



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**Working meeting with representatives of national ESCs and similar institutions  
in conjunction with the meeting of the Subcommittee on the European Convention**

**Brussels, 17 May 2002**

The President of the EESC, **Mr Frerichs**, welcomed the representatives of the national ESCs on behalf of the EESC's members, noting that the meeting was part of the "structured cooperation" defined by the national ESCs and the European ESC in the Helsinki Declaration of 23 November 2001.

The purpose of this first initiative, which was taking place just when the Convention was entering a very active phase, was to have a broad exchange of views on measures undertaken or planned by each of the ESCs in relation to the debate on Europe's future.

**The President** pointed out that for the purpose of taking part in the above debate, the Committee had set up a Subcommittee with the basic task of following the debate on Europe's future and supporting the participation of observers in the Convention's work. Within this Subcommittee, **Mr van Popta**, member of the EESC and of the Dutch Economic and Social Council (SER), had been asked to monitor relations with the national ESCs.

**Mr van Popta** also mentioned the purpose of the meeting, underlining the value of pooling information in this way in order to reach rapid agreement as far as possible on a number of joint initiatives and on a timetable of work. The initiatives in question would be passed on and supported by the EESC observers at the Convention.

**The President** then gave the floor to representatives of the national ESCs.

On behalf of the Belgian Central Economic Council (CCE) and National Employment Council (CNT), **Mr Davreux** observed that the discussion in civil society was developing along several lines.

First, the social partners were involved in the work of the national civil society forum, a think tank for members of the Belgian delegation to the Convention. As well as organisations representing the social partners, two observers were taking part in this forum: **Mr Windey**, President of the CNT, and **Mr Davreux**, representing the CCE. At the beginning of July the forum would be

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organising a seminar to analyse the results of a very broad survey of civil society based on a detailed questionnaire, which can be accessed on the Belgian site of the Convention ([www.euconvention.be](http://www.euconvention.be)).

Secondly, the partners in the CNT and CCE had not put forward joint proposals at this point. There were several reasons for this: the awareness-raising phase had not yet finished; the issues addressed by the Convention concerned very complex institutional areas; and the task of eliciting two or three key ideas was not an easy one.

Thirdly, account must be taken of an important recent factor, namely the contribution signed by six members of the Belgian delegation to the Convention published on 13 May. The document in question, which will be referred to the social partners, is intended to set out the tasks, powers and instruments of the Union and should help to stimulate the debate.

Finally, **Mr Davreux** wondered if similar consultations had been undertaken in other Member States and proposed that if this was not the case, the above-mentioned questionnaire could be used as a model for consulting national civil societies.

**Ms Ana María García Femenía**, Director of International Relations in the Spanish ESC, told participants that formal relations had been established between the ESC and the National Council for the Future of Europe set up by the Prime Minister, **Mr Aznar**.

There had also been informal contacts with the Spanish members of the Convention.

**The President** of the ESC had also had an initial meeting with **Ms Ana Palacio**, Spanish Member of the Convention, in order to consider various cooperation options.

On a practical front, the Spanish ESC had started work which was intended to lead to the presentation of an opinion on the future of Europe. The question that would arise after adoption of the opinion would be how the EESC should relay the position of the Spanish ESC to the bodies of the Convention.

Finally, as in many other Member States, an information site had been set up.

The Spanish ESC fully endorsed the broad lines of the action plan drawn up by the EESC for monitoring the work of the Convention. The role of observers in providing information to national ESCs should be emphasised in this connection. The Spanish ESC felt this to be particularly important and wanted information gathered by observers in the Convention to be regularly communicated to the national ESCs.

**Mr Leppänen**, Secretary-General of the Finnish ESC, said that in September his organisation would hold a debate on the work of the Convention, to which the Finnish members of the Convention would be invited.

A memorandum stating the positions of the Finnish ESC members would also be drawn up. The next question was what particular contribution the individual efforts of the ESCs could make for the members of the Convention. In all cases the solution must be practical.

**Ms Evelyne Pichenot**, head of the French ESC's delegation to the European Union, pointed out first that the French ESC had presented an opinion in October 2001 (see CESlink: [www.esc.eu.int](http://www.esc.eu.int)) in the framework of the national debate on the future of Europe, which formed the basis for the ESC's discussions.

More recently, several work priorities had been set for monitoring the Convention's progress. First, an information memo would be sent to members every month giving the timetable of work of the Convention and a report on the sessions. A networking project had also been set up between all the organisations and associations that had taken part in the national debate on the future of Europe in 2001.

The European Union delegation was to conduct a comparative study for completion by October on problems that could result from transposing the 54 articles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the constitutions of the Member States and the applicant countries, with a view to its incorporation into a future treaty. Another issue, the division of powers, particularly in relation to social questions, would also be addressed in the coming months.

Finally, an exercise had now been carried out to identify questions relevant to the Community in ESC opinions issued over the past five years. It would be very useful to know if similar work had been done by other ESCs.

**Mr Carlo Pinzani**, Secretary-General of the Italian National Council for the Economy and Employment, said that the CNEL and all the organisations represented in it had begun discussing the work of the Convention.

The CNEL was considering launching an initiative soon to stimulate a broader debate in civil society. But it must be conceded that the organisation was facing difficulties in its relations with government in the current political climate which threatened the social dialogue model.

**Mr Pinzani** stressed that the most effective approach for national ESCs was to work in close collaboration with the EESC, because their work thus carried greater weight with the Convention members.

**Mr Raymond Hencks**, Vice-President of the Luxembourg ESC, said that its position in the debate on Europe's future had already been the subject of preliminary discussions and proposals in connection with the annual opinion presented on 9 April 2002 to the government and Luxembourg representatives at the Convention (CESlink: [www.esc.eu.int](http://www.esc.eu.int)).

Important recommendations in that opinion concerned the fight against social exclusion and a call for a constitutional treaty to be drawn up. The opinion also advocated enshrining the Charter of Fundamental Rights in a constitution, so as to strengthen the European social model, and developing social dialogue in Europe through broad involvement of the national social partners.

**Mr Bart van Riel**, adviser to the Secretary-General of the Dutch ESC (SER), noted that the preliminary results of the Convention's work were being evaluated. He observed that the brisk pace adopted by the Convention meant that it was not always possible to have all the information promptly.

Once the current awareness-raising phase was complete, the SER planned to make a contribution in the form of an opinion.

**Mr van Riel** pointed out that several opinions had recently been produced by the SER on issues relating to the work of the Convention, including opinions on improving the efficiency of the administration, extending qualified majority voting, division of powers and social rights.

The SER was fully committed to the approach defined in Helsinki, which did not exclude the possibility of other, more far-reaching, forms of cooperation.

**Mr Almeida Serra**, member of the Portuguese ESC, said that in March his organisation had held a major debate on civil society, which would be the subject of a publication distributed to all the ESCs.

The results of current discussions about the Convention's work would also be issued as soon as they were available.

**Mr Almeida Serra** said that he would like more such meetings to be held because they allowed a useful exchange of information.

After the statements by representatives of the national ESCs, three main points were raised during the discussion by **Mr Little, Mr Nyberg, Ms Konitzer** and **Ms Carroll**:

- the question of launching a debate on the future of Europe in the countries that did not have an ESC or similar institution;
- the question of organising debates at regional level and linking them with the national debate;
- the possibility of having a provisional version of the document currently being drawn up by the French ESC on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in order to provide an additional basis for

discussion of this topic in the Subcommittee and possibly to provide further information and material for discussion to its authors.

In conclusion, **the President** noted that the comments could be accurately summed up in four key words: more information, coordination, consultation and cooperation in relation to action taken by the national ESCs and the European ESC.

Initial responses could already be provided to these needs:

- Mutual information should be promoted through systematic use of the CESlink portal, whose managers were meeting that same day in Athens.
- The annual meeting of the Secretaries-General of ESCs of the Member States, which would be held on 24 June in Dublin, would provide an opportunity to review the situation and to consider new approaches with respect to progress of the Convention's work.
- The symposium on the history and future of the European Union, taking place on 23 July to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ECSC, would provide an opportunity for the European ESC and the ESCs of the Member States to make a preliminary assessment of the work of the Convention before the start of the operational phase in the autumn.

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**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS OF ESCs AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS  
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Belgium	Central Economic Council (CCE) National Employment Council (CNT)	Michel Davreux <i>Adviser to the Secretary-General (CCE)</i>
Spain	Economic and Social Council	<b>Ana María García Femenía</b> <i>Director of International Relations</i>
Finland	Economic Council	Seppo Leppänen <i>Secretary-General</i>
France	Economic and Social Council	Evelyne Pichenot <i>Head of the Delegation to the European Union</i>  Mr Bruno Ravail <i>Administrator</i>
Italy	National Council for the Economy and Employment (CNEL)	Carlo Pinzani <i>Secretary-General</i>
Luxembourg	Economic and Social Council	Raymond Hencks <i>Vice-President</i>  Marianne Nati-Stoffel <i>Secretary-General</i>
Netherlands	Economic and Social Council (SER)	Mr van Popta <i>Member of the SER and the EESC</i>  Bart van Riel <i>Adviser to the Secretary-General</i>
Portugal	Economic and Social Council	José Almeida Serra <i>Adviser</i>