



European Economic and Social Committee

Brussels, 28 April 2006

PLENARY ASSEMBLY

20 AND 21 APRIL 2006

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://www.esc.eu.int/documents/summaries_plenaries/index_en.asp

The plenary assembly was attended by **Mr Vladimir Špidla**, Member of the European Commission, who spoke on policy priorities in the area of employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, and by representatives of organised civil society from the accession countries (Bulgaria and Romania).

1. INDUSTRIAL POLICY

- **Modern industrial policy**

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Ehnmark (Employees – SE)
- **References:** COM(2005) 474 final – CESE 595/2006
- **Key points:**

The Lisbon strategy provides a wide range of horizontal measures to create a framework in order to make Europe more competitive. The sectoral approaches have so far been missing. The Commission communication on a framework for an Integrated Industry Policy is therefore highly welcome.

The EESC supports the Communication's wide analysis of necessary support measures in 27 sectors of manufacturing industry. The EESC also supports the setting-up of 14 sectoral and inter-sectoral task forces, with the objective of outlining more concrete measures to boost the competitiveness of European industry.

However, the issues of "who does what" are left to further consideration.

In particular, the communication does not highlight the necessary distribution of work between the EU and the national level. The EESC emphasises that it is essential to establish coordination.

Two areas where the communication does not provide much guidance are the governments' role in innovation and competitiveness and the borderlines between manufacturing industry and services.

The EESC finds it essential that the social partners can reach agreements on industry change and innovation, as is already the case in some EU countries.

The EESC is ready to include European Industry Policy issues in the network set up for the Lisbon strategy.

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- ***Industrial change in cross-border regions***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Krzaklewski (Employees – PL)

- **Reference:** Exploratory opinion – CESE 586/2006

- **Key points:**

The Austrian Government issued a formal request for the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) to prepare an exploratory opinion on Industrial change and EU enlargement: Examining the effects in border regions.

The Committee considers that, in the course of the next Presidency, it is important to establish a precise and distinct definition of what is meant by the term "REGION" in a cross-border and industrial context. One should distinguish regions bordering non-EU Member States and take into account whether or not a given neighbouring state is a candidate country.

It is important to establish how one can distinguish between the effects of the changes that occurred in these regions in the 1990s and those arising from EU accession, to assess the effectiveness of Community instruments used in these areas before and after accession and to establish the time lag with which EU policies were implemented in these regions as compared with elsewhere.

The Committee notes that a very important and possibly decisive factor which has affected the conduct and development of industrial policy in cross-border regions in the enlarged Europe, both now and in the past, is the ability of stakeholders in these areas to access EU Structural Fund resources. Increasing their role in these regions is absolutely vital. The Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European grouping of cross-border cooperation (EGCC) is a new opportunity in this area. The Committee places particular emphasis on the need to include economic and social interest groups as well as other civil society organisations concerned in the composition of the EGCC, particularly educational institutions. The establishment of such legal entities could create an incentive for cross-border cooperation and give such regions a greater sense of identity and the desire to harmonise their regulations.

The Committee believes that the development of labour markets in the regions concerned is a factor for industrial change which should not be underestimated. At present, there remain temporary obstacles to the cross-border mobility of workers within the EU. The Committee calls on the Member States to look seriously at whether the transition periods could be ended earlier. This requires appropriate involvement and consultation of the social partners at all relevant levels. As far as other industrial policy instruments are concerned, the Committee stresses the importance of the possible introduction of a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB).

In its opinion, the Committee repeatedly stresses the particularly important role that social dialogue and civil society commitment can play in managing industrial policy in the regions in

question; both in implementing dynamic industrial policies and in seeking to overcome problems affecting the mutual relations between different nationalities and ethnic and cultural groups.

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- ***Greenhouse gas emissions and industrial change***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Zboril (Employers - CZ)
- **Co-rapporteur:** Mr Činčera (Various Interests – CZ)

- **Reference:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 593/2006

- **Key points:**

Climate change is a unique problem that humanity has never before encountered in modern times. The problem is global, long-term (even a few centuries) and involves complex interactions between climatic, environmental, economic, political, institutional, social and technological processes. This has important international and intergenerational consequences in the context of broader societal goals such as equality and sustainable development. Developing a response to climate change is characterised by decision-making which involves substantial uncertainties and risks, including the possibility of non-linear and/or irreversible changes.

Further policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must take into account all the economic parameters. If not, those states which have ratified the Kyoto protocol run the risk of having some of their manufacturing move to developed economies which are still hesitating to sign the protocol or to developing countries which are not yet subject to any quota obligations under it. This could result in economic losses and weakened competitiveness, without producing the desired global reduction in emissions.

Climate change is a global phenomenon and should be tackled as such. All possible political instruments or negotiations should be used to involve all the world's major producers of greenhouse gases in efforts to reduce the global level of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. The effectiveness of climate change mitigation can be enhanced when climate policies are integrated with the non-climate objectives of national and sectoral policy development and be turned into broad transition strategies to achieve the long-term social and technological changes required by both sustainable development and climate change mitigation.

These problems cannot be solved without a far better understanding of both the causes of the phenomenon and the possibilities of reducing the manmade influences involved. Only adequate investment in science and research, monitoring and systematic observation will enable the necessary acceleration in scientific understanding of the real causes of climate change. There can be no doubt that in many respects the key factor of both economic success and the progressive

reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is efficient manufacturing and above all an economical use of energy.

The Opinion proposes a range of instruments, which will require substantial resources for science and research and a major push for their implementation if the EU really wants to take on the leading role in the fight against climate change. All measures must be adopted only after thorough analysis of the implications and consequences, so that inappropriate steps should not endanger the competitiveness and the very ability to act of the EU as a whole and of the individual Member States. The safety of the population requires that plans be made, adapted to regional circumstances, to limit the vulnerability to climate change and promote the development of warning and alarm systems linked to monitoring and systematic observation.

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2. **SOCIAL PROTECTION**

- ***Strategy for open coordination on social protection***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Olsson (Various Interests – SE)
- **References:** COM(2005) 706 final – CESE 596/2006
- **Key points:**

The EESC agrees with the thrust of the Communication. It will reinforce the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy if the Member States lend more political weight through the new framework to the goal of modernising and improving social protection.

Although the EESC welcomes the initiative, it would point out that account must be taken of the specific characteristics of the three individual strands, their different stages of progress, as well as to the differences between Member States.

One of the three overarching objectives is to "strengthen governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of the policy." Social partners and other key actors from organised civil society must be much more involved in all key aspects of the process.

The EESC should, as part of its ongoing work, follow up the new framework for open coordination and report on progress before the Spring summit in 2007.

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- ***Portability of supplementary pension rights***

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Engelen-Kefer (Employees – DE)

- **References:** COM(2005) 507 final – 2005/0214 COD – CESE 589/2006

- **Key points:**

The EESC welcomes the Commission's proposed objectives and endorses the draft directive, although it has mixed feelings about some of the means used to achieve these objectives.

Future work on the draft directive should therefore take the following points into account:

- The acquisition and the retention and transfer of supplementary pension rights must be in place to enable the dismantlement of obstacles to employees' mobility. At the same time, sufficient account must be taken of the implications for the various supplementary pension schemes in the Member States.
- Financial contributions by employers to the development of supplementary pensions are desirable and indeed necessary. To avoid any negative effects, transitional arrangements enabling employers to gradually bring pension schemes into line are needed.
- In keeping with the fundamental objectives of the Directive, the deadlines for its transposal should be kept as short as possible, taking into account what is actually necessary in each country.
- Similarly, general exceptions without time limits for certain schemes should be reconsidered.
- Accompanying measures are needed in the field of taxation of supplementary pension schemes in order to dismantle obstacles to mobility arising from such schemes.

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3. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Situation of disabled people – the European action plan 2006-2007***

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Greif (Various interests – SL)

- **References:** COM(2005) 604 final – CESE 591/2006

– **Key points:**

The EESC supports the actions proposed by the Commission and considers that the monitoring of the Equal Treatment directive in Employment and Occupation should continue to be a priority.

The EESC calls on the Commission to propose a Disability Specific Directive following the process of the feasibility study on developing non-discrimination legislation at European level.

The revised objectives of the European Employment Strategy should reinforce the mainstreaming of disability in the Employment Guidelines and the National Reform Programmes.

The EU must commit itself to the principle of mainstreaming in initiatives such as:

- The Structural Funds, ensuring the principles of non-discrimination and accessibility
- The 7th Framework Programme, ensuring research projects in areas such as design for all, ICT systems, transition to independent living, etc.
- Transport promoting the inclusion of more accessible rail transport, international coaches and maritime transport.

For the future agenda, the EESC urges the Commission to pay attention to the following specific issues:

- the concept of independent living and the right of disabled people not to be segregated in institutions or excluded from society. In this respect the modernizing of social protection system is one of the priorities;
- active political participation of people with disabilities in society; The role of relevant NGOs (also smaller and weaker NGOs) should be strengthened at both national and EU level;
- areas outside employment should be addressed in the future, such as education, culture, free time/leisure, etc.;
- the impact of multiple discrimination, cultural differences, poverty, etc.;
- adapted working place (including assistive technologies, job coaching), and appointing equality officers in companies could stimulate equal opportunities in employment;
- safety at work in the light of prevention of disability.

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4. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION

- ***Strategic guidelines for cohesion policy (2007-2013)***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Vever (Employers - FR)

- **References:** COM(2005) 299 final – SEC (2005) 904 – CESE 592/2006

- **Key points:**

The Committee notes that the links between the priorities of the strategic guidelines 2007-2013 and the objectives of the Structural Funds are not explained. In view of the limited scale of the Community budget, the EESC recommends diversifying the resources of cohesion policy, concentrating its measures more and modernising its management methods in order to promote more transparency and interactivity.

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- ***Towards a new social contract in Latin America***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Zufiaur Narvaiza (Employees – ES)

- **References:** Information Report – CESE 68/2006 fin

- **Key points:**

The forthcoming EU-LAC summit in Vienna provides an opportunity to deepen the strategic partnership. This requires a clear political will and a global strategic focus in order to achieve progress in the association agreements, the development of new institutional machinery for solidarity and development cooperation.

Organised civil society is set to be a key actor in consolidation of democracy, a functioning economy and decent work for all, and the EESC and its LAC counterparts are ready, as institutions representing civil society, to play an important role in this policy as strategic allies.

For LAC civil society organisations, the European social model has been and continues to be a benchmark. And for European civil society organisations, fostering a sustainable development model in Latin America is vital, not only for the sake of solidarity but also in order to consolidate the European social model.

The EESC warmly welcomes the European Parliament's recommendation that "more frequent social forums bringing together the business world, workers, consumers, ..." be held, and its call for "the European Economic and Social Committee to intensify its activities in this area [to

establish a specific dialogue on social cohesion] and pass on its experience to the Latin American partners".

The civil societies of Europe and the various countries or regions are interested not only in taking part in the monitoring of the association agreements, but also in giving them a social dimension. This dimension would comprise a set of standards guaranteeing compliance with basic labour rights; clauses to safeguard the human, democratic and environmental rights, as well as the introduction of consultative mechanisms such as mentioned above.

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5. **HEALTH AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

- **Legal framework for consumer policy**
- **Rapporteur:** Mr Pegado Liz (Various Interests – PT)
- **Reference:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 594/2006
- **Key points:**

Consumer policy is one of the policy areas closest to European citizens. It can play a key role in influencing their commitment to the European ideal, insofar as the latter satisfies their needs and aspirations, which has not always been the case.

In its opinion, the Committee notes:

- that political will is necessary to further consumer protection policy;
- that there is also a need for an in-depth study on overhauling the legal framework in order to establish a firm foundation for consumer protection policy in view of the inadequacies of the provisions introduced by the treaties of Maastricht (Article 129 A) and Amsterdam (Article 153).

Aided by contributions from a large number of European lawyers with universally recognised expertise in this subject, the European Economic and Social Committee proposes a new legal basis for consumer policy.

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6. TRANSPORT

- ***Inland waterway transport in Europe***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Simons (Employers – NL)
- **Reference:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 599/2006
- **Key points:**

The EESC endorses the ultimate aim of establishing an *independent organisation*, enshrined in a *treaty*, which can embrace at least both the international organisations, such as the EU itself, EU Member States involved in waterway transport and also non-EU states, such as Switzerland and the non-EU Danube riparian states. Within an organisation, comprising various parties, covered by such a treaty, political decisions, enforceable in law, can be taken by a meeting of ministers, which can also monitor national controls. All the knowledge and expertise currently available in the various existing bodies could also be brought together in the proposed organisation. Care should also be taken to ensure that the existing level of protection and safety is at least maintained and that sectoral social dialogue continues.

Keeping in mind the aim of ultimately bringing about a uniform pan-European system of law, the opinion highlights the following points:

- With regard to geographical scope, inland waterway transport does not directly involve all EU Member States
- States which are not members of the EU are still key players for the inland waterway sector and therefore also for Europe
- Only joint political action can bring about the requisite infrastructure adjustments to and in respect of inland waterways, tasks which fall within the remit of the national authorities of all states
- It is clear that not all rules need to be applied in full and with the same rigour in the case of all European rivers, in view of the variety of natural conditions and differences in infrastructure and the volume of inland waterway transport

Social policy, which has been largely neglected in the existing inland navigation regulatory regions in Europe, must be given special attention in this new system. The social partners must be fully involved in the efforts made in this area.

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- ***Common rules - EASA***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Simons (Employers – NL)

- **References:** COM(2005) 579 final – 2005/0228 COD – CESE 600/2006

- **Key points:**

The objective to extend the scope of the Regulation (EC) 1592/2002 to air operations, FCL and third country aircraft is fully supported by the EESC, since greater efficiency and safety would be achieved by having all aviation safety rulemaking activities performed by a single authority.

In the context of additional certification for third country commercial operators, there should be clear possibilities for the Community to sign bilateral agreements with third countries on the mutual recognition of the relevant certificates. This will require a considerably higher level of Community funding for EASA than currently envisaged. At the same time, the pooling of resources at EU level has the potential for substantial cost savings not only for the industry but also for the national governments. This issue is not addressed in the proposal.

The EESC is convinced that the definition of commercial operations should include corporate operations and fractional operations as well, in order to ensure the same safety protection for all passengers within the EU.

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- ***Civil aviation security***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr McDonogh (Employers - IE)

- **References:** COM(2005) 429 final – CESE 584/2006

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7. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- ***Climate Change Impact of Aviation***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Simons (Employers – NL)

- **References:** COM(2005) 459 final – CESE 25/2006 fin – CESE 598/2006

– **Key points:**

Like the Commission, the EESC is of the opinion that additional (policy) measures are needed to control the impact of aviation on climate change. The increase in aviation's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions will be approximately 50% of the annual percentage increase in aviation, even if all the ambitious R&D goals are achieved over the coming decades. The budgets reserved for this in the 7th Framework Programme will have to be spent in a targeted and effective way.

To limit the impact on the climate, the European Commission has set a policy goal for the reduction of CO₂ and NO_x emissions in the EU, beginning with the period 2008-2012. Taking account of international treaties, agreements and ongoing studies, the EESC is of the opinion that potential measures for aviation should initially apply only to CO₂ emissions from intra-EU air traffic in order to minimise potentially long implementation delays.

From the earliest date possible, all intra-EU air traffic should be included in an open (EU) Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), with a realistic baseline scenario, in order to reflect its (annually increasing) CO₂ contribution to climate impact. There should be allocations at EU level and additional contribution/reduction targets should apply directly to the airlines as the trading parties; it must remain possible for new operators to enter the market, without competitive disadvantage. For other impacts, use should be made of more appropriate local instruments, such as an NO_x levy or operational measures.

Investment in research into the climate change effects of aviation's non-CO₂ emissions and technological developments to secure cleaner air transport should be a key priority for the Community and industry, with particular emphasis on preventing adverse trade-offs between local noise, local emissions and global emissions of aircraft.

Given its emission reduction potential, improved air traffic management should also be a priority, using the Single Sky Initiative and the SESAR programme.

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• **Thematic Strategy – Marine environment**

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Sánchez Miguel (Employees – ES)

- **References:** COM(2005) 505 final – 2005/0211 COD – CESE 585/2006

– **Key points:**

The EESC appreciates the proposal for a Directive establishing a Framework for Community Action in the field of Marine Environmental Policy (Marine Strategy Directive). However, from a

critical standpoint, the EESC believes that while the proposal is necessary, it does not go far enough: the status of our seas and oceans has deteriorated so badly that more coercive measures will be needed in order to implement and monitor compliance with existing measures. Moreover, the proposal only partially covers the status of the marine environment. The EESC therefore believes that a framework directive would be more effective when subsequently integrating and developing the aspects that are not covered in depth here.

By utilising existing legislative or management instruments rather than creating new ones, Member States can be spared additional costs and, above all, increased bureaucracy. Arrangements are also included for public and stakeholder consultation and participation, which are key factors for the public's involvement in environmental issues.

The EESC notes that it is necessary to clarify and strengthen the Commission's monitoring and coordinating role vis-à-vis the regional authorities that are required to assess and plan the targets and the measures for applying these to the marine environment under their control. The aim should be to harmonise and balance actions throughout coastal areas, bearing in mind that seas and oceans stretch across borders. Centralised coordination would make it possible to intervene in the non-EU countries where Community action would be feasible and, in particular, with which the EU has international agreements.

As the good status of marine waters depends to a large extent on quantitative factors, the EESC believes that quantitative descriptors should also be included in the definitions given (particularly the definition of good environmental status based on general qualitative descriptors), as was the case for continental waters in the Water Framework Directive.

Lastly, there are two focus areas which are very important if the objectives proposed here are to be effectively applied. The first concerns the immediate application of all previous measures affecting the marine environment, such as those relating to the ERIKA I, II and III packages; and the second focus area relates to research in the marine environment. By increasing and improving knowledge, it will be possible to set clear objectives and establish the programmes of measures needed to restore good environmental status. Greater participation in the European Framework Programmes for Research is therefore required.

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8. EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND CITIZENS' RIGHTS

- ***Maintenance obligations***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Retureau (Employees – FR)
- **References:** COM(2005) 649 final – 2005/0259 CNS – CESE 588/2006

– **Key points:**

The Committee endorses the Commission's legislative initiative – subject to some specific observations – and welcomes the efforts made to secure sound legislation, including the upstream consultation and preliminary impact assessment carried out ahead of the excellent legal drafting.

The Committee is also pleased that a regulation has been selected as the appropriate instrument and endorses the legal basis that has been chosen, which is better suited to securing harmonisation in cases that have a European element, despite the differences – that are set to continue – between the various national legal provisions.

This issue relates both to family law and to the recovery of claims; from a social angle, it involves poverty risks that also need to be addressed. It also meets the requirements of clarity and legal certainty for the litigants, for any third parties involved and for the relevant administrative bodies. In addition, it protects personal data from being used for any purpose other than to settle the dispute and secure the debtor's compliance with the maintenance obligations.

The Committee would ask the UK and Irish governments to consider opting into this regulation. It would also ask the Danish government to facilitate enforcement of maintenance decisions in line with the Hague Convention on the enforcement of decisions relating to maintenance obligations.

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• ***European year of intercultural dialogue (2008)***

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Cser (Employees – HU)

- **References:** COM(2005) 467 final – 2005/0203 (COD) – CESE 590/2006

– **Key points:**

The year of intercultural dialogue should, by people becoming familiar with and respecting the diversity of our cultures, be an instrument for avoiding conflicts by identifying the causes underpinning them.

A public Community-level medium should be established, such as a TV or radio channel broadcasting in all the languages of European citizens, as an instrument for achieving the objectives of the year.

The EESC is doubtful whether priority objectives can be implemented on the basis of the proposed budget, most of which is allocated to support for Community-level activity. Support for local citizens' initiatives is uncertain.

The EESC recommends that the Commission should develop qualitative as well as quantitative indicators with the participation of the EESC.

An encyclopaedia of European culture could be compiled on the basis of events and measures under the European year of intercultural dialogue. The EESC also supports the proposal for establishing a Day of Intercultural Dialogue and proposes that prizes could be awarded to European citizens, civil society organisations and educational institutions, which play a leading role in mobilising intercultural dialogue.

The EESC would like to take part in the assessment of Year 2008.

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9. IMMIGRATION POLICY

- ***Migration and international protection***

- **Rapporteur:** Ms Sciberras (Employers – MT)
- **References:** COM(2005) 375 final – 2005/0156 (COD) – CESE 587/2006
- **Key points:**

Accurate statistical data is very important in mapping out the migrant populations of EU States, including size and other demographic characteristics, among others. The Committee urges the Commission to emphasise the need for accurate statistical data in this area, so that Member States recognise the importance of this subject and place more resources here.

Most EU Member States have developed thorough statistics on the country of origin of the asylum seekers. However, there is still a great need for a more in-depth statistics based on consistent criteria between the members for future transnational comparisons.

One of the fundamentally important roles that statistics play is the influence in the development and review of policies.

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10. **RESEARCH**

- ***Nanoscience and nanotechnology***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Pezzini (Employers - IT)
- **References:** COM(2005) 243 final – CESE 582/2006
- **Key points:**

The Committee welcomes the proposals presented by the Commission to implement by 2009 an action plan for N&N and calls for this plan to be accompanied by national action plans.

The Committee believes that European industry should expand and intensify N&N research and application efforts, increasing investment levels in this sector.

By 2015 N&N-based materials, products and services will be able to generate a global market worth hundreds of billions of euros each year, provided that scientific excellence can be successfully translated into commercially viable products, processes and services.

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- ***Specific RTD programmes***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Wolf (Various Interests – DE)
- **Co-rapporteur:** Mr Pezzini (Employers - IT)
- **References:** COM(2005) 439-440-441-442-443-444-445 final – CESE 583/2006
- **Key points:**

The objective set out in the Lisbon strategy of developing Europe as the world's leading economy calls for a substantial increase in R&D investment. The Committee also reiterates its comment that European cooperation on research and development is an effective catalyst for European integration and cohesion. The Committee reiterates its recommendation that R&D be given a substantially higher share than hitherto.

In general, the Committee recommends providing as much scope for flexibility as possible, rather than rigidly allocating budgetary resources to the various themes, to enable the Commission to respond promptly during the implementation of the programme to new issues which arise or to necessary restructuring.

In conclusion, the Committee refers to its earlier recommendation to drastically cut red tape for applicants, to simplify procedures and at the same time to ensure maximum continuity in support instruments and award procedures.

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11. COMBATING TERRORIST FUNDING

- ***Transfers of funds/information on the payer***

- **Rapporteur:** Mr Burani (Employers - IT)
- **References:** COM(2005) 343 final – 2005/0138 (COD) – CESE 597/2006
- **Key points:**

The Committee fully agrees that a regulation is necessary. The measures provided for in the Commission document are, in general, appropriate and sensible, but the EESC is concerned as to how effective they will be in practice, at least in the short term.

It suggests that it should be made clear that the text deals with organised crime as well as terrorism; that a single contact point should be created, to be responsible for receiving reports and referring them; and that the authorities report the names of suspects.

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