



European Economic and Social Committee

Brussels, 14 September 2001

PLENARY ASSEMBLY

12 AND 13 SEPTEMBER 2001

SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED

**Full text versions of ESC opinions are available in the 11 official languages
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1. THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Discussion on the future of the European Union

The European Economic and Social Committee devoted a considerable part of its September plenary session to the discussion on the future of Europe, in which representatives of nearly all the economic and social committees or similar institutions from the Member States took part.

The European ESC unanimously adopted a resolution on the future of Europe. This document expresses the Committee's fullest support for the setting-up of a body, "possibly along the lines of the Convention set up to draft the European Charter of Fundamental rights, in which the various democratically mandated stakeholders that make up the European Union as a body politic can work out scenarios and options for the future of Europe in an open debate". The Committee strongly believes that it can play an effective part in the work of that body in fostering a civil society debate that is as open as possible (...) and *calls for the ESC to be involved as a "permanent advisory member"*. The resolution concludes that *"the challenge for the future of Europe (...) requires an approach that enjoys grassroots support"*. "The Economic and Social Committee can, in conjunction with the appropriate national bodies and other civil society organisations, play a constructive part in giving substance to the project for an enlarged Europe."

This resolution was wholeheartedly supported by the presidents of the economic and social committees in the majority of the Member States. They participated in the Committee's Plenary Session in order to develop, in the run up to the Brussels-Laeken Summit, a common position on the future of the European Union and the role economic and social advisory bodies can play in the whole process. *The discussion with the national ESC presidents showed their determination to work together with the European ESC and speak in a common voice to the heads of State and Government at Laeken*. The debate would continue at a meeting in Helsinki in November hosted by the president of the Finnish ESC.

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2. QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT

- **New European labour markets, open to all, with access for all**

Rapporteur : **Ms Carroll** (Employers - IRL)
Co-rapporteur : **Ms Polverini** (Workers - I)
Co-rapporteur: **Mr Fuchs** (Various Interests - D)

– **Reference :** PE. 305.713 and COM(2001) 116 final - CES 1125/2001

The Committee opinion was at the special request of the European Parliament, under the new Treaty procedures, and was officially presented to, and discussed at, the Parliamentary Employment and Social Affairs Committee.

– **Key points :**

The Committee welcomes the Commission's intention to propose in 2002 a more uniform, transparent and flexible regime of **professional recognition**. If those with lower-level skills are to be integrated into a true EU labour market, the Commission must develop further initiatives and a relevant and proactive contribution could be made by the social partners.

The Committee is concerned that the **Lifelong Learning Action Plan** to be put before the Spring European Council in 2002 is still only at the stage of identifying basic skills. It should also identify ways and means by which those who have been failed by the education system in the past could benefit by a lifelong learning strategy, so as to integrate them in the workforce.

The Committee hopes that the Commission's proposed **Communication on the elimination of obstacles to the cross-border provision of supplementary pensions** will speed up the removal of barriers to mobility.

The mobility of researchers, students, trainers and teachers is an essential component of integrated European labour markets.

The Committee urges the early adoption by the Council of directives on the **mobility of third country nationals**.

The Committee welcomes the Commission's proposal for a **one-stop European mobility information site**.

The EURES network should be integrated into the one-stop shop. The proposed **mobility information campaign** should also make increasing use of the social partners and relevant NGOs.

It is vitally important that, hand in hand with the development of an integrated European Labour Market, work continues to **improve economic and social life in underdeveloped regions of the EU**.

There are very particular problems of integrating the relatively undeveloped labour markets of the **candidate countries** into the more sophisticated EU labour markets. The time between now and the achievement of free movement should be used for targeted action for the development of the candidate countries' own labour markets.

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• **Improving the quality dimension of social and employment policy**

Rapporteur: **Mr Bloch-Lainé** (Various Interests - F)

– **Reference:** COM(2001) 313 final - CES 1124/2001

The Committee opinion was at the special request of the Belgian Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities, **Mrs Laurette Onkelinx**, who stressed the importance attached by the Belgian Presidency in its programme to the quality of employment and the usefulness of an ESC opinion on this matter.

– **Key points :**

Though the subject of this opinion is "*improving the quality dimension of social and employment policy*", its main focus is on the quality of employment.

The Committee has focused attention on a number of key themes:

- **Safety/health**

The Committee has stressed and continues to highlight the importance of *combining harmonisation with progress*; this means that minimum key safety levels should not differ according to the size of the firm.

- **Older workers**

The employment rate among those aged between 50 and 64 has been declining at differing speeds, since the 1970s. What is needed is to change the culture and raise awareness, to persuade employees that working beyond the age of 55 is worthwhile and to ensure that companies and public services upgrade their assessment of the contribution which can be made by "ageing" workers.

- **Non-discrimination**

- **Access to training and upgrading of skills**

- **Work and private and family life**

Quality of employment is a key component of quality of life. It could also be necessary to pay rather greater attention to tangible factors such as travelling time to and from work and the existence or absence of local social services and facilities provided for childcare.

- **Information and participation of the workforce**

Finally, the Committee recommends that, initially, particular attention be paid to some of the "possible indicators" set out in the Commission communication, which relate to the "key themes" described above.

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- **Memorandum on lifelong learning**

Rapporteur : **Mr Koryfidis** (Workers - EL)
Co-rapporteurs : **Mr Rodríguez García Caro** (Employers - E)
Mr Rupp (Various Interests - D)

– **Reference** : Own-initiative opinion - SEC(2000) 1832 final - CES 1121/2001

– **Key points** :

The ESC endorses the Commission's general approach to the whole problem. In particular the ESC agrees with:

- the observation that the European Council in Lisbon (March 2000) introduced substantial changes in the direction of European policy and action;
- the realisation that Europe's education and training systems must be adjusted to ensure successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society;
- the need to develop a Europe-wide dialogue involving as many ordinary people as possible with the aim of formulating a comprehensive strategy for lifelong learning;
- the Commission's view that lifelong learning "*... is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts*".

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3. INTRODUCTION OF THE EURO

- **State of preparedness for the introduction of the euro**

Rapporteur : **Mr Burani** (Employers -I)

– **Reference** : Additional own-initiative opinion - CES 1123/2001

– **Key points** :

The introduction of the euro is rapidly approaching, but the many initiatives in progress or planned by a wide range of public and private bodies give the impression that not all the problems have been fully thought through. In any case, the need for systematic coordination of such initiatives is becoming increasingly evident: this is not an easy task, despite the good will displayed by all those concerned.

The Committee, whilst having no intention of encroaching upon the authorities in charge of these initiatives, highlights a number of aspects which, although apparently minor, might give rise to practical or psychological obstacles to the shift from eleven different currencies to the single currency.

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4. INTERNAL MARKET

- **Social services of general interest**

Rapporteur : **Mr Bloch-Lainé** (Various Interests - F)

- **Reference :** Own-initiative opinion - CES 1120/2001

- **Key points :**

The social services covered by this opinion are currently experiencing grave anxiety. Their concern cannot be explained solely by the relative ignorance or underestimation of their influence and role. The problem - and it is a real problem - is the future that lies ahead from the angle of European competition law.

It is obvious that it is difficult to reconcile respect for competition rules with the special characteristics of economic activities carried out by social services of general interest.

In many Member States the concern of these services is not to be used instrumentally, and not to be overlooked. Such a fear is by no means unwarranted, and this is what leads them to request derogations that may in some cases be controversial.

In claiming consideration for their specific circumstances they are seeking to challenge not reason, but the imagination, which are not the same thing. Nor are the two necessarily mutually exclusive. In view of the importance of the issues at stake, such as social cohesion and the fight against various forms of exclusion, the Committee considers that it would be wrong in this instance not to try to combine the two.

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- **Dangerous substances - CMR**

Rapporteur : **Mr Colombo** (Workers - I)

- **Reference :** COM(2001) 256 final - 2001/0110 COD - CES 1113/2001

- **Contact :** *Mr João Pereira Dos Santos*
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- **Machinery**

Rapporteur : **Mr De Vadder (Employers - B)**

– **Reference** : COM(2000) 899 final - 2001/0004 COD - CES 1112/2001

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5. **COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

- **COM/Aid in the seed sector**

Rapporteur : **Mr Liolios (Various Interests - EL)**

– **Reference** : COM(2001) 244 final - 2001/0099 CNS - CES 1119/2001

– **Key points** :

The ESC endorses the Commission's proposal to maintain the current level of aid to the seed sector.

The ESC suggests that the Council and the Commission should discuss the possibility of making this aid valid for longer than the next two marketing years. It goes on to invite them to fix a single level of aid for *Lolium perenne L.* so as not to put certain seed producers at a disadvantage, and recommends examining the possible need to allow certain other seeds into the system.

However, the ESC rejects the Commission's proposal for the introduction of a stabiliser mechanism on the grounds that it is ambiguous, vague and insufficiently documented and also appears unnecessary. The ESC is doubtful as to whether in its report, alongside budget spending, the Commission considered other important Treaty objectives regarding EU integration (TEC) and broader developments in the EU's agricultural sector.

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- **COM/Rice**

Rapporteur : **Ms Santiago (Employers - E)**

– **Reference** : COM(2001) 169 final - 2001/0085 CNS - CES 1118/2001

– **Contact** : **Ms Silvia Calamandrei**
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- **COM/Wine**

Rapporteur-general : **Mr Kienle** (Employers - D)

– **Reference** : COM(2001) 332 final - 2001/0132 COD - CES 1126/2001

– **Key points** :

The Committee emphatically endorses the aims of the proposal for a Regulation to encourage "generational replacement" in the agricultural sector - and in the wine sector in particular - by awarding young farmers new planting rights.

In this connection, the Committee refers to its opinion on prospects for young farmers, which is currently in the pipeline. It emphasises that, in an ESC public hearing attended by representatives of the EP, CoR and European Council of Young Farmers (ECYF) a particularly strong call was made for cutting young farmers' start-up costs.

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6. TRANSPORT AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

- **Occurrence reporting in civil aviation**

Rapporteur : **Mr Green** (Employers - DK)

– **Reference** : COM(2000) 847 final - 2000/0343 COD - CES 1114/2001

– **Contact** : *Mr Luis Lobo*

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- **European programme of radio satellite navigation (Galileo)**

Rapporteur : **Mr Bernabei** (Employers - I)

– **Reference** : Own-initiative opinion - CES 1116/2001

– **Key points** :

The Committee lends its full support to the Galileo programme as a key strategic element for the competitiveness of the European system, and on account of Galileo's potential positive impact at world level, its innovative spin-off in economic, employment and social terms, and its potential to enhance the quality of life for civil society. It urges that a joint strategy be defined in the near future, and recommends the following:

- early adoption of a single, joint strategy, with a defined mandate and a clearly-delineated development platform;

- the launch, by the end of 2001, of a joint undertaking under Article 171 of the EC Treaty, and subsequent creation of a European Galileo Agency to set up a permanent open network for all players in the system;
 - founding this joint undertaking, which should exist only until 2003, and the subsequent agency, on four pillars: an official steering committee open to public and private players; a high-level ethics committee to ensure that the requirements of transparency, exclusively civil use, and safeguards for privacy are satisfied; a regulatory body to provide adequate interoperability guarantees; and an operating body;
 - establishing a commercial structure by means of a "Galileo promotion company" also involving the private sector, which would subsequently assume the financial responsibility, while technical and political responsibility would remain with the public system;
 - cooperation and compatibility through co-existence with GLONASS and GPS by means of international treaties.
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• **Security of information infrastructures (computer-related crime)**

Rapporteur : **Mr Dantin** (Workers - F)

- **Reference :** COM(2000) 890 final - CES 1115/2001

- **Key points :**

The development of the information society is causing profound changes which affect a number of activities: work, education, leisure, industry, trade, etc. Part of the economy can be said to be "computer-dependent".

Increasingly effective practical and legal means will therefore have to be used. The ESC stresses the urgent need to speed up the adoption of regulations. Repressive measures must be backed up by broader measures involving prevention, training and combating exclusion. More emphasis must be put on infrastructure security.

The ESC thinks that technical and legal solutions have to be sought so that Internet access and navigation do not lead to websurfers' private behaviour being tracked or investigated. The sending of unsolicited anonymous messages to a given individual address, particularly from public places such as webcafes and libraries, should also be prohibited.

The ESC believes that the creation of a European forum with the aim of enhancing cooperation at EU level is a good initiative and intends to play an active part in it. More research should be conducted on two issues : how complex can the internet become without risking an intolerable degree of vulnerability, and what are the specific psychological aspects of computer-related crime in the virtual world?

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7. INTERNATIONAL TRADE

- **International trade and social development (7th Euromed Summit)**

Rapporteur : Ms López Almedáriz (Employers - E)

– **Reference** : Information report : CES 438/2001 fin

– **Key points** :

The EU has adopted a broad approach to the Mediterranean (the Barcelona Process), spanning economic and trade questions, social development, security and stability in third countries and cultural cooperation. One of the objectives is the gradual establishment of a free trade area by 2010. This objective is considered compatible with the obligations entered into by the parties in the WTO.

The area's development indicators have not improved as much as the association would have liked and the region is still in the process of completing its transition to an open market economy model. The volume of inter-regional trade continues to be insignificant and it is certainly insufficient if the agreements with the EU are to realise their potential.

The ESC recommends that the EU :

- redouble its efforts to provide technical assistance to the Mediterranean partner countries, thus developing the South-South dimension of the process;
 - make a major effort to improve transport and telecommunications infrastructures;
 - make more rapid progress on harmonising rules of origin;
 - simplify and make improvements in the programming and administrative procedures of the MEDA programme;
 - improve the monitoring of projects financed by MEDA, thereby ensuring their efficiency and actual impact on beneficiaries' development indicators;
 - encourage the creation of transparent, secure and reliable frameworks to facilitate the Euro-Mediterranean area's integration into the world economy;
 - reinforce the role of civil-society players in the Barcelona Process and promote their role as social discussion-partners for their respective governments.
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• **Scheme of generalised tariff preferences (GSP) 2002-2004**

Rapporteur-general : **Mr Walker** (Employers - UK)

– **Reference :** COM (2001) 293 final - CES 1122/2001

– **Key points :**

- The Committee supports the concept of a flat reduction of the MFN duty rate by 3.5 percentage points for all sensitive products and agrees that a uniform reduction of 30% should apply to all products concerned.
- With reference to the exclusion of countries, the Committee approves the principle of using a criterion which is neutral and regularly revisited and accepts that the World Bank threshold meets these requirements.
- The Committee approves the proposal to retain both of the basic rules for graduation – the lion's share clause and the graduation mechanism - and supports the concept that graduation should only take place where beneficiary countries meet one of the criteria in three consecutive years, which need not necessarily be the same criterion in each of those years.
- The Committee notes that the special incentive arrangements have not fulfilled their expectations and agrees that it would seem imperative to make them more attractive. It wonders whether the Commission has gone far enough in this direction.
- The Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission has taken the opportunity afforded by this regulation to pursue the objective of simplification but notes that it has stopped short of fully harmonising and unifying all rules and procedures. While it accepts that the imminence of a major revision in 2004 would militate against making drastic changes at this juncture, it hopes that on that occasion full prominence will be given to the need to simplify, harmonise, streamline, codify, reduce and unify the entire system.

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