



**European Economic and Social Committee  
General Affairs Directorate  
Registry and Protocol Unit**

**SOME COMMENTS ON THE  
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE**

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**ESC INAUGURAL MEETING**

**Excerpts from the statement made by *Mr W. Hallstein*, President of the Commission of the European Economic Community at the inaugural meeting of the Economic and Social Committee held on 19 May 1958.**

*On behalf of the Commission of the European Economic Community, may I warmly welcome you to Brussels for your inaugural session. The Commission of the European Economic Community acknowledges the importance of the tasks awaiting the Economic and Social Committee, the scope of its role in organising the European Common Market and in formulating an economic viewpoint common to all Europe. One thing is certain. The implementation of the Treaties of Rome will radically change the wide range of economic and social conditions. It is precisely during this transitional period, during these various stages that the national economies of the Six must adapt to the new situation and leaders must keep abreast of new methods of production and new ideas. As part of this transformation process, the Economic and Social Committee will provide expertise and must be able to help overcome the difficulties which will arise.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the Rome Treaties give the Economic and Social Committee a strong position, by stating that the Council and the Commission must consult the ESC in all cases provided for in the Treaty.*

*As you can see, although it is not a parliament, the Economic and Social Committee is nonetheless, by virtue of the role it is called on to play, more than just a simple group of experts.*

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*And it can now be said that your Committee is thus, in a certain respect, already participating in making new laws for Europe, insofar as its voice is influential in the drafting of regulations which will be enacted in each of the Six for the purpose of implementing the European economic constitution - the Treaties of Rome.*

*The members of your Committee, whilst representing professional groups, or rather the professional classes, are not delegates from particular interest groups, but are accountable only to themselves and to the European Community. We have high hopes of seeing the natural tensions between social and professional groups eased in your Committee. Your mission is also to discuss our common problems from a technical point of view and you will thus become a group to whom those responsible for implementing the Treaties can talk without having to focus on the specific interests of each nation.*

*May I state here that the Commission will interpret the Treaty undertaking to consult the Economic and Social Committee on the issues in question to mean that a vote of this Committee will be considered as an essential part of our deliberations.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the Economic and Social Committee, which is meeting here today for the first time, assumes a considerable part of the responsibility for the destiny and future of 165 million people. Its opinions can have a definite impact on the future shape of Europe. We all want closer economic and political cooperation and greater fulfilment for our continent.*

*Although the Economic and Social Committee's direct areas of activity are economic, technical and social, I am sure it will also contribute to building this better future, this new force.*

**A. MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

**1. Letter from *Mr Michel Rocard*, chairman on the EP Committee on Employment and Social Affairs to *Ms Nicole Fontaine*, President of the EP, 29 June 2000.**

*At the beginning of the year, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs endorsed my proposal to consult the Economic and Social Committee on the own-initiative report on Supplementary Health Insurance for which I was rapporteur.*

*This gave me the opportunity to appreciate the value of tapping the vast pool of expertise of this Institution, established by the Treaty of Rome in order to enable the economic and social forces to participate in the Community decision-making process and whose scope of action was broadened by the Treaty of Amsterdam.*

*The quality of the ESC's work, the relevance of its comments and its ability to sum up key issues, together with the search for compromises on a particularly difficult subject, which is both technical and political, have enabled me to take account of the positions of the representatives of European civil society and, without a doubt, to improve my draft report.*

*In the light of this experience, it seems to me that the Economic and Social Committee should be more systematically consulted by the European Parliament and asked to issue opinions on not only matters in hand but also on forthcoming topics.*

*The Committee's remarkable pool of expertise could provide us with background material on priority issues, which we do not have the time nor the resources to go into, at a rate of two own-initiative reports by the Committee per annum.*

*Above and beyond the procedures and our genuine need to be able to call on experts, this is also the way to involve the civil society organisations more closely in the European venture and in strengthening a Europe that is close to its citizens.*

**2. Statement by *Mr Giorgio Napolitano*, Chairman of the EP Committee on Constitutional Affairs, to the ESC Bureau on 23 May 2000.**

*I have spoken with a few members of the Convention, including Mr Méndez de Vigo, who is also a member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee, head*

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*of the EP delegation and deputy chairman of the Convention, and these friends told me they greatly appreciated the meeting between the Convention and NGOs. The meeting was felt to provide a very significant opening, and the many helpful discussions can be supplemented by the results of your hearings and of your Resolution.*

*Generally speaking, it is difficult to give any guidance for civil society. I think you have more know-how in this area than the European Parliament, as historically this has been your specific remit. The recent meeting between the Convention for the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the NGOs is an example of how civil society relations can provide vital input.*

**3. Excerpts from the statement made by Ms Nicole Fontaine, President of the Parliament European to the ESC Assembly on 12 July 1999.**

*The numerous instances of rapporteurs from our two institutions working together bear witness to the spirit in which the Committee intends to rise to the challenges presented by the new powers assigned to it by the Amsterdam Treaty, regarding consultation by the Parliament in particular.*

*With respect to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, I have to stress that the Economic and Social Committee has been very involved in this body's work, in particular through its active participation in the Convention's hearings. This will come as no great surprise to those of you who were involved in drawing up the European Social Charter in 1989. We recognise the major role that your Committee played in framing this charter and await with interest the opinion you will issue on the Charter next September.*

*As a consultative body, your Committee makes a very valuable contribution. This should encourage us to increase dialogue in all the Committee's areas of competence and cooperate more closely with it, so as to make it easier for European Parliament bodies to take account of Committee opinions and encourage fruitful dialogue between the rapporteurs.*

*The Treaty of Amsterdam has been in force since 1 May 1999 and since then we have been cooperating more closely. At the beginning of this year, the Parliament decided, for the first time, to ask the Economic and Social Committee for its opinion in connection with its own-initiative report on Supplementary Health Insurance, whose rapporteur was Michel Rocard, Chairman of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. This first application of the new Article 262 of the Treaty is of great importance to both our institutions. **Mr Rocard** informed me personally that he considered this*

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*cooperation to have been very positive and to have helped him improve his draft report, which deals with an issue that is very complex and sensitive for our citizens. We intend to repeat this experience, though not excessively. I believe it should be reserved for major issues on which your expertise will be of great value to our institution. Your opinions will therefore have an even greater impact.*

**4. Excerpts from the statement made by *Mr José Maria Gil Robles*, President of the Parliament European to the ESC Assembly on 25 February 1999.**

*As a consultative body, the Committee will make extremely valuable contributions to the deliberations of the two branches of the budgetary authority, which should encourage us to intensify our dialogue in all areas within the remit of the Committee and at all levels. This requires that we enhance cooperation and seek practical ways of facilitating the consideration of ESC opinions by Parliament bodies and of establishing dialogue between the rapporteurs.*

*All of these are matters of great interest to the European Parliament. We will await the results of the ESC's work with much anticipation. These will make an invaluable contribution to the decision-making procedure in the legislative and political institutions and, furthermore, the ESC will play the very useful role of a linkage between the institutional life of the EU and those involved in civil society in the Member States.*

*I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the work of those people who carry out voluntary activities, thereby enabling the many social and humanitarian-oriented associations to exist. These are European citizens who participate actively in society and whose behaviour is genuinely exemplary.*

*As a result of its specific potential, the ESC could further enhance the work of the political institutions in the field of external relations. In the context of the enlargement process, the dialogue launched by the Economic and Social Committee with the main socio-economic organizations and representatives of economic and social spheres in the countries of central and eastern Europe is an important component. We call for the establishment of consultative committees with the other applicant countries, based on the model for Hungary, and more recently with Bulgaria.*

**B. PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

1. **Excerpts from the statement made by Ms Anna Ekström, State Secretary at the Swedish Ministry of Industry, representing the Presidency-in-office of the Council of the European Union, to the ESC Assembly on 24 January 2001.**

*Lastly, I should like to express my appreciation for the Committee's work on many of the issues which will be particularly important in the run-up to the Stockholm European Council. I am convinced that the Committee's opinions looking ahead to the Stockholm meeting will make a valuable contribution.*

2. **Excerpts from the statement made by Mr Francisco Seixas da Costa, Secretary of State for European Affairs, representing the Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, to the ESC Assembly on 26 January 2000.**

*I can nevertheless tell you, in my capacity as a member of the Portuguese delegation which will also be attending the Intergovernmental conference, that we will communicate the deep and considerable appreciation of the work carried out by this Committee, which was moreover expressed by the Portuguese Prime Minister to the ESC President. We do not say this merely as a matter of form. We believe that the ESC reflects a part of the richness of Europe arising from its diversity in terms not only of the variety of nationalities represented here but also of the various characteristics and features within each of the European Member States. We feel that it would be entirely irresponsible at the moment for the European Union to move towards a kind of sectoral federalisation of its activities, centralising appointments to a body of this type.*

*We also advocate an expansion of the consultative work of the ESC. This Committee has demonstrated a considerable sense of responsibility.*

*Europe has also been shaped by the institutional mobilisation of civil society and this ability of civil society to represent its views via its various different sectors constitutes for us a wealth which must not be lost.*

*Reference has frequently been made here to the fact that the Committee adopts unanimous stances and this might appear to make it less credible in some way. On the contrary, this is the strength of this Committee. The proof of this is the very fact that, given that it is not a forum for social dialogue but a forum for representing the various different aspects of society, it is possible for unanimous opinions to be issued from this forum and this represents a considerable strength of this structure, in terms of what it represents and what underpins it. Therefore, this Committee has already proven that it does not defend the status quo and that it is necessarily open*

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*to change. I do, nevertheless, fully understand that this Committee is not open to changes which would change it beyond recognition. We, for our part, will pass on the Committee's concerns.*

3. **Excerpts from the statement made by *Mr Kimmo SASI*, Finnish Minister of Foreign Trade and European Affairs, representing the presidency-in-office of the Council of the European Union, to the ESC Assembly on 8 July 1999.**

*From the standpoint of the presidency, the Economic and Social Committee has an important role to play in the EU's decision-making process as a consultative body. The Committee works in partnership with the other institutions and through its extensive know-how and expertise it brings added-value to Community decisions. This wide-ranging expertise is particularly important when the different institutions, in particular the European Parliament and Council, are seeking common strategies for their work. For the EU to become closer to citizens, dynamic and effective discussion forums are needed which can pass on the views of civil society organisations. This task has been bestowed on the Economic and Social Committee by the founding treaty.*

4. **Excerpts from the statement made by *Mr Heiner Flassbeck*, Secretary of State, German Federal Ministry of Finance, speaking on behalf of the Presidency-in-office of the EU Council, to the ESC Assembly on 28 January 1999.**

*I feel it is important to involve the social partners and the Economic and Social Committee in the approach to economic policy. It was with great interest that I read your December opinion, which I endorse almost one hundred percent. I believe it is particularly relevant.*

**C. MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**1. Excerpts from the statement made by *Ms Loyola de Palacio*, Vice-President of the European Commission (responsible for relations with the ESC), to the ESC Assembly on 28 February 2001.**

*The Committee contributes actively to the process of approving Community texts on a large number of issues (in the 2001 action programme). The Commission hopes to be able to count on the opinions of the Economic and Social Committee which can make a valuable contribution to improving the quality of consultations and, above all, to improving the Commission's initiatives and the Council's decisions.*

*The Committee has established itself as a framework in which the various components of society and the organisations represented at the Committee can express themselves and attempt to reach agreement and consensus on subjects of great importance for the sections of the European public which you represent and which, in a certain way, feel protected and sheltered by your activity.*

*Governance is opening a new chapter for the activities of the ESC. It is a complex subject with major social and political implications, and an area which the ESC will have the opportunity to study in detail. The Commission awaits the Committee's opinion with great interest, as the Committee, which wishes to make itself the forum for civil society has within its ranks many components of governance.*

*The Commission wishes to make the Committee's function more relevant and it proposes a negotiated document, possibly a protocol, laying down reciprocal commitments aimed at greater efficiency and, ultimately, defending more effectively the general interests of the Union.*

**2. Excerpts from the statement made by *Sir Christopher Patten*, European Commissioner for External Relations, at the inauguration of the India/European Union Round Table at the ESC on 29 January 2001.**

*I am impressed by the competence and high level of both the Indian and the European members of the Round Table. **I am also particularly pleased that the EU's Economic and Social Committee represents European Civil Society.** The quality of your commitment to and your preparation of this Round Table perfectly reflects the important institutional role you play within the EU, as the highest representation of our Civil Society.*

**3. Excerpts from the letter from *Mr Pascal Lamy*, Member of the European Commission, to the President of the European Economic and Social Committee on 18 October 2000.**

*The European Commission also attaches a great deal of importance to improving social conditions in the world, considering this to be one of the key elements of sustainable development.*

*To this end, the Commission has drawn up a strategy aimed at promoting labour standards, one element of which is the introduction of ongoing dialogue with its trading partners and civil society organisations on these matters.*

*The need for such a dialogue is very apparent, both within the European Union and particularly in the context of North/South relations. Dialogue is essential, either as an attempt to reconcile different points of view, or as a means of explaining the European position more effectively.*

*Your Committee, with the composition it has, would be the appropriate forum for an exchange of views and a number of comprehensive debates on this subject.*

*It would therefore be extremely useful for us if your Committee could draw up an exploratory opinion on "Human rights in the workplace" using its networks of representatives of civil society organisations in EU and non-EU countries.*

**4. Excerpts from the statement made by *Mr Franz Fischler*, Member of the European Commission, to the ESC Assembly on 8 December 1999.**

*We have a long road ahead of us. Your experience and the perspectives from which you see agriculture and agricultural policy are of irreplaceable value for the implementation of our European agricultural model in today's EU and tomorrow's enlarged EU.*

5. **Excerpts from the statement made by Mr Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, to the ESC Assembly on 20 October 1999.**

*Looking at the agenda of the Economic and Social Committee, no-one could fail to be impressed by the range of topics you cover in your debates. In recent months you have dealt with such diverse matters as telecommunications policy, civil protection, the information society, the role of women in economic and social life and the competitiveness of European enterprises in the face of globalisation.*

*The Commission is aware of the vast breadth of your scope and appreciates your precious contribution on these and many other important questions. We study your reports and opinions carefully. In the coming weeks and months the Commission will, among other things, be drafting a **White Paper on food safety** and preparing for the **Lisbon Summit on employment and social cohesion**. I would welcome your analysis of both these issues and your suggestions for action to improve food safety and to create jobs.*

6. **Excerpts from the statement made by Mr Mario Monti, Member of the European Commission, to the ESC Assembly on 26 May 1999.**

*I would like to begin by thanking the Economic and Social Committee for its consistent support for the Commission's efforts to ensure the single market fulfils its potential as a motor for jobs, competitiveness and economic growth. In particular, the valuable work of the ECOSOC's Single Market Observatory complements our own efforts to improve the functioning of the single market.*

7. **Excerpts from the statement made by Mr Pdraig Flynn, Member of the European Commission, to the ESC Assembly on 3 December 1998.**

*The Commission greatly values the work done by the ECOSOC. Your predecessors built up a reputation for producing reports which are of a high standard and this has allowed the Committee to play a distinctive role among the European Institutions. Your period in office will see the coming into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, which will further broaden your Committee's role, particularly in relation to the new social and employment issues addressed in the Treaty. This opens up interesting possibilities for your work.*

*But it is not just the new Treaty which makes this an interesting time. Across so many aspects of European society, we are in a time of change. The world*

*we are entering in the new millennium will be profoundly different from the one we will soon leave behind.*

*Economic and social transformation is happening at an unprecedented rate, driven by changes in technology, work organization, demography and political changes such as EMU and enlargement. There is potential here for Europe to make enormous progress, to better the lives of our citizens in so many ways.*

*On the other hand, there is throughout Europe great anxiety that the future will benefit only some people, that it will weaken the forces and systems by which Europe has created a cohesive and inclusive society over the last fifty years. We face a major challenge: how can we realize the potential of the new dynamism in technology and of the world's largest single economic entity once EMU becomes a reality, while continuing to give our citizens the society based on solidarity and security which they clearly want.*

*I would suggest that you, the members of the Economic and Social Committee, might keep this challenge in mind. You are here as representatives of various interest groups within civil society. It seems to me that you have the experience and the standing necessary to address this challenge and to help us, in the other EU institutions, to make the right choices as we seek to develop policy against this background of change.*

*There is, therefore, a lot of interesting work which we might do together over the forthcoming years. It seems to me that there are a number of strands of current activity on the EU stage which you would find very rewarding.*

**8. Excerpts from the statement made by Ms Monika Wulff-Mathies, Member of the European Commission, to the ESC Assembly on 10 September 1998.**

*I am very pleased that the Economic and Social Committee will be the first of the European institutions to approve the Commission's proposals for the new Structural Fund regulations when it adopts its opinion at today's plenary session.*

*In doing so, the Committee is demonstrating that despite different regional, sectoral and national interests it is possible to reach a consensus in Europe about the future of structural policy.*

*This is an important signal to national governments, the Council and the European Parliament, showing that tactical positions can be overcome and that the necessary decisions are being taken as quickly as possible in the interests of those concerned.*

*The Committee's section concerned has discussed the Commission proposals in detail and presented a unanimously approved, technically competent and even-handed opinion to the plenary session.*

*As members of the Economic and Social Committee, you have helped considerably over the past few years to bring Europe closer to citizens, not just through the quality of your opinions, but also by acting as an interface between Europe and national governments.*

*We all know that public debate is still not sufficiently "European", which makes it all the more important for interest groups, trade unions and non-governmental organizations to help make people in the member states more aware of the impact of European issues on the way they live. Your opinions give the lie to all those who maintain that European laws are passed behind closed doors, without the involvement of governments, let alone citizens.*

*Fifty years of European integration, increasing economic interdependence in the single market, the forthcoming introduction of the single currency - these are things that have come about because of a realization that major problems can only be solved now through joint action.*

*This is increasingly the case with the fight against unemployment, which the Economic and Social Committee has long been trying to put on the European agenda. So I need hardly to tell you of all people that common policies do not lessen the national responsibility of the member states; rather they mobilize more European solidarity to solve common problems. As you rightly say in your opinion on the Structural Fund regulation, our structural policy can and must play a role here.*

**9. Excerpts from the statement made by *Mr Romano Prodi*, President of the European Commission, to the 386<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee on 28 and 29 November 2001:**

*(We are placed) under a political and moral obligation to work better, to join forces to create a strong, democratic and united Europe. You have a special role to play here. This role was reaffirmed in the Protocol of partnership between the Commission and the Committee which I had the honour of signing a few weeks ago, with your President.*

*(...) Governance is also your concern, above all because the Economic and Social Committee is by its very nature a mediator between social partners and a bridge between organised civil society and the Union (...).*

*But the Committee also has a role to play downstream that is at least as important, namely in monitoring and assessing European regulations and programmes. This is particularly relevant in view of the professional experience of its members and represents an added value that is indispensable. The success of the Single Market Observatory set up by the Committee is a practical example of this type of contribution.*

*The White Paper's proposals on Community legislation draw heavily on the work of the Economic and Social Committee, particularly the Veer opinion entitled Simplified rules in the Single Market, adopted in October 2000.*

*The Commission is counting on a positive contribution from the Committee to its Action Plan for Better Regulation. Simplifying legislation should become a constant concern which we all share.*

*You are also keeping pace with the preparations for enlargement, forging close links with organised civil society in each of the candidate countries, not least via the Joint Consultative Committees which have recently been set up and are already doing valuable work. This is extremely useful, because enlargement can only succeed if there is well-informed participation and a proper understanding of the Community ideal among the citizens and civil society of the future Member States.*

*As intermediaries you can reconcile certain militant associations in the field of major world issues with the ideals and achievements of the European Communities.*

*The Committee therefore has an important part to play in revitalising the Community method. Your expanding remit seems to me to be in perfect accord with the creativity and the need for expression of today's society.*

*There is increasing evidence of the trust placed in the Committee and the high expectations we have of it. The most obviously political and important signal is the amendment agreed at Nice. (...) this European recognition of your role as intermediaries is not only promising for the future but is also essential for the present.*