The priorities of the EESC during the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union

JULY - DECEMBER 2008
The European Economic and Social Committee
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The EESC’s consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the Community decision-making process. With views occasionally being diametrically opposed, the EESC’s discussions often require real negotiations involving not only the social partners, i.e. employers (Group I) and employees (Group II), but also - and this is the distinguishing feature of the EESC - all the other socio-occupational interests represented (Group III). This expertise, these discussions and negotiations and the search for convergence may improve the quality and credibility of the Community decision-making process, inasmuch as they make it more comprehensible and acceptable for Europe’s citizens and increase the transparency which is so vital for democracy. Within the European institutional set-up, the EESC fulfils a specific role; it is the prime forum in which the organisations of civil society in the European Union can have their views represented and discussed. As a debating and consultative chamber, the EESC helps to strengthen the democratic credentials of the process of building the European Union, including the promotion of relations between the EU and socio-economic groupings in third countries. In so doing it helps to promote a genuine identification with Europe.
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 up through the Permanent Representatives Committee to the Council itself. Member State governments take it in turn to chair the Council's various meetings and to 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.


This publication sets out some of the major activities of the European Economic and Social Committee during the period of the July-December 2008 French Presidency.
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INTRODUCTION BY PRESIDENT DIMITRIADIS

The French Presidency of the Council, which will begin on 1 July 2008, can count, as all its predecessors, on the close cooperation of the European Economic and Social Committee and the knowledge that it gathers and shares through its members and the numerous organisations they represent.

As my mandate as President of the EESC stands under the leitmotiv "Entrepreneurship with a human face", the EESC is organising a conference on this subject in Athens in September 2008. High ranking personalities of the EU institutions, representatives of the business community and stakeholders and scientists will participate and a "European charter on entrepreneurship" will be presented.

The EESC will continue to fully support the efforts of the Presidency to bring to a positive result the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty. It will continue to contribute to broad topical issues such as the renewed Lisbon Strategy, climate change and sustainable development, with a special attention to energy efficient and low greenhouse-gas emitting economy. I see this as a challenge and opportunities for the EU R&D industry policy and specifically for the creation and growth of SMEs. The EESC expects a number of important requests for exploratory opinions from the French Government and will participate and organise several events in France together with the French Economic and Social Council and other public organisations.

External relations will be another important field of action and policy making. I intend to continue strengthening ties between the national Economic and Social Councils in Europe. I want to bring the EU closer to the citizens, who must realise that the EU is not only "Brussels". The citizens are important actors of the EU. More generally, the EESC will continue in fully taking part in implementing the "Communicating Europe" strategy.

I am convinced that my successor, who will take over the presidency of the EESC after the mid-mandate elections end October, will continue this policy in general, notwithstanding adding his personal accents.

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The priorities of the EESC during the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Communicating Europe

At President Dimitriadis’ insistence, and under the scrutiny of the EESC’s Communication Group, chaired by Vice-President Jillian van Turnhout, the European Economic and Social Committee will continue to pursue its role as a committed player in the EU communication context during the French EU Presidency.

- The EESC will give special attention to facing globalisation, including the challenges of growth and jobs, climate change and energy.
- It will focus on external relations and the intercultural dialogue.
- 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", in order to listen, and communicate Europe with one voice, and to respond better to the public’s expectations on the information front.
- In the same interinstitutional context, the EESC will actively participate in communication efforts for the new Reform Treaty (the Lisbon Treaty).
- Lastly, the EESC will seek to implement in practice the addendum on communication appended to the November 2005 European Commission-EESC protocol of cooperation.

To listen and communicate Europe with one voice, and to respond better to the public’s expectations on the information front.
signed in May 2007. That addendum puts the focus on de-centralised cooperation and synergies with the European Commission in the area of communication. The idea of EESC contact points/representatives at national level to be developed.

The EESC will continue to implement the operational recommendations contained in its opinions on “Plan D”, “the White Paper” and the Commission Communication “Communicating Europe in Partnership”. Everybody agrees that Europe/the European process should be closer to Europe’s citizens and both EU institutions and Member States have a joint responsibility and shall strive to work in partnership. EESC members, through their privileged relationship with and knowledge of civil society organisations, can play an important role in this process at local, national and European level. The EESC will continue its ongoing search for solutions to bridge the gap between the EU and organised civil society, not least by using new information and communication technologies. The target groups are the other EU institutions, the national economic and social councils, national administrations and those organisations providing members to the EESC. The EESC will during the French EU Presidency organise its annual Press Officer Seminar in Brussels.

Everybody agrees that Europe/the European process should be closer to Europe’s citizens.

The EESC will also continue with its traditional interinstitutional dialogue on communication matters, for example by taking part in the IGI meetings chaired jointly by the Commission and the European Parliament and when possible according to new procedures, the meetings of the Council Working Party on Information chaired by the EU Council Secretariat. As a request from the French EU Presidency, and as a follow-up to the Commission’s April 2008 paper on “Debate Europe - building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate”, the EESC will draw up an exploratory opinion on “Reconciling the national and European dimensions of communicating Europe”, during its July 2008 plenary. The EESC will have celebrated its own fiftieth anniversary in May 2008. Activities will take place throughout the year using a special anniversary logo.

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Despite a long period of reflection following the failure of the Constitutional Treaty ratification process, the recent setback to the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty following the negative outcome of the referendum in Ireland on 12 June, not only plunges the European Union into a new institutional crisis, but also, and beyond the apparent reasons for this rejection, reflects considerable scepticism, or even profound differences regarding the direction that EU policies have taken, with regard to the future, and sometimes even regarding the meaning of the European project itself.

Against this backdrop, civil society participation in the public decision-making process is an essential tool not only for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the European institutions and EU action, but also for developing a shared perception of Europe’s purpose and where it is heading.

By preserving all of the Constitutional Treaty provisions enshrining participatory democracy and introducing a citizen’s right of initiative, the Lisbon Treaty opens up significant prospects for the development of European democracy.

The Treaty thus lays the foundations, over time, for real structured civil dialogue at European level, in parallel with political dialogue between the European Union and the Member States, and social dialogue with the social partners to ensure lasting participation by organised civil society in European political processes.

This is why, as the Committee has often reiterated, despite the vicissitudes of the Constitutional Treaty ratification process, and now the Lisbon Treaty’s, the institutions should, now more than ever, follow the route mapped out in the provisions of these two treaties and establish genuine participatory democracy.

However, civil dialogue at European level can only be truly effective if it is part of an institutional framework and benefits from a specific forum. As a historic player in participatory democracy, the Committee provides organised civil society with the institutional framework it needs to fully participate in European policies and processes, thus enabling closer public involvement in the European project at all levels.

The EESC will therefore continue with its activities and initiatives, in close cooperation with the EU institutions and all other civil society players, to promote and structure dialogue and consultation both between European civil society organisations and networks, and between such organisations and networks and European institutions.

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Since the Lisbon Strategy was re-launched in 2005 by the European Heads of State and Government, the EESC has considered this to be one of the most important projects for Europe. The Summary Reports prepared by the EESC in 2006 and 2008 set a solid cornerstone for future regular contributions of organised civil society to the renewed Lisbon Strategy.

For the next Lisbon cycle (2008 – 2010) the EESC will continue its cooperation with representatives of national ESCs and similar organisations representing civil society. During the French presidency it will kick off its work on a report for the 2010 Spring Council. The new EESC report will focus on the country-specific recommendations as requested by the European Commission. It will also discuss the future of the Lisbon Strategy in the post-2010 period, assessing the efforts made and setting out priorities and recommendations for the future involvement of organised civil society. During the elaboration of the report, the EESC will conduct targeted consultations for which it will call upon high-level experts from the EU presidency troika (France, Czech Republic, Sweden), policy makers, academia and civil society at large to analyse possible strategies to improve governance of the Strategy based on better-evaluated, better-differentiated and better-targeted objectives, as indicated in the Summary of Principal Conclusions of the Laurent Cohen-Tanugi report on the Lisbon Strategy. It is planned that the EESC report will also present conclusions from other thematic EESC work in relation to the Lisbon Strategy. In order to keep policy makers informed about the contributions made by organised civil society, as an intermediate step a resolution to the 2009 Spring Summit will be worked upon during the French Presidency.

This approach is in line with the 2008 Spring Summit general mandate which “…invites the Commission and Member States to strengthen the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the Lisbon process…”.

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2. See point 5 of the 2008 Presidency Conclusions of the 2008 Spring Council.
Economic and monetary union
and economic and social cohesion

Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, European Monetary Union and the Euro

This year, European and Monetary Union is celebrating its 10th Anniversary. The European Commission has published a report EMU@10 highlighting achievements and pointing out current challenges with the Single currency. Based on its own opinion adopted earlier this year in which the EESC emphasises the perspective of the European citizen and the high-level conference organised to discuss with policy makers, the EESC will continue to contribute to the discussion and participate in the follow-up to the Commission report.

The EESC will adopt an own-initiative opinion to provide a better explanation of the way in which inflation has developed and of the reasons for the persistent discrepancy between the level of inflation as perceived by the general public and actual inflation. The EESC will also adopt an own-initiative opinion on the ethical and social dimension of financial institutions arguing for diversity in the banking and insurance sector.

In the context of its broad-based work on economic governance, the EESC will adopt an own-initiative opinion on The EU Economy 2007 Review - Moving Europe’s productivity frontier in which it examines policies of the EU Member States that are most advanced in implementing the agreed Lisbon reforms and concludes that they are ahead in creating economic welfare and employment.

Taxation

The Review of the Energy Taxation Directive, an important element of the Commission's 2nd Strategic Energy Review, will be on top of the political agenda. The objective is to make the Energy Taxation Directive a more effective instrument of the EU energy and climate policies.

Work on the establishment of an EU-wide common tax base will continue, options and their implications will be examined on the basis of an impact assessment.

The reform of the reduced VAT rates is one further priority initiative and intensive debate is underway in the Council and the EP.

Territorial cohesion

At the request of the French presidency, an exploratory opinion on "Towards balanced development of the urban environment: challenges and opportunities" will be submitted to the September plenary session. This opinion will complement other opinions on metropolitan areas, Euro-regions and territorial cohesion for presentation to the various meetings planned by the French presidency.

Others

In October 2008, the EESC will adopt the opinion drawn up by the subcommittee on the role of the European Union in the Northern Ireland peace process. The opinion analyses and praises the European Union’s generally unacknowledged contribution to this process while setting out to develop a "toolbox" for civil society players to use in similar conflicts elsewhere.

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Single market, production and consumption

The section’s broad remit includes subjects of interest to the French presidency of the European Union. In addition, its Single Market Observatory (SMO) conducts public consultation activities enabling it to draw up opinions, reports and electronic material of relevance to development of the Single Market. The database on co-regulation and self-regulation developed in close cooperation of the European Commission is the only one of its kind in Europe, and in view of this the SMO has been invited to a joint meeting with the French Economic and Social Council during the presidency. Moreover, the information report which the Observatory is preparing on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the Single Market will serve as a valuable political and legal tool for the French presidency and its successors.

The section has been consulted by the presidency on an exploratory opinion on access by SMEs to international public procurement. This opinion, which was adopted by the plenary session in May 2008, was strongly opposed to an American-style “Small Business Act” in Europe, but supported a range of measures to make European SMEs more competitive, particularly in the field of public procurement.

Other INT section opinions discuss various subjects of interest to the French presidency, for example:

- the creation of joint technology initiatives under the 7th research framework programme;
- efforts to create a Community patent;
- increased expenditure on R&D (objective: 3% of EU GDP);
- specific measures to cut red tape;
- measures to support businesses, and in particular innovative SMEs, in line with the recommendations of the Lisbon agenda;
- the creation of a genuine entrepreneurial culture able to overcome bankruptcy;
- eco-friendly production;
- development of hydrogen-fuelled vehicles;
- sustainable and competitive European tourism.

- policies to ensure consumer confidence, in particular by creating effective systems for cross-border compensation;
- a competition policy which takes into account not only the economic interests of large business but also the problems of individual consumers and in particular the situation of the liberal professions;
- an effective, beefed-up intellectual property policy, particularly in relation to copyright;
- a new approach to the competitiveness of defence industries, which are of particular importance in France.

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The SOC Section will draw-up three important exploratory opinions requested by the French Presidency: The first, *Towards a New European Social Action Programme*, has been prepared in close cooperation with French Ministry for European Affairs, will be discussed in the July EESC Plenary in the presence of the French High Commissioner for Active Solidarity, and should be presented to the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs in Chantilly on 10-11 July. The second, on *Social Experimentation*, has also been prepared in close cooperation with High Commissioner’s office and will be presented to the French Presidency Conference on Social Experimentation in Grenoble on 28-29 November. The third, on *Promoting the mobility of young people in Europe*, has been drawn-up in cooperation with the French Permanent Representation and High Level Group, has been the subject of an inter-institutional hearing, and will be presented to the French Presidency Conference on Mobility in Paris on 11-12 September.

Other important SOC opinions which will be adopted during the French Presidency include: three on *Integration, Entry and Residence* and on a *Single Permit* procedure for third country nationals; a major opinion on the Commission’s proposed *Health Strategy*; three exploratory opinions requested by the Commission on *Integration of Minorities –ROMA*, on Multilingualism and on the *Needs of the Elderly*; and three EESC own-initiative opinions on *Employee Participation*, the *Situation of Elderly Workers* and on *Extending Anti-discrimination Measures for Areas Outside Employment*.

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During the French EU Presidency in 2008 the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment will undertake activities in almost all domains linked to the presidency priorities. There will be a strong focus on the Common Agriculture Policy and climate change issues, but all core competences of the NAT Section will be activated.

**Environment**

The Commission is expected to issue a number of important proposals on sustainable consumption and production, eco-design and market-based instruments on which the EESC will draw up opinions.

The EESC is already working on an opinion on electric and electronic waste and it will also issue an opinion on batteries and their end-of-life treatment. In addition, the Committee will work on opinions related to environment and climate change, such as agriculture and climate change (an exploratory opinion requested by the French Presidency), and geological storage of CO2, both highly relevant for the priorities of the French Presidency.

**Agriculture and Fisheries**

The EESC was the first EU body give input to the Commission's evaluation process called the “CAP Health Check”, with an exploratory opinion adopted in the Autumn of 2007. During the French Presidency, the EESC will continue following this key topic by submitting one or more opinions on the Commission's legislative proposal from 20 May. As in its previous, exploratory opinion, the Committee will probably go beyond the current discussions and look at the future of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013, in line with Mr Sarkozy's proposal for a refondation de la PAC.

One important matter related to the external and trade components of agricultural policy will be examined in exploratory opinions requested by the French Presidency: the so-called "global food challenge" linked to a major conference in collaboration with the French ESC in Paris in November 2008.

In the area of fisheries, the EESC will participate in the “Health Check” of the Common Fisheries Policy to be launched in September 2008, with a view to comprehensive reform in 2012.

**Food Safety and Animal Health**

The main issues in this field in the coming months will be animal feed and veterinary and zootechnical information requirements, as well as the rules governing the transport of animals.

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The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) is working on several areas of relevance to the French Presidency. It will closely monitor the implementation of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, and focus its own-initiative opinions on topics relevant to the Strategy, such as Beyond GDP – sustainable measurements for growth.

The SDO also has the coordinating role for the EESC’s work on climate change, an important and contemporary issue, which the French Presidency has identified as one of its main priorities. The SDO follows closely the post-Kyoto process, which started in Bali in December 2007, and where the UNFCCC meeting in Poznan will be of utmost importance. The SDO also follows the “climate-energy package” which was issued by the Commission in February 2008. The package deals with the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the review of Emission Trading Schemes, and renewable energies. The white paper on adaptation to climate change is expected to be published during the French Presidency.

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Transport, energy, infrastructure and the information society

In line with efforts to promote sustainable and competitive transport, a priority for the French Presidency, the TEN section has begun work on an own-initiative draft opinion which takes a holistic view of transport and energy problems: The social implications of transport and energy developments. The Commission’s integrated approach to freight transport and urban mobility is of key importance in promoting sustainable development. A hearing on rail transport issues will be held at the Delta 3 logistics centre in Bourges. The own-initiative opinion on Transport Emissions will propose specific measures to bring down emissions levels more quickly.

With regard to energy policy, the French Presidency would like to concentrate on the issues linked to the security of energy supplies and the role of nuclear power in combating climate change. An exploratory opinion being drawn up at the request of the French Presidency on Future investments in the nuclear industry and their role in the EU’s energy policy will provide a timely contribution. The various components of the “energy and climate change” package of 23 January 2008 will be discussed in the opinions on promoting renewable energy, carbon capture and storage, and energy efficiency. These opinions will support the priorities of the French Presidency in this field, while contributing to the debate on the characteristics of an energy policy for Europe and suggesting new approaches to achieving secure energy supplies, competitiveness and sustainable development.

With regard to the information society, the French Presidency’s priority will be to reach an agreement on revision of the legislative package on the regulatory framework for electronic communication networks and services. There will be a joint presentation of opinions by the EESC and the Committee of the Regions in July, which will be attended by a representative of the French Presidency. Furthermore, a request for an exploratory opinion on universal service is expected at the beginning of July.

With regard to services of general interest (SGIs), the TEN section will use all possible opportunities to take the debate forward at European level, drawing on the opinions on evaluating SGIs and on the impact of globalisation, as well as the conclusions of the seminar on “The role of the social economy in promoting SGIs” held in May 2008.

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During the French Presidency, the Committee will develop its work on industrial change along two broad lines, i.e.:

- an integrated sectoral approach to industrial change with the aim of defining the adaptations of horizontal and general industrial policy deemed necessary by the socio-occupational players in various sectors;
- promoting changes to European industry to ensure the preservation and improvement of its competitiveness in a socially acceptable and sustainable framework.

These avenues allow the Committee to draw out maximum added value from the unique nature of the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), whose members and external delegates are in close touch with grassroots issues and are familiar with the day-to-day reality of the sectors they represent.

In particular, the CCMI will draw up an opinion on aspects of industrial change linked to development of the regions where companies are based. A hearing will be held in Lille to provide input for the preparatory work.

The CCMI will conclude its series of seminars comparing industrial policies to deal with industrial change in the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe. The situation in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia will be discussed at a seminar held in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The CCMI will continue with its sectoral analyses of the aeronautical industry, large-scale distribution networks and their impact on suppliers and consumers, as well as non-energy mining, forest-based, wholesale electrical appliance and metallurgical sectors.

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Europe in the world

The Committee pays particular attention to relations with southern partner countries. In view of this, it will hold the annual summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions on 16 and 17 October in Morocco, in partnership with the Moroccan authorities and representatives of economic and social interest groups. The French presidency will be invited to participate in this event, during which special attention will be focussed on the social dimension of relations between the European Union and its southern partner countries.

The EESC also intends to present the conclusions of the summit to the Euromed Ministerial Conference held on 3 and 4 November in Marseille and to actively participate in the Ministerial Conference on employment.

In connection with the enlargement process, the EESC will hold a meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee in Paris on 20 and 21 November. The French presidency will be invited to make a statement at this meeting, which will discuss the issues of trade union rights, health and consumer policies, and SME access to financing. A meeting of the EU-Croatia JCC will be held in October. Also regarding the Western Balkans, the Committee will hold the first meeting of the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Consultative Committee.

With regard to relations with eastern neighbours, a joint meeting will be held with the Ukrainian national tripartite economic and social council to establish a joint approach in relation to current negotiations between the European Union and Ukraine, thus enabling organised civil society to become involved in the future partnership agreement. Relations with the Russian Public Chamber will be developed with a view to establishing a Round Table as an integral part of EU-Russia relations.

Finally, a joint EESC/ILO conference on the role of civil society organisations in the Black Sea countries will be held on 24-25 November.

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There will be various activities in connection with relations between the EESC and Asia. A meeting of the EU-India civil society round table will be held in Paris on 15 and 16 July, which the French presidency is expected to attend. This meeting will discuss climate change, trade and investment issues. There will also be a meeting of the EU-China Round Table at the headquarters of the French ESC on 5 and 6 November.

EESC activity in Latin America will focus on Brazil in particular. The Committee will adopt an opinion on EU-Brazil relations and hold a joint seminar with its counterpart, the Brazilian Council for Economic and Social Development. The aim of this meeting will be to put forward recommendations to enable an EU-Brazil Round Table to be set up for the next Summit in November.

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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body set up by the Rome Treaties in 1957. It consists of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society. Its main task is to advise the three major institutions (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission).

It is mandatory for the EESC to be consulted on those issues stipulated in the Treaties and in all cases where the institutions deem it appropriate. It can also be consulted on an exploratory basis by one of the other institutions, or can itself take the initiative to issue opinions (around 15% of its opinions are own-initiative opinions). The EESC adopts on average 150 opinions a year on a wide range of subjects concerning European integration. It therefore plays an active role in the Community decision-making process.

The EESC also has two complementary tasks: first, involving civil society organisations more in the European venture, and, second, boosting the role of civil society organisations in non-member countries or groups of countries, such as the countries applying for EU membership, with which very active consultative committees have been set up; the Euromed countries bordering the Mediterranean; African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries; Latin America; and India, amongst others. The EESC holds structured dialogue with...
Thanks to the EESC, building Europe is therefore the task of members of the public belonging to organisations involved in economic, social and cultural life.

representatives of civil society organisations in these countries and regions, and promotes the creation of consultative structures based on its own model. 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 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 sectors of economic and social life that are not covered by the first two 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 exclusion, the general interest, etc. The EESC’s membership is not static. It changes with each four-yearly renewal so as to reflect changes in civil society in the Member States as accurately as possible. The last EESC renewal – which covers the next four-year period – took place in October 2006. A total of 30% of members were newly appointed. Bulgarian and Romanian members joined the EESC at the beginning of 2007.

Until September 2008, the EESC presidency will be held by Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis (Employers’ group, Greece), assisted by two vice-presidents, Mr Alexander-Michael Graf von Schwerin (Employees’ group, Germany) and Ms Jillian van Turnhout (Various Interests group, Ireland). The EESC Secretariat is headed by Mr Patrick Venturini, Secretary-General.

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

The EESC and economic and social councils and similar institutions have in close cooperation built an important network at EU level. In the EU’s Member States, this cooperation is based on regular meetings on specific subjects (in particular on the renewed Lisbon 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), the members of which span 50 countries.

Lastly, the EESC maintains regular relations with civil society organisations in the countries applying for EU membership and in several countries or country groupings outside the European Union. These activities are carried out jointly with the economic and social councils of the relevant countries.
The French members of the European Economic and Social Committee

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**Bros, Gilbert**
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Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)
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Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

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Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

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External Relations (REX)

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Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

Mader-Saussaye, Reine Claude
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President of Group I (employers)
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Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

MANGIN, Philippe
*Chairman of COOP DE FRANCE, and of the National Confederation of Mutual Insurance, Cooperation and Credit Bodies in the Agricultural Sector (CNMCCA)*
Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)
External Relations (REX)

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Ouin, Béatrice
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External Relations (REX)
Panzani, Jean-Paul
Chairman of the Federation of French Mutual Health Insurance Schemes (FNMF)
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)
Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Pichenot, Evelyne
Member, French Economic and Social Council (CES) – Chair, CES delegation to the European Union
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)
External Relations (REX)

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Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

Reignault, Jacques
Associate deputy chairman and chairman of the committee for European and international affairs of the National Union of Liberal Professions
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)
Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Retureau, Daniel
Researcher, General Confederation of Labour (CGT) – European and International Labour Organisation (ILO) affairs
Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)
Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)
Priorities for the French Presidency of the Council, July-December 2008

The French presidency would like Europe to be more accessible and visible to citizens, and it will be guided by four main concerns: identifying added value offered by the European Union, with an emphasis on results; affirming the relevance of its role in relation to globalisation; developing the concept of European interest; calling for protection for Europe and its citizens. Based on these concerns, four priority themes have been defined together with four objectives for action.

Climate change, energy and sustainable development policies

European energy policy is closely linked to combating climate change. The French presidency will raise questions linked to the security of energy supplies to the continent and is expected to promote the role of nuclear power in combating climate change. The aim is to develop a Europe of sustainable development and innovation. The emphasis will be on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, environmental taxation,
the development of clean products and the establishment of a European research area. In order to ensure that this policy is continued, the French government, together with its Czech and Swedish counterparts, drafted a joint action programme for the three successive presidencies of the European Union during the period from July 2008 to December 2009 (France, Czech Republic, Sweden). The programme includes aspects of combating climate change and efforts to reach a post-Kyoto agreement, air quality, protection of biodiversity, waste management and promotion of sustainable development.

**Global and coordinated management of immigration**

Immigration is one of the priorities which has been set by the French presidency of the EU. In view of this, the idea of a "European immigration pact" will be developed. This pact is likely to be based on "rejection of mass amnesties", "harmonisation of asylum systems" and "negotiations on readmission agreements"; it is also likely to be of relevance to co-development issues.

**A Europe of defence**

The presidency would like to make Europe more effective on the international arena, with the position of a high representative for foreign policy being created in 2009. The EU defence budget should be increased to make this action programme more consistent. As part of this policy, the French presidency will also call for closer dialogue with emerging countries and the establishment of a Union for the Mediterranean.

**Health check and future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**

The French presidency is expected to launch debates on revising European policies and funding for them post-2013: in particular this concerns the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The presidency would like to get started on an overhaul of the CAP without waiting for 2013. The debate will be launched at the meeting of agriculture ministers at Annecy in September 2008. The European Commission is currently carrying out a health check of the CAP before presenting legislative proposals.

These four priority themes will be complemented by the following objectives for action:

- preparation for entry into force of the Treaty by defining arrangements for implementing certain aspects of the Treaty;
- growth and employment to revitalise the renewed Lisbon strategy on growth and competitiveness and adoption of a strengthened Social Agenda;
- financial stability;
- continued debate on the future enlargement of the EU.

In order to support preparatory work for these subjects of key importance to the future French presidency, the EESC has been asked for nine exploratory opinion on the following subjects:

- access to international public procurement, in particular for SMEs;
- a new European Social Action Programme;
- the link between climate change and agriculture at European level;
- towards balanced development of the urban environment: challenges and opportunities;
- the European Union and the global food challenge;
- better promoting the mobility of young people in Europe: practicalities;
- reconciling national and European dimensions when communicating Europe;
- social experiments in Europe and active inclusion;
- food safety and compliance of food, animal and vegetable imports with EU standards.
The Economic and Social Council of the French Republic is a constitutional consultative assembly which advises the public authorities. By representing the main socio-occupational activities, the Council promotes cooperation between the various occupational categories and enables them to participate in the Government’s economic and social policy.

**TASKS**

The economic and social council’s mission is three-fold:

- to advise the government and participate in the formulation of economic and social policy;
- through its membership to facilitate dialogue among the various socio-occupational categories, whose initially divergent positions can be reconciled by drawing up proposals in the common interest;
- to provide information for the political assemblies and the general public.

The Council also has the right to consider any issues within its remit.

The government can refer any questions or texts on economic and social issues to the Economic and Social Council.

Opinions, reports and studies adopted by the Council are submitted to the Prime Minister. They are addressed to the two Houses of Parliament, which may hear the rapporteurs at committee or plenary level.

The Council’s work is published in the Official Journal.

**MEMBERSHIP**

The Economic and Social Council has 233 members, belonging to 18 representative groups. They are appointed for a five-year term of office and their appointment is subject to different rules.

163 members are chosen by the following socio-occupational organisations:

In Paris, the Iena Palace houses the Economic and Social Council.
• 69 by trades unions, representing public and private sector employees;
• 65 by trade organisations representing private, industrial, commercial, craft and agricultural enterprises and the professions;
• 19 by cooperatives and mutual societies;
• 10 by family associations.
70 members are appointed by the government:
• 17 on proposals from the appropriate advisory bodies to represent state-owned enterprises, the not-for-profit sector and French expatriates;
• 11 after consultation with the trade organisations deemed most representative of the overseas departments and territories;
• 2 from the savings and housing sectors;
• 40 from among leading figures in the economic, social, scientific and cultural spheres.
In addition to the 233 members, there are 72 “department members”, appointed by the prime minister for two years, who give expert advice to their departments.

ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURES
The president is elected for two and a half years by the assembly of the Economic and Social Council, and directs its activities.
The Bureau is elected for two and a half years by the assembly and acts as an executive body. It comprises the president and 18 members, one for each of the representative groups.
The plenary assembly comprises the 233 members of the Council. It meets twice a month to vote on opinions.
Members of the Council are divided into nine permanent sections and two delegations; wherever possible each section and delegation includes at least one representative from each group.
The sections are as follows:
• Social Affairs
• Work
• Regional economies and spatial planning
• Living conditions
• Finances
• External Relations
• Productive activities, research and technology
• Agriculture and food
• Issues linked to the general economic situation
In 2000 and 2001 the following delegations were established:
• a delegation for women’s rights and equal opportunities for men and women
• a delegation for the European Union.

Details of all the Council’s work (opinions, reports and studies) and activities can be found at www.ces.fr.
Some basic facts about France

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Paris</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>63.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>Euro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface area</td>
<td>635,000 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>EUR 1892 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>EUR 29,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>8.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth</td>
<td>2.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

President of the Republic: Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy
Prime Minister: Mr. François Fillon
Minister for Foreign and European Affairs: Mr. Bernard Kouchner
State Secretary with responsibility for European affairs: Mr. Jean-Pierre Jouyet
Institutions

The institutions of the Fifth Republic are governed by the Constitution of 4 October 1958.

The Constitutional Council

The Council comprises nine members, and checks that elections are carried out in a regular manner and that organic laws and the laws referred to it are consistent with the constitution.

The President of the Republic

The Head of State is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage.

Nicolas Sarkozy, sixth president of the Fifth Republic, was elected on 6 May 2007.

The President of the Republic appoints the Prime Minister and on proposal of the Prime Minister the members of Government.

He chairs the Council of Ministers, promulgates laws and is the head of the armed forces. He can dissolve the National Assembly, and in the event of a serious crisis has exceptional powers.

The Prime Minister and the Government

Directed by the Prime Minister, the government determines and steers the country’s political course. The government is responsible to the Parliament. The Prime Minister directs the work of the government and ensures that laws are implemented.

The Parliament

The Parliament comprises two assemblies:

• The Senate, which comprises 331 senators elected by indirect universal suffrage, with renewal of one-third every three years (next renewal in September 2008);
• The National Assembly comprising 577 members elected by direct universal suffrage for five years (last election in 2007).

Besides monitoring the government, the two assemblies draw up and vote on laws. In this respect, the National Assembly is the final authority on legislation if there is disagreement between the two assemblies.

The legal system

Judicial authority is based on a fundamental distinction between judicial jurisdiction for lawsuits between persons and administrative jurisdiction for disputes between citizens and public authority.

The highest court is the Court of Cassation, which hears proceedings instituted against the rulings of appeal courts.

With regard to administrative jurisdictions, the supreme authority is the State Council which has the final say on the legality of administrative acts. It may also be referred to by the government on draft legislation and certain draft decrees.

Administrative divisions

The French Republic consists of the following:

• metropolitan France (divided into 22 regions and 96 departments),
• four overseas departments (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana and Réunion),
• seven overseas territories: French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, Mayotte, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint-Martin,
• and one sui generis territory: New Caledonia.

Some useful websites (*)

Office of the President of the Republic www.elysee.fr
Minister for Foreign and European Affairs www.diplomatie.gouv.fr
Senate www.senat.fr
State Council www.conseil-etat.fr

Programme of events in 2008
Conferences, seminars, hearings and extraordinary meetings
2nd half of the year

1. EESC ACTIVITIES

HORIZONTAL INITIATIVES

Participation by Mr Jacques Dermagne, president of the French ESC, in the EESC plenary session in conjunction with the French presidency of the EU  
Brussels, 10 July 2008

Biennial conference: "Entrepreneurship with a human face"  
Athens, 8-9 September 2008

Forum for organised civil society from the Baltic countries  
Riga, 25-26 September 2008

Press officers' seminar  
Brussels, 29 October 2008

Extraordinary EESC Bureau meeting  
Paris, 12 November 2008

Joint EESC/French ESC conference on the food challenge  
Paris, 13 November 2008

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Group III

Extraordinary meeting of the Group III Bureau  
Paris 26 September or 3 October 2008
Rome 7 November 2008

SECTION ACTIVITIES

SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

SMO – meeting + public hearing on "A single market for 21st century Europe"  
Paris, 22 and 23 September 2008  
[dates to be confirmed]

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

EU/India round table  

Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions  
Morocco, 15-17 October 2008

4th meeting of the EU-Croatia Joint Consultative Committee  
Croatia, October 2008

4th EU-China Round Table  
Paris, 6-7 November 2008

25th meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee  
Paris, November 2008

Joint EESC-ILO conference on Black Sea cooperation  
Brussels, 24-25 November 2008

1st meeting of the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Consultative Committee  
Place and dates to be decided
TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Hearing in conjunction with the meeting of the study group on "The social implications of transport and energy developments" (TEN/336) at Côtes d'Armor (to be confirmed), September 2008
Presentation of the own-initiative opinion on "Promoting broad public access to the European digital library" (TEN/292) and hearing in conjunction with work following the communication on the subject in November 2008, Paris BNF?

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP

Round Table on families in Europe at Brussels, EESC, September 2008
Hearing on "Sustainable productivity growth and quality of working life" at Brussels, EESC, 9 September 2008

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT

Public hearing: What is the real prospect of agricultural and food prices? (NAT) at Brussels, 22 September 2008
NAT section meeting in Paris (tbc) attended by Mr Barnier at Paris, 8 October 2008
SDO meeting in Bordeaux (tbc), organised in connection with the annual meeting of the EEAC (European Association of National Sustainable and Environment Councils) at Bordeaux, 9 October 2008
Conference on Forestry, the conference is taking place in the context of the European Forestry Week at Brussels, 23 October 2008

CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

Hearing on "Industrial change, territorial development and corporate responsibility" at Lille, France, October 2008
Seminar comparing industrial policies to deal with industrial change in Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria at Sofia, Bulgaria, 6-7 October 2008

2. EESC PARTICIPATION IN EXTERNAL EVENTS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Euromed Summit of foreign affairs ministers at Marseille 3-4 November 2008
Euromed Employment Summit at Morocco, 9-10 November 2008
3rd Session of the EU-Latin America Joint Parliamentary Assembly at Brussels, December 2008

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Conference presenting the results of the EUROCROP project regarding the 6th framework programme for research and development at Brussels, 3 September 2008
Conference on Aquaculture "A coherent approach to sustainable development" at Brussels 9-10 September 2008
Conference on "Agriculture in transition" at Wageningen, Netherlands, 26-29 October 2008

TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

International conference: "Cities and managing mobility - Towards a new culture for urban mobility " at Madrid, 29 September-1 October 2008
EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP

Participation of the SOC section president in the informal ministerial meeting on "employment and social affairs"

Chantilly, 10-11 July 2008

Conference on labour market mobility

Paris, 11-12 September 2008

High-level conference on integrating the Roma

Brussels, 16 September 2008

Estates-General on Multilingualism

Paris, 26 September 2008

Conference on Equal Treatment and Disability

Paris, 30 September 2008

Conference on Labour Market Attractiveness

Paris, 8-9 October 2008

Conference on the European Asylum System

Paris, 13-14 October 2008

Conference on Combating Illicit Employment Practices

Nantes, 24 October 2008

Conference on Integration

Paris, 4 November 2008

Conference on Mobility in Higher Education

Nancy, 4 November 2008

Conference on New Challenges and New Social Questions

Paris, 12-13 November 2008

Conference on Initial Professional Training for Young People

Versailles, 27-28 November 2008

Conference on Social Experimentation in Europe

Grenoble, 28-29 November 2008

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION, AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION

Public hearing "Review of the Energy Taxation Directive"

Brussels – date not yet confirmed (after adoption by the Commission – 2nd half of 2008)

General assembly of peripheral maritime regions

Bayonne – 1-3 October 2008

Seminar on sustainable urban development

Valenciennes – 16 October 2008

Meetings of the EC DGs on urban development

Venue to be confirmed – 29-30 October 2008

Eurocities

Lyon – 22 October 2008

Territorial cohesion and the future of cohesion policy

Paris – 30-31 October 2008

Centres of competitiveness

Sophia-Antipolis – 5-6 November 2008

Local governance

Lille – 17-18 November 2008

Exchange of experiences on regional organisation

Paris, 22-23 November 2008

Informal Council of ministers for spatial planning, regional policy, urban development and housing

Strasbourg – 24-26 November 2008

Urban forum

Montpellier – 27-28 November 2008

CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

Participation in the European Commission’s "restructuring" forums

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

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The French Presidency website, which can be found at http://www.eu2008.fr, provides up-to-date information on the presidency as it unfolds.


The website of the European Parliament (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/) similarly provides a large amount of information about the Parliament and its ongoing activities.

The Europa website of the European Union (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 (http://www.europa.eu/europedirect/) or call the following free number: 00 800 67 89 10 11.