



*European Economic and Social Committee*

Brussels, 26 February 2007

## **PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**15 AND 16 FEBRUARY 2007**

### **SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED**

Full text versions of EESC opinions are available in the official languages on the Committee's web site at the following address:

[http://eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/summaries\\_plenaries/index\\_en.asp](http://eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/summaries_plenaries/index_en.asp)

**Mr Michael Glos**, German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Technology, who made a statement on behalf of the presidency in office of the Council of the EU, and **Ms Viviane Reding**, Commissioner for the information society and the media, attended the Plenary Assembly in connection with the adoption of two opinions.

## **1. ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RENEWED LISBON STRATEGY**

– **Reference** : Resolution – CESE 298/2007

– **Key points:**

The EESC resolution on *The implementation of the renewed Lisbon Strategy* is an intermediate report to the 2007 Spring Council. The resolution is part of the Committee's initiative to increase ownership of the Lisbon Strategy in the European Union and it reflects the EESC's continued commitment to contribute to a better implementation of the renewed Strategy.

The EESC is very much in favour of the National Reform Programs (NRP) and their full implementation. It stresses the importance of political ownership of the Lisbon Strategy by Member States. The EESC calls for strengthening efficient partnerships and new alliances with social partners and civil society, in particular with the national Economic and Social Councils and similar consultative bodies. Effective multi-level governance, closely monitored by the Commission, must be guaranteed.

The EESC considers the whole strategy to be a dynamic process which requires constant fine-tuning within the Member States, the Council and the Commission. Several issues require immediate attention: at national and regional levels, Member States have to identify Lisbon-related priorities more clearly in their national budgets. The whole chain of education needs to be scrutinised while addressing the effects of demographic changes on the economy, labour market and health care systems. At European level, timetables and deadlines for agreed priorities, a common energy policy and tackling climate change are urgent priorities.

The EESC urges the European Council to give its full support to this approach and incorporate organised civil society as a more active player in the implementation of the renewed Lisbon Strategy. This summer it will present four reports on: Investment in knowledge and innovation, Business potential, especially of SMEs, Employment of priority categories as well as Energy policy, as a basis for its Summary Report to the 2008 European Council.

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## 2. HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

- **Workers – minimum safety and health requirements**

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Verboven (Employees – BE)

- **References:** COM(2006) 652 final – 2006/214 (COD) – CESE 59/2007 fin – CESE 208/2007

- **Key points:**

The Committee essentially supports the proposal, but calls on the Commission to take account of two reservations raised and to amend the text of the recitals accordingly. It hopes to see the swift approval of the proposal by the Parliament and the Council.

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- **Asbestos**

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Verboven (Employees – BE)

- **References:** COM(2006) 664 final – 2006/222 (COD) – CESE 61/2007 fin – CESE 209/2007

- **Key points:**

The EESC

- endorses the proposal and hopes that it will be adopted swiftly by the Parliament and the Council;
- reiterates its wish that the Member States ratify ILO Convention 162 on Safety in the use of asbestos.

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### 3. **PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

- ***Water/Environmental Quality Standards***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Buffetaut (Employers – FR)
- **References:** COM(2006) 397 final – 2006/0129 COD – CESE 204/2007
- **Key points:**

The EESC agrees with the broad thrust of the proposed directive.

It agrees with the initial list of priority substances proposed and the standards proposed for them. But it urges action to complete the missing standards for lead and nickel and a robust process for keeping the list and the standards under regular review.

Achieving the environmental quality objectives by 2015 will be challenging. Nevertheless, the EESC urges the Member States to step up their efforts in order to reach these objectives.

The Committee emphasises the need to finalise a system for reporting information and monitoring the implementation by Member States of the directive and the achievement of its objectives. It welcomes the Commission's Water Information System for Europe (WISE) initiative.

It also recommends ensuring the new proposal is consistent with legislation that is currently in force, and that appropriate European legislation be adopted in relation to certain sources of pollution that are not covered by existing legislation (such as diffuse pollution from household products).

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- ***Halting the loss of biodiversity***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Ribbe (Various Interests – DE)
- **References:** COM(2006) 216 final – CESE 205/2007
- **Key points:**

The EESC and the Commission are in agreement in defining the situation which we face: maintaining biodiversity is an essential, key task which does not only represent an ethical and moral obligation. There are also sufficient economic reasons why it is necessary to act more quickly and more effectively. The cost of the economic losses brought about by the decline in ecosystem services is already at the present time estimated at several hundred billion euros. This constitutes a waste of resources which our economies simply cannot afford to bear.

Decline of biodiversity in Europe is the result of millions of individual value judgements which have been taken in recent decades; the absolutely overriding majority of these decisions have been taken in accordance with existing laws. The share of responsibility for species decline in Europe which can be attributed to illegal measures is marginal.

Despite the political promises which have been made, the trend as regards biodiversity regrettably continues to be negative; this cannot, however, be put down to a lack of knowledge. What has been missing up to now is the political will to implement the measures which have long been acknowledged to be necessary. The experience gained with the Natura 2000 network speaks for itself.

In the EESC's view, a key point of criticism of the Commission's Communication is the lack of a strategic debate over how to explain the tremendous discrepancies between the action which should be taken, the action which has been announced and what actually happens in reality in respect of maintaining biodiversity. The EESC deplores the fact that this problem is almost completely disregarded in the Commission's Communication and action plan.

The EESC therefore attaches particular importance to prioritising policy area 4, namely "Improving the knowledge base", so as to ensure that both the general public and politicians fully understand the real consequences of their actions.

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• ***Integrated pollution prevention and control (IPPC) - Codification***

– **Rapporteur:** Mr Osborn (Various Interests – UK)

– **References:** COM(2006) 543 final – 2006/0170 COD – CESE 206/2007

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#### 4. **EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

- ***The role of civil society in EU-Japan relations***

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Päärendson (Employers – EE)
- **Reference:** own-initiative opinion – CESE 214/2007
- **Key points:**

The Committee has been encouraged by the European Commission to examine developments in civil society in Japan and to consider ways in which the EU could cooperate with it to further strengthen EU-Japan relations.

The role of civil society in Japan is of steadily increasing importance although most often it still focuses on local and regional issues.

It will take significant time to establish more and stronger contacts and identifying the best partners will be crucial. An important initial step could be to hold a meeting to identify common problems and to consider how to start to tackle these.

Over time a more structured dialogue on the model of a round table could be envisaged.

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#### 5. **COMMUNICATION NETWORKS**

- ***Statistical information – Advisory Committee***

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Florio (Employees – IT)
- **References:** CESE 202/2007
- **Key points:**

Strengthening the strategic role of the CEIES in choosing priorities and in evaluation, and giving it the option of setting up *ad hoc* working parties, goes a long way towards giving it the responsibilities and resources it deserves.

The EESC is however perplexed by the new membership of the committee, which provides for greater institutional presence which cannot properly reflect the views of institutions such as the European Parliament, or indeed, the European Economic and Social Committee, which represent a diverse range of political views and interest groups.

With its role and unique membership the EESC ought to have more clout in the consultation phase, to reflect not just its institutional role but also its ability to express the viewpoints of European civil society.

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- ***A Strategy for a Secure Information Society***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Pezzini (Employers – IT)
- **References:** COM(2006) 251 final – CESE 211/2007
- **Key points:**

The EESC believes that the Commission should make further endeavours to achieve an innovative, coordinated strategy, given the scale of the issue and its economic implications and impact on privacy. The EESC stresses that the issue of information security cannot in any way be separated from the need to increase protection of personal data and to protect freedoms, as safeguarded by the European Convention on Human Rights. It wonders what the proposal brings new on the table and draws attention to the conclusions of the 2005 Tunis World Summit relating to the information society, endorsed by the UN Assembly in March 2006: The EESC stresses that a Community strategy should tackle, in addition, a number of issues such as prevention measures, technical standards, digital identification, risk-assessment, pilot measures in schools, increased coordination on national and international levels etc.

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- ***EU Regulatory Framework for electronic communications networks and services***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr McDonogh (Employers – IE)
- **References:** COM(2006) 334 final – CESE 212/2007
- **Key points:**

The Committee supports in general the Commission's proposal and thinks that the Regulatory Framework must be aligned with the strategy for development of the ICT sector. Specifically, the EESC recognises the importance of the Regulatory Framework to the creation of a Single European Information Space offering affordable and secure high bandwidth communications with rich and diverse content and digital services; world class performance in research and innovation in ICT by

closing the gap with Europe's leading competitors. Furthermore, a European Spectrum Agency should be established to create a coherent and integrated regime for pan-European spectrum management and the Commission should increase its vigilance to the regulatory measures enforced by National Regulatory Authorities (NRA) to encourage the diversity of supply. In addition, the Committee believes that because of the growing importance of broadband service to economic and social development, broadband connectivity should be included within the scope of the universal service definition.

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## 6. TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

- **European logistics policy**
  - **Rapporteur:** Mr Ranocchiarì (Employers – IT)
  - **Reference:** Exploratory opinion – CESE 210/2007
  - **Key points:**

The EESC takes the view that developing transport logistics and intermodal solutions are primarily business-related activities and thereby a job for industry. Nevertheless, the authorities have a clear role to play in creating appropriate framework conditions and keeping transport logistics and intermodal policy continuously high on the political agenda. This approach should concentrate on improving the institutional framework for logistics innovation, assuring a sound balance between economic, social and environmental needs, and leaving the internal running of company logistics to the companies themselves. In that context, the EESC therefore welcomes the Commission's new approach as expressed in its June 2006 Communication going on different ways but always within a sustainable mobility. The main task is to achieve coordination between modes of transport where possible and where the individual mode's efficiency and suitability can be exploited to the full. This will be achieved when the technical, practical and economic conditions are present. The challenge for the EU is to agree on a common policy to create or develop these conditions.

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- ***Strengthening maritime labour standards***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Etty (Employees – NL)
- **References:** COM(2006) 287 final – CESE 213/2007
- **Key points:**

The EESC commends the Commission for the support it has given to the work in the ILO which has resulted in this new Convention. It notes that the Convention is the result of a delicate balance reached in decision making at the international level and in a tripartite setting.

Ratification is a matter for the Member States exclusively, as the EU is not a member of the ILO. The EESC expects that Member States will ratify as soon as possible, hopefully in 2008 by way of support of the Commission in reaching an agreement with Member States.

The EESC observes, that, whatever solution the Commission envisages for ensuring Community coordination in a tripartite decision-making process, it should never weaken tripartite ILO provisions at the national level.

The EESC recommends Commission support for ILO expert meetings for the development of operational guidelines for Flag and Port State control.

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## **7. AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES**

- ***Pure-bred breeding animals of the bovine species***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Bros (Various Interests – FR)
- **References:** COM(2006) 749 final – 2006/0250 CNS – CESE 207/2007
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