the EU – Iceland JCC with a view to organising its first meeting during the first half of 2011.

Relations with the EU’s Eastern Neighbours and Russia: the EESC adopted an opinion on EU-Russia relations in December 2010. It will continue developing its relations with Russian civil society through the organisation of the 4th Joint Seminar with the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. The Committee will also be actively involved in the third civil society forum of the Eastern Partnership and will continue its participation in the Eastern Partnership intergovernmental platforms. The EESC Eastern Neighbours Contact group will closely monitor the negotiation of association agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. The Committee will pursue its cooperation with the Ukrainian National Social and Economic Council on the involvement of the civil society in the EU-Ukraine association agreement and the EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade agreement through the organisation of a 3rd joint workshop. At the request of the Hungarian Presidency, an exploratory opinion will be drafted on civil society participation in the Eastern Partnership.

Relations with Southern Partner Countries: The EESC will continue its work with its southern neighbours in setting up an Assembly of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions in the Union for the Mediterranean. It will also draw up an information report on rural development and employment in the Euromed region to be presented at the Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions in 2011. Pooling together the expertise of its members in the fields of energy and external policies, the EESC will draft an own-initiative opinion on the promotion of renewable energy as a co-development factor in the Mediterranean region that will build upon the so-called Desertec and Transgreen projects in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

Relations between the EESC and Asia: In May 2011, the 9th Round Table is due to take place in Xi’an in China. An opinion aiming at mapping the emerging civil society in China will be drawn up by the EESC. With regard to India, the focus will be on the EU-India Free Trade Agreement and in particular its civil society dimension and sustainable development clause. The co-operation with Japanese partners will be continued through a bilateral seminar organised in Brussels. The EESC will adopt an opinion on former Soviet Union Central Asia countries.

The EESC continue regular cooperation with ACP countries through its joint ACP-EU follow-up committee. The EESC will also participate in the 21st session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly to be organised mid-April 2011. In June 2011 the EESC will organise the 26th meeting of ACP-EU Economic and Social Interest Groups in Brussels. This meeting – held every two years – aims inter alia to take stock of trade, economic and social developments in ACP countries and promote consultations with civil society. In addition, the EESC will be actively involved in the implementation of the EC-CARIFORUM trade agreement and will contribute to the EU-Africa summit.

In its relations with Latin America, the EESC will adopt an opinion on EU-Mercosur trade negotiations and will start the process of setting up the EU Central America Civil Society Joint Committee provided for in the recent association agreement. The 4th EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table will be held in Brazil in the first semester of 2011.

Transatlantic relations: the EESC will continue the follow-up to the opinions recently adopted on EU-Canada and EU-USA.

Trade issues: the EESC will adopt exploratory opinions on: the future EU trade policy; and trade sustainability impact assessments (SIAs). At the request of the Commission and opinion will be drafted on a comprehensive European investment policy. The monitoring of ongoing negotiations at multilateral and regional level will continue.

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For more information about the work of this section, please consult our website: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.sections-commission.
The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

The European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body set up by the Rome Treaties in 1957. It consists of representatives of organisations of employers, employees and other components of organised civil society in the Member States, notably in socioeconomic, civic, professional and cultural areas. Its main task is to advise the three major EU institutions (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission).

It is mandatory for the EESC to be consulted on all those issues stipulated in the treaties and whenever the institutions deem it appropriate. It can also be consulted on an exploratory basis by these same institutions, or can itself take the initiative to issue an opinion (around 15% of its opinions are own-initiative opinions). The EESC adopts on average 200 opinions a year on a wide range of subjects concerning European integration. It therefore plays an active role in the European Union’s policy-framing and decision-making processes.

The EESC also has two complementary tasks:

- first, promoting the development of a more participatory, more inclusive European Union that is closer to its citizens, by acting both as the preferred intermediary between civil society organisations and the European institutions and as organised civil society’s institutional forum for representation, consultation, information and expression, and,
- second, supporting the European Union’s external activities by organising and developing dialogue with civil society organisations in non-EU countries and regional blocs and by helping to promote and establish structures for consultation and dialogue with organised civil society. Such countries and blocs
include, for example, those applying for EU membership; the Balkans region; the countries bordering the Mediterranean; African, Caribbean and Pacific countries; Latin America; or India and China.

Thanks to the EESC, building Europe is therefore the task not only of the European Union and politicians, but also of members of the public belonging to organisations involved in economic, social, civic and cultural life.

The EESC is made up of 344 members split into three groups: the "Employers" group, the "Employees" group and the "Various Interests" group, which brings together representatives of various components of organised civil society not covered by the two other groups, that is, bodies representing craftsmen, farmers, SMEs, the professions, consumers in the social economy, family associations and associations promoting the rights of people with disabilities and combating social exclusion, the general interest, etc. The EESC’s membership is not static. It changes with each renewal so as to reflect changes in civil society in the Member States as accurately as possible.

Links between the European Economic and Social Committee and national economic and social councils and similar bodies

The EESC and economic and social councils and similar institutions have in close cooperation built an important network of cooperation and communication at EU level. In the EU’s Member States, this cooperation is based on regular meetings on specific subjects (in particular the Europe 2020 strategy), the exchange of information and the development of a joint website (http://eesc.europa.eu/ceslink/08-en/presentation-ceslink-en.html).

It also participates actively in the work of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (IAESCSI), which has about 60 member countries.
The Hungarian Members of the European Economic and Social Committee

Etele BARÁTH
Professor at Budapest Corvinus University, former minister for European Affairs
Member of Group III – Various Interests
Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN), Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

“The Hungarian presidency of the European Union provides a good opportunity for the EESC, with its experience gained in the field of participatory democracy, to directly support the democratic development of the Central European states. A special item on the agenda is the so-called Danube Strategy, which, recognising the special co-dependence of Member States, future and candidate states in various stages of development, may result in an opportunity for strengthened cooperation in the future, and the practical involvement of the civil sector in the decision-making process.”

Ágnes CSER
Co-President of the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions (LIGA)
Member of Group II – Employees
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC), External relations (REX)

“Every child is valuable. The EESC, as the representative of organised civil society, is therefore initiating and supporting, with the backing of the Hungarian Presidency, a programme of equality of access to health care for marginalised groups and the disabled both inside the European Union and as part of the EU’s external policy.”

Antal CSUPORT
Managing Director of the Hungarian Association of Strategic and Public Utility Companies (STRATOSZ)
Member of Group I – Employers
External relations (REX), Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

“The Hungarian presidency takes over in the winter time. Citizens will expect the EU to keep a focus on employment, on the Danube Strategy and on solidarity energy policy.”

Kinga JOÓ
International coordinator, HÖOK (National Union of Students) for Students Foundation, board member, National Civil Fund
Member of Group III – Various Interests
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC), External relations (REX)

“The term «social Europe» will hopefully gain more content during the Hungarian presidency envisaging the active engagement of organised civil society in the implementation of its priorities.”
József KAPUVÁRI

Hungarian National Confederation of Trade Unions (MSZOSZ); Member of the Federal Council
Member of Group II – Employees
Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO), Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (NAT)

"Under the Hungarian presidency, the EESC should continue to act in line with the key priorities already in place. The best way for the Committee to support the European integration process is by expressing and consistently representing the views of organised civil society, in line with its existing approach."

Lajos MIKULA

Executive president AGRYA – Agricultural and Rural Youth Association
Member of Group III – Various Interests
Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (NAT)

"A sustainable and green Europe also calls for a sustainable and green agricultural policy. The Hungarian presidency will have to take over in a time where a serious health check of the Common Agricultural Policy will be on the agenda."

Tamás NAGY

Chairman of the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives and Producers (MOSZ)
Member of Group I – Employers
Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO), Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (NAT)

"The Hungarian presidency takes over in a seriously challenging economic time for the EU. Implementation of the EU2020 strategic goals should not wait 10 years but start now."

Miklós PÁSZTOR

Director of the Specialist Institute of the National Association of Workers’ Councils, teacher at Budapest Corvinus University
Member of Group II – Employees
Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)
External relations (REX)

"As a Hungarian member of the European Economic and Social Committee, I see my main task as ensuring that representatives of employees and organised civil society have a deeper and more complex role to play in the work of the European Union. I feel that one of the main tasks of the Hungarian presidency should be to strengthen this role and give us a wider range of tools to work with. In this way, our presidency will help to flesh out the Lisbon Treaty and neighbourhood policy."
Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY

Director of the Federation of Hungarian Drugtherapeutic Institutes (MADRISZ); National Institute for Drug Prevention
Member of Group III – Various Interests
Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO), Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

“Under the Hungarian presidency, the EESC, as a vital link in participatory democracy, must contribute to the role of civil society as watchdog and initiator in European political culture, while strengthening the role of civil society organisations in Hungary, and, by serving as an interface with third countries and the Third World, help make the voice of civil society heard there.”

Péter VADÁSZ

Co-Chairman of the Federation of Hungarian Industrialists
Member of Group I – Employers
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC), Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

“For the Hungarian presidency to succeed and thus present a positive image of our country, communication with socio-economic players – and ultimately with ordinary Europeans – is vital. The EESC has a potential role to play in such communication and can be used as an effective tool. The EESC can play its role effectively provided it offers scope for the initiatives, views and events of the economic and civil society organisations which it comprises, at the same time as keeping sight of Hungarian priorities and approaching them as issues of relevance to the EU as a whole.”

János VÉRTES

National Federation of Traders and Caterers (KISOSZ)
Member of Group I – Employers
Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

“Engaging in the policy formulation, linking to the relaunching of the European Union economy, the EESC shall work for keeping employment rate as a priority.”

János WELTNER

Member of Semmelweis Érdekvédelmi Szövetség – (Trade Union Block of Intellectual Employers) and of Trade Union Committee
Member of Group II – Employees
External relations (REX), Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

“The EU is facing too big an unemployment rate. In average, 1 in 10 European citizens of working age is unemployed. The EU will have to take up the challenge of combating this ever-growing youth unemployment.

Today, unlike other services, not all health care services can freely follow citizens who need treatment across borders. This should be changed by harmonizing insurance policies such as health insurance fees and reimbursement techniques.”
Endeavouring to support the European Union’s busy agenda and common actions to achieve ambitious goals, during its presidency, Hungary aims to create jobs, promote employment and strengthen the European economy, whilst on the whole deepening solidarity and unity within the Union.

Hungary’s Programme for the EU will be based on four priorities, the first being growth, jobs and social inclusion, whereby the coordination of Member States’ economic policies will be strengthened, the Europe 2020 strategy will be implemented, and special attention will be paid to small and medium sized enterprises, citing these as the engines of job creation. Within this broad sphere, issues such as family policy, child poverty and integration of the Roma population shall be addressed.

Secondly, the Hungarian presidency will strive for a stronger and deeper Europe, building for the future on existing foundations. In attempt to strengthen cohesion, European-wide policies shall be examined and reformed, most notably the European Energy policy at the Energy Summit in February 2011, and the common agricultural policy. Attention shall also be devoted to looking at the possibilities of European policies for transport and water, deepening the internal market, as well as regional development and macro regional cooperation, developing the Danube Region Strategy into a notable example.

Thirdly, with the implementation of the Stockholm Programme, and the extension of the Schengen area to Romania and Bulgaria to enhance free movement and application of fundamental rights, the Hungarian presidency promises to bring the European Union closer to its citizens, whilst maintaining emphasis on cultural diversity. Starting the implementation of the European Citizens Initiative is in the forefront of the Hungarian presidency’s ambitions in this field.

Finally, responsible enlargement of the Union shall be pursued, with the possibility of successfully ending the negotiations with Croatia leading to the signature of the Accession Treaty during the Hungarian presidency, as well as the reinforcement of the engagement of the Union on a global scale, with the May 2011 Eastern Partnership summit hopefully resulting in a straightened neighbourhood policy.

* These are the provisional priorities of the Hungarian presidency as they stood at the time of publication of this document. These priorities may well be subject to change.
Some basic facts about the Republic of Hungary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official name</th>
<th>Republic of Hungary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>Budapest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface area</td>
<td>93 030 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other major cities</td>
<td>Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc, Pécs, Győr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official languages</td>
<td>Hungarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>Forint (HUF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>10 013 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>10,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Roman Catholic (majority), Protestant, Greek Catholic, Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy:</td>
<td>Men 70, Women 78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important Exports: machinery, electronic equipments, vehicles, food and vegetable products (cereals), beverages, crude materials, manufactured goods, fuels and electric energy.

Important Imports: machinery, vehicles, manufactured goods, fuels and electric energy, prepared food, beverages, and tobacco.
**Internet sites:**

Parliament:  http://www.parlament.hu
Government:  http://www.kim.gov.hu
Office of the President:  http://www.keh.hu
Tourism:  http://www.mth.gov.hu (Magyar Turisztikai Hivatal – Hungarian Tourism Office)

**President**  Mr Pál Schmitt
**Prime Minister**  Mr Viktor Orbán
**Foreign Minister**  Mr János Martonyi

**Government**
- **Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség** (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union)
- **Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt** (Christian Democratic People’s Party)

**Opposition**
- **Magyar Szocialista Párt** (Hungarian Socialist Party)
- **Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom** (Movement for a Better Hungary)
- **Lehet Más a Politika** (Politics Can Be Different)

**The state**
The Republic of Hungary is an independent and constitutional state which has been a member of the European Union since 2004. After more than 40 years of communist dictatorship and Soviet occupation it became a parliamentary republic on 23 October 1989, with the implementation of the constitutional amendment which established the current third republic.

**President**
The President of the Republic has a largely ceremonial role, elected for a five-year term by the National Assembly. The presidential powers include the role of commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but also the nomination of the prime minister who is elected by a majority of votes of the members of the parliament. The current president Pál Schmitt was inaugurated on 6 August 2010 and had previously been deputy president of the governing party Fidesz. Prior to taking office Schmitt had been a member of the European Parliament since the 2009 elections and held the post of European Parliament vice-president.

**Government**
The executive power is exercised by the government, led by the current prime minister Viktor Orbán (Fidesz). The prime minister selects cabinet ministers and has also the exclusive right to dismiss them.

**Parliament**
The highest organ of state authority is the National Assembly (Országgyűlés) which is a single-chamber parliament comprised of 386 members. Members are elected by voters for a four-year term through single-seat constituencies (176 members), proportional representation (152 members) and compensated seats (58 members). The National Assembly initiates and approves legislation.

**Constitutional Court**
The Constitutional Court is composed of eleven members and it is the supreme organ for protecting the Constitution. Reviewing the constitutionality of laws, protecting the constitutional order and fundamental rights established in the constitution are the tasks of the Court. The court was established in 1989 and its members are elected by the National Assembly with qualified majority for nine years. Currently the Constitutional Court has only 10 members.

**Administrative Divisions**
Hungary is divided into 19 counties plus the capital Budapest, which is independent of any county government. The counties and City of Budapest have since 1996 been grouped into seven regions for statistical and cohesion policy purposes. The capital Budapest was originally made up of two separate cities: Buda and Pest, divided by the river Danube.

**The Hungarian Economic and Social Council**
The Council was founded in 2004 with the aim of discussing national strategies as a consultative institution supporting the government with opinions, stands, proposals, and resolutions. The national strategies to be discussed by the Council include: economic, social, labour, and employment politics, social insurance and health care, as well as strategic questions of European integration. The Council has 43 members constituting four groups:
- Economy (employers and chambers) – 18 members;
- Employees organisations (representative trade unions) – 6 members;
- Civil organisations (various interest groups) – 11 members;
- Science (current and previous presidents of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, acknowledged researchers of the economy and society etc.) – 8 members.

The Hungarian ESC has developed close co-operation with the EESC and is member of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS).
Programme of events for 2011

Conferences, seminars, hearings and extraordinary meetings

First half-year

### 1. COMMITTEE EVENTS

#### HORIZONTAL INITIATIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press Officers Seminar</td>
<td>Brussels, 27-28 January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth plenary at the EESC headquarters</td>
<td>Brussels, 6-7 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Day</td>
<td>Brussels, 8 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint conference organised by the EESC/Hungarian ESC on the Europe 2020 strategy (focusing on the subjects of education, research and innovation) under the auspices of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Council presidency troika</td>
<td>Budapest (to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition on Hungarian contemporary art or/and a music event about Liszt: “WhatNext”</td>
<td>Brussels, May (to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### GROUP ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting of the Group &quot;Various Interest&quot; (III) Bureau</td>
<td>Budapest, 13 May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### SECTION ACTIVITIES

##### SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public hearing on “Bank resolution funds” (INT525)</td>
<td>Brussels, January/February (date to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMO public hearing on the Single Market Act</td>
<td>Budapest, 8 February (date to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Consumer Day 2011 (ECD 2011)</td>
<td>Budapest, mid-March (date to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMO public hearing on self-regulation</td>
<td>Brussels, first half of 2011 (date to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public hearing on &quot;A new political framework for tourism in Europe&quot; (INT/529)</td>
<td>Brussels (to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

##### EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini-conference on “Intercultural dialogue – the Roma”</td>
<td>Brussels, 12 January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judging process in relation to the European Employee Volunteering Awards 2011 (with participation of EESC members)</td>
<td>Brussels, 7-11 February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference on the integration of immigrants</td>
<td>Valencia, February/March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Integration Forum</td>
<td>Brussels, May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

**Seminar on Regional industrial transition and the position of civil society**

Venue and date to be confirmed

### AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

**Public hearing on Future of CAP post-2013 – NAT/481**

Brussels, March/April 2011

**Agriculture, Rural Development, Environment section meeting**

Hungary, April/May 2011

### TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

**Public hearing on the Use of Security Scanners at EU airports**

Brussels, 11 January 2011

**Public hearing on the rights of persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air**

Brussels, March-April 2011

**Launch of the Glossary on Sustainable Construction during the Sustainable Energy Week**

Brussels, 11-15 April 2011

**Hearing and possibly a conference on “the promotion of renewable energy as a co-development factor in the Mediterranean region” (in cooperation with the Section external relations)**

Tunisia (to be confirmed) (hearing), March-April 2011 / Brussels (conference), June 2011

**One-day conference on “the viewpoint of European civil society on the transport White Paper”**

Brussels, June 2011

**Conference on “Energy Supply: which neighbourhood policy to secure the EU energy supply?”**

Budapest, June 2011

### EXTERNAL RELATIONS

**8th meeting of the EU-Croatia Joint Consultative Committee**

Zagreb, January

**4th meeting of the EU-The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee**

Skopje, February

**Meeting with the Mercosur Economic and Social Development Forum**

Asunción, Paraguay, March 2011

**Hearing and a conference on “the promotion of renewable energy as a co-development factor in the Mediterranean region” (in cooperation with the TEN Section)**

Tunisia (to be confirmed) (hearing), March-April 2011 / Brussels (conference), June 2011

**29th meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee**

Turkey, April

**9th Round Table EU-China**

Xi’an (China), May 2011

**19th European Economic Area EEA CC meeting**

Tartu, Estonia, 12-13 May

**ACP-EU Economic and Social Interest Groups**

Brussels, June (or July) 2011

**4th Meeting of the EU-Brazil Round Table**

Brazil, place and date to be decided

**Joint workshop EESC-Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation**

Brussels, date to be decided

**Joint seminar EESC-National Tripartite Social and Economic Council of Ukraine**

Kiev, date to be decided

**1st meeting of the EU- Iceland JCC**

Brussels, date to be decided
2. COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION IN EXTERNAL EVENTS

SECTION ACTIVITIES
ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion Forum</td>
<td>Brussels, 31 January – 1 February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Ministerial Meeting to discuss Danube Strategy</td>
<td>Hungary, 24 June 2011 (to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels Tax Forum</td>
<td>Brussels, March 2011 (to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels Economic Forum</td>
<td>Brussels, May 2011 (to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation of a delegation of EESC members in the 21st session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly</td>
<td>Venue tbd, 1st half of 2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation of a delegation of EESC members in the 6th session of the Latin America-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly</td>
<td>Montevideo, Uruguay, May 2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on Committee section work, please visit our website: www.eesc.europa.eu
Would you like to know more?

This brochure is one of a series of information documents published by the European Economic and Social Committee. Other titles in the series include: *Discover the EESC* and *The EESC: A Bridge between Europe and Organised Civil Society*. These, and a number of more specialised publications, can be consulted and downloaded free of charge at [www.eesc.europa.eu](http://www.eesc.europa.eu). The Hungarian Presidency website [http://www.eutrio.hu/](http://www.eutrio.hu/) will provide up-to-date information on the Presidency as it unfolds.


The Europa website of the European Union [http://europa.eu/](http://europa.eu/), which is managed by the European Commission, provides a vast amount of information about the European Union’s activities. It contains a number of interactive pages specifically designed to provide a more interactive service for the European Union citizen.

If you have any questions about the European Union or its activities, please send an email to the Europe Direct service on [www.europa.eu/europedirect/](http://www.europa.eu/europedirect/) or call the following free number: **00 800 67 89 10 11**.
In 2009, the EESC was awarded the prestigious “Ecodynamic Enterprise” label by the Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment (IBGE), obtaining 3 stars, the highest level possible. This label rewards organisations for good environmental performance.