



European Economic and Social Committee



Programme of President
Dimitris Dimitriadis
2006 – 2008



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INTRODUCTION



Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee 2006-2008.

My programme will not be in contradiction with the programme of my predecessor [Anne-Marie Sigmund]. My priorities are different, but as the primus inter pares of our Assembly, it is my honour and duty to represent the interests of the socio-professional organisations and of its members.

1. The leitmotiv of my programme is the same one as in my Inaugural Speech: "Entrepreneurship with a human face". Our Europe needs to encourage entrepreneurship ("Unternehmergeist") at all levels of society and in all its forms in order to face the challenges that lie more than ever ahead of us. Entrepreneurship is the key to facing the challenges of globalisation, creating new jobs and innovation having always in mind the social and environmental issues. It is not an objective in itself, but it is rather a mental state we must adopt not only for business but also in our daily life. The ultimate purpose is to preserve our European social model – which is an example to other parts of the world – and to tailor it accordingly in order to be able to face the threats resulting from global competition, and important demographic changes.
2. Being myself an entrepreneur, I know very well that time is precious and that is the reason why I have focused my programme on essential priorities and tried to be concrete, practical and measurable.
3. It is divided into three parts:
 - My political, thematic priorities;
 - The role of the EESC in the context of the European Union;
 - The Committee's own affairs.
4. First of all, I am particularly grateful to all the members who responded to my request for personal contributions. They are all valuable and well targeted, I have particularly taken into consideration the suggestions reflecting a broad consensus. If you find no trace of your suggestions in this programme, it does not mean that I have disregarded them: they are in a file and I will continue to refer to them during the implementation of my programme. Likewise, new ideas are always welcome.

POLITICAL PRIORITIES



Facing Globalisation

5. Globalisation imposes three kinds of challenge to the EU: an economic one, an intellectual one (concerning education, innovation and research) and the one of governance. The Greek philosopher Demosthenes wrote already 2400 years ago: one has to prefer words that save above words that please. We cannot stop the evolution which makes some economic sectors suffer from globalisation. Our task is to coach and to correctly canalise it, to find the adequate solutions, in order to keep up with global competition in an ever faster changing world. The challenge of globalisation must constitute a new engine for the European integration: European citizens start being aware that only the national framework alone is not sufficient to make things better and they become eager to “see through” their national “curtain” the real human, tailored by their needs, European Union.
6. The European Union is, with its current 25 Member States, already the most important economic union in the world. What remains to be done is to “unify” the voice and the needs of all the European citizens towards a political and social union and not just an economic one.
7. In this context the European Economic and Social Committee has an important role to play, both as a structure with its various organs and via your valuable contributions as members. As Europeans and members of your national and international organisations, you are the key and focal points for diffusing the European ideas, needs, expectations thus making people aware of the importance of the EU’s decisions in their daily lives, but also for transferring the European citizen’s echo to the EU and its institutions.
8. No policy and no programme will be effective without each of you taking an active part in it by multiplying the effects and providing feedback on its implementation.

The renewed Lisbon Agenda and Competitiveness

9. I strongly believe that the most important political instrument of the European Union to face globalisation is the renewed Lisbon agenda. At the 2005 Spring Summit, in order to revitalise the process, it was decided to concentrate the priorities on:
- stimulating growth and jobs;
 - measures to encourage research, innovation and competitiveness.
10. Progress has been made but still much remains to be done.





11. The EESC will contribute under my Presidency to the success of the renewed Lisbon strategy and support the related initiatives of the European Union. One considerable contribution is to facilitate networking between the worlds of research and innovation, industrial applications and training. We should focus especially on small and medium-sized enterprises, where most jobs and innovations are created.
12. I am convinced that the introduction of better regulations at a European and national level (as recommended by our Single Market Observatory), the simplification of administrative burdens at a local level, will generate growth, jobs and risk-taking behaviour. This subject is a top priority of the incoming German Presidency of the Council and I warmly welcome this approach.
13. The Committee's work should be actively promoted to the Commission which is preparing a revision of its new approach on standardisation and a mutual recognition directive.
14. Our Summary report to the Spring Summit 2008 must be comprehensive and as close as possible to the European reality in order to have the impact it deserves from the European leaders.

Sustainable Development

15. A policy objective closely linked to the renewed Lisbon agenda is sustainable development.
16. The first meeting of the new Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) was held on 7 December 2006, and a major conference is planned for Spring 2007 on Climate Change and Clean Energy. It should focus particularly on business and its contribution to positive and innovative solutions.
17. The SDO should encourage networks of interested partners, develop contacts with the numerous organisations dealing with sustainable development at economic and social level, with the European Environment Agency and Eurostat.



Climate change, Energy policy and Environmental protection

18. In our times, the political agendas change almost daily and that leads me to the new top priority that has just been promoted by the European Commission, namely climate change and energy policy.

19. In his speech to the German Bundestag on 30 November 2006, Mr José Manuel Barroso stated that "Europe is in the forefront in this area and has every intention of continuing to play a leading role". However the EU must "involve its international partners in meeting this challenge and provide assistance to the developing countries so that they can join our efforts. The stakes are such that we should explore these questions together with imagination and a strong political will".

20. Energy policy has climbed to the top of the EU agenda because of the fast-growing demand of it in the developed and developing countries and it is an important element for sustainable development, climate change, transport and human well-being. The EU imports around 50% of its energy and therefore solutions must be found by increased energy efficiency and diversification of energy sources, supply countries and supply channels. Significant reductions in global emissions over the next few decades have become unavoidable.



21. The Commission proposed last October to create a Global Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Fund, and a Green paper is expected for 10 January 2007.

22. The topic will also be on the agenda of the G8 Summit in June 2007.

23. The EESC has very experienced members familiar with this subject, and I count on them to play an active part in the discussion. Together with our experts and the Bureau, I want to reflect on how to build up an appropriate structure in the Committee and I would welcome it if the Committee were asked to deliver exploratory opinions on this topic.

European social model

24. Social dialogue is an important tool for democracy and economic development. Close cooperation between the European Union, national governments, the social partners and other civil society stakeholders is needed. Necessary reforms and adjustments of social security systems must be negotiated and understood in order to be accepted. The famous Services Directives is a striking example in this context. Therefore we should follow closely the proposed "Working Time Directive", which is currently being discussed by the European Parliament and the Council.



25. The social system must develop training, encourage and stimulate adaptability. Entrepreneurs sometimes need a second or even a third chance to start a business. Today lifelong learning has become a real necessity in order to increase the chances of employability, and constant training is a must to get new skills between jobs.
26. The changes provoked by our ageing societies are a challenge for social security systems, that is true. But we must also explore all the potential that an active senior population represents. This dimension merits our particular attention in the future.

External Relations

27. The institutional role of the Committee in the field of external relations is limited. However, by our steady contacts with our partners outside the European Union, we can be a “flanking partner” to the EU’s official policy. As we are not politicians (and nor do we pretend to be), we can sometimes assist politicians when foreign policy is not making much progress.

IAESCSI (International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions)

28. I am pleased that in Seoul in September 2005 the EESC was granted permanent member status on the board of the IAESCSI. This is an obligation for us not only to assert the EESC’s role as a full member of IAESCSI, but also to play a leading role in this organisation. We should start preparations for the EESC’s participation in the 2007 International Meeting in Beijing early next year. I will also develop contacts at an early stage with the forthcoming Brazilian presidency of IAESCSI.



Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee in the Euromed Meeting in Slovenia on 16 November 2006.

Euromed countries

29. Our partnership with the southern Mediterranean countries and their Economic and Social Councils (where these exist) is a success story and should not be underestimated. The last summit held in November in Ljubljana underlined this.
30. As a Mediterranean, I devote and I am going to devote a lot of attention to this partnership during my mandate.
31. We shall continue to create closer links with the Euromed civil societies to promote participative democracy, education, creation of new jobs, human rights (including gender equality) and environmental policies, encouraging debate and cooperation on a sub-regional level.
32. Allow me at this point a political statement regarding the Middle East Peace process: a lasting peace must be built on mutual understanding of the Euromed civil societies.

Enlargement

33. Whilst it seems to be accepted among European leaders that further enlargements require institutional reforms within the EU as a precondition, the Committee should nevertheless continue its work in the different fields of activities of civil society.

• Western Balkans and Croatia

34. The Western Balkan Contact Group has my full attention and should be enlarged to 12 members like other similar Groups of the Committee. Likewise, I would like to encourage the Follow-up Group EU-Croatia to continue its considerable efforts and to help prepare a rapid accession of Croatia to the EU.

• Turkey

35. It is well known that the accession negotiations are experiencing difficulties. I hope that a diplomatic solution to the question of the opening of Turkish airports and naval ports for planes and ships from Cyprus can be found quickly, so that negotiations continue. I do not have to go into detail regarding the importance of this process and the key role of Turkey due to its geopolitical position.

36. Our contribution should be to strengthen the links with Turkish civil society and the business community and via the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), in order to encourage the efforts for reforms that lead to the country's readiness for accession to the EU.

Bilateral relations

37. Relations with the two most populous countries, India and China, which have some of the fastest growing economies worldwide, should be at the centre of our attention when it comes to bilateral contacts. As I said in my inaugural speech: these countries will provide a benchmark for us as well as for the world economy in 2050.

• EU-India

38. We should reinforce the civil society dimension of relations with India. I will attend the next meeting of the EU-India Round Table in the first quarter of 2007.

• EU-China

39. We should strengthen the links between our Committee and Chinese civil society by setting up in the first semester of 2007 an EU-China Round Table on the lines of the one we have with India. Our aims must be to jointly promote full respect for the international rules of competition with regard to international trade and to encourage best practices in the field of social and



Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, and Mr Dipak Chatterjee, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (from right to left).

environmental standards.



Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, and Mr Guan Chengyuan, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Kingdom of Belgium (from right to left).

Intercultural Dialogue

40. We have to promote the idea of opening our minds towards different cultures. In the first place, I have in mind the many large immigrant populations (already) present in most of the Member States.
41. It must be clear that respect for traditions must be seen both ways:
- from the side of the immigrants the laws and values of the states in which they chose to live;
 - from the side of the EU Member States and their societies to be careful and to take into consideration that the values and the traditions of the immigrants are not in contradiction with “our” laws and values.
42. The common philosophy of the EU encourages an inter-religious dialogue with other cultures of the world. The upcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council wants to make this dialogue a priority of its agenda in 2008. I welcome the creation of a working group on cultural events, with the participation of my predecessor, as part of the Communication Group, and anticipating the generation of some significant conferences on that topic.

THE ROLE OF THE EESC IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Constitutional Treaty, Institutional reform and the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the European Union

43. Like most EU leaders, I count very much on the German Presidency for a relaunch of the institutional debate and negotiation. After the shock of the two negative referendums in France and the Netherlands and an extended “period of reflection”, the time is ripe. The EU needs to address the fundamental aspects laid down in the Constitutional Treaty, whether we finally entitle it a “Constitution” or simply a “Basic” or “Fundamental Treaty”.
44. I remind you that the EESC was invited as an official observer during the work of the European Convention that drafted a Constitution for the EU. This was under the presidency of my predecessors, Mr Göke Frerichs and Mr Roger Briesch.
45. The proposed Berlin Declaration of 25 March 2007 – the day of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome – should now become a milestone in the jigsaw puzzle that will have to be assembled gradually to settle the institutional question. Let me repeat here once again: the European Economic and Social Committee fully supports the principles, the values and the substance of the Constitutional Treaty.

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46. With the creation of an ad hoc Group on institutional reform at the Bureau meeting in November 2006 in Helsinki, we have given a signal that the Committee is taking up the reflection and discussion and I look forward to the position papers that will emerge from that Group. The Committee will also play a very active part in the ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the European Union.

Upgrading the profile of the EESC among the EU institutions

47. But even more important for me is to raise the political profile of our Committee. This is going to be an overall challenge for all my activities as President during the next two years. I am deeply convinced that our Committee has a crucial function among the EU institutions and bodies with its “bridging” function to the citizens and its unique assembly of expertise.



European Parliament

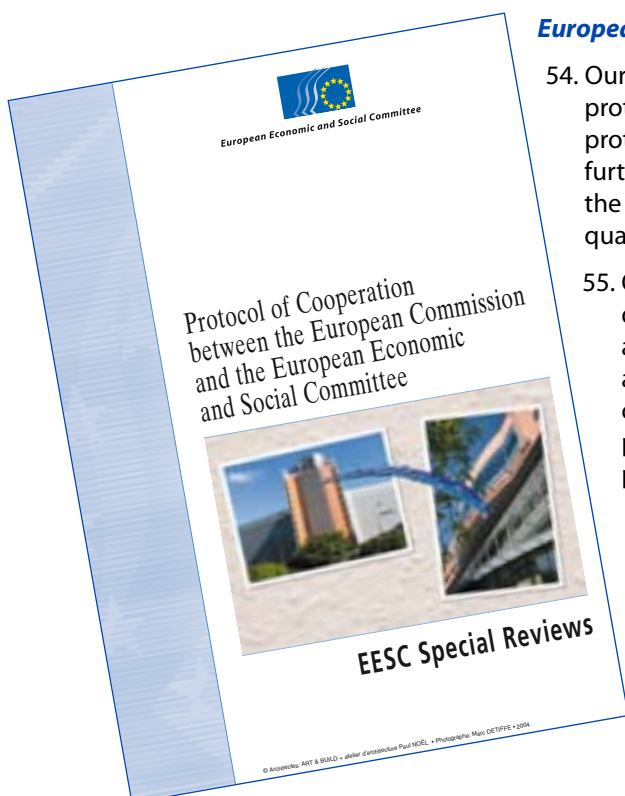
48. We should in particular increase our efforts to strengthen our relations with the European Parliament, as its importance has steadily grown over the past decade. This is clearly the “new frontier”.
49. I want to establish regular contacts with the EP’s Conference of Committee Chairmen and with the chairmen of the political groups. We need a more active presence and participation of our members in meetings of the parliamentary Committees. I will explore how and under what conditions we can revitalise the EESC/EP contact group.
50. Notwithstanding these efforts, our rapporteurs will play a key role in this approach: it is up to them to contact their counterparts on the EP side, i.e. the rapporteurs of the European Parliament, on their subject and to monitor to what extent the opinions delivered by the Committee are bringing an added value to the decision-making procedure.
51. In order to facilitate this process, I have launched an update of the Consolidated Guide to Preparing Opinions.

The Council and its Presidencies

52. Our members should be invited to participate more frequently in meetings of the Council and its working groups. A steady dialogue should be maintained with the General Secretariat of the Council on the working methods of the Council.
53. Even more important is the close observation of the priorities of the Council Presidencies. I have already mentioned a few with regard to the German and Slovenian Presidencies. In addition, I will seek to hold bilateral contacts with the Permanent Representations of the Member States whenever necessary. But most important are the exploratory opinions we have received from the German Presidency, regarding notably the Challenges of globalisation, which I have earmarked as one of our thematic priorities.

European Commission

54. Our relations with the Commission are generally excellent and the protocol of 2005 is proof of this. The envisaged addendum to this protocol, based on the Communication “Communicating Europe”, will further strengthen relations and ensure closer cooperation between the Committee and the Commission. I hope it will be signed in the first quarter of 2007.
55. Our Rapporteurs should not only meet Commissioners and their departments before they start drafting opinions. After the adoption of an opinion by the Plenary Session they should go again and sell their “product” at the highest possible level. Of course our opinions are sent by the Secretariat after approval in plenary to the Commission, but the Commission receives so many papers...



Relations with the national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs)

56. As a first step in assuming a “leadership role” in the network of ESCs in the European Union, I have invited the respective Presidents of all the national ESCs to come to Brussels to attend the Bureau meeting in April 2007 and to participate in a debate on institutional reform.
57. One of my ambitions is to succeed in convincing all stakeholders in Cyprus of the benefits they can obtain from establishing a national Economic and Social Council. Another is to maintain via the EESC members from the countries that do not have a national ESC – including such important Member states as Germany or the UK – stable links with the main socio-professional organisations and NGOs.

Dialogue with Civil Society in Europe

58. I intend to establish formal cooperation agreements with the main socio-professional organisations at the request of the Groups, with the collaboration of the Chairman of each Group.
59. Transparency regarding the work, composition and functioning of the Liaison group with civil society, is important in order to avoid the EESC becoming assimilated to a large NGO.
60. We need to establish new criteria or to reconsider the already existing ones regarding the approach and the collaboration with civil society organisations inside and even more so outside the EU.

THE COMMITTEE'S OWN AFFAIRS

61. As a general remark on this final chapter of my programme, let me say that we can be proud of our Committee. We have good working bodies that deliver excellent results. But as a result of past and recent enlargements, I believe it is time to start a general reflection on their shape and working methods (including probably the sensible question of the use of languages). I would not predict the outcome, nor the timetable of such a reflection, but my feeling is we should not avoid it.

Renegotiating the Cooperation Agreement with the Committee of the Regions (CoR)

62. A first step was to sign a prolongation of the present agreement for six months, plus an automatic additional six-month extension if necessary, to reach a stable agreement for the next ten-year period. Negotiations between monitoring groups from both sides are under way. My aim is clear: continue cooperation with Joint Services and a maximum of synergies, while respecting budget neutrality.

I will rely very much on the assistance of Vice-President Alexander von Schwerin for this exercise.

63. But I am even more ambitious. I will also discuss with the President of the Committee of the Regions how we can intensify our cooperation on political issues, with a view to organising joint conferences and projects. Furthermore, it is necessary to keep abreast of the Committee of the Regions' work, and support our Sections when they need to get in touch with the CoR.



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Functioning of the Committee: Fewer and better opinions, better follow-up

64. An important point, on which I noticed broad consensus amongst those of you who sent contributions is certainly an increased, if not dramatic, prioritisation of our obligatory opinions. We issue too many and we do not concentrate enough on political priorities. I will discuss with the Bureau, the Groups and Sections how to better prioritise and which procedures we could introduce to focus on priorities and drastically reduce the number of obligatory opinions. Of course, this will in no way jeopardise the institutional role of the Committee. Instead, we should encourage our initiative opinions for which a well-defined screening will be absolutely necessary. Regarding requests for exploratory opinions received from EU institutions, they are always by definition of particular relevance and interest for our Committee.

65. In addition – and I have already mentioned it – we have to ensure a more structured follow-up of opinions. They should also be more concise and condensed. Finally, we should ideally be ahead of the Commission's reflections in order to inspire them and then monitor closely the follow-up of the Commissions proposals.

Streamlining plenary sessions and politicising Bureau meetings

66. I definitely intend to reduce the burden of bureaucratic activity in the Committee and around plenary sessions. I consider that it is necessary to invite an important personality to each of our plenaries, in order to discuss matters which are of political interest. I will maintain the tradition of my predecessor, to arrange members' (national) evenings or cultural evenings at the end of the first day of a plenary session.



67. At Bureau meetings, we should have more time for substantial political discussions. This requires organising meetings more efficiently and preparing them better. I have already initiated a study to that end and my goal is to finally adopt the Rules of Procedure for the Bureau, as foreseen in Rule 8(3) of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee.

Communication policy

68. I am happy that we have nominated a very enthusiastic Communication Group under the chair of Vice-President Jillian van Turnhout. The Group is eager to elaborate an ambitious Communication strategy that will involve:

- an even more professional use of the media and publicity by the Committee;
- the establishment of a properly targeted publications programme;
- conferences in partnership with other institutions;
- encouraging the organisation of decentralised thematic stakeholders' forums;
- contributions to the (Golden) 50th anniversaries of the EU (2007) and in particular of the EESC (2008);



The Communication Group meeting on 1 February 2007.

– and last but not least a new logo for the Committee.

69. Now is the most appropriate moment to better communicate and to publicise the importance of our Committee regarding European citizens' shared values at this critical moment for Europe.

Modernising further the administration (Secretariat)

70. I wish to compliment our staff, which is headed by a long-experienced and very competent Secretary-General, Patrick Venturini, and his fellow Directors. The quality of its work is well appreciated by all of us and it enjoys a good reputation among the institutions. The Secretariat has accomplished substantial achievements in applying modern standards at all levels of administration and management. But as in the other public institutions, constant progress is a must. Therefore to be of the best possible service to members of the Committee during my term of office, together with the Secretary-General and other senior staff members, but of course also in consultation with the staff representatives, I will evaluate the introduction of the most advanced administrative practices and techniques (for instance IT-applications, ADONIS and the creation of an Audit Monitoring Group).



Mr Patrick Venturini, Secretary-general of the European Economic and Social Committee.

CONCLUSION

71. We are our own worst enemies: we have too great a tendency to be satisfied with little and to close our eyes when we see truths that annoy us.
72. We have done well in the past and we can do even better in the future.



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Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis, President, Jillian van Turnhout and Alexander Graf von Schwerin, Vice-Presidents of the European Economic and Social Committee.

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Tel. (32-2) 546 96 04 • Fax (32-2) 546 97 64

Rue Belliard 99 • B-1040 Bruxelles

Internet: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu>

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